

Khushu' Series: Taharah, the Wūdū

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[74:4] وَثِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ

“And purify your clothing, and keep away from all impurity”

- ‘Clothing’ esoterically means love and friendship; hence, purify your love and refine it for Allah (74:3 “magnify your Lord”) and cleanse it from other than Allah.
- That’s why spouses are referred to as clothes to one another; a sign of divine love; each being a conduit, to Allah, for the other. Viewing the spouse in any other way is not the goal.
- Imam Sadiq (‘alayhis-salām) has instructed us in relation to the inner meaning of water. In one holy tradition, he says: “...**consider and be attentive towards the water when executing the wūdū; as if you are paying attention to Allah’s mercy...in the same way that Allah’s mercy cleanses one from the inner pollutions, water cleanses one from the outer pollutions...deliberate over water’s capacity to mix with everything...**”. Allah’s utmost mercy and forgiveness is meant to be recalled here. Whoever you are, whatever your sin, never underestimate Allah’s compassion, mercy and forgiveness in refining you. Here one’s humility will be enhanced; humility of the **jamālī** type.
- Intention: here the criterion shariah-wise is merely to own a mental awareness of what one is doing. Verbally reading out the intention is neither necessary nor recommended. At a more deeper level, by intending to attain Allah’s proximity via the set of rituals prescribed upon you, you are promoting your **jalālī**-type humility i.e. you are acknowledging that you must abide by His orders to gain salvation and that you cannot opt for a better route. You are submitting yourself to His command. This process should have started even before when preparing canonically clean clothes etc.

Philosophy of rinsing mouth

- Here we recall that we intend to cleanse ourselves from gossiping, backbiting, swearing, breaking relationships etc. → leading to the enhancement of one’s x-type humility. Gossipers appear as monkeys in the Hereafter, backbiters as devourers of one’s brother’s flesh with their long tongues...

Philosophy of inhaling water through the nose thrice

- Nose is a slogan of snobbishness and grandeur which is to be made humble with knowledge (water), cleansing this vice. Which form of humility is worked upon here? The boastful and arrogant

will appear as ants in some traditions, as wearing clothes of fire in others. The Imams would encounter these realities at the time of wūḍū and hence the paleness of their faces.

Philosophy of washing the two hands

- The hands are the locus of giving and taking during the day. You intend to abide by the shariah and recall all your transactions with the 'water of shariah'. The water is also seen as mercy and compassion in some traditions. Since the hands are a source of miserliness, you wash and cleanse it from such a crippling habit with the water of giving, kindness and compassion, thus ameliorating your x-type humility. Nothing is yours; it's all His, if only you were aware!

Philosophy of washing the face

- Sign of ḥayā: appreciating that He is seeing you whenever you are approaching something which you were forbidden, seeing something, hearing something...
- You are cleansing yourself from previous actions out of embarrassment.
- Which humility is enhanced here?

Philosophy of washing the hands

- Starts with the elbows, a sign of firmness and dependency; one sees in it the daily causes that one encounters throughout one's life e.g. depends on the roof, car, table, pen, and so on. After all in ma'ārij, verse 19, men are described as being created with little patience and as hasty individuals i.e. quickly depending on the worldly causes without deliberating that there is only one true independent cause. Hence, by washing the elbows, we are washing ourselves from all causes and we are reflecting on the one cause of causes. Which form of humility is promoted here?

Philosophy of wiping the head

- Sign of humility and surrender before Allah; the head being the loftiest of limbs but you wipe over it with the water of shariah and tariqah. Hence this wiping is manifesting our unity with Allah by means of surrendering ourselves to His command. Which humility is intended here?
- And that is why wiping the head does not exist in tayammum i.e. because wiping earth over the head is a sign of detachment and separation from a beloved (done in times of burden such as in Muḥarram where we are in mourning due to our separation from him; that's what earth means here)

Philosophy of wiping the feet

- Sign of steadfastness in relation to good things; we are intending our will to remain in going to good places such as Mosques etc. and to cleanse ourselves from attending and being present in bad places.

One day a number of Jews approached the Holy Prophet and asked him as to why the wūḍū ritual is confined to four limbs (face, hands, head and feet). He replied:

When Satan tempted Adam and he approached the tree and observed it, Adam's humility disintegrated. Adam had stood up on his feet and approached the tree. This was the initial step towards error. He then picked that which was on the tree with his hands and then consumed it; as a result, the adornment of his body perished. Adam placed his hands on his head and started crying. After having accepted his repentance, Allah ordered him and his offspring to wash these four limbs. He ordered the washing of the face due to Adam's stare at the tree. He ordered the washing of the hands including the elbow due to Adam's picking of the fruit with his hands. He ordered the wiping of the head as a result of Adam's placing his hands on his head. He ordered the wiping of the feet because Adam had approached the error with his feet.

Stay tuned for part three of this series...