

Abu Hurayrah narrated saying:

1

A man asked God's Messenger (peace be upon him) saying: Messenger of God, we travel by sea and carry a small amount of water with us. If we use it for ablution, we will go thirsty. Can we perform the ablution with sea water?

2

God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: [As for the sea] its water is pure;

3

And its dead [animal] is permissible to eat.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 83; al-Nasā'ī, 59; al-Tirmidhī, 69; Ibn Mājah, 386.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿God loves those who turn to Him in repentance, and He loves those who keep themselves pure.﴾ (2: 222)
- ﴿Lawful to you is all water game, and whatever food the sea brings forth.﴾ (5: 96)

The Narrator

'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ṣakhr al-Dawsī al-Azdī of Yemen was better known by his appellation, Abu Hurayrah. This is what is best known about his name and his father's name. He embraced Islam in the year in which the Battle of Khaybar took place, i.e. Year 7 of the Hijri calendar. He remained close to the Prophet, eager to learn, and he would go with the Prophet wherever he went. He was one of the best memorizers among the Prophet's companions and the one who narrated the largest number of hadiths. Al-Bukhari mentioned that more than eight hundred companions of the Prophet or those who belonged to the *ṭābi'īn* generation narrated hadiths from him. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appointed him as Governor of Bahrain. Later, he returned to Madinah and devoted his time to narrating the Prophet's hadiths and educating people about their faith. He died in Year 58 AH, 678 CE.

Summary

A man asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about using sea water for ablution, i.e. *wudu*. The Prophet told him that its water is pure and its dead are permissible to eat.



Message and Meaning

1

One of the Prophet's companions asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about using sea water for *wudu*, or ablution. He mentioned that when they travelled by sea, they only carried a small amount of fresh water. If they were to use it for ablution, it would soon run out and they would have nothing to drink. Could they, in this scenario, perform ablution with sea water?

2

The Prophet (peace be upon him) told him that sea water is pure and usable for purification, even though it is different from fresh water in colour and taste.

3

The Prophet gives him further information, stating that it is permissible to eat the flesh of dead sea animals. This is an exception from the Qur'anic statement: 'Forbidden to you is carrion'. (5: 3) The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'Two types of dead animals and two types of blood are made lawful to you: the dead ones are fish and locusts; and the two bloods are the liver and spleen'.⁽¹⁾



1 Related by Ibn Mājah, 3314.

Implementation



The Prophet's companion stated his question distinctly and clearly. Rulings may change according to circumstances. Therefore, a questioner must make his question absolutely clear and a scholar must not give a ruling until he has understood the question with all its details.



The Prophet's companion was keen to fulfil his religious duty. Although he might be on a journey and could avail himself of the concessions available to travellers, such as combining two obligatory prayers at the same time, and delaying a prayer until the last part of its time range, so that he may pray on arrival, he was nonetheless keen to enquire further. He seems eager to offer his prayers on time. This is an example of ensuring that life matters should not distract us from our religious duties.



The Prophet (peace be upon him) answered saying: 'As for the sea, its water is pure'. He did not give a short answer such as saying, 'Yes'. Such an abbreviated response might have been understood to mean that it is permissible to use sea water for ablution in cases of need or emergency only, as when having little fresh water. It might also be understood to mean that it is not usable for removing impurity. Hence, the Prophet's answer gives a general ruling, stating that sea water is pure and can be used for cleansing, whether there is plenty of fresh water or not, and whether one is on a journey or in residence. This is an aspect of wisdom that is needed by scholars, as they need to give clear and definitive answers.



The Arabic wording of the Prophet's answer uses definite articles in both noun and adjective, 'water' and 'pure'. This gives further clarity to the answer. Scholars should always make their answers clear, leaving no room for doubt.



The hadith shows that it is right to give a questioner more information than merely answering his question, if the scholar sees that the questioner might need it even though he has not included it in his enquiry. In this case, the questioner frequently travelled by sea. It was possible that he might find dead fish floating on the surface. The Prophet tells him that it is permissible to eat these. It is right for advocates of Islam, scholars and educators to go beyond the terms of the question, if they realize that the questioner has overlooked a necessary aspect.

