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Ethics of Water Usage in the Context of Ablution: A Perception Based on the Concept of Excess in the Qur'an and Sunnah

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Abstract

Usage concept is a wide concept encompassing every aspect of human life, including the aspect of water usage. Otherwise, negative attitudes such as irresponsibility and extravagant may need to be avoided, even in ablution matter. Even though Islam emphasises on cleanliness and sanctity, however it never allows excessiveness in water usage arbitrarily. The focus of this study is to investigate the role of *nas qat'ie* in al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah and at the same time, this study also would highlight the explanation regarding issues on ablution by Muslims scholars as per suggested by Islamic laws without affecting water resource cycle. Other than that, this study applied qualitative research method for the purpose of analysing documents related to environment, usage concept, as well as ethics in ablution as per suggested by Islamic law. The research findings suggested that Islam prohibits excessiveness in achieving perfection in ablution. Islam however has guided that wasteful practice is not supposedly occur as such practice has been degraded in Islam; as per agreed upon by Muslim scholars. Furthermore, Islamic laws have guided the suitable ablution rate for the purpose of maintaining and prospering the nature; in line with the role of humans as the caliphs throughout their lives on this Earth. Therefore, as a concern citizen, the act of excessiveness shall not be practiced as it is not a positive routine. This is to ensure the balance of the nature, particularly the water source, hence it could be shared equally with each and every of us, as well as the next generation.

Keywords: Ethics in Water Usage, Ablution, Al-Qur'an, al-Sunnah, Wastage

Introduction

Islam is a religion that is based on *iman*, *taqwa* and *akhlaq*. According to al-Ghazali (1998: 80), *akhlaq* indicates to a part of the soul that is manifested through good and noble words and deeds when seen from both a logical-rational as well as a religious viewpoint. On the other hand, ethics relates to behavior that is based on an individual or group's *akhlaq* and morality. In other words,

it refers to the intrinsic discipline that reveals the system of values adopted by a society (Marsuki, 2002: 9-11). Both understandings are similar in their emphasis on disciplining a man with the aim of molding a noble personality.

The mind and logic would innately view a culture of wastage as an attitude and mentality that is unwholesome and in fact, doing so is contrary to the ethical principles of man himself. This is also emphasized in the Quran and Sunnah, the two primary sources of references for Muslims. Human life and excess are also always inherently intertwined with each other, be it on a personal or societal level. Therefore, there is a need to shed light on this negative attribute in an effort to reduce the indifference and negligence of our society towards the problem of superfluity especially with regards to the usage of water.

Water is one of the most essential human needs. It is also the life pulse that ensures the survival and development of all creatures. Even those that subsist in areas with a scarcity of water still depend on water to survive (Rusdi, 2008). Humans need to be mindful of the way they use water because, inadvertently, they have become the primary offender of clean water wastage. The abundance of rain every year, one of earth's richest treasures, leads to intemperance among users in their daily consumption of water. One of the wastages referred to here is among Muslims who perform religious rituals such as the ablution.

Ablution is one of the conditions of validity of many obligatory and supererogatory religious acts like performing the prayers or reading the Quran. Furthermore, the use of water is necessary in order to complete the six pillars of ablution. Nevertheless, attention still must be drawn to the method of utilizing the water as per the concept of moderation upheld by Islam.

The concept of Consumerism

According to Muhammad & Hanapi (2018) in explaining the meaning concept in halal-green consumerism in linguistic aspect means use or apply. It also refers to matters to consuming goods and services in order to satisfy the consumer's needs until it creates a benefits or utility value. Meanwhile as in Arabic term, *istihlak* explains the consumerism to use or apply the benefits of goods such as consuming water to get the drinking benefits. Moreover, Adnan (2000) explains consumerism word here has two different meaning. Firstly, it is defined as a practice and policy that protects consumers by making them aware of damaged and unsafe goods, as well as dishonest business practices, misleading advertisements and negligence of bureaucracy. Secondly, consumerism refers to the consumption of food and goods. Thus, it is apparent that the term consumerism is inherently denotative.

However, former President of Consumer International noted that consumer movements have suffered from narrow-mindedness due to the singular focus on 'value of money' rather than 'value for humanity' or 'value for Mother Earth'. The consumer associations in Malaysia have long been advocating value for humanity and environment even though it was originally established to promote 'value for money' as practiced in developed countries (Adnan, 2000). There is a need to redefine the term consumerism so that it conveys a holistic view which embraces value for humanity and the environment in order to raise awareness among consumers to play their part

as intelligent and responsible users in line with ethics in general and in truth, ethical consumerism itself.

The consumer movement has not only laid down guidelines protecting consumer rights that businesses must respect, it has also listed the responsibilities of users towards the said party. This demonstrates that the movement is seeking fairness and efficiency from the traders and the government, as well as working towards creating a society consisting of more conscientious consumers (Adnan, 1994). In addition to the duty of providing complete information to the relevant authorities, and reporting damaged goods and any form of oppression and malpractice witnessed, to the consumer's movement, the responsibility to protect the environment also lies on the consumers themselves. It is a good practice for consumers to support any environmentally-conscious organization alongside the many 'going Green' measures that they can incorporate in their own daily life (Adnan, 1994).

However, these are just a few of the fundamentals that need to be espoused and internalized to guarantee benefit for all parties including the traders, consumers and nature. Even though the existence of many public figures or institutions fighting to save the environment may seem as if a strong defense is already in place, it does not dismiss the role that the masses can play in saving natural resources. It is actually, the starting point to stop the misuse of natural resources and to save the environment.

Rate of Daily Water Usage

The ever-growing wave of modernization has forced the country to carry out many developmental activities abruptly. This has had direct detrimental effects on the quality and quantity of natural resources such as water. Water conservation is one of the fifteen legal issues related to the environment that has been reviewed by various parties from the Environmental Law Review Committee (Ali, 1993).

Humans usually require 80 liters of water a day to meet their basic needs. Five liters of water are used for drinking, 30 liters of water are used for personal hygiene, 25 liters are used for bathing and 20 liters are used for preparing food and beverage. However, the amount of water consumption can reach up to 500 liters per person for city-dwellers (Yang, 2002). This means that the rate of consumption of water for personal hygiene alone can reach up to more than 50% of the standard daily water usage for an individual. The international recommendation of the amount of water consumption is only 165 liters per day while the United Nations standards have put it at 200 liters per day. In fact, figures from other countries such as Sudan with a usage rate of 50 liter, a hundred liters in India and 64 liters for Africans show that their consumption is actually lower than the standards recommended (Chan, 2002).

A study by Green Technology (2011) revealed that Malaysia's domestic water consumption rate can be categorized into 30% of the water used outside the house, 19% used in the toilet, 15% for laundry, 12% for bathing, 9% for food and beverage, 9% leakage and 4% for other domestic uses such as cleaning services. It is clear that the amount of water leakage (no-usage) alone forms a high percentage.

Meanwhile, based on the Malaysian Water Industry Guide, the cost of chemicals utilized for water treatment has doubled from RM66 million in 2003 to RM120 million in 2005. The same report shows that the operations cost of water supply alone has reached RM3.4 billion in the said year (Pengguna, 2008). Although there is an improvement in the quality of river water, one of the sources of water supply, the rapid growth of the manufacturing and agricultural industries can pose a threat to this cleanliness level as a result of these parties wanting to reap fast profits and the inefficiency of authorities in monitoring these activities. (Sekitar, 2011).

It is estimated that every year the earth receives a total of 113,000 billion cubic meters of rain and snow. But water crisis is still a reality. Nearly two billion people in the world, involving around 80 countries, are facing an ongoing water crisis. Whereas, we as Malaysians only need to turn on the tap and have water gush out without an ounce of guilt or remorse (Yang, 1998).

In recent times, uncertainty in climate and weather changes, especially in prolonged droughts, can cause water to dry up and rapidly deplete the water supply at the dams. This is a natural occurrence that can happen due to the increasing hot and dry weather in Malaysia. Water depletion in the dams, coupled with the problem of river pollution, have previously led to the shutdown of water treatment plants. For instance, in May 2014, a water crisis in Malaysia resulted in the disruption of clean water supply, especially in the state of Selangor due to the lack of rainwater harvested in the dam area (Kini, 2014: 3). Although the Selangor State Government has implemented a scheme to provide 20-meter volume of water free of charge for the welfare of its citizens, it is also a way of encouraging people to save water in their daily use. Indeed, it is not impossible for the same crisis to be felt by people in the other thirteen states of Malaysia if prudent water consumption in everyday life is not stressed on.

Wastage for Perfection

Simply by observing, we can see water collected as a result of water consumption for ablutions in mosques, prayer rooms (surau) or in places where the ablution areas are provided. Some Muslims at the mosque, prayer rooms (surau) or other prayer facilities, use water such that their clothes will also be wet from taking ablution. We are certain that our prayers will not be perfect without the perfect ablution. However, should perfection be achieved through excess?

A complete and valid ablution must be performed as per the steps revealed in Surah al-Ma'idah verse six:

يَتَأْتِيهَا الذَّبَابُ إِذَا قُمْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ
وَأَمْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ جُنُبًا فَاطَّهَّرُوا وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مَرْضَىٰ أَوْ
عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِنْكُمْ مِنَ الْغَائِبِ أَوْ لَمَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا
طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ مِنْهُ مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَكِنْ
يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُنِمْ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

Translated as: *O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles. And if you are in a state of janabah, then purify yourselves. But if you are ill or on a journey or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself or you have contacted women and do not find water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and hands with it. Allah does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you and complete His favor upon you that you may be grateful.*

Based on this verse, perfection in ablution can be achieved by wiping the face, hands up to the elbows, a part of the head and the foot up to the ankle. The washing of these four body parts are also referred to as the obligatory acts of ablution and water must reach them in order for an ablution to be completely performed. However, how many have achieved the perfection of ablution while not wasting any water? Have we ever thought about that?

Islam is not a religion focusing only worship and shariah such as the ablution, prayer, fasting and pilgrimage, but it also emphasizes on the tiny details of life on earth from the smallest of particles to the biggest of creations. One after the other scientific discoveries have been mentioned in the religious book of this religion before any other source, from the smallest cells to creation of man as a caliph on earth, to the creation of seas, to the creation of hills and mountains as a natural system of balance inhabited by various species of life forms (Ujang, 1993: 23-24). But in this case, waste is not necessary simply for the sake of trying to perfect the ablution, when waste itself is an attitude that cannot be accepted as characteristic of perfection.

Research Methodology

This literature review has been carried out using the scientific research method, library research. Document analysis was conducted to understand how Islam teaches us about the consumption of water based on the guidelines in the Quran and Sunnah. In addition to this, the views of Islamic scholars were also reviewed in order to gain detailed explanations regarding the evidences from the Qur'an and Sunnah on the concept of water usage while performing ablution.

Moreover, this study also puts forth a combination of views from both scholars and researchers which include a number of views from the scholars of *Tafsir* and scholars of *Fiqh of ibadah* on the best way of taking ablution as is required of every Muslim.

Findings

The discussions on the Ethics of Water Usage in the Context of Ablution in this study are divided into two parts. First is Islam's view on water source, the second is be modest and waste not.

1) Islam's View on Water

Indeed, water is the creation of Allah that is a precious source of all life. Hence, its benefits are not limited to use by human beings only, but also for animals and all other types of life that occupies the earth. This is explained in the words of Allah in Surah al-Anbiya' verse thirty:

أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا ۖ وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ
 شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Translated as: *Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?*

Moreover, water also serves as a way to clean the body and clothing from any impurities and so it is a medium for *ibadah*. Allah says:

إِذْ يُغَشِّيكُمُ النُّعَاسَ أَمَنَةً مِّنْهُ وَيُنزِلُ عَلَيْكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لِّيُطَهِّرَكُم بِهِ وَيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمْ رِجْسَ
 الشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيَرْبِطَ عَلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتَ بِهِ الْأَقْدَامَ ﴿١١﴾

Translated as: *[Remember] when He overwhelmed you with drowsiness [giving] security from Him and sent down upon you from the sky, rain by which to purify you and remove from you the evil [suggestions] of Satan and to make steadfast your hearts and plant firmly thereby your feet. (Qur'an 8: 11).*

Based on the verses given above, we can conclude that there are two functions of water. The first is its function in sustaining life on earth and the second with respect to acts of worship. Wherever there is water, life will surely exist in that area. It is the point where man's daily life begins, later flourishing and forming a civilization. This can be seen from the early civilizations which were drawn towards and dependent on water for their daily activities. For example, the Mesopotamian civilization (the Tigris and Euphrates), Ancient Egypt (Nile River), Indian civilization (Ganges River) and Chinese Civilization (Huang Ho River).

It is clear that water is a basic source of life driving the development of a civilization by facilitating activities such as finding food, transportation, agriculture, manufacturing and others. Therefore, human beings must be wise in profiting from water resources which include the river, the sea, the lake and the like as a sign of gratitude to Allah for His favor. Allah says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ الْبَحْرَ لِنَآكُلُوا مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَنَسَخَّرِ جُؤَا مِنْهُ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى
 الْفَلَكَ مَوَاجِرَ فِيهِ وَلَتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلِعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

Translated as: *And it is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from it tender meat and to extract from it ornaments which you wear. And you see the ships plowing through it, and [He subjected it] that you may seek of His bounty; and perhaps you will be grateful.* (Al-Qur'an 16:14).

2) Be Modest and Waste Not

Prudence in using water is ordered by the Shariah. Islam strictly forbids the *Ummah* from wasting any resources, including water. Carelessness, excess and ingratitude in benefitting from this blessing of Allah must be avoided. This is demanded by Allah Ta'ala in Surah al-A'raf:

﴿ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ
 الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴾ ﴿٣١﴾

Translated as: *O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.* (Qur'an 7: 31).

Furthermore, the Prophet S.A.W. also forbade his people from wasting water, even when performing ablution. This is apparent through a story related in a hadith about a companion of Rasulullah S.A.W named Sa'ad bin Abi Waqas, who was at the time taking ablution by a river. The Prophet S.A.W. saw him and advised him;

أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم مرّ بسعد, وهو يتوضأ, فقال: ما هذا السرف؟ قال: أفي الوضوء إسراف؟ قال: نعم, وإن كنت على نهر جار

Translated as: *The Messenger of Allah S.A.W. approached Sa'ad who was taking ablution. Rasulullah S.A.W. asked: "What is this waste?" Sa'ad asked: "Is there excess in taking ablution?" Prophet S.A.W. replied: "Yes! Even if you are by a stream of water that flows".* (Ibn Majah 1419H, Kitab al-Taharah, Bab ma ja'a fi al-qasd al-wuduk wa karahati al-ta'addi fihi: 425).

The management and usage of water must be in accordance with what the Shariah has outlined. The Islamic law has laid down clear guidelines on the amount of water to be used in matters relating to worship which also takes into account ablution and bathing. Anas ibn Malik narrated;

كان النبي يغسل أو كان يغتسل بالصاع إلى خمسة أمداد ويتوضأ بالمد

Translated as: *"The Prophet bathed using one sha' to five mud of water and the Prophet performed ablution with one mud of water"* (Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Wudu', Bab al-Wudu' bi al-Mud: 188)

Moreover, there is a hadith narrated by ʿAmru bin Shuʿaib regarding the hadith that mentions that the Prophet S.A.W. performed the steps of ablution three times each. He referred to it as the procedure that was demonstrated by the Prophet S.A.W. himself. Any additions to this is considered as an abuse and injustice. Abuse in ablution is from excessive consumption of water because washing more than three times is reprehensible from two aspects; firstly, it is adding on something not recommended by the Shariah and secondly, it is wasting water without making any good use of it.

In the opinion of *Shafiʿiyyah* scholars, increasing the number of washings to more than three in the ablution is considered as *makruh tanzih*. *Makruh tanzih* is something that is better left out rather than acted upon (al-Zuhayli t.th: 261). The book al-Majmuʿ (1996: 502) states that abuse asserted in the hadith is not a *haram* act because it is not a sinful act. This opinion is rejected by others because, just based on linguistics, abuse is considered as an immoral behavior. Immoral behavior is undesired and it is blameworthy, hence, it is contrary to what is mentioned by the Qur'an and al-Sunnah (al-Risuni 2008: 73). Allah mentions in Surah Ar-Rum verse ten:

ثُمَّ كَانَ عَاقِبَةَ الَّذِينَ أَسَفُوا السُّوْءَىٰ ۖ أَن كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

Translated as: *Then the end of those who did evil was the worst [consequence] because they denied the signs of Allah and used to ridicule them.*

A hadith of Rasulullah S.A.W. reiterates the argument mentioned in the verse above. The Prophet S.A.W. said;

إنه سيكون في هذه الأمة قوم يعتدون في الطهور والدعاء

Translated as: *"There will come a group of people who exaggerate in cleansing and prayer"* (Dawud, 1418H, al-Toharah, al-Israf fi al-Ma': 96).

Exaggeration in cleaning means going beyond the limits set for water consumption. It is not a part of moderation prescribed by Islam and is an excess that is entirely forbidden. Thus, Abu Dawud classified this hadith in the section of 'excessive use of water' in his book, Sunan Abu Dawud as a result of his *istinbat* of an Islamic law and this shows that the view of Islamic jurisprudence regarding the issue is praiseworthy. (al-Risuni 2008: 74).

There is no contradiction among Islamic scholars about the limits and amount of water permissible for use while bathing and doing ablution. They are also in unison regarding the criticism of exaggeration in the use of water as did the Prophet S.A.W. and the *salaf* scholars. For example, Imam al-Bukhari states:

The scholars prohibit excessive use of water as it surpasses what the Prophet S.A.W. has exemplified in performing ablution (1996: 439).

Imam al-Nawawi also said:

The scholars are unanimous in denouncing excess in using water for ablution and bathing (1996: 503).

It is then evident that Islamic scholars have united in their reproach of excessiveness. Imam al-Bukhari opines that the censure of extravagant use of water is *makruh tahrim* rather than *makruh tanzih* as per the views of *salaf* scholars. Imam al-Bukhari adopted the view that it is a *makruh* act based on the following verse:

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ فِيكُمْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ لَوْ يُطِيعُكُمْ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ لَعَنِيمٌ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبِيبٌ إِلَيْكُمْ
الْإِيمَانَ وَرَزَقَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَكَرَّهَ إِلَيْكُمْ الْكُفْرَ وَالْفُسُوقَ وَالْعِصْيَانَ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الرَّاشِدُونَ



Translated as: *And know that among you is the Messenger of Allah . If he were to obey you in much of the matter, you would be in difficulty, but Allah has endeared to you the faith and has made it pleasing in your hearts and has made hateful to you disbelief, defiance and disobedience. Those are the [rightly] guided.* (al-Qur'an 49: 7).

According to Al-Subki (1984), the more accurate category of *makruh* here is *tahrim* rather than *tanzih*. This will deter a person from asking; 'Is this unlawful or lawful?', instead they will tend to say; 'I do not like this. Please do not do it.' Ibn Qayyim elucidates that here the *salaf* scholars use the meaning of *makruh* based on what has been written in Qur'an and Sunnah but the *khalaf* scholars define *makruh* specifically as something that is not *haram* (prohibited) but is best avoided.

Therefore, the use of water in performing ablution must be according to what has been taught by the Prophet S.A.W. i.e. only one *mud*. The number of repetitions to wash each limb in performing ablution is left to each individual to decide. They may repeat it once, twice or thrice. However, going beyond three washing is blameworthy as per the unison of scholars discussed earlier.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is unmistakable that extravagance in the sense of wastage is an ethical (*akhlaq*) offense, what more of excess in the use of water, including, for ablution. It is an act that violates natural ethics and more so the *akhlaq* that have been taught by Islam. Individuals who indulge in excess can be classified as individuals who do not hold on to noble ethical values or *akhlaq* because this act has a detrimental effect not only to themselves but it is also a disruption of an effective ecological cycle.

When viewed from the aspect of water consumption, there are many recommendations to be prudent in using water collectively and efficiently without misusing water resources. Every day, Muslims need a specific amount of water for ablution and personal hygiene (bathing). In addition to the reprimand towards indulgence in excess, Islam also educates the *Ummah* to maintain cleanliness as a clean environment begins with personal hygiene.

But in order to ensure that water resources are sustained, we need to be wise in how we utilize water as it does not only involve the human populations. We need to make an effort to be just too, to all other inhabitants of the earth including animals and plants who also need water. Although Muslims have been commanded to perform ablution before performing any worship, it does not mean that Islam gives absolute freedom to waste as wished. Furthermore, not all people of the world are privileged with a sufficient water supply such as the people living in the African continent, in particular and other areas, in general, that often experience water shortages.

Therefore, the researcher advises that the preservation and conservation of natural resources, especially water, should start from the smallest of practice such as the ablution before we can move on to greater changes in our daily activities. Prudence need to be internalized by individuals and societies as a pure gesture to nature and a sign of thankfulness to the Creator for the blessings He has given.

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