

Islamic view on extravagance

A Fatwa by Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan Brailvi

In Fatawa rizwiyya volume one page 651 someone asked the Maulana; What is the Sharia ruling on using water unnecessarily when doing ablution or having a bath? Maulana gave a long scholarly reply spread over 140 pages. Here I present an abridged version of that remarkable Fatwa.

I have come across four different opinions of the scholars concerning this. All of them are apparently contradictory to each other. By the Grace of Allah I will try to reconcile them. They are:

1. **Haram**; It is absolutely forbidden and sinful to use more water than is necessary even if one is doing ablution and bathing in a stream. This is according to the Shafi scholars. However some of them regard this as a weak position..
2. **Makruh Tanzeehi**; It is offensive and disliked even in a stream and is against the sunnah but is not sinful. For example Imam Nawi says:

”The scholars are agreed that using more water than is necessary even from a stream is not allowed. It is makruh tanzeehi and some of our scholars regard it as
Haram.”
3. It is neither makruh tahrim nor tanzeehi. It is regarded merely against good manners.
4. It is permissible to waste water when doing wudu or bathing in a stream otherwise it is makruh tahreemi.

After presenting these four opinions he gives his own critique where he analyses, revises, challenges and even corrects these opinions. He calls this effort “awakening.” Here he makes seven lengthy conflated and highly technical and complex “awakenings.” Sometimes he discusses the issues like a master jurist, at other times as a Muhaddis expert in the science of hadith, and sometimes as a social commentator reflecting on much wider issues. It is in this latter role that I found this particular fatwa most interesting. Ala Hazrat digresses from the issue of wasting water to “extravagant lifestyle.” Five Quranic terms; Israf, Tabzeer, Abas, Laghw, and Laab are explained literally and their legal status. For me this is a fascinating discussion as it brings out the Islamic attitude to consumerism and materialism. In our age of extravagance, waste and recklessness towards natural resources such nugget of wisdom are a source of guidance. Below I have summarised the seven “awakenings.”

First and second awakening

He criticises Shami and supports the author of Bakr and Durr who regard it as makruh tahreemi.

He picks a mistake made in Bahr about the opinion of Durr and points out that the author of Bahr was confused about 'doing wudu with water from a stream' and doing wudu in the stream.' It shows how prepositions like 'in' and 'from' can change the whole meaning so drastically. It also reveals Ala Hazrat's sharp intellect.

Third awakening

Nahr al Faiq has merged the third opinion with the second. He argues that 'israf' is against mustahab (desired activity) therefore it is Khallaf-e-ullah which is makruh tanzeehi.

Ala Hazrat then explains this as follows:

"Manhi (a prohibition) is a commandment that is proven by a definite text and a definite argument it is called "haram." However if the text is suspect and the argument is indefinite then it is 'makruh tahreemi.' And when both the text and the argument are suspect, then it is 'makruh tanzeehi'. Implicit in this is the fact that leaving out mustahab is not makruh.

An interesting outcome of this discussion is Ala Hazrat's classification of sharia rulings into eleven categories. These eleven terms are fundamental for understanding the significance of sharia rulings.

The Eleven Important Terms of fiqh according to ala hazrat

Following is a list of the most important eleven terms in Islamic law. These are the eleven categories of the rulings arranged according to their degree of importance.

(1) Al-Fardh - The Obligation

This is a ruling that must be carried out, omitting it is a major sin. It is definitely from either the Quran or the Sunnah. Therefore its denial is a kufr act. Hence it is also known as Fardh Iteqadi i.e. it is a part of the faith to believe and follow it.

Examples of Obligations are daily Salah, Zakah, Hajj and Fasting in the month of Ramadan.

(2) Al-Wajib - The Necessary

This Ruling must also be carried out and its omission is a major sin. However it is different from the obligation since it is not proven by definite evidence i.e. the proof for it is not conclusive, there is some doubt as to whether Shariah is prescribing it a compulsory or is only recommending it. Therefore to deny that is not Kufr. Hence it is called Fardh ul Amali i.e. it is compulsory to act upon it. Examples of Wajib are the Witr prayer after Isha and Eid prayer.

(3) As-Sunnah-ul-Mu'akkadah - The Emphatic Sunnah

This ruling is based on a regular activity or a habit of the blessed Messenger of Allah or the guided Caliphs. The Sunnah is neither obligatory nor necessary but is highly

recommended. The Shariah commends this action as being good and acceptable. To habitually miss the Sunnah is detestable, since it gives the impression of turning away from the Prophets practice.

Examples of emphatic Sunnah are saying the Adhaan and praying in congregation.

(4) As-Sunnah Ghair ul Mu'akkadah - The less emphatic Sunnah

This is a practice of the blessed Messenger or the Caliphs but unlike the emphatic Sunnah this was not performed regularly by them. Examples include the four units of Sunnah before Asr and Isha.

(5) Al-Mustahab- The desirable.

This is a ruling that the Shariah approves of and finds it agreeable. This includes activities and devotions like voluntary fasting and prayers. It is sometimes called Al-Mandoob (the recommended), At-Tatawwa (the voluntary) and Al Adat (the decent). Performance of any desirable act earns merits and its omission carries no sanctions.

The Five Types of Prohibitions

(6) Al-Haraam- The Unlawful

This is a ruling that forbids something. In other words it must be avoided. This prohibition is proved by definite text. To regard an unlawful as lawful is therefore kufr. To commit the unlawful is a major sin. Examples include drinking Alcohol, gambling and Adultery.

(7) Al-Makrooh-ut-Tahrimi- The Major offense

This is a prohibition that is proved by a prescriptive and not a definite text of argument. To ignore this ruling is a sin that is punishable but to regard it permissible is not an act of kufr.

(8) Al-Mukrooh ul Tanzeehi- The Minor Offense

This is a ruling, which makes something undesirable. It is best to avoid it but there is no harm in doing it. Examples include splashing water on the face during wudu.

(9) Al-Isaa'h- The Offense

This ruling is in between Mukrooh-ut-Tahrimi and Tanzeehi in terms of importance. It is a sin to do it and doing it on a regular basis is a major sin. Examples are not rinsing the mouth and cleaning the nose during the Wudu.

(10) Khilaaf-ul-Awla- The undesirable

This is the opposite of Mustahab, it is best to avoid it but there is no harm in doing it

(11) Al- Mubaah- The permissible

This is something neither prescribed nor prohibited by the Shariah; it carries no reward or any punishment. This ruling derived from the Islamic principle that basically everything is permissible unless it is prohibited.

In this discussion Ala Hazrat also tries to reconcile opinion two and three by saying "perhaps the author of the third opinion means sunnah by good manner."

Here are some other useful issues Ala Hazrat brings out in his discussion about what is sunnah, makruh and mustahab.

- To leave out a mustahab is not makruh since you need evidence to prove that something is makruh. If you believe that not doing the mustahab is makruh then we would all be engaged in makruh as there are hundreds of such activities.

- Discussing good manners (Adab) he says: Any ring that has the name of God and the Messenger engraved on it should be removed before entering the toilet and particularly when doing istanja. The Splashing of water on the face and the washing of the feet above the ankles are makruh.
- Here is a comprehensive definition of sunnah. The ruling about sunnah is that its performance should be demanded but it is not compulsory nor necessary however since it is a way that we are commanded to keep alive, its negligence deserves punishment..

Fourth awakening

The fourth opinion considers avoiding israf as sunnah and therefore committing israf would be makruh tahreemi. Ala Hazrat traces the origin of this opinion from various classical fiqh books and he questions the correctness of this view that israf is makruh.

Fifth awakening

Here he explores the reasons for declaring Israf haram.

Ala Hazrat quoting Allama Umar says:

1. Imam Zaili has expressed absolute Kirahat (offensiveness)
2. although the ahadith that forbid Israf are absolute
3. Mutaqa (classical Fiqh text) lists it as forbidden.

He then discusses each of these in great detail. At this point he asks “what is the revised ruling after all this discussion?” he states he will come to that after we have investigated the meaning of Israf.

Sixth awakening

This is an interesting discussion on what is Israf, extravagance. Ala Hazrat uses many sources to prove that extravagance is haram.

Allah taala says “ and do not be extravagant for Allah does not like the extravagant.” (6:141)

And in another place he says: “and do not waste, surely the wasters are brothers of the devils and the devil was most ungrateful to his Lord.” (17:26)

Ala Hazrat lists twelve meanings of Israf. Here are three of them:

1. To spend in the wrong place for the wrong thing. He quotes Abdullah ibn Abbas “if you were to spend in God’s way the amount of gold equivalent to mountain of Abu Qubais, that would not be extravagance but if you were to use just a gram in the Lord’s disobedience that would be israf.” (Tafsir Kabeer). When someone said to Hatim “there is no good whatsoever in extravagance.” He replied “there can be no extravagance whatsoever in good.” However, the sharia teaches moderation even when being generous. Allah says “And do not tie your hands to your neck nor open it up fully so that you are
blamed....(17:29)

And again Allah says: “and when they spend they are not extravagant nor miserly but they spend in moderation” (25:67)

And again Allah says: “And give him his due on harvest day and do not be

extravagant.”

(6:141)

2. Israf is “to go beyond the limits set by God.”
3. To eat small amount of haram or excessive amount of halal.

Discussion of Tabzeer.

Ala Hazrat says: “there are two statements of scholars about it.”

1. it is synonymous with israf and that is how the disciples understood, spending in the wrong place.
2. Tabzeer is different from israf. Tabzeer is to waste in sinful activities. So according to this view israf is general whilst tabzeer is specific. He comments on this with reference to a hadith: Walid ibn Mughira reports the Messenger (saw) said: “Allah dislikes for you idle talk, gossiping and wasting of wealth.” (Bukhari)

He concludes from this “to wash more than three times whilst cleansing oneself for a good reason does not fall into the category of israf. Since spending for a proper reason is neither a sin perse nor considered as wastage. In this case the proper reasons could be to achieve thorough cleanliness or to cool oneself or to do wudu despite having wudu. According to Fath ul Qadeer: “there is nothing wrong in doing wudu on wudu or because of doubt to become sure.”

He then slightly digresses and says “To be in state of purity (wudu) all the time is one of the rituals of Islam” and mentions seven spiritual benefits of being in wudu;

1. Having the company of angels
2. the pen records merits
3. His limbs glorify the Lord
4. He will not miss the first takbeer of Jammāt
5. Angels protect him whilst he sleeps
6. He will be comforted at the time of death
7. He will remain under divine protection

He then goes on to say “Wudu is of two types, one, compulsory wudu which is necessary for prayer, sajdā and for touching the glorious Quran and two, recommended, this is for laughing uncontrollably, backbiting, gossiping, swearing, using foul language, lying, reading romantic poetry, being angry, to look at a non-mahram woman or touch her or to touch ones own private parts.

Then he engages in a side discussion on what breaks wudu and challenges the shafi schools view that touching a non-mahram, or ones own private parts breaks wudu. This is followed up by another interesting discussions on what to do when one is in doubt. The hadith says: “leave that which puts you in doubt and do that which removes the doubt.” In another hadith the Messenger (saw) said: “when anyone of you has a doubt about how many units of prayer he has performed whether three or four, let him reject the doubt and complete his prayer on the basis of what he is certain about.” (Muslim). ‘Rejecting the doubt’ means assume you have done only three and do one more to complete the four. So the rule is to assume the lowest and complete the prayer.

SUMMARY SO FAR

None of the four rulings is such that it does not deserve careful scrutiny. The greatness of the third view is not hidden. The second view is that of Imam Nawawi and his preference for makruh tanzih has consensus of the scholars. The fourth view, which was rejected by Shami, you have read how Mukhtar, Durr and several others have all accepted it. In the final analysis, it is clear that israf wasting of water in cleansing is makruh tahrime and not tanzeehi.

One day the Messenger was passing by Saad who was doing wudu. On seeing Saad, he said, "why are you wasting water?" Saad asked "O Messenger! Is there wasting in wudu?" the Messenger replied "yes, even if you were in a stream." (mishkat). Ala Hazrat says:

"The hadith proves that there is indeed israf even at a stream and the shariah has condemned israf generally."

In another hadith the Messenger (saw) said "even in wudu there is a devil he is called 'Walahan' because he whispers about wudu." (Ibn Maja). Again the Messenger warned against israf and predicted "soon there will be people in this nation who will be extravagant in cleanliness and supplication." (Abu Dawud).

The glorious quran pronounces "who ever exceeds the divine limits has surely been unjust to himself." (65:1).

Seventh awakening

The term 'Abas' meaning frivolous, playful, and amusement is another term closely related to extravagance so he discusses it at length . Hence he gives twelve quotations from various sources which clarify its meaning. here is a selection ::

1. Any activity that has improper and wrong purpose is Abas. If there is no purpose then it is Safah, stupidity and foolishness.
2. Abas is any activity that has a non-shariahi purpose i.e it is not against shariah but just different. This is more general than the first since every improper activity is non-shariahi and not necessarily every non-shariahi purpose is improper.
3. Abas is any useless and purposeless activity sometimes called Batil, that is an absurd, groundless, null, void and worthless activity.

Some of the other shades of meanings of Abas include:

- Anything whose benefit is not known
- The effort exerted does not result in equal benefit
- Any activity from which no benefit is expected or required

Ala Hazrat then likens Abas with Lahw and Laab, two other Quranic terms meaning play and amusement respectively.

He says: “any play and amusement that is done for relaxation and peace of mind is not Abas even if outwardly it is play and amusement. Since the Messenger (saw) said “play and amuse yourself. I don’t like harshness to be seen in your religion.” (Jamea –As Saghir).

Imam ibn Hajar Makki says: “The Messenger (saw) has allowed play and amusement and as long as it is not contrary to human dignity. His advice “Play and amuse.” Is evidence for permissibility of playing and amusing oneself for the sake of relaxation and to overcome stress and boredom.

Ala Hazrat then proceeds to link this with the question of extravagance and wasting water whilst cleansing. He says, Abas is a useless and purposeless activity liked israf – since it can either be evil or neutral. Allah says:

“Do you think that we have created you purposeless and that you will not return to us?” (18:115)

The scholars say this means “do you think we created you without purpose, goal meaning and wisdom and you will just die and that there will be no accountability? As the unbelievers say:

“Ours is only the wordly life we will live and die and will not be resurrected.” (18:37)

Ala Hazrat then turns to a profound discussion on what is the shariah ruling about Abas. He concludes:

“An Abas activity – a purposeless activity per se is neither haram nor unlawful. It only becomes haram when a haram activity is a part of it.”

Since, Abas is neither beneficial nor harmful by itself, the principle is ‘ the punishment for sin is because of the intention of evil not because of the absence of good intention’

He uses this to show that doing any purposeless (abas) activity in prayer will be makruh. This is because of the prohibition of doing abas in prayer like playing with the beard or cracking the fingers. These are useless activities which are makruh in the prayer.

However, Ala Hazrat suggests that the preferred state for man is to be engaged in activity that benefits him. To prove his point he quotes the hadith, “from the beauty of a persons Islam is to avoid things which do not concern him” (Tirmazi). Man has certain basic needs for his survival like food, drink, clothes, chastity and so on. This does not include anything which is for mere pleasure. The phrase ‘things which don’t concern him’ means those he does not need particularly those that will not benefit him in the hereafter. Another view on this is ‘these are things that expand ones worldly status and material well being.’ Yet another meaning of ‘which do not concern him’ is things that one does not need in this world nor for ones religion nor are they pleasing to the Lord. In brief the Messenger is advising his followers to leave all things that do not benefit his religion nor earn him the pleasure of t he Lord nor are they beneficial to him in any other way.

Five ways of eliminating satanic thoughts

Earlier on I mentioned a hadith in which the blessed Messenger warns of a devil called 'Walahan' who tempts people when they are doing wudu. Ala Hazrat now turn to methods of eliminating satanic thoughts. He says:

1. Turn to God, seek divine protection and say 'La haula'. Recite surah An-Naas, proclaiming 'I believe in Allah and his Messenger' and say 'He is the first and the last, the manifest and the hidden, the one who knows everything.' After this the thought will disappear immediately. In a hadith a man complained about satanic thoughts whilst he was in prayer, the Messenger gave him the following tip 'When you have these thoughts, raise your right hand index finger and smack the left thigh with it and say Bismillah, this will go like a knife through Satan.'
2. Do not pay attention to the thought, do not act on it, instead go against it. This seducer has the habit of increasing his attacks the more he is welcomed. However, as soon as he is opposed he runs away. His temptation is fickle. Abdullah ibn Murra says:
"Whoever is impressed by the Satan's temptation becomes his regular target."
Abu Hurairra narrates the Messenger said:
"When anyone of you is in the Mosque the Satan comes to him and pats him affectionately all over his body just like you pat your horse, if the person does not immediately get rid of him, the Satan controls him."
Abu Hurairra adds "this hadith is confirmed by the fact that you see people who bow but do not do dhikr and his mouth is wide open but are not doing dhikr."(Musnad of Ahmed)
The Satan does all kinds of tricks to tempt people. This is why we have to be attentive, aware and wide awake otherwise he will take control.
3. despite all these attempts if the Satanic thoughts continue to come and make you doubtful about your wudu then reject them. You can simply say "O filthy Satan you are a liar!" This is according to hadith. Pay no attention to such doubts. Ala Hazrat points out that there are two types of Satans. One is from the jinns and the other from people (may the curse of the Lord be on them both, may they be disgraced forever and may God help us against them both).
"Thus we have appointed for every Messenger an enemy: the Satans among men and jinn, who inspire one another with vain and varnished falsehoods."
(Anam:112)
The Scholars believe that the Satans among men are more dangerous than the jinn Satans.
Amongst these men Satans are the false preachers who sow doubts in the minds of Muslims through their programmes. He condemns attending lectures organised by the enemies of Islam. They are trying to weaken your faith. The Quran says; "if your Lord wanted they could not have made these doubtful claims so stay away from their inventions, so that the hearts of those who have no faith in the life to come may be inclined to it and being pleased, persist in their sinful ways."
(6:111-12)
These verses clearly warn against listening to, reading or watching films which criticise Islam or Islamic way of life. Some people say we are Muslims from the heart therefore these things will have no influence on us. This is not true. The Messenger has warned against this too: "whoever hears the news

from Dajjal, it is compulsory on him to run away from him.” Sadly some will go near him thinking they are Muslims, what harm can he cause them? They will fall into his trap and become his followers. (Abu Dawud) Do you think that Dajjal will only be that one-eyed monster? No. In fact all those people who deceive mankind are Dajjal and we are told to avoid them all. The Messenger (saw) predicted: ”In the last days there will be many liars who will be deceivers. They will bring you news which you will not have heard nor your forefathers, stay away from them and keep them away too lest they lead you astray and create problems for you.” (Muslim)

4. Following the Satanic thoughts is dependant on self-determination in rooting –it out. The Satan puts doubts in your mind that you have not done this well enough or perfectly, your response should be ‘ that shariah has given dispensation and that is sufficient for me, perfection is not demanded of me, I have done what was feasible and within my means! May my Lord accept it and have mercy on me.’ Abdul Haq Dehlvi says “Don’t take trouble in fulfilling their thoughts, take advantage of the dispensations given by shariah. If he says to you “this activity of yours is incomplete and false and is not acceptable to God, reply to him by saying ‘Go away! I cannot do anymore my Lord is most merciful and generous. He will accept this.”

5. “The final treatment is to burn or cauterise and the last mean is the sword.” When all treatments have failed the surgeon decides to cut off the limb. Amputation is the final treatment. If all above methods fail, just say to the satan: ‘O accursed Satan! It does not matter if my wudu is broken or I have just prayed three rakats, I am happy as it is but I will not obey you! This is a powerful way of uprooting the satanic thoughts. By the divine grace the enemy will be defeated and humiliated.