

Wiping The Feet Or Washing Them In Wudu'

The Muslim scholars disagreed upon the kind of ablution of the feet from among the parts included in wudu'. The Sunni jurists, including the four imams,¹ determined that washing the feet in wudu' was obligatory. Dawood bin Ali and an-Nassir lil-Haqq, who were from among the imams of the Zaydites, said it was obligatory to perform both of washing and wiping the feet.² Some of them might say that it was optional to choose between washing and wiping.³ The Shia, according to their pure imams, thought that wiping the feet was prescribed by the holy Quran.⁴

The evidence of the Shia

The evidence of the Shia for this matter was the Quranic verse

(O you who believe! when you rise up to prayer, wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows and wipe your heads and your feet to the (two) ankles. 5:6)

Imam ar-Razi sufficed us in showing the point of the argument in this verse when he declared: "The evidence of those, who thought that wiping the feet was obligatory, was based upon the two kinds of reciting the phrase (***and your feet***) mentioned in the verse of wudu'. Ibn Katheer, Hamza, Abu Amr an Aasim recited the phrase in genitive and Nafi', ibn Aamir and Aasim recited it in accusative. Reciting it in genitive determined that (***your feet***) was coupled to (***your heads***) and then as it was obligatory to wipe the head it would be obligatory to wipe the feet. As for reciting it in accusative, it also determined that it was obligatory to wipe the feet because the saying (***and wipe your heads***) made (***your heads***) as object and (***your feet***) was coupled to (***your heads***) so both of them were objects of the verb (***wipe***)"

This was his very saying.⁵ But he said: "Many traditions were narrated about the obligation of washing the feet (in wudu'). Washing included wiping but wiping didn't. So washing was nearer in taking precaution and hence it had to be performed in wudu' as wajib.⁶ Therefore it had to be determined that washing the feet would replace wiping them..."

You will see the thought of the infallible imams of the Prophet's progeny and their followers about the traditions talking about washing the feet soon inshallah.

As for his saying that washing included wiping, it was a clear fallacy because washing and wiping were two different acts literally, traditionally and legally.⁷ It had to be determined then that washing wouldn't replace wiping but ar-Razi stopped between two precautions; either to contradict the Quranic verse or to contradict the traditions as he thought and so he contradicted himself when saying that washing included wiping and that it was nearer in taking precaution. He thought by saying so that he would reconcile the verse with the traditions. Whoever pondered at the justification of ar-Razi would find that he was confused. Since the verse was clear in determining the obligation of wiping so he didn't need to put washing instead of wiping.

Some of the great jurists and linguists declared that the verse had showed the obligation of wiping the feet and not washing them. Among them was the jurist Sheikh Ibraheem al-Halabi in his book *Ghunyatul Mutamalli fee Sharh Munityatul Musalli* according to the Hanafite school. He said: "The verse was recited (according to the rules of Arabic) by putting "**your feet**" either in accusative form or genitive form.

The most famous reciting was to put "**Your feet**" in accusative form by coupling it to "**your faces**" or in genitive form according to (neighboring). But the most correct form was to couple "**your feet**" to "**your heads**" because "**your feet**" wouldn't be coupled to "**your faces**" that the two phrases were separated by a different sentence (**and wipe your heads**). The rule in linguistics was not to separate between the two with a word so how about a full sentence."⁸

Among those, who followed this clear way in dealing with this verse, was Imam Abul Hasan Muhammad bin Abdul Hadi as-Sindi. He said: "Wiping the feet was declared by the verse because reciting the phrase in genitive form was clear according to the wording of the verse and reciting the phrase in accusative form would be not acceptable according to the linguists because the two coupled phrases were separated by a full sentence and so the apparent meaning of the verse showed wiping the feet."⁹ He also, like the others, tried to subject the Quran to the traditions that determined washing the feet.

Az-Zamakhshari philosophized in his *Kashshaf* when talking about this verse. He said: "The feet were among the (three) organs that were to be washed (in wudu') by pouring water over them. Perhaps it was considered as bad wasting, which was prohibited, so "the feet" were coupled to "the heads", which were to be wiped, not in order to be wiped but just to draw the attention to the necessity of economizing in pouring water over them. It was said "**to the ankles**" as an end of washing in order to clear the meaning for those, who thought that the feet were to be wiped, because no end was determined for wiping in the Sharia."

This philosophy of coupling "the feet" to "the heads" and in mentioning the end (limit) of washing the feet had nothing to do with deducing the legal verdicts out of the verse at all. The verse had nothing of that at all but it was his way in submitting the verse to his doctrine instead of deducing the legal verdicts out of the evidences the verse had. He was so odd in his affectation, which no one would listen to except who thought that washing the feet was irrefutable according to one's belief but as for it was the point of the

dispute then no one would listen to because many of the Sunni had confessed that the verse declared the obligation of wiping the feet. The rules of Arabic determined that “**your feet**” was coupled to “**your heads**” which must be wiped according to the consensus, and this sufficed as clear evidence.

[A look at the traditions of washing](#)

The traditions talking about washing the feet were two kinds:

1. The traditions that didn't evidence washing like the tradition narrated by Abdullah bin Amr bin al-Aass and mentioned in al-Bukhari and Muslim's *Sahih*s. He said: “In one of our travels with the Prophet (s), the Prophet (s) retarded a little. Then he joined us when it was the time of Assr prayer. We began to wipe our feet (in wudu'). He said: Woe be to the heels from Hell!”^{[10](#)}

If this tradition was true, then wiping the feet would be the correct act of wudu' because the Prophet (s) didn't deny it but he confirmed it. He only denied the filthiness of the heels. Among the Muslims were ignorant bare-footed nomads, who often made water over their heels especially in travel, so he threatened them of Hell lest they offered prayer with those impure heels.

2. The traditions that referred to washing the feet in wudu' like the tradition narrated by Hamran the freed slave of Othman bin Affan. He said: “I saw Othman pouring water from his vessel over his hands and washed them three times and then he rinsed his mouth and his nose... then he washed each foot three times... then he said: I have seen the Prophet (s) doing wudu' like mine.”^{[11](#)}

Another tradition of Abdullah bin Zayd bin Aasim al-Ansari when he was asked: “Would you do wudu' before us like the wudu' of the Prophet (s)?” He asked for a vessel of water. He poured some water over his hands...then he washed his feet to the ankles. Then he said: “The Prophet (s) did wudu' like this.”^{[12](#)} There were other traditions having the same meaning.

We had some notes about these traditions as the following:

First: these traditions contradicted the holy Quran and the traditions of the infallible imams of the Prophet's progeny, who agreed upon the obligation of wiping the feet in wudu'. The Quran and the Prophet's progeny were the two weighty things the Prophet (s) had left for the umma. If the umma kept to them, it would never go astray. Hence every thing contradicted these two things would be brushed aside.

It sufficed as evidence for denying washing the feet in wudu' and refuting the traditions talking about it that the scholar of the umma and the vessel of the Quran and the Sunna, Abdullah bin Abbas often said: “Allah determined two washes and two wipes (in wudu'). Didn't you see that when He mentioned tayammum, He determined two wipes in stead of the two washes (of wudu') and cancelled the two wipes (of wudu').”^{[13](#)}

Abdullah bin Abbas often said: “Wudu’ is two washes and two wipes.”¹⁴

When he was informed that ar-Rabee’ bint Afra’ al-Ansariyya pretended that the Prophet (s) performed wudu’ at her house and washed his feet, he came to her asking her about that. When she told him of that he said denyingly: “The people insisted on washing (the feet in wudu’) whereas I didn’t find in the Book of Allah save wiping.”¹⁵

Second: if these traditions were true, they would be recurrent and would be narrated by the all because knowing about the purity of the feet in wudu’ was a necessary need of the Muslims; men and women, frees and slaves, and it was a necessity needed every day and night. If it was else than the wiping mentioned in the Quranic verse, then it would be known by the Muslims, who lived at the time of the Prophet (s) and after that. It would be a certain thing among all the Muslim and it would spread in every country and at every age and there would be no way to deny it or to doubt about it. But since it was not so, the traditions appeared to be so weak and then to be brushed aside.

Third: the traditions talking about the kind of the purity of the feet contradicted each other. Some of them showed that it was to wash the feet in wudu’ like the traditions narrated by Hamran and ibn Aasim and some showed that it was to wipe the feet like the tradition mentioned by al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* and narrated by Ahmad, ibn Abu Shayba, ibn Abu Omar, al-Baghawi, at-Tabarani and al-Mawardi. All of them narrated the tradition from a trusted and reliable series of narrators.¹⁶ The tradition reached Abul Aswad from Abbad bin Tameem from his father, who said: “I saw the Prophet (s) performing wudu’ and wiping his feet.”

Also there was the tradition narrated by Zurara bin A’yun and Bukayr bin A’yun that Imam Baqir had imitated the Prophet’s wudu’ by wiping his head and his feet with the leftover water of his hands.

It was mentioned in *Majma’ul Bayan* that ibn Abbas had imitated the Prophet’s wudu’ and wiped his feet.

Since there was a contradiction between the traditions, so we had to depend upon the Book of Allah as our reference.

[A look at their excuse of approval](#)

The Sunni might justify washing the feet that they found it more suitable for the feet than wiping as that wiping the head was more suitable than washing it because the filthy feet often wouldn’t be purified unless they were washed unlike the head, which would often be purified by wiping.

They said that the reasonable interests could be reasons for performing the religious obligations until the Sharia noticed two meanings; one referred to interest and the other referred to worship. They meant by interest what referred to the perceptible things and by worship what referred to the purification of the soul.

We believe that Allah the Almighty has noticed His people in all what He has charged them with of the legal obligations. He hasn't ordered them to do anything unless it is for their benefit and He hasn't forbidden them from doing anything unless it causes corruption to them. In spite of that He hasn't let the divine verdicts be decided according to the people's thoughts whether they cause benefit or corruption. He has ordered them to worship Him according to irrefutable evidences and He hasn't left to them any outlet to slip to other than His verdicts. The first of these evidences is the holy Quran. The Quran has determined wiping the heads and the feet in wudu' and it must be obeyed. As for the cleanness of the feet, it must be done before performing wudu' according to special conditions saying that the purity of the organs, which were to be washed or wiped in wudu', must be confirmed before performing wudu'.¹⁷ Washing the feet done by the Prophet (s) as it was mentioned in those traditions might be of this kind or it might be for cooling or it might be to exaggerate in cleanness after performing wudu'.

Note

Ibn Maja mentioned in his *Sunan* a tradition narrated by Abu Iss-haq that Abu Hayya had said: "I saw Ali perform wudu' and then he washed his feet to the ankles. He said: I wanted to show you how the Prophet (s) performed wudu'."

As-Sindi said: "This was a serious refutation against the Shia, who believed in wiping the feet, where Ali believed in washing the feet. Therefore the author mentioned it and began his chapter with it. He did well in mentioning this tradition in this concern. May Allah reward him good. The apparent meaning of the Quranic verse required to wipe the feet as it was narrated by ibn Abbas and so it must be interpreted to mean washing the feet."¹⁸

May Allah forgive him, ibn Maja and all the Sunni scholars. They knew well that this tradition was null in many ways:

First: Abu Hayya, the narrator of this tradition, was nobody and was one of the most obscure narrators. Ath-Thahabi mentioned him in his *Mizan* and said: "No one knew who he was." Then he mentioned that ibn al-Madeeni and Abul Waleed al-Fardhi had said: "He was unknown." He also said: "Abu Zar'a said: His name was never mentioned."¹⁹ Then ath-Thahabi said: "I researched more and more on Abu Hayya but I got nothing about him save ignorance and obscurity. This name might be fabricated by the one, who had fabricated the tradition. Allah is the most Aware!"

Second: this tradition was narrated from Abu Hayya by Abu Iss-haq only.²⁰ Abu Iss-haq became too old, dotard and often forgot; therefore the people brushed his traditions aside²¹ and no one narrated from him save Abul Ahwass and Zuhayr bin Mo'awiya al-Ju'fi,²² who were criticized by people for that.²³

There was no doubt that if a narrator became dotard, then all of his traditions narrated after his dotage would be null whether it was known that the traditions were narrated after the dotage like this tradition or

it was unknown when they were narrated.

Third: this tradition contradicted the holy Quran and it contradicted the certain traditions of Imam Ali and his infallible sons (s) and then it must be brushed aside.

To the ankles

The ankle mentioned in the Quranic verse was the joint between the foot and the leg. Zurara bin A'yun and Bukayr bin A'yun asked Imam Baqir (s) about the ankles and he answered them so.²⁴ So was mentioned by Sheikh as-Sadooq.²⁵ The linguists said that every joint of bones was called "ka'b" ankle.

The Sunni scholars said that the two "ka'bs" ankles were the two protruding bones on the two sides of the leg. They justified that by saying that if the "ka'b" was the joint between the foot and the leg, then each leg would have one "ka'b" and so it should be said (and your legs to the "ka'bs" ankles)²⁶ as each hand had one elbow so it was said (and your hands to the elbows).

I said: if it was mentioned in the verse (the two elbows), it would be right too without any confusion. Then the meaning would be (wash your faces and hands to the two elbows of each of you and wipe your heads and feet to the two ankles of each of you). The duality or plurality of the two words in the verse didn't affect the meaning and also the duality of one of them and the plurality of the other wouldn't affect the right meaning. Perhaps diversity in expression required that.

This would be if each leg had one ankle but if each leg had two ankles then there would be no way for their justification.

The anatomists confirmed that there was a round bone like the ankle of a cow or a sheep beneath the bone of the leg forming a joint between the leg and the foot. It was called ankle (ka'b) too.²⁷ Hence wiping each foot ended to "ka'bayn" two ankles, which were the very joint and the round bone under it. In dualing the word "ankle" only without the word "elbow" in the verse there was a wonderful point referring to something that was not known except by the anatomists. Glory be to Allah, the Creator, the Aware, the Wise!

^{1.} Abu Haneefa, Malik, ash-Shafi'iy and Ahmad bin Hanbal; the imams of the four Sunni sects.

^{2.} Fakhruddeen ar-Razi talked about them in his Tafseer when explaining the verse of wudu'. He said that as if they became confused because of the contradiction between the verse and the traditions they depended upon; therefore they determined to perform both washing and wiping.

^{3.} Like al-Hasan al-Basri and Muhammad bin Jareer at-Tabari. Ar-Razi talked about them in his Tafseer and showed that they thought that both the Quran and the Sunna (the traditions they depended upon and thought they were true) must be followed and so they thought that both of washing and wiping were required, hence they said it was obligatory to choose one of them optionally.

^{4.} This was the belief of ibn Abbas, Anass bin Malik, Akrima, ash-Shi'bi and Imam Baqir as it was mentioned by ar-Razi in his Tafseer. This was not only the belief of Imam Baqir but also it was the belief of all our imams (s).

^{5.} At-Tafseer al-Kabeer vol.3 p.370.

^{6.} Precaution doesn't occur except by performing both of washing and wiping because they are two different acts.

- [7.](#) Washing means the pouring water over the object being washed even if it is a little whereas wiping doesn't mean pouring water but it is just to rub the wiped object by the hand.
- [8.](#) Refer to Ghunyatul Mutamalli p. 16.
- [9.](#) Refer to Sharh Sunan ibn Maja vol. 1 p.88. Those, who declared like what ar-Razi, al-Halabi and as-Sindi had declared, were many that we couldn't quote all the sayings about the subject. The sayings of these three imams (may Allah have mercy upon them) were enough for us.
- [10.](#) This phrase (woe be to the heels from Hell) was mentioned in the traditions narrated by Amr, Aa'isha and Abu Hurayra according to al-Bukhari and Muslim's Sahih.
- [11.](#) It was mentioned by al-Bukhari in his Sahih.
- [12.](#) Mentioned by Muslim in his Sahih.
- [13.](#) Kanzul Ommal vol.5 p. 103.
- [14.](#) Ibid.
- [15.](#) Mentioned by ibn Maja in his Sunan when talking about washing the feet and mentioned by others.
- [16.](#) Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani said in his book al-Issaba, vol. 1 when mentioning the biography of Tameem bin Zayd that all of them were trusted and reliable. So was said by the authors of the books of Hadith when mentioning them.
- [17.](#) Therefore you see the barefooted ones, the farmers and those, who don't care much for the purity of their feet during working, wash their feet when the time of prayer comes and wipe them, in wudu', after being dried.
- [18.](#) He wanted to submit the holy Quran to his doctrine and not vice versa!
- [19.](#) Abu Hayya was just a surname.
- [20.](#) Mentioned by ath-Thahabi in his Mizan.
- [21.](#) Refer to Mizanul I'tidal and other books of biographies when talking about Omar bin Abdullah as-Subay'iy, Abu Iss-haq's full name.
- [22.](#) Mizanul I'tidal by ath-Thahabi when talking about Abu Hayya.
- [23.](#) Imam Ahmad said: "Zuhayr bin Mo'awiya was reliable but there was weakness in what he narrated from Abu Iss-haq. Abu Zar'a said: "Zuhayr bin Mo'awiya was reliable but he narrated from Abu Iss-haq after he had become dotard. Ath-Thahabi said: "The weakness in Zuhayr's traditions was because of Abu Iss-haq and not of Zuhayr."
- [24.](#) In a tradition mentioned by Sheikh at-Toosi that they asked Imam Baqir (s): "Where are the ankles?" He said : "Here are they." He meant the joints beneath the legs.
- [25.](#) He said that Imam Baqir had imitated the wudu' of the Prophet (s) and then he wiped his head and the back of his feet to the joints of his legs.
- [26.](#) It was mentioned in the verse "ka'bayn" that meant two "ka'bs" (two ankles) whereas with the hands it was said "marafiq" (more than two marfaqs-two elbows).
- [27.](#) Muhammad bin al-Hasan ash-Shaybani and al-Asma'iy said that the "ka'b" mentioned in the verse was this bone, which was beneath the bone of the leg. Al-Asma'iy said: "The two protruding bones on both sides of the leg are called (manjamayn)." Ar-Razi thought that this was the belief of the Shia so he confuted them by saying that the round bone beneath the bone of the leg was hidden and not known except by the anatomists unlike the two protruding bones on both sides of the leg that they were apparent and the evidences of the general (religious) obligations must be apparent and not hidden. When ar-Razi saw the Shia wipe their feet to the ankles, he thought that they believe in what ash-Shaybani and al-Asma'iy had said and he didn't know that the "ka'b" according to the Shia was the very joint, which was known and perceptible by every one.

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