

Fast 10: Prayer — Ablution before Prayer

- *Wuḍū*, in the terminology of Islamic law, means the washing of certain parts of the body before prayers. The necessary details of *wuḍū* are given in the Holy Quran:

“O you who believe, when you rise up for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads, and (wash) your feet up to the ankles.” (5:6)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قُمْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ
فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَ
امْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ إِلَى
الْكَعْبَيْنِ

- *Wuḍū* may be performed before every prayer, but the necessity for it arises only when there has been passing of urine, stools or wind, or when one has been fast asleep.
- The taking of a bath is rendered necessary in certain cases before prayer can be performed; for example after sexual intercourse. Bath is also necessary for the Friday and the Eid prayers, when clean clothes must also be put on and scent used if available.
- This serves as a preparation for going before a higher Presence, and helps to turn one's attention from lower objects and divert it to the higher. It also makes the atmosphere in which gatherings of people take place, purer and healthier.
- The Holy Prophet said:

“That person has not performed *wuḍū* who does not remember Allah in doing it.” (Tirmidhi)

لَا وُضُوءَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَذْكُرْ اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ

The performance of *wuḍū* is, therefore, not a mere bodily ritual. A person should be clean and he should feel that he stands in need of the purification of the soul as he stands in need of the cleaning of the body. The remembrance of Allah is needed to direct attention to this.

- Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad writes the following instruction for his followers:

“When you stand up for prayer (*salat*), it should not be as if you are performing a ritual. But before the prayer, just as you perform an external *wuḍū*, also perform an internal *wuḍū* and wash off ungodly thoughts from your limbs. Then, with both these ablutions, stand up and make many supplications in your prayer.”

- When water is not available, still it is necessary to perform an act which **diverts attention from bodily purification to the purity of the soul**, which is the aim of prayer. It is called *Tayammum* and the direction for it is laid down in the Holy Quran:

“...and you cannot find water, then resort (*tayammamū*) to pure earth and wipe your faces and your hands with it. Allah does not desire to place a burden on you but He wishes to purify you, and that He may complete His favour on you, so that you may give thanks.” (5:6)

فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا
فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ مِنْهُ مَا
يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَكِنْ
يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُنِيعَ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥﴾

When a person is unable to find water, or when the use of water or the taking of a bath is harmful, he or she is told to avail of pure earth, which is stated to be a means of purification. Now, wiping of the face and the hands with earth does not serve the purpose of bodily purification; **therefore it is the purification of the soul which is intended here.**

- *Tayammum* consists of striking both hands on pure earth or anything containing pure dust, then blowing off the excess of dust from the hands, and passing the hands over the face and the backs of the two hands, the left over the right and the right over the left.

Prayer as uniting society

- The prayer service in Islam is divided into two parts, one to be said individually (known as *sunnah*) and the other to be performed in congregation (known as *farḍ*). The *farḍ* part is essential and must be said individually if one cannot join a congregation. The individual, private prayer is meant simply for the development of the inner self of man. The congregational one has other ends as well in view, which make the Islamic prayer a mighty force in the unification of the human race. It brings people together and makes them equal.
- Before their Maker they all stand shoulder to shoulder, the ruler along with his poorest subject, the rich with the beggar, the white man with the black. Differences of rank, wealth and colour vanish within the mosque, and an atmosphere of brotherhood, equality and love, totally differing from the outside world, prevails within the holy precincts.