

Home > Adab as-Salat: The Disciplines of the Prayer Second Revised Edition > Discourse Two > Objective One : Purification > Chapter 3: The Cordial Disciplines Of The S_{al}ik When Coming To Water For Purification

Chapter 3: The Cordial Disciplines Of The S_{al}ik When Coming To Water For Purification

In this chapter we translate a noble *hadīth* from *Misb_{ah} ash-Shar_{ah}* so that the pure hearts of the people of faith may get from it some lumination.

It is stated in *Misb_{ah} ash-Shar_{ah}* that Im_{am} as-S_{adiq} ('a) said: “When you intend purification and *Wudu'* [ritual ablution], proceed to the water as you proceed to Allah's mercy, because Allah has made water the key to His proximity and supplication, and a guide to the court of His service. And, as Allah's mercy purifies the sins of the servants, similarly the outer filths are purified by water and by nothing else. Allah, the Exalted, says:

“And He it is Who sends the winds as good news heralding His mercy, and We send down purifying water from the sky” (S_{urah} al-Furq_{an} 25:48).

He also says:

“And we made every living thing of water. Will they not then believe?” (S_{urah} al-Anbiy_{ah} 21:30).

So, as He has given life with water to everything of the blessings of this world, likewise, He has made obedience the life of the hearts, out of His mercy and grace. Think of the clarity, softness, purity and blessing of water and of its tender mixing with everything. Use it to purge the organs that Allah has ordered you to purify, and observe their disciplines in His obligations and advantages. So, if you use them respectfully, the springs of the advantages will burst out for you presently.

Then, mix with the creatures (servants) of Allah like the mixture of water with things: It gives to everything its due without any change in its own meaning. And learn a lesson from the Messenger of Allah (s) (who said): “A sincere believer is like water.” Let your clearness with Allah, the Most High, be like the clearness of water as He sent it down from the sky and called it “purifier” [*tah_{ir}*]. Purify your heart with fear of Allah [*taq_w*] and certitude [*yaq_{in}*] as you cleanse your organs with water.”¹

In this noble *hadīth* there are delicate points and facts, which enliven the hearts of the people of knowledge, and bestow animation on the clear souls of “the people of heart” [*ashāb-i qulūb*].

Describing water, in this *hadīth*, as Allah's mercy, or interpreting it to be so, denotes that water is one of the great manifestations of Allah's mercy, which He sent down to the world of nature, and made it the source of life for the beings. Rather, the vast divine mercy, which descended from the high heaven of His Names and Attributes, and with which the lands of the individual entities [*ta'ayyun-i a'yūn*] were revived, is called “water” by the people of knowledge.

And as the vast divine mercy is more obvious in the apparent substance of water than in other things, Allah, the Exalted, has assigned to it the task of purifying the outer filths, and made it the key to the door of His proximity and of the supplications to Him, and the guide to the court of His service, which is the door of the doors of the inner mercies.

Actually, the water of Allah's mercy descends and appears in every growth [*nash'ah*] of existence and in every visible and invisible scene to purify the sins of Allah's servants according to that growth [*nash'ah*] and suitable to that world. So, the invisible sins of the individual entities are purified with the water of mercy which descends from the heaven of His Oneness [*ahadiyyat*], and the sins of the non-existence of “the outer quiddities” [*māhiyyat-i khariyyah*] are purged with the water of the vast mercy descending from the heaven of His Unity [*wahidiyyat*] in every stage of existence according to that stage.

In the stages of human growths [*nasha'at*], too, the water of mercy has different manifestations, as with the water descending from His Essence onto “the purgatorial collective individuations” [*ta'ayyun-i jam'iyyat-i barzakhiiyah*] the sins of the “existential secret” [*sirr-i wujūd*] are purified: “Your existence is a sin incomparable with any other sin.” With the water descending from His Names and Attributes and the manifestation of Act, the vision of the attribute and the act is purged.

With the water descending from the sky of His “Decree of Justice” [*hukm-i 'adl*] the inner moral impurities are purified. With the water descending from the sky of His Forgiveness the sins of the servants are purged. And with the water descending from the sky of “the kingdom of heaven” [*malakūt*] the formal impurities are purged. So, it is clear that Allah, the Exalted has made water the key to His proximity and the guide to His court of mercy.

Then, in the noble *hadīth* there is another instruction, which opens another way to the people of *sulūk* and of observance. It says: “...Think of the clarity, softness, purity and blessing of water and of its tenderly mixing with everything. Use it to purge the organs, which Allah has ordered you to purify, and observe their disciplines in His obligations and traditions, as under each one there are many advantages. So, if you use them respectfully, the springs of the advantages will burst out for you presently.”

This noble *hadīth* refers to the degrees of purity in general and puts it in four general degrees, of which one is that which is mentioned so far in the noble *hadīth*, i.e. purifying the organs. It also notes that the

people of observance and the *sāliks* to Allah should not stop at the apparent form of the things. They have to regard the appearance as a mirror reflecting the inside, to detect the facts from the forms and not to be satisfied with formal purification, which is a satanic snare.

So, in the purity of water they discover the purity of the organs, which they have to purge and clarify by way of performing the obligatory duties and the divine laws, whose fineness is to be used to make fine the organs and to take them out of the coarseness of disobedience, and to let purity and blessing flow into all the organs.

And, from the tenderly mixing of water with things, they realize how the divine heavenly powers are mixed with the world of nature, preventing the impurities of nature from affecting them. When the organs are clothed with the divine obligations and laws and their disciplines, the inner advantages gradually appear, the springs of the divine secrets burst out and a part of the secrets of servitude and purity uncover themselves for the *sālik*.

After explaining the first stage of purification and its instruction, the *hadīth* gives the secondary instruction, saying: "...then mix with the creatures (servants) of Allah like the mixture of water with things: It gives to everything its due without any change in its own meaning. And learn a lesson from the Messenger of Allah (s) (who said): "A sincere believer is like water."

The first instruction concerns the *sālik's* managing his organs and inner powers. The second instruction mentioned in this noble *hadīth* concerns man's relation with Allah's creatures. This is a comprehensive instruction telling how the *sālik's* behavior with the creatures should be, which is also an implication of the reality of privacy [*khalwat*]; that is, the traveler to Allah, while treating each group of the people with kindness, giving them their natural dues, and dealing with anyone of them according to his disposition, is to strictly observe the divine rights, and never to lose his own meaning, which is servitude and attending to Allah.

At the same time of being in multiplicity [*kathrat*], he is to be in privacy [*khalwat*], and his heart which is the lodging of the Beloved is to be free from others and empty of all designs and paintings. Then the *hadīth* refers to the third instruction, which concerns the *sālik's* connection with Allah, the Exalted. It says: "Let your clearness with Allah, the Most High, be like the clearness of water when He sent it down from the sky and called it 'purifier' [*tahūr*]."

That is, the traveler to Allah should be free from the intrusion of nature, and its impurity and darkness should not be allowed into his heart, and all his acts of worship should be free from all external and internal polytheism. As the water is pure when descending from the sky, and the hands of impurity have not extended to it, the heart of the *sālik*, which has descended pure from the heaven of the invisible, is to be protected against the intrusion of Satan and nature, and to be prevented from being polluted with the impurities.

After this instruction, the *hadīth* comes to the last and the comprehensive instruction for the people of

austerity and of *suḥk*. It says: “Purify your heart with fear of Allah and certitude as you cleanse your organs with water.”

Here is a reference to two lofty stations of the people of knowledge: one is “God-fearing,” which is perfected by abandoning everything other than Allah. The other is certitude, which is perfected by discerning the Presence of the Beloved.

1. Misbḥ ash-Sharḥ, ch. 10, on “Purification”.

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