

Ḥumrān, ‘Uthmān’s *mawla* narrated that:

1

‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān called for water and he performed the ablution: he washed his hands three times, then rinsed his mouth and blew his nose. He then washed his face three times, then washed his right hand up to the elbow three times, then washed his left hand in the same way. He then wiped his head, then washed his right foot up to the ankle three times, then his left foot in the same way.

2

He then said: ‘I saw God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) performing the ablution in a way similar to what I have done

3

then God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever performs the ablution in a similar way to what I have done now, then stands up and offers two *rak’ahs* during which he thinks of nothing [other than his prayer] is forgiven whatever sin he did”¹.

4

Another version related by Muslim adds: ‘and his prayer and walk to the mosque will be a gain’.⁽¹⁾

From the Qur’an

- ﴿God loves those who turn to Him in repentance, and He loves those who keep themselves pure﴾. ﴿2: 222﴾
- ﴿Believers, when you are about to pray, wash your faces, and your hands and arms up to the elbows, and pass your wet hands lightly over your heads, and wash your feet up to the ankles. If you are in a state of ceremonial impurity, purify yourselves. But if you are ill, or on a journey, or if one of you has come from the toilet, or if you have been in intimate contact with women and can find no water, then have recourse to pure dust, passing therewith lightly over your faces and your hands. God does not want to impose any hardship on you, but He wants to purify you, and to bestow on you the full measure of His blessings, so that you may be grateful﴾. ﴿5: 6﴾

The Narrator

Abu ‘Amr, or Abu ‘Abdullāh, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān ibn Abi al-‘Āṣ ibn Umayyah ibn ‘Abd Shams of the Quraysh tribe was the third caliph and known by his nickname Dhul-Nūrayn (i.e. the one with two lights). He was one of the earliest people to embrace Islam, and one of the ten companions of the Prophet given the happy news that they were certain to go to Heaven. He went on the two migrations to Abyssinia and Madinah. He was married to two of the Prophet’s daughters: Ruqayyah, and later Umm Kulthūm. The angels used to be diffident in his presence. He became the third caliph after the martyrdom of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb in Year 24 AH 645 CE. During his reign, Arminia, Khurāsān, Tunisia and other areas were annexed to the Muslim state. He completed the collation of the Qur’an and unified its copies so that no disagreement could take place in different areas of the state. He was assassinated in Madinah and became a martyr in Year 35 AH 656 CE.

Summary

‘Uthmān performed the ablution following the example of the Prophet as he performed it for prayer. He then told those present that the Prophet said that whoever performs the ablution in the same way and offers two *rak’ahs* of prayer, with sincere devotion, will have his past sins forgiven. His prayer and his walk to the mosque will be considered as an additional act of worship that is gained.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 164; Muslim (his text), 226



Message and Meaning

1

'Uthmān ibn 'Affān took his place in public to teach people how to do the ablution, i.e. *wudu*. He called for water to be brought in, and started with his hands, washing them three times. He then took some water in his cupped hand and rinsed his mouth. He also inhaled some water and exhaled it to clean his nose. He did this three times. He then washed his face three times. The face extends vertically from the top of the forehead to the lowest point of the chin. It also comprises the area between the two ears. He then washed his arms up to the elbows, starting with the right hand washing it three times before washing the left arm three times. He then wet his hand and wiped the top of his head once only. The requirement concerning one's head is to wipe it once, not to wash it. He finished with washing his feet and ankles three times, starting with the right foot and finishing with the left.

The narrator does not mention washing one's ears, because they are washed, front and back, along with wiping one's head. This was the Prophet's confirmed practice.

In this hadith, 'Uthmān mentions that the Prophet's ablution showed that each part was washed three times. Other hadiths mention that the Prophet did the ablution washing each part once only, and on a different occasion he washed each part twice. The total sum of these hadiths is that the obligatory part is to wash each part once only, making sure that it is well washed. What is more than once is recommended, i.e. sunnah. He did not wash any part more than three times. He said: 'Whoever does more than this misbehaves, does wrong and is unfair.' This means that washing each part once is adequate, the second is sunnah and the third attains perfection. What is more is unfair.

2

'Uthmān then states that he saw the Prophet performing the ablution in this way and that he wanted to teach people the Prophet's practice as he saw it.

3

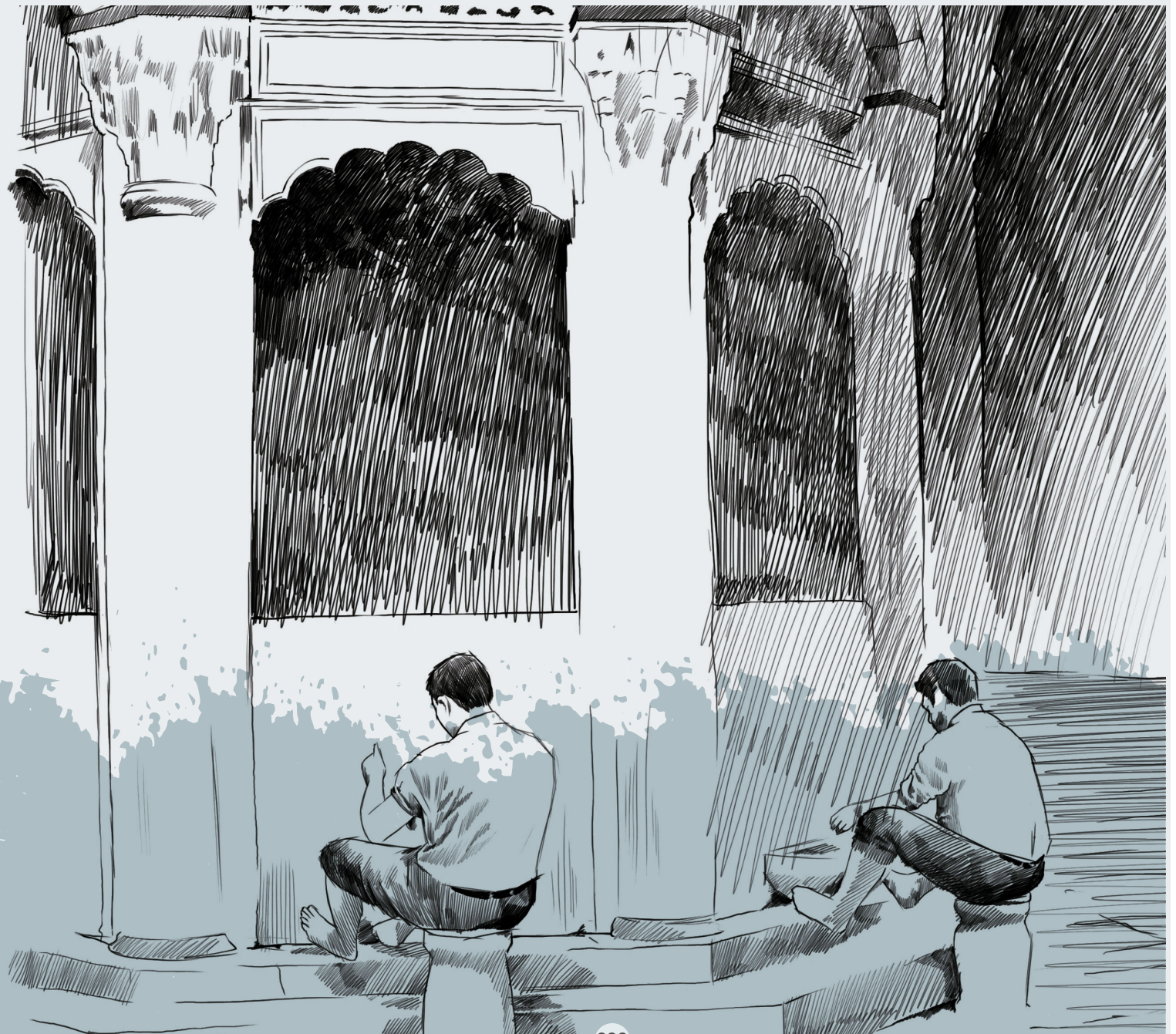
'Uthmān further adds that the Prophet told them that whoever performs the ablution in this manner then offers two *rak'ahs* of voluntary prayer, calmly and sincerely, giving no thought to worldly matters and ignoring any sudden such thought, will be rewarded by the forgiveness of his past sins.

The apparent meaning of this hadith covers all sins, major and minor. However, similar hadiths specify the minor sins, excluding the major ones. One such hadith quotes the Prophet: 'The five [obligatory] prayers, and Friday Prayer to Friday Prayer, and Ramadan [fasting] to Ramadan will wipe away what is committed between them unless major sins are committed'.⁽¹⁾ Scholars consider this condition mentioned in the hadith applicable to similar hadiths that do not specifically state it.

1 Related by Muslim, 233.



Since the forgiveness of sins is the reward of the ablution, the prayer and walking to the mosque are given additional reward. This means that a person who performs the ablution and offers a prayer of two *rak'ahs* will have his sins wiped away. He will also earn the reward of the following prayer and the walk to the mosque. The reward of these two is granted in full, unaffected by anything. How generous God is: He not only wipes away past sins, but also rewards His servant for both his prayer and his walk to the mosque.



Implementation

1

'Uthmān was known to be a very shy person. However, he did not hesitate to perform the ablution in front of people, so as to teach them the Prophet's method. A Muslim should not allow his shyness to stop him seeking or disseminating knowledge, correcting mistakes, enjoining what is right or prohibiting wrong.

2

This hadith teaches us the perfect way to perform ablution. We should be keen to always do it this way.

3

The best form of ablution is washing every part three times. We should all do this, adding nothing more.

4

Washing one's hands is one of the recommended parts of the ablution and the Prophet consistently did it, although it was not mentioned in the Qur'an. Every Muslim should make sure to practise all the recommended aspects of *wudu*.

5

Rinsing one's mouth, inhaling and exhaling water through the nose and wiping one's ears are aspects of both the ordinary ablution, i.e. *wudu*, and the grand ablution, i.e. *ghusl*. They should be attended to, not neglected.

6

Doing the obligatory and recommended parts of the ablution in the right order is also obligatory and must be fulfilled.

7

It is important to do the whole of the ablution without interruption. Therefore, one must not disrupt one's ablution and continue after a while. Indeed if one stops one's ablution midway for a time and the washed parts dry up, then one should start afresh.

8

The elbows and the ankles are included in one's ablution. Therefore, they must be included and washed.

9

The ankles are the two protruding bones at the lower ends of the shins. When the wudu is done hastily, some people may overlook washing them, which is wrong.

10

'Uthmān did not vocalize his intention to do the ablution, because intention is a mental action. To say it verbally is a deviation.

11

The way 'Uthmān performed the ablution clearly indicates that the Prophet used not to say anything of the supplication people say during ablution. 'It is not reported that he used to say anything when he performed ablution other than starting with *bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* [i.e. in the name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful]. When he finished it, he used to say: *Ashhadu an lā ilāha illa Allah waḥdah lā sharīka lah, wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan 'abduhū wa rasūluh. Allāhumma j'alnī min al-tawwābīn wa j'alnī min al-mutaṭahirīn.* [i.e. I bear witness that there is no deity other than God. He has no partner. And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. My Lord, make me one of those who turn to You in repentance and one of those who purify themselves]'.
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12

Educators and advocates of Islam should practically demonstrate the practices they want to teach, as 'Uthmān did. Such practical demonstration is easier to understand and follow.

13

When a person is about to start an act of worship, he should remove from his mind all thoughts of life's affairs. He should strive to focus on his worship. During prayer, a person unfortunately often experiences thoughts of immediate concern.

14

One should not pay attention to worldly concerns during worship. As for thoughts of the life to come, the Day of Judgement and what it involves of reckoning and other aspects, these are not reprehensible.

15

When thoughts of this present life and its concerns occur during one's prayer, one should dismiss these and focus on the Qur'anic verses the worshipper or the imam is reciting.

16

What a great chance to have one's sins wiped away: just performing the ablution and offering a prayer of two short *rak'ahs*.

17

Every Muslim should be keen to do the ablution well. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Shall I tell what ensures that God will wipe away [people's] sins and raise their grades?' People said: 'Yes, please, Messenger of God'. He said: 'Doing the ablution full well despite difficulty, walking longer to mosques and waiting for one prayer after another. That is [equal to] standing guard'.⁽¹⁾

18

Islam is a religion of purity, cleanliness and beauty. Self-purification is considered as one of the most important acts of worship by which a person gets closer to his Lord. It is a condition for the validity of many other acts of worship.

19

No one enters Heaven who is foul or having anything foul. Therefore, a person who purifies himself during his life and meets God having no impurity will enter Heaven without difficulty. A person who does not purify himself in this life either has an inherent impurity, such as a disbeliever has, or an acquired impurity. The one with an inherent impurity does not enter Heaven at all, but the one with an acquired impurity will be purified of it in the Fire and then come out. In fact when believers have crossed the fine line, they will be stopped over a bridge between Heaven and Hell, where they will be cleansed of traces left on them and kept them short of Heaven, but did not send them into Hell. When they have been thus cleansed, they will be permitted to go to Heaven.⁽²⁾

20

God bestows His favours on His servants, forgiving them their sins and rewarding them for their prayer and for their walk to the mosque. What a great blessing that no wise man should ever ignore.

1 Related by Muslim, 251.

2 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ighāthat al-Lahfān min Maṣāyid al-Shayṭān*, Vol. 1, p. 56.

