300866 - Commentary on the hadith about clean earth being a means of purification for the Muslim

the question

What is the meaning of the hadith “Clean earth is a means of purification for the Muslim”? What is the rest of the hadith? I hope that you will explain in simple language, because I am just an ordinary Muslim.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

May Allah grant us and you understanding of His religion and make us and you steadfast in doing that which pleases Him. Amin.

The hadith mentioned in the question is an authentic hadith.

It was narrated by Imam Ahmad in *Al-Musnad* (21304), Abu Dawud in his *Sunan* (333) and at-Tirmidhi in his *Sunan* (124) from Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (may Allah be pleased with him), that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Clean earth is a means of purification for the Muslim, even if he does not find water for ten years. Then when he finds water, let him make it touch his skin, for that is good.”

The hadith is authentic. An-Nawawi classed as it authentic in Al-Majmu` (1/94). Ibn Hajar classed its isnad as strong in *Fat-h al-Bari* (1/235). Al-Albani classed it as authentic in *Sahih Abi Dawud* (358).

This hadith has to do with tayammum, as is clear from its context.

It is well known that Allah, may He be Exalted, has made it obligatory for the Muslim to purify

himself for prayer and so on, and He has obliged the Muslim to use pure water for wudu and for ghusl for janabah and following menses.

However, sometimes a Muslim man or woman may look for water to do wudu or ghusl for janabah or following menses and not find any water, or they may find water but not be able to use it because of sickness, for example, or perhaps they will find water but they need it to drink or to give to their livestock to drink. In such situations, Allah, may He be Exalted, has made it permissible for the Muslim to do tayammum to purify himself, so he may use soil and the like instead of water, by striking his hands on the clean soil, or on anything pure that is on the face of the earth, then wiping his hands and face, with the intention of purifying himself. This action is called tayammum. Allah, may He be Exalted, has explained that in His Book, where He says:

{O you who believe, when you prepare for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands [and arms] to the elbows; wipe over your heads [with wet hands]; and [wash] your feet to the ankles. If you are in a state of major impurity [janabah], then purify yourselves [ghusl]. If you are ill, or on a journey, or have relieved yourselves, or you have touched women, and cannot find water, then find some clean earth, and wipe your faces and hands with it [tayammum]. Allah does not wish to impose any hardship on you, but to purify you, and complete His favour to you, so that you may give thanks} [Al-Ma'idah 5:6].

The Muslim scholars are unanimously agreed that it is prescribed to do tayammum when water is not available or one is unable to use it.

Ibn `Abd al-Barr said in *At-Tamhid* (19/270): The scholars of the regions in the Hijaz, Iraq, Greater Syria, the east and the west are unanimously agreed, as far as I know, that doing tayammum with clean earth when no water is available is a means of purification for anyone who is sick or travelling, whether he is junub or without wudu, and they did not differ concerning that. End quote.

Regarding the explanation of the hadith quoted by the questioner, it is as follows:

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Clean earth is a means of purification for the Muslim."

This hadith consists of three words in Arabic:

The first word is *as-sa'id* (translated here as earth), which refers to what is found on the surface of the earth.

This word is mentioned in the verse of tayammum quoted above, where Allah, may He be Exalted, says: {then find some clean earth [*sa`idan tayyiban*], and wipe your faces and hands with it [tayammum]}.

The scholars differed as to what is meant by *as-sa'id* (earth): is it soil in particular, or is it anything on the surface of the earth, even if it is sand and the like, and not soil?

Some of them said that it is soil only, and others said that it is anything on the surface of the earth, such as soil, stones, sand and rocks.

Al-`Iraqi said in *Tarh at-Tathrib* (2/99): The scholars differed as to what is meant by as-sa'id (earth). Malik, Abu Hanifah, al-Awza`i, ath-Thawri and Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari said: As-sa'id (earth) is the surface of the earth, and they said that as-sa'id (earth) is anything that is on the surface of the earth such as soil, stones, sand, gravel, lime, gypsum, and marble…

The majority of jurists – including ash-Shafa`i, Abu Yusuf, Ahmad, Is-haq, Ibn al-Mundhir and Dawud az-Zahiri – were of the view that the word as-sa'id (earth) refers to soil only, and not to anything else that is on the surface of the earth. End quote.

We have previously explained the correct view regarding this issue, and that it is permissible to do tayammum using things on the surface of the earth other than soil if one cannot find soil. This is the view favoured by Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) and others.

See the answers to questions no. 264397 and 36774.

The second word is at-tayyib (lit. good; translated here as clean), which is a description of as-sa'id (earth). What is meant is that it is pure and free of impurities.

Ibn Hajar said in *Fat-h al-Bari* (1/447): Clean earth (*as-sa`id at-tayyib*): what is meant by at-tayyib

(clean, good) is pure. End quote.

This explains the condition for the soil and the like that is to be used for tayammum: It must be pure in and of itself, otherwise whatever is impure in and of itself, or is contaminated with impure substances is not valid to be used for tayammum.

The third word is *tahur* (means of purification). That is, it is purifying for the Muslim when he uses it in the manner prescribed. Therefore after doing tayammum, the Muslim becomes pure and it becomes permissible for him to pray and so on with this purification, but this purification of his is of limited duration, as we will explain below.

Regarding the Prophet's words, "... even if he does not find water for ten years":

What is meant is that if the Muslim cannot find water, or he is unable to use it, for a lengthy time, it is permissible for him to do tayammum, even if that time continues for ten years or more.

Al-Khattabi said in *Ma`alim as-Sunan* (1/103): What is meant by the words "even if he does not find water for ten years" is that he may do tayammum again and again, even if that lack of water continues for ten years. End quote.

Regarding the Prophet's words, "Then when he finds water, let him make it touch his skin":

What is meant is that if a Muslim has no water available or he is unable to use it, it is permissible for him to do tayammum so long as he cannot find water or is unable to use it, then when he finds water or his excuse ceases to apply, at that point he must use water to do wudu and to do ghusl if he was junub, or if a woman was menstruating, because tayammum is a concession granted by Allah to make things easy when water is not available, in order to make it permissible to pray and so on. Then when water becomes available, the Muslim must remove the impurity, and that is done by washing for wudu or ghusl.

This indicates that the purity that results from doing tayammum is purity of limited duration that lasts only so long as water is not available or one is unable to use it. Then when the individual finds water or becomes able to use it, the ruling on purification using tayammum no longer

applies, and he must now purify himself using water for ghusl or wudu.

For more information, please see the answer to question no. 204760.

In the hadith which was narrated by al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (344), it says that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was on a journey with his companions, and he led them in prayer. `Imran said: When he finished his prayer, he saw a man standing by himself who had not prayed with the people. He said: “O So-and-so, what prevented you from praying with the people?” He said: I became junub, and I have no water. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “You should use clean earth, and that will suffice you.” … Then the people became thirsty, and when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) found water, he gave a vessel of water to the one who had become junub and said: “Go and pour it over yourself.”

For a description of how to do tayammum, please see the answer to question no. 21074.

Praise be to Allah, much good and blessed praise, for what He has made easy for people of His religion, and has granted them the means of avoiding hardship, for He is Most Generous, Most Kind.