

Recommended Acts of Ritual Bath (Ghusl)

Description: An explanation of when it is recommended to perform *ghusl* and to understand some general guidelines and regulations especially related to women.

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Category: Lessons > [Acts of Worship](#) > [Prayers](#)

Prerequisites

- Etiquette of the Ritual Bath (*Ghusl*).

Objectives

- To know the occasions in which the performance of *ghusl* is not mandatory but a recommended and rewardable act.
- To understand the regulation for women with regards to *ghusl*.
- To be familiar with some general guidelines related to *ghusl*.

Arabic Terms

- *Ghusl* - ritual bath.
- *Wudoo* - ablution.
- *Eid* - festival or celebration. Muslims celebrate two major religious holidays, known as *Eid-ul-Fitr* (which takes place after *Ramadan*) and *Eid-ul-Adha* (which occurs at the time of the *Hajj*).
- *Salat ul-Jumuah* - Friday prayer.
- *Junub* - one who is in a state of post-sexual impurity.
- *Fajr* - the morning prayer.

When is it Better, but not Required, to Perform *Ghusl*?

There are certain occasions when it is recommended and rewardable for a Muslim to perform *ghusl*. Some of them are listed here:



(1) For the Friday Prayer (*Salat ul-Jumuah* in Arabic).

It is better to perform *ghusl* on Friday before *Salat ul-Jumuah*.^[1] The time extends between Friday dawn and the time of the Friday prayer. Although it may not be possible for many to perform *ghusl* right before the prayer due to work or school, they can do so before they leave in the morning. If one breaks his *wudoo* after performing *ghusl*, it is sufficient to make new *wudoo* without bathing again.

(2) For the Bi-Annual Eid prayers.

A Muslim is encouraged to perform *ghusl* for *Eid* prayers. Many reports from the Companions have been reported regarding this matter.

(3) On entering Mecca.

It is preferable for whoever wants to enter Mecca to perform *ghusl*.^[2]

(4) *Ghusl* after washing a corpse.

Performing *ghusl* is preferred for one who has washed a corpse.^[3]

Ghusl for Women

A woman bathes as outlined above, except that if she has braided hair she does not have to undo it, provided the water can reach the roots of her hair.^[4] It is sufficient for her to pour water over her head three times, making sure that the water completely reaches the roots of her hair.

Also, nail polish or any other agent which prevents water from reaching the body parts must be removed at the time of *ghusl*.^[5]

It is preferable for a woman, after performing *ghusl* due to menstruation or post-childbirth bleeding, to take some cotton smeared with fragrance and wipe her private parts, in order to cleanse herself from the odor of the menstrual blood.^[6]

Ghusl is not required in the following two cases:

(i) Normal vaginal discharge. It is normal for a vagina to be naturally moist with a kind of mucus. It changes throughout the monthly cycle in response to the body's hormone production. Most normal young and older women have a white, sticky discharge called leucorrhoea, a liquid quite distinct from orgasmic fluid. It's normal for women to get a little discharge on their clothing. The secretions can be more inclined to wetness or dryness, and be more or less thick or viscous. These secretions may turn white or yellow when exposed to the air. Normal vaginal fluids can have a mild scent, or no aroma at all, and can be clear or milky white when moist, yellowish in color when dried, and mucus-like or stringy in consistency. They can be heavier during mid-cycle, when ovulation occurs, during pregnancy, and when using birth control pills. *Ghusl* is not required in such cases.

(ii) Foreplay, thinking about intercourse and sexual arousal causes veins to dilate. This swelling creates a "sweating reaction," producing a fluid that lubricates the vagina and wets the entrance. The combination of vaginal mucus and lubrication makes up women's sexual secretions. It can be white and thin and is *not* followed by feeling of exhaustion. This fluid is called *madhiy* in Arabic. *Ghusl* is not required in this case as well.

A woman is considered sexually impure and must perform *ghusl* in two cases:

- (a) Insertion of the penis in the vagina, even if there is no ejaculation, renders both husband and wife sexually impure. Both require *ghusl* to resume worship.
- (b) Emission of the vaginal fluid called *maniy* due to wet-dream^[7] and female orgasm.

A woman has to do *ghusl* if she experiences an erotic dream and notices *moisture* when she wakes up.

Also, *ghusl* becomes obligatory when *maniy* is produced after female orgasm due to any other reason for that matter. Orgasm is the climax of sexual activity accompanied by vaginal contractions and other changes in the body, and commonly results from sexual intercourse.^[8]

Certain indicators like smell and color distinguish *maniy* from normal vaginal discharge. Women's *maniy*, the fluid which requires *ghusl*, is known by several qualities:

- (a) it is released as a result of feeling sexual pleasure and a woman feels excitement when it is produced.
- (b) it is followed by a feeling of exhaustion.
- (c) it has a particular odor.^[9]
- (d) it is usually yellow and non-viscous. It can be white.

The first two qualities are perhaps the most important indicators. Vaginal discharges described above that do *not* meet the characteristics of *maniy* do not require *ghusl*, but do require *wudoo*.

General Guidelines for *Ghusl*

Husband and wife may bathe together, but it is immodest and forbidden to bathe nude or in bathing suits publicly. It is forbidden to uncover one's private parts except to one's spouse or for medical treatment.

It is sufficient to perform one *ghusl* for two reasons, such as for sexual impurity and the Friday prayer, provided one has the intention for both of them.

It is sufficient for a person to perform *ghusl* even if he did not perform ablution within it.

It is perfectly permissible for a person in post-sexual impurity (*junub*) or for a menstruating woman to remove hair, cut their nails, go shopping, and so on, and it is not considered a reprehensible act.

It is permissible for the spouses to use the water left over by the other just as it is permissible for them to perform *ghusl* from the same container.

A husband and wife do not have to perform *ghusl* immediately after intercourse. If done after the night prayer, it is permissible to delay bathing until the *Fajr* prayer. In this case, it is recommended to perform *wudoo* before sleeping.

Endnotes:

[1] The Prophet said, "Whoever makes the ablution and perfects it and then goes to the Friday prayer and listens attentively, will be forgiven during the period between the Friday and the next Friday, and an additional three days." (*Saheeh Muslim*)

[2] Nafi' reported that Ibn Umar never entered Mecca without spending the night at Dhi Tawu until it was dawn, when he took a bath, and then entered Mecca in the morning. He (Ibn Umar) mentioned that the Messenger of Allah used to do that. (*The Two Saheehs*. This version is from *Saheeh Muslim*)

[3] The Prophet is reported to have said, "Whoever has washed a corpse must perform *ghusl*, and whoever carried him must perform ablution." (*Musnad, Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmidhi, Nisa'i, Ibn Majah*)

[4] Umm Salamah, the Prophet's wife said, "O Messenger of Allah, I am a woman who has closely plaited hair on my head. Do I have to undo them for *ghusl* after sexual intercourse?" He said, "No, it is enough for you to throw three handfuls of water on your head and then pour water over yourself. After doing this, you shall be cleansed." (*Musnad, Saheeh al Bukhari, and Al-Tirmidhi*)

[5] This is based on the order of Allah to wash faces and hands, etc (make *wudoo*) in Quran 5:6 before prayer. According to the scholars, **washing** implies that water **must actually reach the skin**, so any insulating product covering it should be removed.

[6] A female companion asked the Messenger of Allah about *ghusl* after menstruation has ended. He said, "She should use water mixed with the leaves of the lote-tree and cleanse herself. Then she should pour water over her head and rub it well till it reaches the roots of the hair, after which she should pour water over it. Afterwards, she should take a piece of cotton smeared with musk and cleanse herself with it." (Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah, and others)

[7] Wet-dreams in women is little studied even today, but confirmed by Prophet Muhammad 1400 years ago. In 1953, Alfred Kinsey, Ph.D., a sexuality researcher, found that nearly 40 percent of the 5,628 women he interviewed experienced at least one nocturnal orgasm (orgasms during sleep), or "wet dream," by the time they were forty-five years old. A smaller study published in the Journal of Sex Research in 1986 found that 85 percent of the women who had experienced nocturnal orgasms had done so by the age of twenty-one... some even before they turned thirteen. Vaginal secretions could be a sign of sexual arousal without orgasm.

[8] In *most* women, fluid is not ejaculated in female orgasm, but often vaginal wetness is experienced.

In *some* women, "ejaculation" of a clear fluid is believed to be produced by the Skene's glands similar in composition to a man's prostate gland. It is produced during orgasm and is not urine. It is similar in composition to semen, only without the sperm. This fluid differs from a woman's secretions during arousal.

[9] Even though it may be unfamiliar to many readers, it is described to be like that of palm tree pollen or the smell of dough.

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