# 312826 - Is it stipulated when cleaning oneself with pebbles after defecating that they should not be fewer than three pebbles?

## the question

How come it is stipulated when cleaning oneself with pebbles after defecating that they should be an odd number, three or more, even though in *Sahih al-Bukhari* it says that the Prophet cleaned himself using two pebbles?

## Summary of answer

The correct view is that when cleaning oneself with pebbles after defecating, it is stipulated that one must clean the area properly, and that one should not use fewer than three pebbles.

## Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

### The stipulated number of pebbles to be used for cleaning oneself after defecating

The scholars differed regarding cleaning oneself with pebbles: Is it stipulated that they should not be fewer than three pebbles, or is it that whatever is sufficient to clean the area properly is good enough, even if it is with two pebbles?

The Shafa`is and Hanbalis are of the view that two things are stipulated when cleaning oneself with pebbles: cleaning the area properly and using three pebbles; if one of them is done without the other, that is not sufficient.

According to their view, a large stone with three edges may be good enough, instead of three smaller pebbles.

Ibn Qudamah said in *Al-Mughni* (1/10 2): Both conditions must be met: cleaning the area properly

and using three pebbles. If one is done without the other, that is not sufficient. This is the view of ash-Shafa`i and a number of other scholars. End quote.

See: *Al-Umm* (1/37) and *Kashshaf al-Qina`* by al-Bahuti (1/69).

They quoted a number of texts as evidence, including the following:

1.The report narrated by Muslim (262) from Salman al-Farisi (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: Our Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade us to clean ourselves [after defecating] with fewer than three pebbles.

2.It was narrated from `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "When one of you goes to relieve himself, let him take three pebbles with him with which to clean himself, for that will be sufficient for him." Narrated by Abu Dawud (40) and an-Nasa'i (44); classed as authentic by al-Albani.

3.. The report narrated by Muslim (239) from Jabir ibn `Abdillah (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "When one of you cleans himself with pebbles, let him use an odd number."

The Hanafis and Malikis are of the view that what must be done when using pebbles is to clean the area properly, and the number does not matter.

What is meant by cleaning the area properly is removing the substance and moisture of the impurity, in such a way that when wiping oneself with the pebble for the last time, it comes away clean and dry.

As for using three pebbles, it is recommended (and not obligatory) in their view.

See: *At-Tajrid* by al-Qaduri (1/160) and *Bidayat al-Mujtahid* by Ibn Rushd (1/ 93).

They quoted as evidence the report narrated in *Sahih al-Bukhari* (156) from `Abdullah [ibn Mas`ud], who used to say: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) went to relieve himself, and he instructed me to bring him three pebbles. I found two pebbles and I looked for a

third, but I could not find one, so I picked up a piece of dung and brought it to him. He took the two pebbles and threw the dung aside, and said: “This is impure.”

They said: This hadith indicates that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was content to clean himself using two pebbles, and he did not clean himself with three pebbles. This indicates that it is not stipulated that one should use three pebbles; rather it is sufficient to clean the place properly, even if it is with less than three pebbles, so long as it is cleaned properly.

This conclusion was refuted by noting that this hadith was narrated elsewhere than in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, in a report which says that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) instructed Ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) to bring him a third pebble instead of the piece of dung.

In *Musnad Ahmad* (7/326) it was narrated from Ibn Mas`ud that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) went to relieve himself, and he instructed Ibn Mas`ud to bring him three pebbles, and he brought him two pebbles and a piece of dung. He threw the dung aside and said: “It is impure; bring me (another) pebble.”

In *Al-Mu`jam al-Kabir* by at-Tabarani (10/61) it says: “This is impure; bring me (another) pebble.”

But there are some reservations about the chain of narration of this additional text, because it was reported by Abu Is-haq as-Subay`i from ‘Alqamah ibn Qays an-Nakha`i, and there is some difference of opinion among the scholars as to whether Abu Is-haq heard reports from `Alqamah.

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar confirmed this additional text, and supported the view that using three pebbles when cleaning oneself after defecating is stipulated.

He (may Allah have mercy on him) said: At-Tahawi quoted it as evidence that it is not stipulated to use three pebbles. He said: That is because if it were stipulated, he would have asked for a third pebble.

This is what he said, but he (may Allah have mercy on him) overlooked what Ahmad narrated in his *Musnad* via Ma`mar from Abu Is-haq from `Alqamah from Ibn Mas`ud in this hadith, in which it

says: He threw aside the dung and said: “It is impure; bring me (another) pebble.” The narrators of this isnad are trustworthy and honest. Ma`mar Abu Shu`bah al-Wasiti narrated a similar report, but he is weak (da`if). Ad-Daraqutni also narrated it, and `Ammar ibn Ruzayq, one of the trustworthy narrators, narrated it from Abu Is-haq.

And it was said that Abu Is-haq did not hear from `Alqamah, but it was proven that he (Abu Is-haq) heard this hadith from al-Karabisi. Assuming that this report is mursal, the mursal report is regarded as evidence by those with different views and also by us, if it is supported by further evidence. However, there are some reservations about at-Tahawi’s conclusion, because it is possible that Ibn Mas`ud brought him a third pebble to replace the dung he had thrown aside. Hence there was no need for him to instruct him to bring a third pebble. Or it may be that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used one stone twice (with different edges), so there was no need for a third stone, because what matters is wiping three times, and that can be achieved even with one stone. The evidence for the soundness of this view is the fact that if he were to wipe himself with one edge of the stone and then throw it aside, then someone else came and wiped himself with the other edge of the same stone, that would be sufficient for both, and there is no difference of scholarly opinion regarding that…

End quote from *Fat-h al-Bari* (1/257).

This is the response to the evidence quoted by those who say that it is not stipulated to use three pebbles.

Based on that, the more correct view is the first one, which says that it is stipulated when cleaning oneself after defecating to clean oneself properly and wipe oneself three times, and that if a large stone has three edges, it may take the place of three pebbles. That is because of the strength of their argument, which is based on the hadiths of Salman al-Farisi and `A’ishah (may Allah be pleased with them both), and the hadiths which enjoin using an odd number of pebbles when cleaning oneself.

This view was favoured by Shaykh al-Islam ibn Taymiyah, who said: The scholars differed with

regard to cleaning oneself with fewer than three pebbles, or cleaning oneself with something that is not allowed, such as dung or rope, or with one’s right hand: Is that valid? The correct view is that if a person cleans himself with fewer than three pebbles, he must complete what is enjoined.

As for one who cleans himself with bones or using his right hand, that is sufficient, and he has done what is required [which is removing the impurity], but he is sinning, and there is no benefit in doing it again.

End quote from *Majmu` al-Fatawa* (21/211).

This view was also favoured by Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him), who said: When cleaning oneself with pebbles, it is essential to use three pebbles, and the reason for that is the fact that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) asked `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud to bring him three pebbles, then when he rejected the dung, he said: “Bring me something else.” This indicates that it is essential to use three pebbles.

End quote from *Fat-h Dhil-Jalali wal Ikram* (1/308).

And Allah knows best.