

Summary of 5.1

Testimony of Faith
There were there basic points that we discussed last time. ♦ First was the quotation from Prophet Muhammad that the infrastructure of Islam is based on five pillars the testimony, prayer, payment of poor♦s due, fasting and performing the pilgrimage once in a life time. ♦
The second major point we try to make is that many time non-Muslim writers about Islam present the pillars as if they are they are the entirety of Islam which is erroneous. ♦ We made an analogy between a building and Islam and that one can have pillars within a building but one can not have a building with pillars alone. ♦ A building need a roof, walls, insulation, partitions and heating etc. ♦ At the same time Islam cant be a complete way of life if we simply have the pillars as they are the bare minimum upon which the remaining structure of Islam is built. ♦ The Pillars of Islam are necessary but insufficient for a complete Islam. ♦
These pillars are not formalistic rituals they are a lot more than that because they give lessons that cover all aspects of human life be it social, economical or political. ♦
The third major point was to look at the first Pillar of Islam the testimony. ♦ We said that in order for a person to be a Muslim must confess with conviction without any compulsion that there is no deity but Allah, the one and only universal God of all humanity and that Muhammad is his messenger. ♦ We discussed why this testimony starts with negation rather than affirmation to show that there is rejection of any authority or sovereign other than that of God. ♦ We also explained briefly what it means in terms of some of the divine attributes of God being all powerful, all merciful, being close to mankind and caring for them. ♦ We also briefly looked into the meaning of prophethood and that it is a Muslim♦s obligation to believe in all prophets from Adam to Muhammad with a focus on the five major prophets Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and♦ last of them Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through whom revelations were completed in the form of the final holy book or the Quran. ♦
As I mentioned last time it took about forty programs to explore in some degree of depth the meaning of that first fundamental pillar of Islam. ♦

5.2 ♦ Purity and Hygiene

Host: ♦ The next pillar is *salah*. ♦ Is the term *salah* roughly equivalent to the English term prayer? ♦
 ♦
Jamal Badawi: ♦
In fact the term *salah* in Arabic which is the original for what is termed prayer in English is a lot more comprehensive. ♦ When one checks the dictionary prayer means something like supplication, petition, humbleness and invocation. ♦ In that sense the Muslim term *salah* includes but is not exclusive to the meanings for the English term prayer. ♦ The reason for this is prior to those prayers the Muslim must make certain acts of washing or cleanliness called ablution or *wudu* in Arabic. ♦ In addition to that prayer is not merely supplication after preparing for the prayers there are certain movements and prostrations that are done with the prayers. ♦ In a way the Muslim understanding of the term *salah* is a lot more than the meaning of prayer. ♦ However, one should say in fairness that the essence of Muslim prayer *salah* is actually petition and supplication to God. ♦ Prayer is a rough term but it may represent one major aspect of Muslim prayer. ♦
Host: ♦ You have mentioned that special washing is required before one performs the five daily prayers. ♦ Could you explain to us how this washing is done? ♦
 ♦
Jamal Badawi: ♦
This washing before prayers is called *wudu* and is usually translated as ablution. ♦ In the most common cases before a person performs the prayers by way of preparation he has to wash at least, and I am talking about the bare minimum, the face, hands, rub over the hair and wash the

feet.

The more perfect and complete form of ablution as taught by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and as communicated to him through angel Gabriel is to start by washing the hands to the wrist three times. This is followed with rinsing the mouth three times, preferably also brushing or cleaning the teeth, then after this rinsing out the nostrils three times, then washing the face three times, all the way from the forehead to the chin and from ear to ear. Then one should wash the right arm to the elbow three times then the same process is repeated for the left arm, the next step is wetting the hand and gently rubbing over the hair and then washing the ears with the index finger on the inside and the thumb on the outside. The last step is washing the right foot and then the left foot. This is the most complete form of performing ablution.

Host: Why is this done before one begins to perform the *salah*? Why is this specific order followed?

Jamal Badawi: First of all it is an act of worship and it is connected to prayers. It is really like a continuation of prayer. In acts of worship one obeys it as a divine command out of love for God and out of love of God, obedience and submission to His will. In fact ablution has been mentioned in the Quran itself in (5:6) the minimum parts that are to be washed.

In addition to this each of these acts of worship even though they may be purely a matter of obedience and submission to the will of God carry lots of wisdom and reason. The attitude of the believer is that if a divine command is given they would follow it as it is. The revelation doesn't prohibit one from trying to seek some understanding of possible reasons but a person doesn't put the reasons as a prerequisite to following them.

If we really reflect on the meaning of ablution prior to prayers we find that first of all it is a kind of psychological preparation. A Muslim's prayer is one of the most noble if not the most noble acts that any human can have by communicating directly with God without any intermediary. If we as human beings consider it adequate and polite to get ready when we want to meet somebody who is great among humans then when we are going to stand in front of God in supplication it is even more adequate to have this psychological preparation.

Secondly, the Muslim prayer is performed five times everyday which allows for a kind of refreshing break from our routine while getting ready for the act of prayer. The feeling of cleanliness itself enhances the benefit that one gets from prayer.

To address why ablution is performed in this particular order we should notice that first of all one washes their hands because they will be used to wash other parts. As soon as the hands are clean one cleans their mouth and nostrils the logical order is to wash the face afterwards. There is a logical order here that the face comes before the arms and the arms before the feet which are the last body part to be washed.

Another interesting observation is that when I was talking to some brothers in the medical profession and when I described that when we wash the arms we take the water and let it flow towards the elbow they said that this is what they learn so that the germs stay away from their hands. This is an interesting reflection that people have given to the meaning of ablution. The Prophet emphasized the importance of ablution as a spiritual act. As the Prophet said that when one gets ready for prayer and really washes completely and perfectly before prayer one's sins flow out of their body every time they wash their body parts until they also come out of finger nails. In a sense then symbolically when we get ready for the prayer we are washing our face and our eyes which might have committed something that is not appropriate. In a way we are repeating this symbolic act of repentance and purification (Muslims do not believe in original sin) as we are constantly attempting to cleanse ourselves and to pray to God for forgiveness and improvement in our life.

Host: After an individual

has performed *wudu* or ablution how many prayers can be done before the person is required to make another ablution? Or is it done for every prayer?

Jamal Badawi: It is not necessary for one to make ablution for every prayer so long as the ablution is still valid. ♦ Knowing our normal biological functions it is virtually impossible for one to remain for the whole day without the need to renew the ablution. ♦ There are certain things in Islamic law that are regarded as nullifying factors of ablution, which means one must make *wudu* before making additional prayers. ♦ These factors include natural discharges when a person goes to the washroom, deep sleep, or if a person is unconscious from fainting or some other problem then the ablution is nullified and the person must make another ablution before performing additional prayers.

Host: ♦ Are there any concessions related to this issue of ablution, or special circumstances that one might become involved in that would exempt them from carrying out the ablution?

Jamal Badawi: ♦ Yes there are and in fact this is one aspect of the flexibility within the Islamic jurisprudence. ♦ This is based on a rule established in the Quran for example in (5:6)* it says ♦ Allah doth not wish to place you in a difficulty, but to make you clean, and to complete his favor to you that ye may be grateful. ♦ ♦ The basic rule is not really ritualism in itself but an aspect of training in physical and spiritual cleansing.

♦ There may be circumstances where ablution could either be impossible or very difficult. ♦ An example of this would be a person who is traveling and doesn't have enough water (if there is water it may be needed for drinking, cooking or to give to animals) can simply stroke something that is clean like stone or sand (blow the dust off) and rub both hands over the face once and that would do the job.

♦ There are cases where a person has a skin disease where water could be quite harmful or a person might be injured and he may have a bandage one can make ablution on parts that won't be hurt by water, they can gently rub the area, or they can do the symbolic act without using any water.

♦ Another interesting and useful thing that was used by the Prophet fourteen hundred years ago that relates to the question people ask about washing the feet in the workplace or office setting where there are no facilities for this. ♦ If a person wakes up in the morning and makes complete ablution including washing the feet and puts on stockings it would be permissible, over the next 24 hours for a resident and three days for a traveler, to later make regular ablution for all parts but to wet the hands and gently rub the right sock then the left sock to substitute washing the feet. ♦ These are examples of solutions to problems that may arise from time to time which shows that it is not the ritual of the law that matters but the purpose behind it that really matters and if it is possible to achieve both that is good but if there are extenuating circumstances there is always some kind of flexibility.

Host: ♦ Are there circumstances where ablution alone is insufficient?

Jamal Badawi: ♦ There are situations where bathing or washing the entire body would be a prerequisite for performing *salah* or prayer. ♦ Both males and females after intimate relations can not pray by just making ablution but they must take a bath. ♦ Muslim females after the monthly cycle or the postnatal resting period, a maximum of forty days but could be less, can not pray directly but must take a full bath. ♦ For males after a wet dream a full bath is required. ♦ These are examples where ablution would not be enough but these situations are not as repetitious as the other functions that simply require renewal of ablution.

♦ Of course the same kind of concessions that apply to ablutions also apply to bathing. ♦ For example if a person needs to take a bath but there is no water available or it may hurt him for health reasons at least for a temporary period the concessions I mentioned could be

applicable.

The cases I mentioned are the minimum mandatory cases where a person must take a bath. In addition to this we find that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught Muslims that a person must at least once a week rub and clean his body and take a bath. He encouraged people to take a bath on Friday before going to the congregational prayer, before festivals and many other occasions. There are numerous occasions where bathing would be a highly recommended act religiously not just as a custom as it is part of our religious duty to maintain cleanliness.

Host: Some might wonder as to the injunctions on *wudu* and prayer as not too detailed and involved?

Jamal Badawi: It depends on how one understands and perceives the term religion. This is where Islam stands quite distinct. For the majority of people primarily in the west the term religion seems to be associated with a set of dogmas and beliefs in spiritual and moral aspects and that is it. To the Muslim however the word religion means a complete way of life. Now if Islam is a complete way of life then it must also provide complete and comprehensive guidance to humans. It doesn't leave a person hung up with some beliefs without showing how to conduct a life that would be pleasing to God and satisfactory and understandable in the human sense. If this is the case then that religion must be capable of giving guidance in spiritual belief, moral aspects, social aspects, and political aspects. Personal cleanliness and hygiene are definitely parts that can not be left out, even ecology is part of the picture. This simply shows the comprehensiveness of the nature of Islam.

To start with Islam doesn't view physical purity and spiritual purity as two different or opposing things. Why should one be achieved at the expense of the other? The equivalent of the English word purity in Arabic is *al-tahara*. The word *tahara* as used in the Quran is used in both the spiritual and physical sense. In the Quran in (9:108)** it describes people who stand in prayer to God in Mosques or places of worship as people who love to be purified and that is in the spiritual sense. In the (2:222) it says that Allah love those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.

The very same derivative of the word *tahara* is used for physical cleanliness. For example in the Quran in (8:11) that He caused rain to descend on you from heaven, to clean you therewith. This verse is referring to the physical cleanliness. In Islam the physical and spiritual purity is integrated.

There are plenty of other teachings that are related to hygiene and ecology. For example there is the *miswak* which is a kind of twig from a special tree called *arak* and fourteen hundred years ago which was twelve hundred years before the invention of any toothbrush Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) recommended very highly that people use that cleans and refresh their mouth. In fact in one of his sayings as quoted in Muslim he says if I didn't think it would have been too hard for my people I would have ordered them to clean their teeth with this before every prayer. There have been some studies about the *miswak* that found that it contained a combination of natural oils and minerals which are very effective in dental hygiene and that it is less abrasive than the toothbrush it is more gentle and provides nice stimulation for the gums. In addition to this one finds that Islam requires circumcision for males, trimming nails and shaving excess hair from the body. The Prophet (PBUH) forbade people from relieving themselves in waterways, sheds, or the roads of others. Again using modern science we can understand that this is one way of preventing the spread of germs. There is also prohibition of drinking of alcoholic drinks or other intoxicating things that might hurt the health, or eating dead animals except for fish of course if an animal dies without being slaughtered it is not to be eaten. It is also prohibited to eat pig meat.

There is no virtue in Islam in shabbiness. ♦ The Prophet (PBUH) in numerous sayings indicated that cleanliness and tidy appearance is one of the characteristics of a believer, he was talking in particular about tidying the hair and cleaning it. ♦ Islam also taught that one should wash his hands before and after eating food and to eat with the right hand. ♦ Islam encouraged physical fitness. ♦ It shows that our wellbeing whether moral, spiritual material or physical are important in Islam.