



# AL-GHAZĀLĪ

*The Mysteries of Purity for Teens*

FONS VITAE

## Book 3

### The Secret Dimensions of Ritual Purity

*Praise be to Allah, who has treated His servants gently, for He has called them to serve with cleanliness.*

*The Prophet said: “The religion was based on cleanliness,”.....and he has said,” Ritual Purity is half of the faith.”*

*As understood by those endowed with faculties of discernment, these outward signs indicate that the most important of all matters is the purification of the innermost beings, since it is highly improbable that what is meant by his saying “Ritual purity is half of faith” could be the cultivation of the exterior by cleansing with the pouring and spilling of water, and the devastation of the interior and keeping it loaded with rubbish and filth. How preposterous, how absurd!*

Purity is central to our faith. So what then is purity? Is it a physical state of the body or is it more? Before we discuss this matter further, let us use the following metaphor. Think of a house that looks very nice from the outside. It has fresh paint, sparkling windows and a nice lawn. At first you might think well of this house. After seeing the inside, however, you realize that this house is actually in poor condition. The foundation is damaged, the wood is rotting and the whole interior is filthy. What is your opinion of the house now that you have seen its interior? Would you want to live in such a house? Of course not! This same rule can be applied to understanding purity in Islam. If we observe the laws

regarding ritual or physical purity but do not at the same time pay any attention to the quality of our actions, our thoughts, and our feelings towards God and His creation, then are we really completing half of our faith? No, certainly not. Purity in Islam is deeper and more meaningful than having a clean body. Outward purity, or being clean for prayer does matter. It matters very much. But just like the example of the house, the condition of what is on our “inside” is what matters the most. So as we learn the rules and reasons behind outward or ritual purity in Islam, please keep in mind that this type purity is just one type of purity. The beauty of inward purity is more valuable in Islam than that of outward purity. In fact Al-Ghazali says that:

*Ritual purity has four degrees:*

*The 1<sup>st</sup> degree:* Purification of the physical body through ritual washing or baths.

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> degree:* Purification of your actions through doing what is right and leaving what is wrong (what al-Ghazali calls “offenses and sins”).

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> degree:* Purification of the heart through having beautiful intentions, true and firm beliefs, wise thoughts and tempered feelings (and avoiding what al-Ghazali calls blameworthy morals and nasty vices).

*The 4<sup>th</sup> degree:* Purification of your true, innermost self from all that is other than God. Your innermost being is the most special part of you. It is what makes you who you truly are. What you are is more than what you look like, what you think, feel and do. This part of you is a bit of a secret, like a special gem hidden in a cave. It is there and it is real, but you

probably haven't seen it yet. You get a glimpse of it when you are at your best, when you remember God with respect and love, and when you treat others the way you want to be treated. Only God knows what this special you is truly like. And the more you know God, the more you come to know your innermost heart, your secret, gem-like self. Those who know and have become their true, gem-like selves are like the Prophet and the saints. For they lived their lives according to the truth with all their hearts, all their minds and all their souls. In fact our tradition describes the Prophet Muhammad as "a ruby among stones." Do you then want to be a ruby or a stone?

*These are the stations of faith, and each station has a level. The servant will not attain to the high level, unless he transcends the low level. He will not attain purity of the innermost being from blameworthy attributes, and to its cultivation by means of those that are praiseworthy, so long as he has not accomplished purity of the heart from blameworthy morality, and its cultivation by means of praiseworthy morality. That will also not be attained by someone who has not accomplished purity of the limbs from prohibited things and their cultivation by means of acts of worshipful obedience, for whenever the goal is lofty and noble, its track is difficult, its path is lengthy and its obstacles are numerous.*

The four degrees of purity are like stations or stepping-stones on a path to God. You cannot reach the end of the path without first walking through the path's beginning and middle. Likewise, we cannot clean what lies within our innermost hearts without first purifying our actions, words and inner states. Honestly, none of this is easy. This path is similar to a hike on a very steep and rocky mountain trail.

But just like a difficult hike, the further you go the more beautiful the view becomes. As the Holy Quran says, “Indeed with difficulty comes ease.” God wishes that we embark upon great journey, as difficult as it may be, because it is the journey of our lives and it is the most rewarding adventure there is.

### *The First Section*

*Concerning ritual purity from filth [khabath], the examination whereof is related to what is removed, the means by which it is removed, and the process of removal*

*The first part relates to what is removed:*

*That is impurity [najasa], and the sources are three: (1) inanimate substances, (2) animate beings, and (3) the components of animate beings.*

Here al-Ghazali wishes to teach us about the first degree of purity. He wants us to keep our physical bodies clean and God-pleasing so that we may perform sacred rites like the daily prayers. In order to keep our bodies in a clean state we need to understand what makes us dirty. Those substances that are considered unclean and make us impure are called *najasa*. *Najasa* or impurity is divided into three categories. The first concerns inanimate substances. Inanimate substances are non-living objects like sand, rocks or dirt. Everything on earth that is not a living creature is in fact pure except for one substance: alcohol. Muslims are not allowed to drink wine, beer, liquor or any other intoxicating beverage.

Those who do drink these substances, May God forgive them and put them on the right path, have entered a state of impurity and their prayers for example, are not considered legitimate. Everything else that is inanimate, or not living, is considered pure. In fact we can even pray on grass or on sand if we were camping and had no prayer carpets with us. You can even come inside from being outdoors still covered in dirt and pray your daily prayers so long as you are still in a state of *wudu* (don't worry we will explain this later!). MashaLLah, what a blessing!

The second category of *najasa* or impurities concerns what is called animate beings or living creatures. The vast majority of animals and what comes from them (such as saliva) is considered ritually clean. So for example, if a cat comes to you and showers you with kisses then you need not to worry. The cat's saliva has not made you impure. Nearly all animals are clean in this way. There are only two that you need to remember: dogs and pigs. They and what ever may come from them are considered impure. This does not mean that dogs or pigs are bad in and of themselves. In fact, according to Abu Haraira, our blessed Prophet once told the following story: "While a man was walking he felt thirsty and went down a well and drank water from it. On coming out of it, he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said, "This dog is suffering from the same problem as that of mine. So he went down to the well, filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth and climbed up and watered the dog. Allah thanked him for his deed and forgave him." The people asked, "O Allah's Apostle! Is there a reward for us in serving animals?" He replied, "Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate."

Clearly in Islam all animals are worthy of our respect and care. Just because dogs and pigs are unclean with regards to our rituals it doesn't mean that we should be mean to them. It does mean however, that we should keep them away from our places of prayer. Likewise, if you have been playing with a dog and he or she has showered you with sloppy kisses, then please know that you need to purify yourself before praying. How that is done will be discussed shortly. Also, we as Muslims do not eat pigs or anything that is made with pork ingredients. Pig is considered *haram* or forbidden in this light.

While all animals are considered pure while they are alive *after* death they are no longer pure. In other words, all dead animals are impure and therefore a type of *najasa*. There are however, a few animals that *remain* pure after death. These are five: (1) the human, (2) the fish, (3) the locust, (4) the apple-worm or any similar pest that infects foods, and (5) everything that does not have a liquid nature like flies or beetles. So don't worry if a fly lands in your glass juice, your juice is still pure---just take the fly out before you drink it!!!

The last category of impurities pertains to components of living creatures. In other words, anything that comes from the inside of an animal such as pus, blood, urine or fecal matter. Of course most of us do not live on a farm and do not have much contact with these sources of *najasa*.

However, we do have a very close contact with one animate being and its parts everyday. Do you know which one? YOU! So any time you go to the bathroom and urinate or have a bowel movement, or both, then you have become

ritually impure and need to perform both *istanja* and *wudu* in order to pray. Don't worry we'll discuss what *istanja* and *wudu* mean very soon. Just remember that all impurities need to be removed. This applies not only to those impurities we find in the bathroom, but other the substances mentioned like blood. So let's say you cut your knee while climbing a tree and it bled, then you would need to remove the blood before praying.

*The second part relates to the means by which it is removed:*

*That is either a solid substance or a liquid.*

Now that we know what makes us impure we need to know how to get rid of it. If you have any impurities on your clothing then you should change your clothes and wash the dirty ones. If however, you have gone to the bathroom then you need to wash your privates, a process known as *istanja* in Arabic. After *istanja* you will also need to perform a ritual washing called *wudu*. In English it is referred to as *the minor ritual ablution*. There is also a major ritual ablution called *ghusul*. But do not worry about these terms right now. What is important here is that all of these processes require the use of *pure water*. We know what pure water is by knowing what makes it dirty. Our sacred law defines impure water as follows:

*Water is deprived of ritual purity when it is altered by the effect of an impurity on its taste, color or smell.*



In other words, water is pure so long as its color, smell and taste are normal. Just use your common sense. If the water does not look, taste or smell right, then it is most likely not clean.

There are many acceptable sources of pure water. Most of the time you will use tap water from the faucet. Other sources of pure water are rainwater, spring, sea, or river water, melted snow or hail, as well as water from a big tank or pond, so long as the taste, color and smell appear clean.

### *The Second Section*

*The ritual purification of excrements [abdath],  
Including the minor ritual ablution [wudu],  
The major ritual ablution [ghusl]  
And the ritual ablution performed with sand [tayammun],  
Preceded by wiping the private parts [istinja]*

*According to the Prophetic tradition of Salman (may Allah be well pleased with him): “Allah’s Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) taught us about everything, even excrement...”*

The beauty of our religion is that it teaches us about everything, from lofty and spiritual realities to very practical, everyday matters. Happily, in our religion, there is no shame in discussing the body and any its functions.

Now before going to the bathroom it is beneficial to say, “In the Name of Allah, I take refuge with Allah from Satan the accursed.” You probably already know how to say this prayer in Arabic. Just be sure that you are alone and able to meet your natural needs in a private manner. If you are camping outdoors, find a private area, away from other campers. As the Prophet has said, “Every religion has its character traits and the character trait of Islam is modesty.”

Side note to boys: it is *Sunnah* to sit while urinating. The Prophet himself would sit while urinating instead of standing. Of course these days most men stand while urinating, but if you are interested and able to do so, you could try it sitting down for there is a wisdom and benefit in copying the Prophet Muhammad, even in the bathroom! Your fathers can show you how this is done.

When you are finished going to the bathroom it is important to clean yourself well. The special way in which Muslims clean their private parts is called *istanja*. In the Prophets time there was no toilet paper so they used either clean stones or water. Water was considered the best and healthiest way to clean the privates. These days we have toilet paper and it is very useful. It is good to use toilet paper, but water is more thorough for it cleans better than toilet paper. If you have had a bowel movement it is probably best to use toilet paper first and then follow up with a quick water rinse. Either way it is important to use the left hand for wiping and to do so *three times*. If you are using water as well then pour the water with the right hand into the left. Muslim families usually keep a pitcher of water in each bathroom for this purpose.

When you are done wash your hands thoroughly. You may even take this quiet time as an opportunity to ask Allah to purify your heart. Yes, we can speak to God anywhere, even in the washroom. This helps us remember that while it is important to be physically clean, our hearts and our souls need a washing too!

*The manner of the minor ritual ablution [kaifiyyat al-wudu]”*

*When someone has finished wiping the private parts, he must preoccupy himself with the minor ritual ablution, for Allah’s Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) was never seen emerging from defecation without performing the minor ritual ablution, and he used to begin with the toothpick [sivak]. Allah’s Messenger once said (Allah bless him and give him peace): “Your mouths are the paths of the Quran, so improve them with the toothpick!”*

After going to the bathroom, performing *istanja* (cleaning your privates) and washing your hands it is then time to perform *wudu* our special ritual washing that allows us to pray in a manner acceptable and pleasing to Allah. We are not suppose to pray until we have done our *wudu* for it is a legal condition of prayer. In other words, before praying we *must* be ritually pure.

Every time the Prophet did his *wudu* he would always brush his teeth first. He loved being clean! In his time they used a special toothpick called *sivak*. If you happen to have a *sivak*, then great, otherwise a simple toothbrush is just fine. The point is to have a fresh and clean mouth. Also, by learning how to be careful and attentive to small matters then you begin to develop an overall habit of mindfulness that will help

you in other areas of life. Small good habits grow into even bigger, better habits. And as the Prophet himself once said, “It is incumbent upon you to use the toothpick, for it is a means of purification of the mouth and a means of pleasing the Lord.”

*Then, once he has finished using the toothpick, he should sit ready for the minor ritual ablution...*

Performing *wudu* is very simple. Just study and practice the following steps:

1. Face the *Qibla* (the direction of Mecca) and say: “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate!” Since Arabic is our sacred language try your best to say this prayer in Arabic: *BismiLlah irRahman, irRaheem*.
2. Wash your hands three times.
3. Now you should declare your intention. You do not have to do this out loud, but can talk privately to God in your heart. Tell him that you are going to do *wudu* in order to remove any impurities and that you hope that He accepts this act so that you may pray in a state that He finds pleasing. Your intention here is very important! As the Prophet has said, “*Actions are judged by their intentions.*”
4. Now take a scoop of water with your right hand and rinse out your mouth, gargling and swooshing it around as if it were mouth wash. Rinse three times!
5. Take another scoop of water with your right hand and clean your nose by breathing the water in and then blowing it out. Do this three times!

6. Now it is time to wash your face. Start at the hairline at the top of your forehead and wipe your entire face, everything between your ears, all the way down to the chin. Don't leave anything out, including your eyebrows and eyelashes, eye sockets and any facial hair. For boys as they get older and grow a mustache or beard then they will have to wash these hairs as well. Wash your face *three times*.
7. Now wash your right arm from the hand to the elbow. Do this step ONE TIME only.
8. Wash your left arm from the hand to the elbow, ONE TIME.
9. Now wet your hands and together stroke the top of your head, wetting the hair from your hairline to the very back of your head. If you are a boy or have very short hair once you have reached the back of your head reverse the motion and return your hands to the hairline, all as one continuous wipe. Do this *three times*.
10. Rub your ears on the inside and the backside with new water. You may do this by inserting the index finger into the inside of the ear and twisting your thumbs over the backside of the ears. Rinse out both the left and the right ear at the same time, and do so only ONCE. Then rub the back of your neck once.
11. Finally it is time to washing the feet. Start with the right foot. Wash the entire foot from the tips of the toes (and in between!) to the heel. Rinse all the around as high as the ankle. Do this three times with both the right and the left foot.

Once you have done *wudu* it is valid for the rest of the day. Just remember that your *wudu* is “broken” and therefore no longer valid if one of the following occurs:

1. You go to the bathroom (urinate or have a bowel movement)
2. Emit semen
3. Fall asleep
4. Vomit
5. Lose your senses
6. Faint
7. Laugh aloud while praying
8. Bleed
9. Have sexual contact

Some also say that if you touch your private parts with your bare hands that this “breaks” your *wudu*.

*Several matters are reprehensible in the minor ritual ablution.*

Doing *wudu* is easy. Soon you will have all these steps memorized. Before we go on however, there are just a few errors you need to avoid while performing *wudu*:

1. Try not to over do any of the steps. When it says to wash your mouth out three times then do so three times, no more and no less.
2. Do not waste any water. Water is a very precious resource. We share water with other people, we share it with animals and we share it with the earth.

It would be disrespectful to God to waste this life-nurturing gift.

3. Do not talk or play around while performing *wudu*. The ritual wash is a sacred act. It is the first step towards prayer the time of the day we stand before Allah. As such it demands our full attention. If we do the *wudu* correctly then we are also purifying our inner selves. As the Prophet once said, “If someone performs the minor ritual ablution, performing it well, and performs two cycles of ritual prayer in which he does not talk to himself about anything of this world, then he will emerge from his sins as he was on the day when his mother bore him.” MashaAllah, think about what that means, what the Prophet is actually saying. He is saying that if you perform the minor ritual ablution and then pray afterwards with sincerity, then all of your sins will be forgiven. All of your sins!!!! That means any mistakes you have made, any ugly act or unkind word is forgiven. Just washed away. MashaAllah, God is truly generous!

*Whenever a person has finished his minor ritual ablution and embarked upon the ritual prayer, he ought to bear in mind that he has purified his outer being, and that the focal point of the creature is to be ashamed of conversing with Allah (Exalted is He) without the purification of his heart, for that is the focal point of the Lord (Glory be to Him).*

As al-Ghazali taught us earlier there are four degrees of purity. What we have just studied is the first degree. And what is our true goal? Our true goal is purity within and this goes beyond keeping our bodies physically clean for ritual

prayer and the like. Remember the example of the house used earlier? Well if we follow Gods rules but do not also make clean and beautiful our actions, words and feelings than we are like a house that appears nice from the outside but is not so on the inside. If you were ugly on the inside would you want your friends to see? No you would not. Well Allah ta'ala is our closest friend. As the Holy Quran says, God is closer to us than our jugular veins. So we will do well to take these matters seriously and do our best for Allah.

*The excellent merit of the minor ritual ablution [fadulat al-wudu]:*

We have so much to gain when we do our best for Allah. There are so many wonderful sayings of the Prophet which bear witness to this truth. As al-Ghazali notes the Prophet once said, *“If someone performs the minor ritual ablution and performs it well, then raises his glance toward the sky and says: ‘I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, Alone without any partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger,’ then the eight gates of Garden of Paradise will be opened for him to enter from whichever of them he wishes.”*

According to a saying of the Prophet related by Ibn Abbas, the Gardens of paradise have eight gates of gold each inlaid with precious jewels. Written on the first gate is *Laa Ilaaha illallaah Muhammad ar-RasoolAllaah*. It is the gate of the Prophets, Messengers, Martyrs, and the Generous. The second gate is the gate of those who prayed, who were excellent in *wudu*’ and the basic elements of the prayer. The third gate is that of those who gave *Zakat* cheerfully. The fourth gate is that of those who commanded the good and forbade the bad. The fifth gate is the gate of those who



rooted out their appetites and prevented passions. The sixth gate is the gate of those who did *Hajj* and *Umrah*. The seventh gate is the gate of those who fought *Jihad* with nobility and honor. The eighth gate is the gate of those who turned their eyes from *haram* things, did what was right and gave proper respect to parents, relatives and others.

Just think we are actually being presented with the opportunity to enter through anyone of these gates! Doesn't it leave you speechless and humbled by this most generous opportunity?

*The manner of the major ritual ablution [kaifiyyat al-ghusl]:*

*Ghusl* is also known as the major ritual ablution. This type of washing is a full body wash that can be done most easily in either the shower or in the bathtub. This is how it is done:

1. Invoke the Name of God and make your intention
2. Wash your hands three times
3. Clean your privates
4. Do *wudu*
5. Wash your head three times
6. Wash the right side of your body three times
7. Wash the left side of your body three times
8. Wipe the front of your body then your back
9. Run your wet fingers through your hair

*The major ritual ablution is obligatory in four cases*

Those situations which make *ghusl* mandatory are: (1) the emission of semen, (2) sexual intercourse, (3) menstruation, and (4) childbearing.

There are a few other occasions during which it is recommended to perform *ghusl*. It is beneficial to do the major ritual ablution before *juma* or the Friday Prayers as well as on both Eids. *Ghusl* is also performed on certain days during the Hajj by those who are on pilgrimage.

Obviously *ghusl* is not as relevant for those who have not yet reached puberty, but once you do, and likewise, once you have married and begin your own families, knowing how and *when* to perform *ghusl* will be important.

### *The Third Section*

*Cleansing from the external waste matters,  
Which are of two kinds:  
The filthy substances and the elements*

### *The First Kind*

*The filthy substances and perspired moistures, which are eight in number:*

There are a few other areas of the body that we, as Muslim, should keep clean. They are:

1. Hair: The Prophet would comb his hair often, sometimes even dabbing a little bit of perfume on it. He once said, *‘If someone has hair let him treat it reverentially!’*

2. Ears: it is good to keep your ears clean, q-tips are particularly useful. Like wise don't forget the backs as they too often get a little dirty.
3. Noses: Keep them clear! Tissue will help with this sticky issue!
4. Teeth: Floss and brush them thoroughly! And don't forget the tongue, it too needs a brushing!
5. Facial hairs: When boys mature into men they may decide to grow facial hair. According to a well known traditional the Prophet used to comb his beard twice a day.
6. Knuckles: Sometimes when we eat or are playing outside or doing an art project this area of the hands hides dirt. Please keep this clean.
7. Fingernails: don't forget to clean under the nails!
8. The skin in general: For those who are particularly active outdoors or who play sports you might notice that sweat makes you dirty. It is important to bath or shower regularly, to keep track of your body odor and to make sure you do not forget to clean your armpits. You will feel better about yourself and others will too!

Side note: After this section Al-Ghazali discusses in depth the rules and restrictions concerning bathhouses. Much of the information in this section however, is not relevant for contemporary youth. However, there are a few general rules to know for we encounter similar issues while changing in the locker room at school gyms or similar environments. These basic rules include:

1. Do not look at other people when they are naked. Viewing exposed bodies is shameful and not befitting a modest and good Muslim.
2. Boys should cover the area between the naval and the knees.
3. Girls should also cover the area between the naval to the knees, but also from the naval to the chest. So if you are in an all-girls swim group, still wear a one-piece swimsuit, bikinis are not appropriate.

### *The Second Kind*

*The elements that occur in the body,  
Which are eight in number:*

This last section discusses a few more rules concerning general maintenance of the body. This list also consists of eight different body parts. They are:

1. The hair of the head: As Muslims there is no one acceptable way to grow out your hair. Long hair, short hair, and shaved hair are all acceptable. Though for women, long hair has traditionally been considered more feminine and therefore more beautiful. Different people however have different hair types and all hair types are in truth beautiful.
2. The hair of the mustache: The Prophet Muhammad used to encourage the growing of a beard. No facial hair is also permitted.
3. The hair of the armpit: this should be kept either trimmed or shaved.

4. The hair of the pubic region: This too should be kept either trimmed or shaved monthly.
5. The nails: The Prophet recommended keeping the nails trimmed regularly, it is cleaner and therefore healthier.
6. The umbilical cord: at birth the cord is cut.
7. The *glans penis*: Circumcision is customary for Muslim men and it is done either at birth or sometime during early childhood.
8. The hair of the beard: Al-Ghazali has a very long and detailed discussion concerning the beard. In general, the beard is considered to be a very handsome and noble appearance for Muslim men, as it was the way of the Prophets and those like them. However, it is not mandatory to grow a beard.

*The Book of the Secret Dimensions of Ritual purity  
Has now been completed  
With the praise of Allah (Exalted is he) and His help.  
It will be followed, if Allah (Exalted is He) so wills,  
By the Book of the Secret Dimensions of the Ritual Prayer.*

*Praise be to Allah, Alone,  
And may Allah bestow blessing upon our Master, Muhammad,  
And upon every chosen servant!*