

## Wuzu (Statutory Ablution) in Allah's Book and the Prophet's Tradition

One of the rules on whose necessity and conditions for performing the five daily (obligatory) prayers all the Muslims have consensus is the purity (*Taharah*). One for whom the obligatory bathing (*Ghusl*) is not necessary can accomplish purifying by ablution. Some actions and conditions of the ritual ablution, like whether to wash or rub the feet, are subject to controversy. Most Sunni scholars believe that washing the feet in ablution is compulsory, but the verdict of all Shi'a jurists is to rub them. In case rubbing is incumbent, should it be done all over the foot? Or is it enough to rub the feet from the toes to the ankles?

At the outset of this discussion, we direct the attention of the gentle readers, and mostly our Sunni brethren, to some points:

A) Most of the beliefs and rituals which are now considered as Islamic certainties have not been so at the time of the Companions, their followers and even one or two generations after them. In fact, there has been controversy over these issues among scholars and jurists in the past, but due to political and practical concerns, some of the opinions (and sometimes even one opinion) have dominated others over time. Clearly, in such a situation, scholars and thinkers may be frightened by the dominance of an opinion and attempt to find reasons and argumentation, though unjustified, for it. The reason behind this is that they have been brought up on respecting that opinion and have accustomed to it. Later, they have faced the same thing in their exchanges with their fellows in the society. Leaving such an opinion is hence very difficult, since it is deeply internalized in one's soul and mind. But reason and justice requires that we save ourselves from these jams and try to think logically and independently and choose accordingly. Our present discussion is one of the clearest evidences of this issue.

B) The main source for the inference of religious rulings is the Holy Qur'an that is away from any untruth and everything should refer to it. If a tradition or some traditions are against the Word of Allah, they are surely invalid and should be ignored. So, if traditions were contrary to each other, i.e. some were in

accord with Allah's Word and some against it, those in apparent accordance with Qur'an are certainly preferable. Of course, if the traditions in apparent contrast with Qur'an are not opposed by other traditions, some people may use them for the interpretation of Allah's Book, leaving the face of Qur'an. However, it is not the case if there are other opposing traditions, since the proof of a tradition is lost due to the contradiction to other traditions and therefore there remains no proof for rejecting the face of Qur'an. The Holy Prophet (a.s) says in this regard:

إِعْرَضُوا حَدِيثِي عَلَى كِتَابِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ وَافَقَهُ فَهُوَ مِنِّي وَأَنَا قُلْتُهُ

“Compare my traditions with the Word of Allah. If it was in accord with Qur'an, (you will find out that) it is really my statement.”<sup>1</sup>

C) Shi'a jurists refer to traditions quoted from the Ahl al-Bayt for proving the rulings of ablution, like other rulings. Based on Thaqalayn tradition and other traditions, they not only take traditions from the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) as proof but also prefer them to other traditions, as acknowledged by some Sunni scholars. For instance, when Hakim Nayshapuri speaks of the most valid documents and the best narrator chains, he mentions some of the Companions but first of all he says:<sup>2</sup>

“The most valid tradition narrated from the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) is Ja'far Ibn Muhammad (Imam Sadiq) from his father (Imam Baqir), from Ja'far's grandfather (Imam Sajjad) from Ali (a.s), provided that the narrator from Ja'far is trustee.”<sup>3</sup>

About the document of the famous tradition known as *Salsalat Al-Dhahab* (Golden Chain)<sup>4</sup> narrated by Imam Riza (a.s), from his father from his grandfathers from the Messenger of Allah (a.s), Ahmad Ibn Hanbal says, “If this document is read to an insane, he will be surely healed.”<sup>5</sup>

Our emphasis here is on the traditions quoted by the Sunni, but some of the traditions quoted by the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) from the Holy Prophet are mentioned, too. Our purpose is for our Sunni brothers in this age to know, like their great scholars at the first centuries after the emergence of Islam, that these rulings are not especially for the Shi'a; rather they can be obtained through the traditions of themselves. Also some of the Companions, their followers and some others who are accepted by both the Sunni and the Shi'a believe in these rulings and verdicts, too. It is hoped that these scientific discussions make the two Islamic sects approach each other, preventing the adversaries of Islam and Qur'an from enjoying their differences. This illumination may, by God's favor, make those who are of opinion and do not consider *taqlid* as limited to “the four Islamic schools”, choose this opinion, as did their scholars previously.

D) The contradiction seen among the traditions are of different sources, not just due to fabrication and wrong attribution to the Messenger of Allah (a.s), though alteration is the main source. Qurtubi has some viewpoints about the traditions' quotation and alteration. He says, “One should not heed what liars and fabricators have said about the virtue of reciting some Qur'anic chapters and other deeds. The liars have

fabricated these with different purposes. Some of the apostates by doing these aimed at making doubt among the people and some others did so as a result of their whims.[6](#)

As Nuh Maruzi fabricated some traditions in virtue of the Holy Qur'an's chapters one by one. When he was asked about his intention, he answered, "I saw people turning away from the Qur'an and going toward the jurisprudence of Abu Hanifah and *Maghazi* of Ibn Ishaq, so I fabricated these traditions for God's sake!" Qurtubi then continues, "Avoid what Islam's opponent and miscreants have established for encouragement or warning! The most harmful of these is a group known as being ascetic who supposed that they fabricated traditions for God's sake. People trusted them and hence accepted what they fabricated. They were misled and led people astray, too."[7](#)

Nevertheless, contradiction is found in some traditions since the narrator may not have noticed situational[8](#) or textual[9](#) signs, or if he has noticed them, he has not mentioned them because the signs had been clear to him. For example, he has brought a conditional rule as full or a full one as conditional. Some other sources of contradiction can be thought of which are included in *Dirayah* and *Usul* books in detail.

E) As understood from reference books of traditions, prayer and ablution were stipulated in the religion from the beginning of the Prophet's Mission, since the Messenger of Allah (a.s) prayed along with Ali (a.s) and Khadijah (a.s).[10](#) Ibn Majah in his *Sunan*, Hakim in *Mustadrak* and Tabari in his *Tarikh* quote Abbad Ibn Abdullah as saying that he heard Ali (a.s) saying:

أَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ وَأَخُو رَسُولِهِ وَأَنَا الصِّدِّيقُ الْأَكْبَرُ لَا يَقُولُهَا بَعْدِي إِلَّا كَذَّابٌ. صَلَّيْتُ قَبْلَ النَّاسِ بِسَبْعِ سِنِينَ

I am God's servant and the brother of His Messenger, and I am the greatest truthful. No one would claim this after me except a liar. I prayed seven years before other people did."[11](#)

Though prayer had been included in the religion from the beginning, there is consensus that the Ablution Verse (5:6) has been descended in Medina[12](#), as this verse is in Al-Ma'ida Chapter, which was revealed in Medina.[13](#)

Of course, as is evident from some of the verses in this Chapter, some verses of it have been revealed toward the end of Prophet's life. Keeping this in mind, there is likelihood that at first, ablution was different regarding its conditions and details, and after the revelation of the honorable verse, the previous tradition about the ablution was abrogated. Some traditions imply the same concept, too. Therefore by rejection of some traditions because of their contradiction, we do not intend to deny them totally. Perhaps the narrators have quoted an abolished ruling headless of its being abolished or heading its clear abolition.

With regard to the above-mentioned facts, we present the honorable verse of ablution (*wuzu*) and dry ablution (*tayammum*) and discuss it in details.

Almighty God says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قُمْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ جُنُبًا فَاطَّهَّرُوا وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مَرْضَىٰ أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِنْكُمْ مِنَ الْغَائِطِ أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ مِنْهُ مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَكِنْ يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهَّرَكُمْ وَلِيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

***O you who believe! when you rise up to prayer, wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows, and rub your heads and your feet to the ankles; and if you are under an obligation to perform a total ablution, then wash (yourselves) and if you are sick or on a journey, or one of you come from the privy, or you have touched the women, and you cannot find water, betake yourselves to pure earth and rub your faces and your hands therewith, Allah does not desire to put on you any difficulty, but He wishes to purify you and that He may complete His favor on you, so that you may be grateful. (5:6)***

## The Quality of Washing the Hands

The first issue of difference in ablution between the Sunni and the Shi'a is the quality of washing the hands. The Shi'a, when washing the hands during the ritual ablution, begin from the elbows down to the fingertips, while the usual method among the Sunni is the reverse, i.e. they start from the fingertips up to the elbows. Of course, this is not a basic difference. All the Sunni jurisprudents consider the Shi'a's method in washing the hands as true.

That is right!

Some of them state that in some cases beginning from the fingertips is recommended. Nawawi in his *Al-Majmu'*, says, "Abu'l-Qasim Saymuri and his friend, Mawirdi, in the book entitled *Hawi* say that it is recommended to start from the fingertips during washing the hands in ablution. So, one should pour water to his palm and reach it to the elbow by the palm of the other hand. The natural flow of water is not sufficient. And if someone else pours water for him in ablution, it is recommended to pour water from the elbow to the fingertips and one who pours water should be on the left side."<sup>14</sup>

Also, a part of *Al-Fiqh ala Al-Madhahib Al-Arba'a* reads: "One of the recommendations in ablution for the Shafiite is to begin from the front part of the organs (the fingertips) provided that the water is taken by handfuls from a bowl or a vessel. But if someone else pours water or water pours from something like a trumpet, it is recommended to begin from the elbows."

Except the Shafiite, others have quoted the virtue of beginning from the fingertips when washing the hands in the ritual ablution. As far as the author scrutinized, no Sunni jurisprudent knows beginning from the fingertips compulsory. A point worthy of mentioning about washing the hands is that the elbow

should certainly be washed, as stipulated in traditions narrated by both the Sunni and the Shi'a:

عَنْ جَابِرٍ، كَانَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِذَا تَوَضَّأَ أَمَرَ الْمَاءَ عَلَى مِرْفَقَيْهِ.

Jabir said: The Holy Prophet (a.s) always washed the elbows in ablution.

The honorable verse states the same thing too, because the word “إلى” (into) is used as meaning “مع” (with) implying that the elbow should also be washed to the sufficient extent. The lexicographers and jurists have stipulated this fact. The usage of “إلى” with the meaning “مع” is not limited to this verse only, since both in Allah’s Word and in Arabic, it is frequently found, such as in 11:52, 4:2 and 3:52. In Arabic language, there is a proverb supporting this claim.<sup>15</sup> But *Sharih Razi* has proposed the meaning of addition. Undoubtedly the theme of the honorable verse is that hands should be washed including the elbows and the word “إلى” (to) means inclusion, but the verse does not include the quality of washing the hands.<sup>16</sup>

Most Shi'a scholars, based on traditions, believe that beginning from the elbow is mandatory when washing the hand in ablution, but some others reject the proof of these traditions and believe that traditions only prove the desirability and preference of beginning from the fingers when washing the hands in ablution. Consequently, to them, washing the hands from the fingers is allowed and does not nullify the ablution. Among the believers in this issue is Sayyid Murtaza Alam Al-Huda, in one of the two quotations attributed to him.<sup>17</sup> Ibn Idris Hilli, in *Sara'ir*, explicitly accepts this quotation and about adducing it, he says: “...since the Exalted God has ordered us to wash the hands in the ritual ablution and one who washes his hand from the fingers to the elbow has undoubtedly done his duty.”<sup>18</sup>

## The Quality of Rubbing the Head

Another controversial issue in the ablution is the quality of rubbing the head. The Shi'a rub only the front part of the head, while most Sunnis rub most or all the head. In fact, this difference is not so controversial and many jurists do not consider rubbing the entire head as obligatory. For instance, Imam Shafi'i considers the least amount of rubbing sufficient. In *Bidayat Al-Mujtahid*, we read the following:

Scholars have reached consensus that rubbing the head in the ritual ablution is compulsory, but they are not in agreement about the amount of it. Malik believes in the obligation of rubbing the whole head. Shafi'i and some of the followers of Malik and Abu Hanifah believe that only rubbing a part of the head is necessary.

These disciples of Malik have determined a one-third amount for rubbing the head. Some others have set the two-third amount. Abu Hanifah says that the amount is one-fourth. Moreover, Abu Hanifah has determined a part of the hand to rub with, saying: “Rubbing the head with less than three fingers is not

enough.” Shafi’i has determined no limitation for the hand nor for the head.[19](#)

Ibn Rushd then adds:

The main reason for this difference is that “بِ” (to) has two meanings in Arabic; (1) Addition, as in 23:20, and (2) division.

The usage of “بِ” for division in Arabic is undeniable as agreed upon by the grammarians of Kufah. People who know this fact consider as obligatory rubbing a part of the head. They have referred to the tradition of Mughirah who said: “The honorable Prophet (a.s) performed ablution and rubbed the front part of the head and upon his turban.”

Ibn Qudamah writes in his *Al-Mughni*, “It is also narrated from Ahmad that he deems legal rubbing a part of the head.” He then continues, “Abu Al-Harith says: ‘I asked Ahmad, ‘Does it suffice to rub just a part of the head and leave other parts?’ He answered, ‘Yes, it is sufficient.’”[20](#)

It is narrated that A’ishah, Uthman and Ibn Umar rubbed the front part of the head during the ritual ablution.[21](#) In *Al-Mughni*, Hasan, Sufyan Thawri, Awza’i and other opinionists are said to believe in rubbing a part of the head.[22](#)

In arguing for the obligation of rubbing a part of the head, some grammarians are quoted as saying, “When “بِ” is added to the object of a verb which is transitive per se, it refers to division, such as in the honorable verse *وَأَمْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ* (rub your heads), but if the verb is not transitive by itself, the “بِ” refers to addition, such as in 22:29. Some have argued that “بِ”, when added to a noun, refers to the fact that a part of that noun is intended. Abu Al-Su’ud, in the exegesis of the honorable verse says, “It is proved that “بِ” adds a sense of containing to the verb. Perhaps, it is said that it does not mean to rub all the head, unlike *وَأَمْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ* which resembles God’s saying “*فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ*” (wash your faces.) Therefore, the great majority of Sunni jurisprudents believe that rubbing a part of the head is sufficient. All Shi’a scholars believe that rubbing a part of the head is obligatory and consider necessary rubbing the front part of the head. However, there is controversy on determining its amount. What is common among Shi’a jurisprudents is that naming (something) rubbing the front part of the head would suffice.[23](#) The proof for this famous statement is valid traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s).[24](#) We bring here one of these traditions narrated by Imam Baqir (a.s):

Zurarah asked the Imam (a.s), “How do we know that rubbing a part of the feet is enough?” Imam Baqir (a.s) replied:

يا زُرَّارَةُ! قَالَهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَتَزَلَّ بِهِ الْكِتَابُ مِنَ اللَّهِ لَأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يَقُولُ “اغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ” فَعَلِمْنَا أَنَّ الْوَجْهَ كُلَّهُ يَنْبَغِي أَنْ يُغْسَلَ ثُمَّ قَالَ “وَأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ” ثُمَّ فَصَلَ بَيْنَ الْكَلَامَيْنِ فَقَالَ “وَأَمْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ” فَعَرَفْنَا حِينَ قَالَ “بِرُءُوسِكُمْ” أَنَّ الْمَسْحَ بِبَعْضِ الرَّأْسِ لِمَكَانِ الْبَاءِ ثُمَّ وَصَلَ الرَّجُلَيْنِ بِالرَّأْسِ كَمَا وَصَلَ الْيَدَيْنِ بِالْوَجْهِ فَقَالَ “وَأَرْجُلُكُمْ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ” فَعَرَفْنَا حِينَ وَصَلَهَا بِالرَّأْسِ أَنَّ الْمَسْحَ عَلَى بَعْضِهَا

O Zurarah! This is the word of the Messenger of Allah (a.s) and the same is true in what has been revealed of Allah's Book; since Allah states, "wash your faces;" so, He told us to wash the whole face. Then He said, "and your hands as far as the elbows." Then He distinguished these two proceeding statements saying, "Rub your heads." When He said, "your heads," He taught us that rubbing will be done with part of the head, as He had attached the ruling of the hands to that of the face, so He stated, "and your feet to the ankles." Thus, by attaching the ruling of the feet to that of the head, He taught us that rubbing a part of the feet is sufficient.

As is evident from this tradition, Imam Baqir (a.s) has adduced both the Prophet's tradition and the Qur'an's surface and lexical aspect. To Shi'a jurisprudents, rubbing the head is recommended to be horizontally and with three closed fingers in amount.

### Rubbing or Washing the Feet?

The most controversial issue in the ritual ablution among the Sunni and Shi'a is what to do about the feet. Most of the Sunnis, following the idea of the four Islamic schools, believe that the feet should be washed up to the ankles, but some of grand Sunni jurisprudents and all the Shi'a believe that what is ordered is rubbing the feet up to the ankles, not washing them.

Some Sunni jurisprudents believe that both rubbing and washing are valid and still some others have issued verdicts to perform both of them. The honorable verse, about our duty toward the feet in ablution says:

وَأَمْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلِكُمْ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ

And rub your heads and your feet to the ankles.

Among the usual pronunciations, the word "أرجلكم" (your feet) has been pronounced in two ways: one with the *jarr* (genitive case) vowel (/i/ sound) and the other with the *nasb* (accusative case) vowel (as the vowel sound in English 'lab'). We now discuss either pronunciation to understand our true duty as stipulated in the Holy Qur'an.

#### **Pronunciation with *jarr* vowel (*arjuli*)**

Anyone who has a minimum knowledge of Arabic language agrees that when "أرجلكم" (your feet) is pronounced with *jarr* vowel, it is added to "رؤوس" (heads), and whatever rule is mentioned for "heads" is applicable to the feet. This is not in considerable difference with the case it had directly said, "امسحوا بأرجلكم" (rub your feet).

One may claim that although the statement apparently stipulates that "أرجلكم" (your feet) is added to 'head' and has the same rule as the head, external reasons<sup>25</sup> indicate that 'feet' do not have the same

rule as of 'head' and they should be washed, not rubbed. Our answer is that, first, as it will be discussed later, there are no such valid and unquestionable reasons.<sup>26</sup> Second; if we suppose that there are such reasons, their proof is not certain. On the other hand, the explicitness of the statement in the verse makes altering it very obscene, away from God's Glorious Word, which is of the best degrees of eloquence.

If 'feet' is not added to 'heads,' not having its rules, it should probably be added to 'your hands' and hence washed. But in this case too, pronouncing 'your feet' with *jarr* vowel would be unjustifiable. The only apparently justified argument posed by some people to justify the vowel *jarr* for 'feet' without being attached to 'heads' is *jarr*, because of an adjacent noun. They say 'your feet' actually has *nasb* vowel, but since it is adjacent with 'your heads,' which has *jarr* vowel, it has become of similar feature. These people have cited instances of '*jarr* because of an adjacent noun' mentioned in ancient Arab poems and proverbs.

## The counter argument for 'jarr due to an adjacent noun'

The answer lies in Ibn Husham's *Mughni Al-Labib*, the second rule of section eight, where he writes:

Scholars believe that *jarr* due to adjacent noun is rarely used for description or emphasis; but *jarr* due to an adjacent noun cannot occur in case of nouns joined by conjunctions, since conjunctions do not allow vowels to be extended to the following noun."<sup>27</sup> Sayrafi and Ibn Jinni have basically rejected *jarr* due to the adjacent noun.<sup>28</sup>

One may object to this explanation citing an ancient Arab poem as example; yet, Ibn Husham himself replied to such an objection in the Fourth Section of *Mughni Al-Labib* quoting some people as saying that in case of an agent or an adjective, normally with *nasb* vowel, it is basically allowed to add a noun with vowel *jarr* to them. They give evidence from an ancient Arab poem, too.<sup>29</sup> When an agent has a sense of past tense, it is only added to another noun, but it cannot affect the vowel of that noun. It is now clear that *jarr* due to adjacent noun is not a grounded possibility.

In general, we conclude that, first; some grammarians such as Sirafi and Ibn Jinni have basically rejected the rule of *jarr* due to an adjacent vowel. Second; if we accept this rule, the scholars (as to Ibn Husham) have said that there are very rare instances in cases of description and emphasis, but not in connection to a previous manner as in our case. Further, how can one interpret the Holy Qur'an with such a rare possibility? The Holy Qur'an is the most eloquent of the words which men and jinn are unable to replicate. Is it not imposing one's own unjustified inclination to the Holy Qur'an?

## Another instance of jarr due to an adjacent noun

Some people may say that the rule under discussion appears in verses other than the Ablution Verse, as in "56:22) (وَحُورٍ عِينٍ)" in which "حور" is pronounced with *jarr* vowel, though lexically it cannot be added to

“بِأَكْوَابٍ” (with globes) since the verse does not mean that ‘the youths’ go round about with ‘beautiful ones.’ So, it should have *jarr* due to the adjacent “بِأَكْوَابٍ وَأَبَارِيقٍ” and added to “وَلِدَانٌ مُّخَلَّدُونَ” which has *nasb* vowel.

Also, in case of the honorable verse “55:35) (يُرْسَلُ عَلَيْكُمَا شُوَاظٌ مِّنْ نَّارٍ وَنُحَاسٌ فَلَا تَنْتَصِرَانِ)”, some people have pronounced “نحاس” with *jarr*, while it is added to “شواظ” which has *nasb*. They argue that grammarians and interpreters believe that justifying the *jarr* vowel due to its adjacent noun is only a possibility and not completely valid. About the phrase “حور عين”, Zamakhshari says: “If the two nouns are pronounced as having *jarr* vowel, there are two possibilities: first, that it is connected to “في جنات” (النعيم) 56: 12). Second, this phrase is connected to “أَكْوَابٍ” (goblets) because the meaning of the verse supports so.

Hence, as is evident, Zamakhshari has not posed the issue of *jarr* due to an adjacent noun. The above-mentioned possibilities have been also mentioned in *Mughni*. The author of *Kashf* is quoted as saying, “*Jarr* due to an adjacent noun is a weak possibility or it is totally rejected, in case of the non-adjacent nouns.”

Still other people have mentioned another reason for “ارجل” (the feet) taking a *jarr* vowel, in order not to accept rubbing for the feet. They have stated that the connection of “ارجل” (the feet) to “رأس” (the head) is not because of their identical rule of rubbing; rather since washing the feet may lead to wastage, ‘feet’ has been connected to ‘head,’ implying that in washing the feet, care must be taken not to waste water. This is so weak a statement, as is evident.

It thus became clear that in the honorable verse of ablution, the *jarr* vowel of “ارجل” (the feet) due to an adjacent noun is not true, and the only valid contribution is connecting it to “رؤسكم” (your heads), which proves the correctness of rubbing the feet.

## Pronunciation with the nasb vowel (arjula)

In case “ارجلكم” (your feet) is pronounced with *nasb* vowel, it is understood by anyone familiar with Arabic that it is connected to “رؤوس” (heads). In other words, it is connected to the position of it in the sentence, since “برؤوس” per se, is the object of the verb “امسحوا” in the sentence and its underlying vowel is *nasb*. Connecting a noun to another’s position in the sentence exists in books of Arabic grammar and there are so many evidences on it.

If someone says that “ارجلكم” (your feet) is connected to “ايديكم” (your feet) in the previous sentence, our answer is that this is a rare possibility, because the first sentence is finished and nothing is expected to follow. The next sentence is started; and to connect “ارجل” to the first sentence at this place is away from eloquence. Surprisingly, some people have claimed that unlike washing, the amount of rubbing is not limited in religion, and since “ارجلكم” (your feet) is limited (to the ankles), it should be connected to something whose rule is washing, i.e. “ايديكم” (your hands).

This is so strange an argument, because it is a prerequisite. One who considers rubbing of “ارجل” as compulsory rather than washing it, will inevitably consider it limited. In this case, the two sentences become even more compatible; since in the first one there are two body parts to be washed (The face and the hands), one of which is limited (The hands) and the other unlimited (The face), and in the second sentence there are two body organs to be rubbed (the head and the feet) one unlimited (The head) and the other limited (The feet).

Further, the compatibility of the two pronunciations (*jarr* and *nasb*) is the best evidence that “ارجلكم” (your feet) cannot be connected to “ايدي” (hands), since in the first possibility, we clearly proved that pronouncing with *jarr* vowel, the honorable verse stipulates to the obligation of rubbing the feet.

The claim that rubbing means washing or is rubbing in case of the head, but washing about the feet is a very ungrounded one. The reason is that in this verse and the like, ‘washing’ and ‘rubbing’ have been used in contrast to each other, as some people have said, In Qur’an, rubbing is mentioned, but in tradition, washing is considered obligatory.” This sentence indicates that by rubbing, they mean ‘touching with the hand. In fact, they believe what is in tradition is washing and hence found Qur’an and tradition in apparent contrast.

Moreover, if we suppose rubbing as meaning washing; is there any evidence in Qur’an perse other than evidences outside it posed by some people? Is there any difference between “وامسحوا برؤوسكم وارجلكم” in Ablution Verse and “فامسحوا بوجوهكم وايديكم منه” in the verse expounding the *Tayammum* (Dry Ablution)? This illuminates the invalidity of another justification.

## Ablution in the Prophet’s Tradition

Some people have claimed that traditions imply the obligation of washing the feet in the ritual ablution and there are no valid traditions for rubbing them. This claim has led them to justify and interpret the honorable verse of ablution against its apparent meaning. The counter argument to this claim is that so many valid traditions stipulate to the obligation of rubbing, not washing the feet. The readers’ attention is hereinafter directed to some traditions narrated by the Sunnis:

عَنْ رِفَاعَةَ بْنِ رَافِعٍ أَنَّهُ كَانَ جَالِسًا عِنْدَ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ: إِنَّهَا لَا تَتِمُّ صَلَاةٌ لِأَحَدٍ حَتَّى يَسْبِغَ الْوُضُوءَ  
كَمَا أَمَرَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: يَغْسِلُ وَجْهَهُ وَيَدَيْهِ إِلَى الْمِرْفَقَيْنِ وَيَمْسَحُ بِرَأْسِهِ وَرِجْلَيْهِ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ.

It is narrated from Rifa’ah Ibn Rafi’ that he was by the Prophet (a.s) when said: “In fact, no one’s prayer is acceptable until he/she accomplishes the ablution completely and correctly, as the Almighty has stated, i.e. washes the face and the hands to the elbows and rub the head and the feet to the ankles.[30](#)

As is evident, this tradition has clearly stated that the head and the feet should be rubbed.

رَأَيْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَتَوَضَّأُ وَيَمْسَحُ الْمَاءَ عَلَى رِجْلَيْهِ.

Al-Bukhari, Ahmad, Ibn Abi Shaybah, Ibn Abi Umar, Al-Baghawi, Al-Tabarani, Al-Bawirdi and others have narrated Abbad Ibn Tamim Al-Mazani's reporting his father's saying: "I saw the Messenger of Allah (a.s) performing ablution and rubbing his feet with water."<sup>31</sup>

Ibn Hajar Asqalani has narrated this tradition in the biography of Tamim Ibn Zayd Ansari, saying, "The narrators of the tradition are all trustworthy." The stipulation of this tradition to the obligation of rubbing the feet is also clear.

عَنْ أَبِي مَطَرٍ قَالَ: بَيْنَمَا نَحْنُ جُلُوسٌ مَعَ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلِيِّ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ عَلَى بَابِ الرَّحْمَةِ جَاءَ رَجُلٌ فَقَالَ: أُرْنِي وُضُوءَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ . وَهُوَ عِنْدَ الزَّوَالِ، فَدَعَا قَنْبَرًا فَقَالَ: ابْتِنِي بِكُوزٍ مِنْ مَاءٍ. فَغَسَلَ كَفَيْهِ وَوَجْهَهُ ثَلَاثًا وَتَمَضَّمْضَمَّ ثَلَاثًا فَأَدْخَلَ بَعْضَ أَصَابِعِهِ فِي فِيهِ وَاسْتَنْشَقَ ثَلَاثًا وَغَسَلَ زِرَاعِيهِ ثَلَاثًا وَمَسَحَ رَأْسَهُ وَاحِدَةً فَقَالَ: دَاخِلُهُمَا مِنَ الْوَجْهِ وَخَارِجُهُمَا مِنَ الرَّأْسِ، وَرِجْلَيْهِ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ ثَلَاثًا وَلِحْيَتُهُ تَهْتَلُ عَلَى صَدْرِهِ ثُمَّ حَسَا حَسَوَةً بَعْدَ الْوُضُوءِ ثُمَّ قَالَ: أَيْنَ السَّائِلُ عَنِ وُضُوءِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ؟ كَذَا كَانَ وُضُوءُ نَبِيِّ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ .

It is narrated from Abu Matar that he said: One noon, as I was sitting in a mosque near Bab al-Rahmah (A door in Kufah Mosque) with Amir al-Mu'minin (the Commander of the Believers) Imam Ali (a.s), a man came and asked him to show him the ablution as performed by the Messenger of Allah (a.s). Ali (a.s) called Qanbar (his servant) and asked for a jug of water. Then, he washed his two palms and his face three times. Then he took some of his fingers to his mouth (washing his teeth) and sniffed water twice or three times.

Next, he washed his forearms three times and rubbed his head once. Then he said, "Inside the mouth and the nose are like the face and their outside parts are like the head (in ablution)." He then rubbed his feet to the ankles while water poured from his beard to his chest. Then he drank water and said, "Where is the man who asked me about the Prophet's ablution? His ablution was like this."

In *Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib*, Ibn Hajar has cited Ibn Habban and Abu Matar among the trustee.

عَنْ حَمْرَانَ قَالَ: دَعَا عُثْمَانُ بِمَاءٍ فَتَوَضَّأَ ثُمَّ ضَحِكَ فَقَالَ: أَلَا تَسْأَلُونِي مِمَّ اضْحَكْتُ؟ قَالُوا: يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ، مَا اضْحَكْتُكَ؟ قَالَ: رَأَيْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ تَوَضَّأَ كَمَا تَوَضَّأْتُ فَمَضَّمْضَمَّ وَاسْتَنْشَقَ وَغَسَلَ وَجْهَهُ ثَلَاثًا وَمَسَحَ بِرَأْسِهِ وَظَهَرَ قَدَمَيْهِ.

Hamran says: Uthman asked for water and performed ablution. Then he smiled and said, "Will you ask me why I smiled?" He was then asked, "Well, what made you smile?" He replied, "I saw the Prophet (a.s) perform ablution as I have just done; he rinsed his mouth with water and sniffed it and washed his hands three times and rubbed his head and the top of his feet."<sup>32</sup>

The same tradition is narrated in *Kanz Al-Ummal* and Abu Ya'li is quoted as saying that this tradition is true.[33](#)

فَدَعَا بِجَفْنَةٍ فِيهَا مَاءٌ فَتَوَضَّأَ وَمَضْمَضَ وَاسْتَنْشَقَ وَغَسَلَ وَجْهَهُ ثَلَاثًا وَذِرَاعَيْهِ ثَلَاثًا ثَلَاثًا وَمَسَحَ بِرَأْسِهِ وَظَهَرَ قَدَمَيْهِ...  
ثُمَّ صَلَّى

Abu Malik Ash'ari told his relatives, "Come to me to copy the prayer of the Prophet (a.s)." Then he asked for water to perform ablution. He sniffed water and washed his face three times and washed his (hands from) the elbows three times, and rubbed his head and the top of his feet. Then they performed prayers.[34](#)

إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَوَضَّأَ وَمَسَحَ عَلَى نَعْلَيْهِ وَقَدَمَيْهِ...

The Messenger of Allah (a.s) performed ablution and rubbed on his shoes and his feet.[35](#)

أتاني ابنُ عَبَّاسٍ فَسَأَلَنِي عَنِ هَذَا الْحَدِيثِ - تَعْنِي حَدِيثَهَا الَّذِي ذَكَرْتَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَوَضَّأَ  
وَوَسَّطَ رِجْلَيْهِ - فَقَالَ ابْنُ عَبَّاسٍ: إِنَّ النَّاسَ أَبَوْا إِلَّا الْغَسْلَ وَلَا أُجِدُ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْمَسْحَ

It is narrated from Rubayyi' that she said, "Ibn Abbas came to me and asked about the tradition I have narrated—the one stating that the Prophet (a.s) washed his feet in ablution. So, Ibn Abbas said, "People avoid anything but washing, while I find in Allah's Book not but the obligation of rubbing."[36](#)

According to *Al-Zawa'id*, "The document of this tradition is true."

Muhammad Ibn Jarir Tabari, in his *Tafsir* (exegesis of the Holy Qur`an) quotes Ibn Abbas as saying:

الْوُضُوءُ غَسْلَانِ وَمَسْحَتَانِ

Ablution contains two washings (the face and the hands) and two rubbings (head and the feet).[37](#)

Ibn Jarir Tabari writes in his *Tafsir* again:[38](#)

Humayd Tuwayl says: Musa, son of Anas, told his father, O Abu Hamza! Hajjaj delivered a sermon for us in Ahwaz; he reminded us of the ritual purity saying, 'Wash your faces and your hands and rub your head and feet. Indeed, nothing is dirtier in human body than the feet, so wash your feet—both sides.' Anas said, 'The Almighty said the truth but Hajjaj lied. The Almighty says: Rub your head and feet.' Humayd Tuwayl said, 'Anas himself, when rubbing, wets his feet.'[39](#)

All the narrators of this tradition have been confirmed to be truthful<sup>40</sup> as Ibn Kathir does in his *Tafsir*. As you see, Anas, a Companion of the Prophet, denies a person who obliges washing the feet in the ritual ablution and believes that God has only stipulated rubbing.

عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ قَالَ: إِمْسَحُ عَلَى رَأْسِكَ.

Abi Ja'far said: "Rub your head."<sup>41</sup>

Shi'bi is quoted as saying, "The feet should only be rubbed. Do you not see that some people rub when they should wash and leave where they should rub?"<sup>42</sup>

It is narrated that Ikramah said: "The feet should not be washed, but rubbed."<sup>43</sup>

There are a variety of such traditions.

In short, so many traditions have been narrated from the Holy Prophet (a.s), the Companions and their followers deeming rubbing obligatory. Regarding the Holy Qur'an's stipulation about the obligation of rubbing and also the many traditions some of which are true, is it true to issue verdict as to the obligation of washing the feet in ablution? If it is said that the Ablution Verse is downplayed by the traditions, it would be answered: First, the Ablution Verse is in Al-Ma'idah Chapter, and as we mentioned before, both the Chapter and the honorable Verse have been revealed in the last years of the Prophet's life and, hence, the possibility of canceling them is little. Second, opposing traditions, as narrated by Fakhr Razi and others, are interrupted<sup>44</sup> traditions, which cannot abrogate the Holy Qur'an's Verses.

## **The Ultimate Solution for the Problem of the Traditions of Washing (The Feet)**

To ultimately solve the contrast between the traditions stating the washing of the feet (during the ritual ablution) on one hand and the Holy Qur'an and the traditions stating the rubbing on the other, it is more appropriate to say that in case the traditions narrated from the Holy Prophet (a.s) denoting washing (the feet) are true, they are all from the time before the revelation of the Ablution Verse; and this honorable Verse and the traditions of the rubbing abrogate them. Some people have been unaware of this fact and issued verdicts based on the canceled traditions or believed in the option to wash or rub. Still some others have obliged both of them.

One may say that the obligation of washing is reached upon by consensus,<sup>45</sup> which cannot be rejected. To answer, there is no such consensus. For abolishing this suspicion, a reference to Islamic jurisprudence books suffices. *Bidayat Al-Hikmah*, for instance, stipulates that this is a controversial issue, reading:

Scholars have consensus that the feet are among the organs of ablution, but they do not agree on their kind of washing. Some say that they should be washed. These are Sunni scholars. Others say what is obligatory is to rub them. Still, others have said that both washing and rubbing are allowed and they are up to the individuals themselves.[46](#)

Also, Ibn Qudamah says, in *Al-Mughni*, that washing the feet (in the ablution) is compulsory to most of the scholars. He then reports from (Imam) Ali, Ibn Abbas, Anas and Shi'bi that rubbing them is obligatory; and he reports the option between rubbing and washing from Ibn Jabir. Nawawi, in *Al-Majmu'*, says:

Our disciples have quoted Muhammad Ibn Jarir as believing in the option between washing and rubbing the feet. Khattabi narrated the same concept from Al-Jaba'i, the Mu'tazilite. Some who take in the surface indications of the traditions have deemed allowable both washing and rubbing.

As you see, no such consensus exists among the Sunni scholars, let alone among the Shi'a, since based on what is narrated by the Shi'a, the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) have consensus on the obligation of rubbing the feet in the ablution. But what is the amount of rubbing? That is an interesting discussion per se, which requires an expanded opportunity and since I wanted to prepare this article for the conference, I postpone this discussion to another time. I only remind that some traditions, as mentioned before, read, "The Holy Prophet rubbed his head and the top of his feet." Also, various traditions about rubbing the shoes indicate that rubbing the feet to the ankles is enough. Moreover, the application of 'rubbing to the ankles' and connecting it to "رؤسكم" (your hands) in the Ablution Verse is the best proof on the sufficiency of rubbing the top of the feet to the ankles.

[1.](#) Kanz al-Ummal, Al-Risalah, No. 992; Al-Jami' Al-Saghir, 1st ed., Dar Al-Fikr 1401, No. 1151.

[2.](#) Ma'rifa Ulum Al-Hadith, p. 54.

[3.](#) In these cases, the tradition is narrated from Imam Sajjad (a.s) from Imam Husayn (a.s) from Ali (a.s).

[4.](#) A divine tradition in which the Exalted God states:

كَلِمَةُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ حِمْنِي فَمَنْ دَخَلَ حِمْنِي أَمِنَ مِنْ عَذَابِي.

"The phrase "There is no God but Allah," is My fort. Whoever comes to My fort will be safe from My chastisement."

[5.](#) Ibn Hajar Asqalani, Al-Sawa'iq Al-Muhriqah, p. 122.

[6.](#) They supposed they fabricate traditions for God's sake.

[7.](#) Tafsir Qurtubi, 2nd ed. Dar Al-Shu'ab, Egypt 1372, Vol. 1, p. 78.

[8.](#) Situational signs include the state of people involved in question and answer, and conditions of time and place while asking and answering. In the present discussion, the issue at stake is that the narrator may not have attended these conditions while narrating the tradition, (Editor).

[9.](#) Textual signs are words and phrases in traditions that bear special meaning. The issue at stake here is that the narrator may have narrated the tradition headless of these words' sensitivity and special connotation, not bringing the original words (Editor).

[10.](#) Sirah by Ibn Husham, Vol. 1, p. 260; Tarikh Ya'qubi, Vol. 2, p. 23.

[11.](#) Sunan Ibn Majah, Dar Ihya; Al-Turath Al-Arabi 1395, Vol. 44 (in the same page it is quoted from Al-Zawa'id, "This document is true." Mustadrak, Dar Al-Ma'rifa, Beirut 1406, Vol. 3, p. 112; Tarikh Tabari, Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, Vol. 2, p. 310.

[12.](#) Jalal Al-Din Suyuti, Al-Itqan fi Ulum Al-Qur'an, Vol. 1, p. 133.

[13.](#) Ibid.

[14.](#) Abu Zakariyya Muhyi Al-Din Ibn Sharaf Al-Nawawi, Al-Majmu', Dar Al-Fikr, Vol. 1, p. 394.

[15.](#) An Arabic proverb says:

الذُّودُ إِلَى الذُّودِ إِبِلٌ.

[16.](#) Other jurisprudents propose the possibility of the meaning 'end' for 'إلى' but this is not to say that the thing to be washed (hand in this case) is limited to this extent and that 'إلى' means the end point in washing since beginning from the elbow when washing the hand in ablution is agreed upon by all Muslims.

The quality of washing the hand in the honorable verse: We should see what 'إلى' (to) means and to which verb it belongs. There are two possibilities; the stronger one is that it means "مع" (with) and belongs to the verb 'wash.' In this case, the verse does not include the quality of washing the hands at all, and we should obtain it from traditions; since this verse only implies that hand should be washed along with the elbow, but does not say anything if the hand should be washed beginning from the elbow or the fingertips. The other, yet weaker, possibility is that 'إلى' (to) means 'the end point.' In this case, we should see to which verb 'إلى' belongs. If it belongs to "اغسلوا" (wash), the verse means that the elbow is the end point of the hand to be washed in the ablution. In other words, washing the hand should begin from the fingertips and end in the elbow. At the first glance, 'إلى' may seem to belong to "اغسلوا", But with further attention, it becomes clear that 'إلى' (to) cannot belong to "اغسلوا" (wash), because when 'إلى' is used to mean the end point of something, the action before the end point should be repeated before the final action. As in the phrase, "ضربته إلى أن مات" (beating to death), in which the action before the end point (beating) is repeated before the end point (death). But it is not true to say "قتلته إلى أن مات" (killing to death). The question here is that if the mentioned condition exists in the honorable verse, i.e. whether or not the action before the end point is repeated before "مرفق" (elbows). The answer is negative, because the action before the end point is "washing the hand" and it is not repeated before "the elbows." The reason is that "hand" includes the fingertips and the arms and the parts between them, and when "washing the hand" is completed, washing "the elbow" is done too and "washing he hand" cannot be repeated before "the elbow."

As a result, if 'إلى' means the end point, it cannot belong to "اغسلوا", since the mentioned condition is not present, i.e. the action before the end point is not repeatable before it. So, 'إلى' should be considered to belong to something else and that is the verb "أسقطوا" (exclude), which is omitted here. In this case, the meaning of the verse becomes, "Wash your faces and your hands, but exclude up to the elbows."

Of course "washing the hands and excluding up to the elbows" can be in two ways; first, not to wash from the fingertips to the elbow and wash from the elbow to the arm; and second, not to wash from the arm to the elbow and wash from elbow to the fingertips. But no one has ever said not to wash from the fingertips to the elbow. Therefore, the only true sense is not to wash from the arm to the elbow, but to wash from the elbow to the toes. This possibility is quoted by Ibn Husham from some grammarians and he has not rejected it. See: Mughni Al-Labib, Vol. 2, section 5 (Editor).

[17.](#) Al-Intisar, p. 16.

[18.](#) Al-Sara'ir, Vol. 1, p. 99.

[19.](#) Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd Qurtubi, Bidayah Al-Mujtahid, Published in Egypt, Vol. 1, Kitab Al-Taharah, Kitab Al-Wuzu, 2nd section, Question 6, p. 11.

[20.](#) Al-Mughni, Vol. 1, Bab Al-Siwak wa Sunnah Al-Wuzu, Question 28, p. 175.

[21.](#) Vol. 1, p. 111.

[22.](#) Ibn Qudamah, Al-Mughni, Vol. 1, Bab Al-Siwak wa Sunnah Al-Wuzu, Question 28, p. 175; Al-Majmu', Vol. 1, p. 433.

[23.](#) That is if someone is seen to have rubbed, that suffices even if it has been the least amount (Editor).

[24.](#) Madarik Al-Ahkam, Vol. 1, p. 208.

[25.](#) That is religious reasons other than this honorable verse.

[26.](#) Section "Ablution in tradition."

[27.](#) Mughni Al-Labib, Vol. 2, p. 895.

[28.](#) Ibid.

[29.](#) Mughni Al-Labib, Vol. 2, Part 4, ma aftariqu fihi ismul fa'il wa sifat al-mushabbaha, p. 600.

- [30.](#) Sunan Ibn Majah. Vol. 1, section 57, tradition 460, No. 453; Sunan Abi Dawud, No. 730; Sunan Al-Nisa'i, No. 1124; Sunan Al-Darimi 1295 (Int'l No.)
- [31.](#) Al-Isaba, Vol. 1, p. 185, No. 843.
- [32.](#) Musnad Abi Shaybah, Vol. 1, p. 18. Nearly the same is narrated in Musnad Ahmad, Musnad Al-Asharah, No. 391 (Int'l No.)
- [33.](#) p. 442, No. 26886.
- [34.](#) Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, No. 21825 (Int'l No.)
- [35.](#) Sunan Abi Dawud, Vol. 1, p. 41, No. 160, No. 138 (Int'l No.)
- [36.](#) Sunan Ibn Majah, Vol. 1, p. 156, No. 458, No. 451; Musnad Ahmad, No. 25773 (Int'l No.)
- [37.](#) Tafsir Tabari, section 6, p. 82.
- [38.](#) Tafsir Tabari, Section 2, p. 82.
- [39.](#) In his book, Al-Durr Al-Manthur, Suyuti narrates this tradition under the Ablution Verse, quoted by Sa'id Ibn Mansur and Ibn Abi Shaybah.
- [40.](#) See Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib.
- [41.](#) Tafsir Tabari, section 6, p. 82.
- [42.](#) Tafsir Tabari, section 9, p. 83
- [43.](#) Tafsir Tabari, section 6, p. 82.
- [44.](#) According to the classification of traditions (hadith), they are divided into successive and interrupted. A successive tradition is that which is narrated from a variety of narrators of every age who are away from alteration and mistake. An interrupted tradition is not so.
- [45.](#) What is agreed upon by all Islamic scholars.
- [46.](#) Ibn Rushd, Bidayah Al-Mujtahid, Published in Egypt, Vol. 1, Kitab Al-Taharah, Kitab Al-Wuzu', section 2, Question 10,p. 14.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/shiism-sunnism-sayyid-muhammad-ridha-mudarrisi-yazdi/wuzu-statutory-ablution-allahs-book-and#comment-0>