

## **ABLUTION SPACES CLEANLINESS: LITERATURE DEBATE ON THE MALAYSIAN MOSQUE'S DESIGN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Mosques, as a place for Muslim prayers and other social activities to be performed, are built to worship the Almighty Allah at all times, aside from providing an environment that responds to the needs of devotees, as well as educating the future generation by the Quranic verses and the Prophet's teachings. Deriving from the Holy Quran and the Prophet, purity is compulsory at all times for Muslims, and it has many denotations that are applicable during prayers and during the day. Muslims are required to pray five times a day, in which ablution has to be performed prior to praying. The ablution room is always integrated in all mosques designs as it is an unseparated element. As such, this paper looks into the hygienic consideration of the ablution space; it discusses prior statements and some Islamic perceptions pertaining to the design of the ablution space, as well as the cleanliness of space and person. Several researches have been analyzed to seek better understanding regarding the relationship between space cleanliness and Muslims in the design of mosques. The results from the discussion reveal that purity is required for internal and external cleanliness, in which the facilities of ablution space in mosques have to be specific so as to avoid any type of intervention for other various usages. The paper is an effort to generate better hygiene space in future designs of mosques with focus on the ablution space, as well as to respond to the Islamic teaching for ablution and purity.

**Keywords:** ablution spaces, cleanliness, hygiene, Malaysian mosques, purity

### **INTRODUCTION**

It has been estimated that 20 – 25% of the world population are comprised of Muslims and they are the majority in approximately 40 countries. Muslims regularly perform their prayers as one of the pillars of Islam. However, this religious activity requires a space that is designed in accordance to the needs of Muslims. In fact, there is always a need for spaces in mosques to hold as many Muslims as possible in one space that is well-maintained. In that line, Mokhtar (2005) mentioned that the design of a mosque and its facilities require essential details that are important in Islam and for Muslims, in which designers involved in such design might be unfamiliar, thus failing to adhere to such requirements. Mokhtar further explained that such issue arises not just due to unfamiliarity among designers, but also absence of guidelines that may offer easy instructions, particularly for ablution area (Neufert, 2012). Furthermore, (Hilliard, Frederick, Tierney-Gumaer, & Simpson MJ, 1999) claimed that lack of understanding concerning the design does not only lead to discomfort, but may also jeopardize one's safety.

The Islamic principles have been used as guidelines among the Muslims as they share awareness campaigns on Islamic teachings, which have been proven useful and effective within the Muslim arena (Gilli, 2004). Gilli further discussed that the reason behind the reliability on the Islamic teachings in several aspects is that they can easily touch and reach the strata of the society. These principles are divinely derived as law and influential appeal on population that

even those less educated can understand the importance of Islam as a religious influence; Quranic and Shariatic.

In Islam, it is essential to create a space that meets Muslims requirement from social to religious ones, in which the mosque is the place where all Muslims gather to perform their *Salat* (prayer) and social activities. Mosque is the symbol and the impetus of Islamic life, for it represents the identity of Muslims, besides serving the main purposes of prayers and social aspects. Development of mosque architectures is becoming an essential part of the Islamic world, as the Muslim religious community is expanding and various activities are carried out in enclosed space so as to offer spiritual and motivation for Muslims (Ahmed, 2016). Moreover, the study has raised concerns about sustainability of mosques and achievement of the basic requirements, in which the findings that reveal lack of expertise and facilities management may lead to the universal issue of hygiene that has to be considered. Insufficient space, immoral consumer attitudes, and low-quality equipment appear to be some of the barriers in managing mosque facilities, as portrayed in this paper.

Thus, within the Islamic legal framework, a Muslim can pray almost anywhere. However, a mosque is purposefully built to facilitate collective ritual worship for daily congregational prayers (Maimunah Sapri, Zafirah Ab Muin, & Ibrahim Sipan, 2014). In Malaysia, with Islam is the main religion of the country, the ablution designs have consumed modernity. High specification material and conceptual design are applied in most of the spaces so as to highlight beauty and comfort.

## **DEFINITION OF ABLUTION IN ISLAM**

Being a prerequisite to praying among followers of Islam, ablution is an action with several sequences that Muslims need to preform prior to praying. Furthermore, this process can be performed at any time, requesting the person to be in this state until the end of the prayer or to more prayers. The ablution area is required before any prayer as some actions can terminate this state, such sleeping, visiting the lavatory, passing wind or becoming unconscious (Mokhtar, 2005).

Ablution derives from the Arabic word '*wudu*', which means cleanliness and brightness, apart from physical and spiritual actions. *wudu* must be ensured as a ritual cleansing and purification to the body, in which a few steps have to be performed to achieve the state of ablution (Johari, Anwar, Hassan, & Kamaruzaman, 2013).

Ablution involves several steps that have to be performed properly so as to ensure the legibility of the prayer. This starts with cleaning several parts of the body with fresh water, first rinsing the palms, rinsing the mouth, washing the nose, washing the face, washing each arm, wiping the hair, rubbing the ears with wet hands, and finally, washing the feet up to the ankles (Hamid, Wahab, Alias, & Rahmat, 2015). In some cases, full body shower has to be taken before the ablution procedure. If one has to stay for prolonged period of time, showering facilities may be required to be attached to the ablution space.

Rahim (2005) stated that *wudu* or ablution is one of the Islamic teachings that are concerned about cleanliness, which must be carried out before performing prayer. The *niyyah* (motive) is the basic principle before the ablution, and after that, several movements have to be done to be ready for the prayer. It is a disciplinary act that helps one to stay hygienically clear, in private or public space.

Another definition of ablution space and design was introduced by Zakaria, Rashid, and Ahmad (2016) in their research entitled '*Ablution Design: The Concept and Design Criteria*'. The research denoted the importance of *wudu* in Islam, which can be performed anytime during

the day and before the prayer in order to clean particular parts of the body. Also, the research clarified how certain actions have to be done during the ablution process, and which area has to be designed properly to ensure user safety by taking size, hygiene, accessibility, and other elements into consideration. The research focused on prayer rooms found in shopping malls and mosques. The objective was to identify and to analyze the weaknesses and the poorly designed spaces that can affect the overall design of the mosque and the ablution area. Besides, in many Islamic countries, including Malaysia, very few guidelines and insufficient understanding are related to the design aspect and other consideration of mosque design criteria. In the same line, it was suggested that the ablution area has to be refined, while the humanities aspects need to be analysed in order to sustain the rule of Islam.

Next, (Hamid, Taib, Wahab, & Alias, 2015) discussed the findings retrieved from three case studies concerning ablution space design from the aspect of hygiene. The three case studies raised concerns regarding the design of the ablution space and how it does not fully respond to one's need; conceptually and hygienically. The first case study defined the access to the ablution space, which is from the outside clean zone, hence differed from the second and third case studies that showed access from the inside clean zone, along with access from the ablution space to the praying room. The findings from the research summarized that Islam encourages environmental factors, such as cleanliness, good hygiene, and effective maintenance. Neglecting those can result in bad ventilation, unpleasant stench, and unhealthy space.

## **CLEANLINESS AND PURITY**

Özdemir, and Frank (2000) highlighted cleanliness and purity as the important values in Islam. They are the aid to worship, a preparation, and without them, the canonical prayer is considered invalid. The Quran frequently refers to the term cleanliness and purity as they are ideal in Muslim piety and consciousness. Özdemir further explained the dimensions of purity and cleanliness as the internal one referring to the emptying or cleaning the self of all pride that might result from the love of self, and of being Allah-fearing person, while the external dimension is the physical hygiene. In Islam, external and internal are not separated, as well as faith and action.

Prophetic experience identified by idolater correspondents claimed that dirt and impurity are both internal and external. Purity and cleanliness are categorized under religious, just like studying and learning about truth and religion. Being in a state of uncleanness is invalid to perform prayer, in which ablution is necessary as a ritual act of purity and cleanliness. Ablution or *wudu* is the status of being clean and pure for praying, as demanded by the Quran and Hadith, and Muslims are obligated for ablution as that is a revelation from Allah. It is the bedrock and the heart, thus lack of ablution makes the prayer unacceptable. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) introduced the ablution practice for Muslims as he carried out the Qur'anic teachings and requirements, as his followers reported. In emulation of the Prophet and his trusted teaching, Muslims have followed his steps in the same manner, for it keeps the unity among Muslims everywhere, including their solidarity and security (Özdemir & Frank, 2000).

Islam, since its existence, has focused on one's purity and cleanliness; many verses in Quran have portrayed this notion. Ablution, as the main practice for Muslims for both as a symbolic and practical level, takes water as the main element to start the ablution for it is a precious gift given by Allah that humanity can benefit from. Gilli (2002) also explained that in order to reach a state of purity, ablution must be performed before praying. Quran has it's

saying on the importance of water and ablution for the subject of purification and personal cleanliness.

Maimunah Sapri, Zafirah Ab Muin, and Ibrahim Sipan (2014), in their pilot study, have discussed the barriers in managing mosque facilities towards sustainable facilities management approach. The paper explored issue related to managing mosque facilities, which argued that based on the observation from newspaper articles, hygiene issues are present in mosque facilities, as well as space, location, and infrastructure. The paper has suggested a focus group to investigate with the mosque management team, so as to address the issue in an effective manner. The findings from this research revealed that lack of financial assistance, limited staff, as well as poor knowledge and expertise, have caused this issue. Hence, in order to achieve a more sustainable space in mosque design, diversity of facilities management, role, and contribution are beneficial for this practice.

Next, Preston, and Ritter (2012) stated that, purity rituals are important structures of many religious ritual practices, including Islam. These practices help those faithful to be distant from physical contaminants and to show the symbolic purity of sacred objects, apart from maintaining sanctity. In their research, they examined the association between cleanliness and religion as they both represent one's purity. The research further found that cleanliness and religiosity may activate the others, for they have the impact as goals for purity. As part of religious devotion, cleanliness and religion are both connected to the pursuit of purity, whereby cleanliness is indeed next to godliness.

Meanwhile, Rahim (2005), in her research entitled 'A Concept of Clean Toilet from the Islamic Perspective', discussed about Islam and the aspect of cleanliness that is integral to be practiced in everyday life. She also discussed that since the existence of human being, the issue of cleanliness has been a key aspect, and the teaching of Islam has contributed in many ways, such as clothing, building, and the surrounding. In order to achieve a healthy and dynamic community, the wholesome of purity and cleanliness is one of the many important values in Islam. Moreover, Asiah stated that the level of cleanliness is required in any space, be it in the office, hospital or home, but the question is 'what is the level of hygiene of that space' and 'if the design covers those aspects'. Toilet, for instance, is an important facility that sometimes does not comply with the demand sought by every user. She also said that toilets have always been criticized in terms of hygiene, hence people try to avoid using them in public space.

It is obvious that people are indeed concerned about space hygiene and cleanliness, as highlighted by Nur (2016) in his thesis entitled 'Mosque As A Multi-Functional Institution Evaluation Of Users' Perception On Two Community Mosques In Malaysia', which explained the Islamic community concerns during prayer and congregation in mosques that mainly focus on the place of purity and other factors. His research analyzed two Malaysian community mosques, which are Al-Hasanah Mosque in Bandar Baru Bangi, and As-Salam Mosque in Puchong, as case studies. The analysis included survey (walkthrough), interviews, and questionnaire.

## **ABLUTION AND PRAYER AREAS**

Jasmi (2014) explained the correlation between ablution area and prayer hall. The design circulation, as well as access to mosque and prayer area, should be defined by the designer and should achieve the stage of 'clean zone'. The separation between those spaces is definitely compulsory to create a space that prevents unsuitable function between the spaces, in addition to hygiene consideration. There are many definitions that can determine the necessary separation between mosque spaces, such as shoe rack, wet floor, smell, and others.

Mokhtar (2005) stated that most designers involved in such spaces have designed the shoe area outside the clean zone, which can lead to the person walking in and out the public space to the ablution area. This could lead to unclean areas that are communally mixed between the clean and the unclean. The researcher also revealed some designs that portrayed the disadvantage of wearing slippers, which could lead to wet floors and probable skin diseases between the ablution area and the external area.

In the same line, some have bathrooms located outside the clean zone and not oriented to the entrance of the shoe removal area. Moreover, the bathroom location near to the entrance at the mosque is not preferable, in which some designers have not considered it during the design process. Unhygienic situation is created in this case as the areas between the ablution and the bathroom are not separated, which is against religious ruling regarding purity, hence making the *wudhu* process doubtful (Raboobe, Aboobaker, Peer, & Micro, 1998).

## **DISCUSSION**

Islam is a religion with guidelines, including for performing prayers, where certain rules have to be obeyed, as stated in Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The literature shows that the steps that have to be considered for ablution purpose in Islam are defined by guidelines; one of these is hygiene and cleanliness. In precise, *wudu* in Islam is a compulsory regulation that has to be performed before the prayer. It means; cleanliness helps one to stay hygienically clean in private and public spaces. Cleanliness and religiousness may activate the others, as part of religious devotion, whereby cleanliness and religion are connected to the pursuit of purity.

Although Muslims can pray almost everywhere, several facilities have to be provided and designed to assist the procedure of ablution. Spaces like washrooms, bathrooms, clean water taps, and a special space that is considered clean to perform all those activities are required. The ablution room in mosques is designed to help Muslims perform their prayers after taking *wudu*. Previous studies have discussed that the ablution room has to be designed based on several factors that can affect the process of ablution, such as accessibility, size, and hygiene. In spite of these considerations, some places have failed to apply those considerations into the design of the ablution space. The ablution area has to be refined, where human aspects have to be considered and analyzed to sustain the rules of Islam. Also, environmental factors are important in designing the ablution space and as encouraged by Islam, space ventilation and good hygiene maintenance are required for the space.

Purity, as defined by Prophet Muhammed (pbuh), is for both internal and external of a person, thus categorized under religious importance. Being in a state of uncleanliness dismisses canonic prayer, as the ritual of ablution must be adhered. Besides, many verses stated in the Holy Quran clearly define the obligation of being clean and pure.

Other studies have investigated the issue of hygiene in Malaysian mosques; several case studies have been carried out to identify the design criteria of those constructions in term of cleanliness and space arrangements. Some papers discovered several factors that may affect the space hygiene mainly derived from human err, such as lack of knowledge, financial issues, staff number, and facilities management. The other element that may affect the hygiene level of prayer and ablution spaces is the location of the facilities. It is defined by the designer to allocate those spaces that cannot be mixed to avoid the mixture between clean and unclean spaces. For example, shoe rack, wet floor, smell, and water source have negative impact on the ablution space, thus should be considered in any design. Space accessibility can also be a factor

of hygiene to the ablution room, defining the area from outside and inside as one walks to the space to perform ablution.

Some papers argue about the issue of lack of hygiene consideration in the design of the ablution room among Malaysian mosques. Unclean space could result from lack of designer knowledge as one walk from the public space to the prayer hall or even to the ablution room. Several diseases might be contracted in such space, especially skin diseases. Besides, bathroom location and orientation should be considered by designers, in which failing to resolve such issue can lead to doubtful *wudu* and other issues regarding religious purity of a person.

## CONCLUSION

The defined Muslim guidelines are set to help Muslims to stay pure and clean at the time of performing prayer. Quran, Sunnah, and Hadith by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) have significantly defined Muslims' duty towards purity of self and have explained the importance of hygiene space. Ablution is a compulsory aspect of prayer that has to be performed to respond to Allah and his Prophet; it has a religious implication to apply this practice and to keep oneself clean at all times. Malaysian mosques have been doubted in applying some of the Islamic regulations to uniform a space that is hygienically clean and that can respond to the needs of Muslims. Hence, some serious actions have to be taken to analyze the present mosque designs in Malaysia to further look into the facilities related to ablution rooms.

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