

Research Question no. 1

Let us begin our research by posing this question:

What is Taharah? And what is 'Ismah?

Taharah ((طهارة), by its linguistic definition, refers to the process of cleansing and the removal of anything that may pollute that object (e.g. dirt, spots, odor, germs) with things that are unwanted or harmful to that person. As for the religious or spiritual connotation of Taharah, it means the purification and cleansing of the bodies, objects, soul, and heart from the things which Allah (SWT) ordered that they be purified from and with the way that He (SWT) ordered and specified.

The process of Taharah (purification) can be carried out by yourself to yourself, or to others just like people can do it on you. There exists a strong correlation between the efficiency of purification and the proficiency of that person who carries that procedure, who is referred to as the *Mutahir* ((مُطَهِّر). The more knowledgeable, experienced, and competent that individual is in achieving purification and cleansing, the more efficient and complete the results of purification will be. In other words, if the proficiency of the *Mutahir* is approximately 60%, we can also predict that the efficiency of the process of *Tat-heer* will also be approximately 60%.

We have three things three components: *Mutahir* ((مُطَهِّر), *Mutahar* ((مُطَهَّر), and the process of *Tat-heer* ((تَطَهِير). *Mutahir* is the person or thing which attempts to purify, while *Mutahar* is the person or thing that is sought to be cleansed and purified. *Tat-heer* is the process by which the purification takes place.

For instance, if you send your clothes to be washed at a laundromat, your clothes are the *Mutahar*, the laundromat is the *Mutahir*, and the method or procedure that the Laundromat undertakes to wash the clothes is the process of *Tat-heer* (purification). Logically-speaking, the cleanliness of your clothes will depend on the proficiency and competence of the *Mutahir*.

As for the spiritual meaning of Taharah, you can also carry it out on yourself, or someone else could carry it out on you, and the same logic applies to the rules of relationships, as mentioned earlier.

Spiritual Tat-heer is of two types:

- 1) Physical cleansing and purification of materialistic things which you can see and feel, such as clothes or bodies.
- 2) Spiritual cleansing and purification of moral things which you cannot see or touch, such as your heart, spirit, or mind.

It is logical that the 2nd type of purification be more abstract and difficult to accomplish since you would be attempting to purify something that is not seen or felt. This process of Tat-heer is non-specific and the experience and proficiency of the person who carries it out could be limited too. That is because the proficiency and experience of the *Mutahir* depends on the proficiency and experience of the original teacher.

So, if the original teacher lacks the expertise and experience, the purifier (*Mutahir*) will also lack it. And if the proficiency and knowledge of the teacher is minimal, it will also be minimal in the student who is learning from his teacher. This type of Tat-heer that is not felt or seen could also be carried out by yourself as you may try to purify and cleanse your heart, spirit, mind, and soul through worship and remembrance of Allah (SWT) (ex: prayer, supplication, fasting, Samara, Hajj, good deeds, reading, etc.). Others may also carry out this process on you, like the sheikhs, U'lama, spiritual teachers, religious institutions, and seminaries.

As for the meaning of *'Ismah* ((عصمة), it simply means protection and safeguarding. *Ya'sim* refers to the act of protecting, while *'Asim* ((عاصم) is the person or thing that protects. *Ma'soom* is the person or thing that is sought to be protected by the *'Asim*, whose occurrence and efficiency of *'Ismah* is 100% guaranteed.

Now, if the person seeks protection, but the efficiency or approval for protection is not guaranteed by the *'Asim*, he is not anymore called *Ma'soom* ((معصوم). Rather, he is called *Mu'tasim* ((مُعْتَصِم) since he is not sure if the *'Asim* will approve or is capable of protecting him or not.

Furthermore, if the person actively and relentlessly seeks the protection and exerts lots of effort to attain it, which is also not guaranteed, he is called *Musta'sim* ((مُسْتَعَصِم). Hence, not every *Mu'tasim* is a *Musta'sim*, and not every *Musta'sim* or a *Mu'tasim* is *Ma'soom*. That is because the *Ma'soom* is the only one whose process of protection is successfully completed by the *'Asim* with 100% efficiency.

If we analyze the use of the word *'Ismah* (and its derivatives) by Allah (SWT) in the Qur'an, we will find the following:

- 1) Ayat Al-Balagh:

وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ النَّاسِ

“Wallahu ya'semuka min al-naas”

“And Allah will protect you from the people.” [5:67]

In this verse, Allah (SWT) is the *'Asim* and since He is the *'Asim*, there is no doubt in the efficiency of His protection which is 100% guaranteed. The Holy Prophet (SA), in this case, would be considered *Ma'soom* since the process of purification was approved and completed by the Almighty Creator.

2)

قَالَ سَأُوِي إِلَىٰ جَبَلٍ يَعْصِمُنِي مِنَ الْمَاءِ

“Qala sa-awy illa jabalen ya'semuni min al-maa'...”

“He said: I will betake myself for refuge to a mountain that shall protect me from the water.”

[11:43]

The *'Asim* in this verse is the mountain, while the son of Prophet Nuh (AS) is *Mu'tasim*, since the ability of the mountain to protect him is doubted and in fact proved to be a failure as indicated by the verse,

وَحَالَ بَيْنَهُمَا الْمَوْجُ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمُغْرَقِينَ

“...And a wave intervened between them, so he was from among those who drowned.” [11:43].

3)

وَلَقَدْ رَاوَدتُّهُ عَنِ نَفْسِهِ فَأَسْتَعْصَمَ

“Wa la-qad rawadtuhu 'an nafsih, fasta'sam...”

“And certainly I sought his yielding himself to me, but he abstained [12:32].

In this example, Yusuf (AS) is *Musta'sim* according to Al-'Azeez's wife, since she witnessed Yusuf exert strong effort with great concern to attain the protection of His Lord. Due to her lack of belief in Yusuf's God (*'Asim*), she doubted the ability of the *'Asim* in protecting him. So, she referred to him as *Musta'sim* and this in itself is a testimony from her to his persistence in refusing what she asked, and his seeking the protection of his God from her.

4)

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا

“Wa'tasimu be-hablullah jamee'an...”

“**And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together...**” [3:103]

Here, Allah (SWT) orders us to ask and seek His protection, which is represented by the “rope” of Allah. If we obey His order and seek His protection, we will be considered *Mu'tasimeen* with the rope of Allah, but **not** *Ma'sumeen*.

This is not to doubt the ability of Allah (SWT) in protecting. Rather, it is because we don't know if Allah (SWT) will accept to protect us due to a deficiency or defect in us. Therefore, not every *Mu'tasim* with the rope of Allah is considered to be *Ma'soom*, except whom Allah (SWT) accepts and completes His protection. Otherwise, he is considered to be a *Mu'tasim* who seeks the compassion and acceptance of Allah (SWT) in granting him protection.

Let us now try to relate between the meaning of the words **Taharah** and **'Ismah**:

So far, we have clarified that Taharah is the process of cleaning and purifying the thing itself, while 'Ismah is the protection of that purified thing from getting sullied or polluted again and from losing its state of purification (which was achieved after the process of Tat-heer).

Thus, 'Ismah is the process of protecting the *Mutahar* from losing its state of purity (that was carried out by the *Mutahir*). The *Mutahir* attempts to purify, while the 'Asim tries to maintain that state of purification and keep it constant. If it is not for the 'Asim, the purified thing would not stay pure and clean.

So, if we say that there is an object or thing that is always clean, it is logical then to believe in the presence of a 'Asim who maintains the state of cleanliness for that object at all times. This object will therefore be considered to be *Ma'soom* due to the presence of continuous and ongoing protection that is carried out by the competent and skillful 'Asim.

So, Taharah and 'Ismah are two processes which complete one another and cannot be separated from each other, *if* we indeed desire the purified state of something to continue and be constant. Again, the more competent and knowledgeable the 'Asim is, the more efficient will the 'Ismah be, as in the case of the *Mutahir* and the process of Taharah.

For example, a street cleaner or a custodian is considered to be a *Mutahir* (since he cleans the street or office), while a policeman or security guard is referred to as 'Asim (one who try to prevent impurification from taking place and the loss of Taharah, which is achieved by the *Mutahir*). Every one carries out his role in order to accomplish constant and cleanliness and purification. Based on that, 'Ismah cannot be present without prior existence of Taharah, and the opposite is not true.

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