

Cultivating young Hearts on the Fertile soils of Islam

فِقْهُ الطَّهَارَةِ

The Fiqh of Tahaarah¹

Lesson 8

صِفَةُ الْغُسْلِ

(A Description of Ghusl)

This lesson will cover how to perform الغُسْلُ correctly and the occasions when it is obligatory or recommended to perform الغُسْلُ.

In this lesson, we will study how to perform الغُسْلُ correctly, but before we do that, let us investigate the word in the dictionary and then see what it means according to the scholars of الفقه.

The base letters for the noun الغُسْلُ are غ س ل, and this is what they mean according to the dictionary:

¹ Compiled by Abu Ameenah AbdurRahman Bennett.

غسل *gasala i (gasl)* to wash (ب ھ ء s.o., s.th. with), launder (ب ھ s.th. with); to cleanse, clean (ھ s.th., e.g., the teeth); to purge, cleanse, clear, wash (ھ s.th., of); to wash (ھ against s.th.) II to

The dictionary teaches us that it means **to wash** or **clean**. So what does the word **الغُسل** mean according to Islamic law? This is how they define it:

إِسْتِعْمَالُ مَاءٍ طَهُورٍ فِي جَمِيعِ الْبَدَنِ عَلَى صِفَةٍ مَخْصُوصَةٍ

Using pure water to wash the entire body in a specific way.

Now that we know what **الغُسل** means in the Arabic language and according to Islam law, we can now move on and learn how to make ghusl correctly. However, before we provide a detailed account of the Prophet's (ﷺ) ghusl, let us first learn when it is a **وَاجِبٌ** (obligation) to perform **الغُسل** and when it is **مُسْتَحَبٌّ** (recommended) to perform **الغُسل**.

Occasions when **الغُسل** are obligatory:

1. The emission of semen from the private part requires that **الغُسل** be performed before praying. The evidence for this from the Qur'an is the part of the verse:

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ جُنُبًا فَاطَّهَّرُوا^١

And if you had intercourse, then purify yourselves.

[Al Maa'idah 6]

The evidence from the Sunnah is the Prophet's (ﷺ) statement:

الْمَاءُ مِنَ الْمَاءِ

“The water (of the ghusl) is due to the water (of sexual emission)”²

² Saheeh Muslim (343).

2. When the male and female private parts meet. The evidence for this is found in the Sunnah. The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

إِذَا جَلَسَ الرَّجُلُ بَيْنَ شُعْبَيْهَا الْأَرْبَعِ ثُمَّ جَهَدَهَا فَقَدْ وَجَبَ الْغُسْلُ

“When a man sits between the four parts (arms and legs of his wife) and has intercourse, then ghusl is obligatory.”³

3. When a person becomes a Muslim, **الغُسلُ** is required.⁴ The evidence for this is that when the Companion, Qays ibn ‘Aasim accepted Islam, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) ordered him to perform **الغُسلُ** with water and lotus leaves. The scholars of Islam say that because the Prophet (ﷺ) ordered him to wash then this shows that this type of **الغُسلُ** is an obligation. The scholars disagree on whether this type of **الغُسلُ** is obligatory, but the safest thing is to assume it is. Best to be safe than sorry!

4. When a Muslim dies, it is an obligation for Muslims to perform **الغُسلُ** for him. The evidence for this is when the Prophet (ﷺ) said concerning a man who fell off his mount and died during Hajj:

اغْسِلُوهُ بِمَاءٍ وَسِدْرٍ، وَكَفَّنُوهُ فِي ثَوْبَيْنِ

“Wash him with water and lotus leaves and shroud him in his two garments (that he was wearing for Ihram).”⁵

Once again, the scholars say that the evidence for its obligation is that the Prophet (ﷺ) commanded it.

5. When a woman has finished from her menstruation, she is required to perform **الغُسلُ**. The evidence for this is the Prophet’s (ﷺ) statement to Faatimah bint Abi Hubaysh:

³ Saheeh Muslim (348).

⁴ This applies to the person who converts to Islam and the person who left Islam and then returns.

⁵ Saheeh Muslim (1206).

فَإِذَا أَقْبَلَتِ الْحَيْضَةَ فَدَعِيَ الصَّلَاةَ وَإِذَا أَدْبَرَتْ فَأَغْسِلِي عَنْكِ الدَّمَ وَصَلِّي

“So when menstruation comes, leave prayer, and when it ends, wash the blood from yourself and then pray.”⁶

Once again, the order of the Prophet (ﷺ) teaches us that this type of **الغُسل** is an obligation. This also teaches us that when the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) orders us to do something, we are required to do it. And from the Prophet’s command, we have a legal ruling in Islam: **وَاجِبٌ** (an obligation).

6. A woman who discharges blood from her womb during or after childbirth is required to make **الغُسل**. The evidence for this is that the Prophet (ﷺ) labelled it as a type of menstruation. The scholars of Islam are agreed that **الغُسل** is required when a woman is in this state.

Occasions when **الغُسل** is recommended:

1. It is recommended for a person who washes a dead body to perform **الغُسل**. This is the view of the great Companions Ibn ‘Abbaas, Ibn ‘Umar and Aa’isha. This view is based on the hadith of Abu Hurairah who said that Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) said,

مَنْ غَسَلَ مَيْتًا فَلْيَغْتَسِلْ وَمَنْ حَمَلَهُ فَلْيَتَوَضَّأْ

Whoever washes the dead, let him do ghusl, and whoever carries him, let him do wudu’.

Now, we said earlier that when the Prophet (ﷺ) commands something that this means it is an obligation. However, sometimes there are other evidences that cause a ruling to change from an obligation to a recommendation. The evidence here to cause this change in ruling is the statement of Ibn ‘Abbaas, “When you wash your dead, you do not have

⁶ Saheeh Muslim (333).

to do ghusl afterwards, for your dead are not najis. It is enough for you to wash your hands.”⁷

2. It is recommended for a person who recovers from insanity or recovers from fainting to perform **الغُسل**. The evidences for this is the hadith of A’isha who said,

The Prophet (ﷺ) became seriously ill and asked whether the people had prayed. We replied, ‘No, O Allah’s Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم)! They are waiting for you.’ He (صلى الله عليه وسلم) added, ‘Put water for me in a trough.’ ‘Aisha added, “We did so. He took a bath and tried to get up but fainted. When he recovered, he again asked whether the people had prayed. We said, ‘No, they are waiting for you. O Allah’s Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم),’ He again said, ‘Put water in a trough for me.’ He sat down and took a bath and tried to get up but fainted again.”⁸

3. It is recommended to perform **الغُسل** on Fridays.⁹

مَنْ تَوَضَّأَ يَوْمَ الْجُمُعَةِ فِيهَا وَنِعِمَّتْ وَمَنْ اغْتَسَلَ فَالْغُسْلُ أَفْضَلُ

Whoever performs ablution on Friday has done a good thing and he who takes bath, taking bath is better (for him).

صِفَةُ الْغُسْلِ (a description of ghusl)

According to the scholars of **الفقه**, there are two descriptions for **الغُسل**: (a) The obligatory description (**الصِّفَةُ الْوَاجِبَةُ**) and (b) the recommended description (**الصِّفَةُ الْمُسْتَحَبَّةُ**).

In this lesson, we will just provide a detailed account of **الغُسل** that is recommended.

⁷ Al-Bayhaqi (398).

⁸ Al-Bukhaari (687).

⁹ There is a strong difference of opinion regarding the ghusl that is performed on Fridays. Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al-Uthaymeen was of the opinion that it was an obligation.

The Recommended Ghusl (الصِّفَّةُ الْمُسْتَحَبَّةُ):

1. He has intention (يُنَوِّي)

The home of intention is the heart and therefore there is no need to verbally express your intention when performing an act of worship. It is not prescribed in the Islamic sharia to verbally express one's intention. Logically speaking, why would we need to verbally express our intention when

وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَلِيمًا ٥١

Allah knows what is in **your hearts**. And ever is Allah Knowing and Forbearing.

[Al Ahzaab 51]

The Prophet (ﷺ) worshipped Allah more than anyone and there is not one single report from the Companions about the Prophet verbally expressing his intention. Thus, the Prophet not doing something becomes a proof that this action is not from the Sunnah and by doing something that is not from the Sunnah, we have fallen under the following threat from our Prophet (ﷺ):

مَنْ أَحْدَثَ فِي أَمْرِنَا هَذَا مَا لَيْسَ فِيهِ فَهُوَ رَدٌّ

If anyone introduces in our affair (i.e. Islam) something which does not belong to it, then it will be rejected.¹⁰

It is important to note that intention is a condition for the validity¹¹ of all acts of worship, and we know this from the Prophet's (ﷺ) statement:

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّةِ وَإِنَّمَا لِامْرِئٍ مَا نَوَى

(The validity of) an actions depends on the intention behind it, and a person be rewarded only for what he intended.¹²

¹⁰ Al-Bukhaari (169).

¹¹ Validity means here the state or quality of being legally valid in Islam as an acceptable act of worship.

¹² Muslim (1907).

Another benefit the scholars give us when defining and categorising things is that intention can be split into two types:

(1) نِيَّةُ الْعَمَلِ (intention behind action), which is something discussed by the فُقَهَاءُ (scholars of fiqh) because intention is a condition for the validity of worship. For example, a person intends to make الْغُسْلُ for the Friday prayer.

(2) نِيَّةُ الْمَعْمُولِ لَهُ (the one for whom the act is intended i.e., Allah), which is a matter discussed by the scholars of Tawheed because it is a matter directly related to الْإِخْلَاصِ (sincerity).

As an example, let us combine the two: a person intends to make الْغُسْلُ for the Friday prayer and so this is an intention to do a specific act of worship. However, when a person intends to do this act of worship seeking to gain closeness to Allah then this is now the intention of making your deed purely and sincerely for the sake of Allah.

2. He says the Bismillaah (يُسَمِّي)

Does anyone know the difference between the تَسْمِيَّةٌ and the بَسْمَلَةٌ? Well, the تَسْمِيَّةٌ is just to say بِسْمِ اللَّهِ (in the name of Allah), but the بَسْمَلَةٌ is to say بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ (in the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy). So the Sunnah is to say بِسْمِ اللَّهِ at the time you are about to perform الْغُسْلُ.

The word بَسْمَلَةٌ is similar to an acronym¹³ in the English language. For example, the word BBC, which means British Broadcasting Corporation, is an acronym. Look carefully and you will see how the letters in the بَسْمَلَةٌ have been taken from بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ to form a short version of the phrase for convenience.

3. He washes the hands thrice (يَغْسِلُ الْيَدَيْنِ ثَلَاثًا)

¹³ a word formed from the initial letters or groups of letters of words in a set phrase or series of words and pronounced as a separate word

When the word **الْيَدُ** is left unrestricted¹⁴ then it just means **the hand**. For instance, when Allah says

وَالسَّارِقُ وَالسَّارِقَةُ فَاقْطَعُوا أَيْدِيَهُمَا ۚ

And (as for) the man who steals and the woman who steals, cut off their hands,

[Al Maa'idah 38]

then this means just the hand and not anything above the wrist. Obviously, the word 'hand' in the English language just means the hand, but this is not the case when we look at the word 'hand' in Arabic. The word 'hand' in Arabic can also include the arm.

4. He performs wudhu (يَتَوَضَّأُ)

And then he performs **الْوُضُوءُ** just as he performs **الْوُضُوءُ** for the prayer. We know this because 'Aa'isha said,

وَتَوَضَّأَ وَضُوءَهُ لِلصَّلَاةِ

...and performed ablution like that for prayer.

Al-Hamdulillah, we have already provided a detailed account of **الْوُضُوءُ** in our fifth lesson.

5. He pours water over his entire head three time (يَخْنِي عَلَى رَأْسِهِ ثَلَاثًا)

He does this by making sure that the water reaches the roots of his hair. This also means that the water should not be little in its amount. We have the hadith of 'Aa'isha who said about the Prophet (ﷺ),

ثُمَّ يُخَلِّلُ بِيَدِهِ شَعْرَهُ حَتَّى إِذَا ظَنَّ أَنْ قَدْ أَرَوَى بَشَرَتَهُ أَقَاصَ عَلَيْهِ الْمَاءِ ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ ثُمَّ غَسَلَ سَائِرَ جَسَدِهِ

¹⁴ This word means not limited by anything.

Then he (ﷺ) ran his hands through his hair, until he was sure that the water had reached the scalp. Then he poured water over his head three times. Then he washed the rest of his body.¹⁵

It seems that the Prophet (ﷺ) would pour water over his head and run his hands through his hair, and then he would pour water over his head three times. Some scholars said that the meaning of three times is that the Prophet (ﷺ) poured water on the right side of his head, then left and then the middle.

6. Then he washes his whole body completely (يَعْمُ بَدَنَهُ عَسَلًا)

We know this from the part of the above-hadith of 'Aa'isha:

ثُمَّ عَسَلَ سَائِرَ جَسَدِهِ

Then he washed the rest of his body.

Some of the scholars say that he should wash his body three times, just as he washes his body parts three times when doing الوضوء. However, the great scholar Shaykh al-Islam ibn Taymiyyah said that he should not do it three times because three times was not mentioned by the Prophet (ﷺ) in his Sunnah.

It is also important to remember that he does not just pour water over his body, but rather he washes his body with his hands. He does this just to make sure that water has reached over every part of his body.

7. He starts from the right side of his body (بِالْيَمَنِ)

This means that he starts with the right side of his body when washing and pouring water over himself. We know this to be from the Sunnah of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) because 'Aa'isha said,

كَانَ الْيَمَنِيَّ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - يُعْجِبُهُ الْيَمِينُ فِي تَنْعُلِهِ، وَتَرْجُلِهِ، وَطَهْرِهِ، وَفِي شَأْنِهِ كُلِّهِ

¹⁵ Al-Bukhaari (272).

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) loved to begin with the right while putting on his shoes, combing his hair, in his purification and in all his affairs.¹⁶

8. Then he would wash his feet in another place (يَغْسِلُ قَدَمَيْهِ مَكَاناً آخَرَ)

So when our Prophet had finished from الغُسل, he would wash his feet in a place different from the place he made الغُسل. Great scholars, such as Muhammad ibn Saalih al-'Uthaymeen, state that it seems he only does this when the place he washed in previously is dirty, but if the place is clean, such as our bathrooms we have today, then there is no need to wash the feet in a different place.

Al-hamdulillah, this concludes our lesson on الغُسل.

¹⁶ Al-Bukhaari (168).

Questions on الغُسل

Answer the following questions by reading the text of the lesson carefully:

1. What are the base letters for the verb 'to wash/clean'?
2. What does the term الغُسل mean according to Islamic law?
3. How many types of الغُسل are there and what do we name them?
4. Can you list the five occasions when الغُسل is obligatory and the three occasions when الغُسل is recommended?
5. What is the first step in الغُسل?
6. Why is there no need to verbally express your intention before performing الغُسل?
7. How many types of نِيَّة (intention) are there and can you explain the difference between the two?
8. What is the second step in الغُسل?
9. What is the difference between تَسْمِيَّة and the بِسْمَلَة?
10. What is an acronym and can you provide an example?
11. What is the third step in الغُسل?
12. What can the word 'hand' in Arabic also include?
13. What is the fourth step in الغُسل?
14. What is the fifth step in الغُسل?
15. What is the sixth step in الغُسل?
16. What is the seventh step in الغُسل?
17. Why should we start from the right side of our bodies?
18. What is the eighth step in الغُسل?
19. What did Shaykh al-Uthaymeen say about washing your feet in another place?

