118037 - Wisdom Behind Purification in Islam

the question

What is the meaning of purification, to answer the People of the Book regarding that? Why do we purify ourselves for prayer?

Summary of answer

The wisdom behind purification in Islam includes:
1. Purification is in harmony with the sound nature (fitrah) that Allah, may He be exalted, instilled in people.
2. Islam is a religion of cleanliness and beauty, and it encourages its followers to stand out among other people by cleaning their bodies, combing their hair, wearing the purest of clothes and smelling good.
3. Modern, well-founded scientific studies have proven that cleanliness and purification protect a person from many diseases, and that filth is the cause of many diseases.
4. The Muslim is required to meet and converse with his Lord, may He be exalted [in prayer].
5. Whoever strives to purify his body and clothes from filth and impurities should be even keener to purify his heart and soul of bad characteristics.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Understanding the wisdom of legislation in Islam

The one who has a good understanding of the great teachings of Islam will not have any problem with what Islam enjoins and forbids, because his knowledge of Islamic teachings will prevent him from becoming confused and searching for the wisdom and purpose behind the teachings. We have not seen anyone asking such questions except one who has no knowledge of this great

religion.

If there is a person who absolutely trusts a doctor, who is a mere human, and that doctor advises him to follow a program to maintain good health and protect against illness, you will see the one who trusts the doctor submitting to him and doing what he tells him to do, with full confidence that what he says is based on knowledge and experience. You will not find him pausing and thinking to find out why the doctor told him to do this here and not to do that there, and so on.

To Allah belong the most sublime attributes; our trust in our Lord cannot be compared to that person's trust in that doctor. How can that be so, when there is no comparison between the divine and the human, between the Creator and the created being?

This is confirmed by what Imam Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said at the end of his discussion on the wisdom behind the prescription of purification:

If Hippocrates and his ilk recommended such a thing (purification), his followers would adhere to that and they would honour him and show a great deal of respect to him (because of this advice), and they would try to work out the purpose behind it, and list as many of its benefits as they could."(*Shifa' Al-'Alil* p. 230).

Wisdom behind purification in Islam

With regard to the wisdom behind the prescription of purification, there is a great deal of wisdom behind it. What we mean by purification is removing filth and impurities, and doing wudu' and ghusl . This wisdom includes the following:

- Purification is in harmony with the sound nature (fitrah) that Allah, may He be exalted, instilled in people. There can be no doubt that Islam is the religion of sound human nature, and that it encourages the sunan al-fitrah (practices that are in accordance with sound human nature), urging people to do whatever they can do of them, and to keep away from any unsound inclinations that should be shunned.

Hence washing the face, cleaning the nose and mouth, washing the hands, washing the entire body, and cleaning oneself after relieving oneself are all things that do not require any law to prescribe them; rather it is sufficient for a person to have a sound human nature in order to clean those limbs and body parts, and to be keen to keep them free of filth and impurity.

- Islam is a religion of cleanliness and beauty, and it encourages its followers to stand out among other people by cleaning their bodies, combing their hair, wearing the purest of clothes and smelling good.

Undoubtedly people like this would be admired by others, and this is something that leads to success in their calling people to this great religion, because just as people are inclined to favour one whose body and clothes are pure, by the same token they are put off by one whose clothes and body are dirty and filthy. Dirtiness has nothing to do with Islam.

- Modern, well-founded scientific studies have proven that cleanliness and purification protect a person from many diseases, and that filth is the cause of many diseases. So how can this great religion not have in its teachings that which plays a role in protecting against disease and preventing its occurrence and spread?

- The Muslim is required to meet and converse with his Lord, may He be exalted [in prayer]. The one who stands before a president, king or prominent figure is keen – as we see – to ensure that his body and clothes are clean and that he smells good. People are keen to do that with other humans, and there is nothing in Islam to disallow that; rather this was the practice of our Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), as he used to make himself look good for the delegations.

We may add to that the most important One for Whom we should make ourselves look good, and the greatest One for Whom we should be keen to purify our bodies and clothes when we want to stand before Him, namely Allah, may He be exalted. Hence we should not find it strange that we do that when we want to stand before Him, may He be exalted. People are very keen to do something like that, or more so, when standing before another human like themselves, so how

should they be when standing before Allah? For Allah is more deserving that people should make themselves look good for Him, as Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah have mercy on him) said. [See: *Sahih Ibn Khuzaymah,* 766)

- If a person reflects on the rulings of Islam and Allah, may He be exalted, blesses him with understanding, he will be able to see the wisdom behind the different methods of purification in Islam, and he will see that there are reasons why ghusl is prescribed in the case of janabah and not in the case of urinating, for example, and that there is a difference between wudu’ and ghusl .

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“The fact that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) enjoined ghusl after emitting semen and not after urinating is one of the greatest beauties of Islamic teachings, and highlights what they include of mercy, wisdom and purpose. For semen comes from the entire body, which is why Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, called it {an extract} [as-Sajdah 32:8], because it flows from the entire body. As for urine, it is the waste product of food and drink, which is transformed in the stomach and bladder. Thus the impact on the body of the emission of semen is greater than the impact of the passing of urine.

Moreover, doing ghusl following the emission of semen is one of the most beneficial things for the body, heart and soul. In fact, all the souls that reside in physical bodies are strengthened by ghusl, which helps the body to recover what it lost through the emission of semen. This is something that everyone may experience.

Furthermore, janabah leads to tiredness and lethargy, whereas ghusl energizes and revives the body and makes it feel lighter. Hence when Abu Dharr did ghusl for janabah, he said: It is as if a burden was lifted from me.

To sum up, this is something that anyone with sound thinking and a sound nature would understand, for he would realize that ghusl for janabah comes under the heading of that which is necessary for the well-being of body and soul, in addition to the fact that when he is in a state of

janabah, his body and soul are kept away from good souls, but when he does ghusl, that changes. Hence more than one of the Companions said: When a person goes to sleep, his soul ascends. If he is in a state of purity, his soul is given permission to prostrate, but if he is junub it is not given permission to do so. Hence the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) instructed the one who is junub to do wudu' if he wants to sleep .

Top doctors have clearly stated that doing ghusl after having intercourse restores strength to the body and replaces what was lost; it is one of the most beneficial things for both body and soul, and not doing it is harmful. The testimony of reason and sound human nature are sufficient to determine that it is beneficial. And Allah is the source of strength.

Moreover, if the Lawgiver had prescribed doing ghusl after urinating, that would have been very difficult and hard for the ummah, and it is contrary to the wisdom and mercy of Allah, and His kindness to His creation." *(I'lam Al-Muwaqqi'in* (2/77, 78). See also: *At-Tahrir wa't-Tanwir* by At-Tahir ibn 'Ashur (5/65)

- In Islam there is a connection between the outward and the inward. Whoever strives to purify his body and clothes from filth and impurities should be even keener to purify his heart and soul of bad characteristics.

If someone strives to keep his body and clothes clean and beautiful, that is an indication that he also strives to beautify himself inwardly too. Islam does not only focus on outward beauty and ignore inward beauty; rather both are required. A person may be excused if he does not have the means of beautifying his outward appearance, but he is not to be excused for failing to strive for inward beauty too. Both types of purification are a means of attaining the love of Allah, as He, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.} [Al-Baqarah 2:222]

- We will conclude with a concise comment from Imam Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him), who said:

“Reflect on the teachings of Islam, the means of adhering to them and the purpose of these teachings, and you will find that there is a great deal of purpose and wisdom behind them, and there are praiseworthy goals for which these teachings are prescribed, without which people would be like animals, or even worse off. How much wisdom there is and how much benefit for hearts and bodies; how much energy these teachings bring to the heart and physical faculties; they reduce the natural dirt that accumulates on the body and they reduce the sin caused by arrogance and pride. These teachings cleanse hearts, souls and bodies. Doing ghusl for janabah brings a feeling of cleanliness, and helps to replace what the body has lost as a result of janabah; this is one of the most beneficial of things.

Reflect on how wudu’ involves washing the limbs that one uses to work and earn a livelihood. It cleanses the face, which is the location of hearing, sight, speech, smell and taste, which may all be means of committing all kinds of sins. It cleanses the arms, which are upper limbs like wings with which a person strikes, takes and gives. Then it cleanses the feet, with which a person walks and goes about.

Because washing the head may be very difficult and cause hardship, it is replaced [in wudu’] by wiping over the head. Wudu’ is a means for sins to exit from these places with the drops of water that fall from the hair and skin, as it is soundly narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), in the hadith of Abu Hurayrah, that he said: “When a Muslim – or a believer – does wudu’ and washes his face, every sin that he looked at with his eyes comes out from his face with the water – or with the last drop of the water. When he washes his hands, every sin that his hands committed comes out from his hands with the water – or with the last drop of the water. When he washes his feet, every sin to which he walked with his feet comes out from his feet with the water – or with the last drop of the water – until he emerges cleansed of sin.” (Narrated by Muslim)

In *Sahih Muslim* it is also narrated that ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever does wudu’ and does wudu’ well, his sins come out of his body, even from beneath his nails.” This is one of the greatest purposes and benefits of

wudu’.

Those who deny the purpose and wisdom of purification say that it is burdensome, difficult and pure hardship; it serves no purpose and there is no wisdom behind it. If there were no purpose or wisdom behind it except the fact that it is the sign of this ummah and its traces will appear as marks on their faces and limbs on the Day of Resurrection, by which they will stand out among other nations, and this will belong to no one else, and if there were no purpose and wisdom behind it except the fact that the one who does wudu’ purifies his hands with water and his heart with repentance in preparation for standing before his Lord and conversing with Him, standing before Him pure in body, garments and heart, what wisdom, mercy or purpose could be greater than that?

As desire flows through the entire body, to the extent that under every hair there is a desire, ghusl for janabah reaches everywhere that desire reached, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Beneath every hair there is janabah.” [Narrated by the authors of *As-Sunan*; there is some weakness in it]. Therefore he enjoined making the water reach the root of every hair, thus cooling the heat of desire, thus calming oneself, and finding comfort in remembering Allah, reciting His words and standing before Him." (*Shifa’ Al-‘Alil* p. 229, 230)

Whatever the case, the one who reflects on the rulings of Islam will clearly see the wisdom behind them. Whoever Allah deprives of insight and understanding will never benefit from what he sees or from what he hears. It should be noted that purification is one of the good characteristics and practices concerning which there is no difference among the laws and teachings that came before Islam.

It cannot be imagined that any messenger who brought a message to his people would not, first of all, call them to purify their hearts and cleanse them of the abomination of idolatry, then he would call the people to that which is beautiful of words, deeds, and characteristics, and he would call them to purify their garments and bodies, to do ghusl and cleanse themselves, and to rid themselves of filth and impurity. None of the divinely revealed systems of law differed in their teachings concerning that. Whoever argues against that is arguing on the basis of falsehood.

And Allah knows best.