

Women and Ritual Purity in Islam

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Abstract. Purity is a beautiful word that is pleasing to the eye, and a quality that everyone wishes to maintain. From an Islamic perspective, purity has a general meaning. Thus it may mean, on one hand, physical cleanliness which is the purity (of the body) from perceptible filth or ritual purification. On the other hand, it may mean spiritual purity which is the purity of the self from vices, sins and abandoning disobedience, and getting used to good deeds and words. Purity (Arabic: طهارة, ṭahāra is an essential aspect of Islam. It is the opposite of najāsa, the state of being ritually impure. It is achieved by first removing physical impurities (for example, urine) from the body, and then removing ritual impurity by means of wudu (usually) or ghusl. Rules which regulate the cleanliness rituals are placed both by Quranic requirements, and the rituals to acquire a new level of social status in everyday Muslim life. Physically, spiritually, ethically, and psychologically every Muslim must value cleanliness and purity. In this work, I investigate the concept of “purity” from the Islamic perspective. I argue that cleanliness and purity form an essential ideal in Muslim piety and consciousness. The Qur'an frequently refers to it..

Keywords: Women, Ritual, Purity, Islam.



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INTRODUCTION

In Islam women purity is an ethical concept that must be followed as a moral principle (Ilahiane 2014). Islamic ethics is defined as "good character", historically took shape gradually from the 7th century and was finally established by the 11th century (Ilahiane 2014). It was eventually shaped as successful amalgamation of the Quamic teachings, the teaching of Sunnah of Mohammed, and the precedents of Islamic jurists. The pre-Islamic Arabian tradition, and non-Arabic element (including Persian and Greek ideas) embedded in or integrated with a general Islamic structure, although Mohammed's preaching produced a radical change in moral values based on the sanctions of the new religion and the present religion and the fear of God and of the last judgment.

The foundational source in the gradual codification of Islamic ethics was the Muslim understanding and interpretation of the Quran and practices of Muhammad. Its meaning has always been in context of active submission to God performed by the community in unison. The motive force in Islamic ethics is the notion that every human being is called to "command the good and forbid the evil in all spheres of life". The Quran defines and sets the standards for social and moral values for Muslims women, Professor of Toronto, states that, "a lengthy passage in the Quran (Quran 17:22) "represents the fullest statement of the code of behavior every Muslim must follow".

The Muslims are of the view that "Islam teaches man to walk in straight path" (Azam 2005, p. 94). Islam spells out the way of life it proposes and guides women on how to live in accordance with purity or Tahara. A Muslim woman must know where she stands, wear, have sex, her obligations during menstruation and if she transgressed, she knows what to do. Islam has clarity, an order, and a precision which is in sharp contrast to the shifting, relative, uncertain quality of a much modern life and Muslims explicitly claim this as one of Islam's strengths (Azam 2005, p. 94). The principles that regulate the whole private life of Muslims women in their relationship with God and neighbor are contained in what is traditionally called the five pillars of Islam in their social teachings.

HISTORY OF ISLAMIC RELIGION

Islam was founded in Arabia, before the founding of Islam, Arabia enjoyed their traditional life and culture like any other country in the world (DeLong-Bas 2013). Before the birth of Mohammed in Mecca the people of Arabia had their traditional religious system. This religion was polytheistic in nature. They had a supreme God Allah under which were other divinities which numbered about 360 (gods) in all, these were called daughter of Allah, example are: Almanat, Habail etc. These divinities were worshipped in Mecca in a traditional shrine known as Kabba, the worship were supervised by Priest from the Quarish clan in Mecca. In this traditional shrine the centre of attraction was the Black stone meteorite believed to have fallen down from

heaven and was placed there by Abraham or Ibrahim and his son Ishmael (Delong-Bas 2013).

Islam is a religion that was founded by a man called Prophet Mohammed. Mohammed according to the Quran had received a revelation in a dream one night during the month of Ramadan in 610AD as he secluded himself in the cave of mount Hira (Delong-Bas 2013). He also said that Gabriel the archangel was the one who gave him the revelation and the command of God, three year? later he received the second revelation (vision). Islamic religion was founded as a result of Mohammed soul-searching and spiritual re-assessment lasting over fifteen years. Mohammed saw the injustice permeating all levels of Meccan society in his days which undoubtedly weighed heavily in his mind and caused him much anguish. Farah also proves this point when he observed that:

The wealthy lorded it over the poor, the helpless were at the mercy of the strong; greed and selfishness ruled the day: infanticide was widely practiced by Bedovins who lacked adequate means of sustenance and there were numerous evils prevailing on and all levels of Arabian society that had the effect of widening the gulf between the privileged Aristocracy and the deprived multitudes of Mecca (Hoyland 2002, p. 39).

Mohammed was confronted by twofold crises in Mecca which are: spiritual and social. Mohammed undertook the task to show that the whole organization and institutional beliefs of Pagan Arabia were not in conformity with the divine will. Mohammed began preaching monotheism and social reforms hand in hand. He centered on equal concomitant of worship. He sought for the cohesion of Arabia society through uniform beliefs and a unified faith which he called Islam.

According to Salism who traced the route word Islam says: it was derived from an Arabic word 'Salam' which means peace, thus peace with God and man similarly a Muslim is a person who makes peace with God and man (Hoyland 2002, p.91).

Islam in a broader sense means submission, surrender and total obedience to the will of Allah. It is a complete way of life and an ideology per excellence. This is because it covers all aspects of human life, spiritual, judicial, political, economical, social, military, educational, public and private life, etc. In 622, the Hijira flight to Yathrib in Medina with 150 followers marked the beginning of Islamic calendar. Mohammed became a political leader and a prophet ruling in Medina and later Meccans and entire Arabian Peninsula (Fitzpatrick & Walker 2014).

In 610-632 the Quran recitations were recorded by Mohammed's followers. While in 632 Mohammed died at 62 years of age after returning from a pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca (Fitzpatrick & Walker 2014). After his death, his followers continued to utilize the force of Arms in the conquest of many nations however and Jihad (holy war) was used mainly to spread Islam to other nations.

BASIC PILLARS AND ETHICAL CONCEPTS OF ISLAMIC RELIGION

The fundamental pillars of Islam are the basic principles of Islamic teachings upon which other aspects rest. So, to believe in them and act accordingly is the first and foremost duty in Islam. Such fundamental pillars are five; viz:

1. Shahada (words of testimony)
2. Salat (Prayer)
3. Zakat (Almsgiving)
4. Sawm (Fasting)
5. Hajj (Pilgrimage)

Apart from the spiritual functions of these pillars, they also have social values. These include self-control, love, unity and equality among mankind. Again they improve social welfare in the society.

Shahadah (Words of Testimony)

The quotation "La'ilaha illallahu Muhammadun Rasulullahi" is called Kalimatush -Shahadah. It means "There is no God worthy of worship but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah" (Khalim & Hasaniyah 2018, p. 43). The pronouncement and belief in these words make a person a Muslim. It is the principal pillar of Islam upon which the remaining four pillars stand.

To believe in the kalmia means you should not conduct your ritual, sacrifice and all the ways you live except in the way Allah (SWT) likes them and Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) taught them. This means that you should not obey any order, law, decree or edict that is in conflict with the Divine Law, Allah (SWT) said in the Holy Qur'an:

"Say: Truly, my prayer,
And my service of sacrifice,
My life and death,
Are (all) for Allah,
The Cherisher of the worlds"; (Q6:162)

Believing in these words of testimony is the bedrock of fear of Allah (SWT), which definitely gives rise to truth, honesty and harmony in the society. It is also encourages and enhances love, equality and unity among mankind. These are achieved as a result of good faith in Allah and His Prophet.

Salat (Prayer)

Prayer is a form of physical worship assigned to the Muslims five times daily at specified times. It is second to the Kalima in moulding the behavior of Muslims. This is made clear in Qur'an. "Surely prayer keeps one away from indeceppy and evils" (Q29:45). This is the wisdom behind interrupting the Muslims' businesses five times a day for forayers. Even if a person has been misled by the devil at one time or another, he/she would be called to order by prayers at different intervals. Thus, all people benefit from this orientation, Muslims or non-Muslims.

Payers seriously teach high sense of unity, equality and love among mankind. The standing shoulder to shoulder, foot to foot in prayers between the well-to-do and the masses is unique in demonstrating equality among people. Likewise the bringing of a community together five times daily, a collection of communities weekly (for Friday prayers) and of (bourse the congregation of all communities in a locality bi-annually (for two id prayers in of utmost unity and love. During prayers, the portions of the Holy Qur'an are read which serve as a guidance on how to live in this world including good behaviours to all people.

Zakat (Almsgiving)

Zakat is an Arabic word, which means purification. In Islam it means a specific amount of wealth taken from a specific quantity of wealth at a specific time of the year given to specific people so as to purify one's wealth. Zakat is the highest means of sharing wealth in the society. It eradicates undue concentration of wealth by few members of the society. It also fights poverty, unemployment, stealing, armed robbery, fraud to mention but a few. Thus, it encourages love, unity - and, progress in the society. Zakat improves welfare of the society through building of schools, Hospitals, roads, water supply, trade and training among others (Vajda 2017).

The above were made clear during the reign of Caliph Umar bn Abdul'aziz, during his time, there were proper administration of Zakat, and with time everybody in Medina became so rich that nobody could take Zakat. Thus, Zakat had to be sent to other places.

Sawn (Fasting)

Fasting means abstinence from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual intercourse from the dawn to sunset with the intention of submission to God's command (Vajda 2017). Muslims are obliged to fast in the month of Ramadan every year. They can also fast voluntarily in the other months of the year. Fasting, like other pillars, serves many functions. It trains self-control by restraining a person from the desire of food, drink and sexual intercourse. It also draws the attention of the wealthy to the suffering of the poor as a result of their experience of hunger during fasting. This results in the sympathy and help of the rich towards the poor.

At the end of the fasting of Ramadan Zakatilfitr (charity of completion of fasting) is distributed to the needy in order to make them happy on 'Id day. This in turn encourages love and unity in the society. Fasting gives rest to the digestive system. This increases the capacity and efficiency of the digestive system.

Hajj

The literal meaning of Hajj in Arabic is to set out towards a definite objective. In Islamic law it means to set out for the Ka'abah, the Sacred House of Allah and to fulfill the pilgrimage rites (Ryad 2017). Pilgrimage is also another means of leveling all differences of rank, race, and nationality as well as bringing about cohesion and unity among people, which is the basis of living civilization (Ryad 2017). This is clear by putting on uniform dress, performing the same service at the same place during Hajj without any segregation. It can also be used to enhance diplomatic relations between

different nations. Again it improves commercial transactions between people from different parts of the world. The large number of animals sacrificed during Hajj is used to alleviate hunger in poor countries in the world. To sum it all, the fundamental pillars of Islam contribute enormously to human development.

MEANING OF PURITY (Tahara) IN ISLAM

Tahara, (Arabic: "purity") system of ritual purity in Islam. This system is based on two premises: the first is that humans lapse from a state appropriate to ritual activity as a result of certain bodily acts, such as defecation, sexual intercourse, or menstruation. Second, there are certain substances, such as pork or blood, that are either unclean by nature or have the effect of defiling a space, person, or object, rendering it unfit for ritual use. In both cases, the unfitness of the thing or person can be remedied by the ritual application of water or of a simulacrum (sand, clean rock, etc.) (Rouse & Hoskins 2004).

All things and places are presumed to be ritually acceptable or neutral unless Scripture either Qur'an or Hadith indicates otherwise. Items that are always defiling are called *najas* and include swine, blood, dog saliva, and wine. All *najas* should be avoided when possible, and if clothing or dishes come in contact with these items they should be washed with water until there is no smell, sight, or other evidence of the proscribed item. Pork or carrion should never be eaten and neither should carrion eaters such as vultures or dogs; products such as feces or hides from these animals should also be avoided.

There are two ritually disabling states into which humans fall affected (*muhdath*) and precluded (*junub*). Acts that are "affects" are called *hadath*, and these include defecation, urination, breaking wind, touching a person of the opposite sex (with desire, for most schools of Islamic jurisprudence), or touching one's own genitals. For most jurists, unconsciousness or sleeping in a prone position make it probable that one has at least broken wind and so is affected (Rouse & Hoskins 2004). Likewise, violent laughter, coughing, or anger, according to many jurists, ought to occasion ritual purification, if they do not actually require it. Until the affected person undoes this state, he or she cannot perform ritual worship (*jalat*), circumambulate the Ka'bah, or handle the Qur'an.

The ritual purification for being affected is called ablution *yvudu*. It consists of (1) intending to perform the *yvudu*, (2) washing the hands to the wrists three times, (3) rinsing out the mouth and snuffing water into the nostrils three times, and (4) washing the face from the hairline to the neck, the chin, and the openings of the nostrils. (5) The beard (if there is one) is then combed with wet fingers, and (6) the hands and arms are washed up to the elbows three times. (7) The head - from the forehead to the nape of the neck, including the ears is then rubbed with both hands, and (8) the feet, particularly the tops and including the ankles, are rubbed. Finally, (9) the Muslim says, "I bear witness that there is no God but God, the unique, who has no partner. I bear witness that Muhammad is his servant and his Messenger."

The other state of impurity, which is sometimes called the major impurity, is referred to in ritual texts as preclusion (*janabah*). It arises from sexual intercourse, seminal emission, menstruation, and childbirth. A person in a state of preclusion is ritually disabled like the affected person, but in addition he or she may not recite the Qur'an, perform ritual recollections (*dhikr*) of God, or fast for Ramadan. This disability is reversed by—according to most schools—adding the pouring of water over the entire body to the rituals of ablution. This lustration (*ghusl*) is the reason why bathhouses, are found throughout Islamdom, since every act of sexual intercourse, every menstruation, and every childbirth requires lustration before the Muslim can resume his or her ritual life. Only women are ritually disabled in this major way by acts they cannot control, and only women cannot immediately lustrate themselves into a state of ritual capability.

Unlike in many other ritual communities, however, in Sunni law a ritually disabled person does not, by touch, conversation, or other contact, have the power to disable another person ritually. Shi'ism differs from Sunni law precisely on this issue of the contamination through ritually disabled persons and impure substances. For Imami Shi'ites, women who are menstruating can render a man in need of ablution by contact with her. Indeed, according to some legists, the very sweat of a menstruating woman, passing through her clothing, can ritually disable a man. Also, prayer in an area contaminated by an impure substance or person is invalid. In addition, Christians, Jews, and other non-Muslims have been seen in much of Shi'ite legal theory as ritually contaminating. According to some, food cooked by non-Muslims cannot be eaten, water being drunk by non-Muslims and the cup that contains it are ritually impure, and (as one of the distinctive features of Shi'ite law) Christians and Jews cannot be acceptable butchers, as they may be for Sunnis.

The penalties for transgressions of the rules of purity are generally mild. Muslims who have intercourse when the woman is menstruating must make a small donation to charity. Impure foods eaten inadvertently require no penance. Prayer or other rituals deliberately offered in a state of ritual impurity are simply invalid, causing one to suffer the double fault of disobeying God and failing validly to perform one's ritual obligations.

One of the most striking features of the Islamic legal (*ftqh*) literature on purity (as on most things) is the nearly complete absence of any justification for ritual rules. Why God ordained washing in a certain way as a precondition of prayer or excluded menstruating women from ritual was not explained by the legists. The arbitrariness of these rules - from a human point of view—was recognized in legal and theological discourse (Saari 1998). The Sufi tradition, by contrast, did not shy from venturing such explanations, and works like Abu Talib al-Makki's *Out al-qulub* and al-Ghazali's *Ihya' ulum al-din* are filled with explanations of the reasons or symbolism behind the rituals of purity. In Sufism, they were particularly prone to see in the rituals of ablution and lustration figures of moral or spiritual purity. The cleansing of the body

and the cleansing of the heart were conflated by Sufi legists, so that these rituals took on a deeper significance and acquired many layers of meaning (Saari 1998).

In modern times the justification of ritual as obedience has seemed embarrassing to apologists, and from the 19th century both liberals and Islamists have labored to find the real point of these rituals. Most have assimilated ritual purity to "cleanliness" or "hygiene" and have seen in the rules for ablution a wise anticipation by God and his Prophet of the insights of modern scientists such as Louis Pasteur and Joseph Lister

The Quran says: "In it there are men who love to observe purity and Allah loves those who maintain purity" (Surah At-Tawbah 9: 108), and also there is one verse which concerned with Taharah or purity and impurity of Human as follow: "O you who believe! The polytheists are certainly impure (najas): so let them not approach the Holy Mosque after this their year. And if you fear poverty, Allah will enrich you out of His grace, if He wishes. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all wise" (Surah At-Tawbah 9: 28).

IMPORTANCE PURITY IN ISLAM

Observing cleanliness of the soul, the clothes, and the surroundings is obligatory upon every Muslim, and this is considered as one of the pillars of Islam. Before offering prayers, it is necessary to perform *wudu*, and in certain cases, both *wudu* and *ghusl*. The purifying agent is always clean water. However, during times when water is not available or is scarce, symbolic wudu and ghusl can be performed with clean dry earth which is known as *Tayammum*. If the body or clothes show traces of blood, pus, urine, feces, semen or alcohol, then *Taharat* becomes essential. The clothes should be washed and the affected part of the body cleaned with pure water, or the whole body given as *ghusl* as the case may be.

A person must not touch the Quran if the person is not in the state of Tahara. The Quran says: None shall touch it but those who are clean (56:79). When in a state of janaba, one is not allowed even to recite the Quran, let alone touch it. In a state of minor ritual impurity, it is forbidden (in some schools, makruh) to handle the Quran and to read it, and is considered to be acceptable (neutral, mubah) to recite it, although it is better liked (recommended, mustahabb) to be ritually pure when reciting the Quran. A mushaf is only a Quran if it is the Arabic Quranic text, and a book that contains more than 50% non-Quranic material is not viewed as a Quran for the above purposes, even if it contains verses of the Quran or the entire Quranic text. Examples would be a tafsir, or a translation of the Quran such as Yusuf Ali's (with commentary) which contains over fifteen times as much text in footnotes than it does in Quranic text or Quranic interpretation in either Arabic or English, or a book of hadith that contains Quranic verses embedded in the narrations.

Shia views of purity

In respect to purity of non-Muslims, the majority of Shia Muslims believe in the impurity of non-Muslims. However, there is a minority among Shia which believe

in purity of non-Muslims.

Majority views

Some people such as Shaykh Tusi believed that it is not permissible to eat with Kuffar or non-Muslims. Considering non-believers as Najis has been prevalent until twentieth century (Baghalian 2021). Muhaqiq Hilli also believes in impurity of non-believers. Most of maraji (authorities such as Sayyid Ruhollah Khomeini, Nasir MakarimShirazi, Sayyid Muhammad Rida Gulpaygani, and Sayyid Abu al-QasimKhu'i) believed in impurity of Kuffar, including Ahle Al Kitab. Of course, Khu'i pointed out precaution ruling in the subject. However, there are some authorities such as Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Muhammad FadilLankarani, Sayyid 'Ali al- Sistani, and Sayyid 'Ali Khamene'i who did not believe in impurity of Ahle-Al-Kitab.

Minority views

Some scholars such as Mulla MuhsinFayd al-Kashani (d. 1680) and Al-Muhaqqiq al-Bahrani (d.1708) did not believe in the impurity of non-believers, and particularly non-Kitabi (Darwish 2014). For instance, Kashani believes that the impurity of Kuffar is spiritual and internal, so there is no need to wash after touching them. This group believes in the purity of non-Muslims and of all humans (Darwish 2014). Muhammad Ibrahim Jannaati, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah, Seyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad and Yusuf Sani'i are part of this group.

Cleaning the teeth

Cleaning teeth is also very important. Muhammad is reported to have said that the angels of mercy tum away from a person whose mouth emits foul smell because of unclean teeth. It is not only unhygienic to neglect cleaning teeth but also an anti-social habit likely to repel people from one's presence. It is narrated by IbnMaj ah to "use the Miswaak, for verily, it purifies the mouth, and it is a Pleasure for the Lord (Darwish 2014). Jibreel (A.S.) exhorted me so much to use the Miswaak that I feared that its use would be decreed obligatory upon me and upon my Ummah. If I did not fear imposing hardship on my Ummah, I would have made its use obligatory upon my people. Verily, I use the Miswaak so much that I fear the front part of my mouth being peeled (by constant and abundant brushing with the Miswaak)" (Darwish 2014).

Menstruation

Verse 2:222 in the Qur'an implies that sexual relations during menstruation are prohibited. However, unlike Jewish tradition, Islam does not forbid men from interacting with menstruating women entirely (Bhartiya 2013). Ibn Kathir, a muhaddith, narrated a hadith that describes Muhammad's habits with his menstruating wives. This hadith demonstrates that Muhammad gave license to all forms of spousal intimacy during the period of menstruation with the exception of vaginal intercourse (Mirza 2012). Women are required to perform ritual cleansing (*ghusl*) before resuming religious duties or sexual relations upon completion of her menstruation.

CONCLUSION

Tahara which is purity in Islam is often seen as gender inequality by some, though the Quran identifies women purity as ethical and moral requirements that bring one closer to Allah and make the person acceptable. The codification and foundation of Islamic purity is rooted in the Muslim understanding and interpretation of the Quran and practices of Muhammad. Its meaning has always been in context of active submission to God performed by the community in unison. The motive force of women purity in Islam is the notion that every human being is called to "command the good and forbid the evil in all spheres of life".

The Quran defines and sets the standards of social and moral values for Muslims women, especially in regards to sex and menstruation which is considered as an act or process of impurity which the Quran highlights on what women must do in order to be pure. The Muslims are of the view that "Islam teaches man to walk in straight path" (Ray 2016, p. 146). Islam spells out the way of life it proposes and guides women on how to live in accordance with purity Tahara. A Muslim woman must know where she stands, wear, have sex, her obligations during menstruation and if she transgressed, she knows what to do.

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