

# **WOMEN'S NORMAL DISCHARGES: A QUESTION OF PURITY OR IMPURITY?**

An Adapted Summary of a Research Paper by:

**DR. FATIMAH OMAR NASSIEF**

Associate Professor

Department of Islamic Studies

KAU, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Translated by:

**SAMIRA AHMAD BADGAISH**

M.A. in Translation, UK.

Email: [samira.badgaish@gmail.com](mailto:samira.badgaish@gmail.com)

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## Preface

All praise be to Allah who created Man in the best of moulds and endowed him with an intellect that leads him to the straight path. Praise be to Him also for sending His noble Prophet, Mohammad Bin Abdullah, a mercy to all the worlds, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, his family and companions.

Vaginal discharge is a common problem of which most women complain. The many complaints and queries raised by women regarding this problem have spurred me to study this issue and look thoroughly into it. It is one of the perplexing issues to women because of the different opinions that jurists have as regards giving a ruling on it. To rule that a particular thing is impure (najis) can nullify or invalidate an act of worship. This ruling also involves a command from Allah to His servants to remove impurity and avoid it (when performing an act of worship) on the one hand, and to clean the affected area, garment, or body on the other hand, even if it happens unwittingly or undeliberately.

A female believer is keen to please Allah and is concerned about the acceptance of her worship. The most important and greatest act of worship is prayer (salah), where purity is a prerequisite and a condition for performing it. A female believer wants to know exactly whether this discharge is impure similar to urine and faeces (stool), or pure similar to mucus and saliva, and whether this discharge nullifies ablution (wudu) ... etc.



Since these discharges constantly flow out for most women, and since they are uncontrollable, it has become a necessity to clarify the religious ruling on this issue, particularly when our ancestral scholars did not decisively tackle this problem. On the contrary, their opinions were varied as regards this wetness being impure and, thus, it impurifies what it touches!

After reviewing related books of jurisprudence (fiqh), I could not find a satisfactory, conclusive answer to this problem. Hence, I decided to look into this matter, asking the help of Allah, and seek to reach the correct ruling through the correct evidence. By doing so, I aim to help women overcome this problem and save them the embarrassment caused by these discharges, especially at places of worship (such as the two Holy Mosques and mosques in general), and during times of worship - such as when performing (tawaf) (circumambulation around the Ka'bah) and prayer, as it is sometimes difficult to find, or reach, clean washrooms (toilets) nearby for purification.

I pray to Allah that this paper offers the best help to women so that they can worship in the correct manner with peace of mind based on the correct ruling with the right evidence. I also pray to Allah to guide me to the right ruling and bestow upon me the understanding of His Book and His Prophet's teachings.

O Allah, the Lord of Jibraa'eel, Meekaa'eel and Israafeel, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Knower of the seen and the unseen. You are the Arbitrator between Your servants in those matters over which they have differed. Guide me to the truth by Your leave for, verily, You guide whom You will to the straight path.

**The author**



## **Definitions:**

Women's normal discharges are secretions discharged from the women's vagina in normal conditions. Religious scholars (jurisprudents) call them "wetness of the woman's vulva". They do not mean the semen, the secretion of the prostate (wadie), or the pre-seminal fluid secretion – also known as spermatorrhea discharge (mathie). Instead, they are discharges that constantly flow out for most women, but they vary from woman to woman as regards their quantity only. They are common among women, married or unmarried (virgins).

### **\* The Juristic Definition:**

- Muslim jurisprudents define this discharge using Imam Nawawi's definition which reads: "the vaginal wetness in women is a white discharge that wavers between pre- seminal fluid and sweat".
- It is "a discharge that comes out from inside the vulva, i.e., the inner vulva".

### **\* The Medical Definition:**

The two sources of main normal vaginal discharge are:

1. The inner membrane of the vagina, which secretes a clear, thin fluid.
2. The cervix at the upper part of the vagina. Its discharge is clear, mucous and sticky.

The function of these discharges is to prevent the vaginal tube



from becoming dry. These discharges are clean with no odour and they come out outside the times of menstruation. Their quantity varies from time to time, and their color also varies from transparency to whiteness. These discharges have several causes, some are normal and others are pathological. **They are considered pathological in the following cases<sup>1</sup>:**

1. If their quantity increases remarkably.
2. If they have an unacceptable odour.
3. If their color becomes yellow, looking like clotted milk.

From the above definitions, the source of this discharge is determined, which is the vaginal wall, i.e., the inner vulva. This definition will help a great deal in giving a ruling on this wetness, which is the essence of this discussion.

\* **The Discussion:**

The exit point of this discharge determines the ruling. Those who consider it impure are of the opinion that this exit is one of the two private parts from which urine and faeces are excreted. However, this exit is not one of them. The discharge comes from the women's vagina and not from those two private parts of urine and faeces. Their arguments regarding this point contradict the scientific facts of the human anatomy. The vagina, in fact, is a third natural orifice (opening), other than the two natural orifices, which are the exit openings of urine and faeces, for the following reasons:

1. It is determined that whatever is discharged from these two natural orifices is impure (najis) for a very clear reason: the

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\* In this case, such discharge is nullifying ablution (*wudu*).

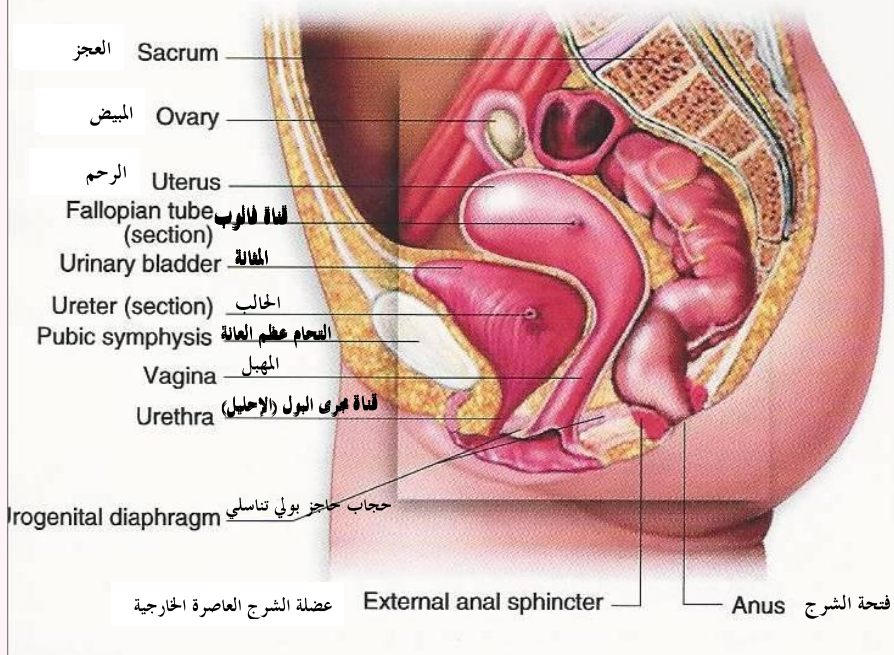


opening of the anus (the fecal exit) is connected to the source of impurity (najasah), i.e., the rectum, colon, and large intestines, where human waste is found. Also, the urinary exit is connected to the source of impurity in “the bladder”. As for the women’s vagina, it is not connected at all to these two natural orifices; it is far from the sources of impurity. This is clearly shown in [Figure 1] where the urinary and fecal orifices are completely separated from the birth canal (the fetus’ passage way) – the vagina. One cannot compare either of them to the other: the former two orifices are connected to the sources of impurity (urine and faeces), while the latter (the vagina) is connected to the uterus (womb).

2. The uterus is pure except in certain conditions, such as during menstruation and postnatal bleeding. Outside those states, the uterus is pure (tahir) as stated in the Quran when Allah forbids having sexual intercourse during the menstruation period as the vagina becomes an outlet for the impure (najis) blood: **﴿They will ask you about menstruation. Say, ‘It is an impurity, so keep apart from women during menstruation and do not approach them until they have purified themselves, then go to them in the way that Allah has enjoined on you.﴾, (2:22).** This verse states that marital sexual intercourse (jemaa) should be done in a pure place, after it becomes completely pure following an impure condition (menstruation or postratal bleeding) **﴿...until they have purified themselves...﴾.**
3. The uterus’ purity, together with what it is affiliated to, is supported by the fact that Allah forbids the husband from



## Internal genitals (medial section) ■



شكل (١)

الجهاز التناسلي للمرأة

- Figure 1-



having sexual intercourse with his wife in the back private part (the anus, which is the fecal orifice) because it is impure. This is substantiated by authentic hadiths of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in this context:

- **(Allah does not refrain from stating the truth. Do not have sexual intercourse with women in their back private parts". (Ibn Majah).**
- **(Whoever has sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstruation period or in her back private part has become a disbeliever in the revelation of Muhammad". (Ibn Dawoud).**
- **(Allah does not look at a man having sexual intercourse with his wife in her back private part". (Ibn Majah).**

These hadiths clearly state the prohibition of sexual intercourse in the presence of impurity (najasah). Hence, having sexual intercourse in the back private part is definitely forbidden because impurity is always attached to it. Also, sexual intercourse in the front private part of a woman (vagina or the fetus' passage way) is forbidden during menstruation and postpartum periods. These are sufficient evidences that clarify the prohibition of having sexual intercourse in the presence of impurity because of the ensuing harm.

4. The story of the people of Lot mentioned in the Quran emphasizes the significance of this prohibition when it states:



﴿ **But the answer of his people was not except that they said, ‘Drive out the family of Lot from your city. Indeed, they are people who want to be clean and pure’.** ﴾ (27:56).

This verse indicates that the place of the sexual intercourse of a woman (the front private part) is pure, while having sexual intercourse in the men’s back private part is impure because it is a place of impurity. That is why, in the above verse, those perverted people describe the believers as being pure.

Hence, the difference is significant and clear between the ‘vagina’ - the fetus’ birth canal or passage way- and the other two private parts. Therefore, the woman’s uterus is pure, except during menstruation and postnatal bleeding, because it is in the uterus that the human fetus is created, fed and developed. If the uterus is impure, this will imply another rule about the impurity of the fetus that grows in the uterus. However, humans and their offspring are not impure. The Hanbali scholars state that the human being is pure, dead or alive, in accordance with the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) saying: **(Subhan Allah, the believer never becomes impure (najis))**. (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim).

Thus, it should be considered that the uterus is pure in normal conditions (and whatever comes out of it), because menstruation stops during the formation stages of the fetus in the uterus. Accordingly, the vagina is considered pure because it is connected to the pure uterus except in the conditions mentioned earlier (menstruation and postnatal bleeding).



- **The jurists' judgement on the body's natural discharges:**

Let's first identify these discharges coming out of the human body. They are two kinds:

1. Discharges (secretions) that constantly come out of the body, such as sweat, saliva, and nasal mucus. They are, unanimously, considered pure. If otherwise, people would be placed under great difficulties.
2. Discharges that do not constantly come out of the body, such as urine, faeces, semen, pre-seminal fluid (mathie), secretion of the prostate (wadie), blood, pus, and the like. These are considered impure, except semen which is considered pure because from it a human being is created. As regards the woman's vaginal discharge (wetness), though there is disagreement among jurists regarding this issue, the rule that it is considered pure outweighs the opinion that it is impure because of the evidence supporting its purity, which agrees with the general principles of the rules on purity. Among such evidence is the following:
  - a. The vaginal discharge is compared to the normal constant discharges of the body. It cannot be compared to urine or faeces and the like. If we ruled that the women's front private part is



impure, we would have ruled that semen is impure because it comes out of it.

- b. Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, used to rub out the semen from the Prophet's garment (which is the semen resulting from having sexual intercourse because prophets do not have wet-dreams (ehtilam). When semen comes out, it passes through the vaginal wetness. If this wetness is considered impure, the semen would be impure as well, and rubbing it out will not be sufficient for the purity of the garment.

### **Other supporting evidence:**

1. One of the established rules in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) is that the basic ruling of things is that they are permissible and pure. To rule that a particular thing is impure requires strong religious evidence (proof) that indicates that it is - at least-probable so that it will not clash with the established rule that says (originally, things are pure). It remains as such until authentic conclusive evidence emerges ruling that it is impure.
2. Women are, commonly, afflicted with these discharges. If they were impure, the Prophet, peace be upon him, would have explained the rule. Ibn Taymiyah states: (Everything that is



unavoidable to touch is condonable). It is already known that women's vaginal discharge is uncontrollable and unavoidable. Even if a woman tries to avoid or prevent it, it is so difficult to do so. Therefore, it is judged, in such conditions, that they are pure for the sake of alleviating the burden on Allah's servants, as Allah states in the Quran ﴿... and (He) has imposed no difficulties on you in religion...﴾ (22:78).

3. The vaginal discharges cannot be compared to the pre-seminal fluid (mathie) because of two reasons:
  - a. The pre-seminal discharge normally comes out when a sexual desire is aroused, while vaginal discharge is always there; it exists without the presence of a sexual desire. Its purity applies during normal conditions, without a sexual desire accompanying it. The pre-seminal fluid, on the contrary, is unanimously agreed on its being impure.
  - b. The nature of the (moistness), or the vaginal discharge, is different from that of the pre-seminal fluid. While the vaginal discharge is acidic, the pre-seminal fluid is alkaline. Therefore, the pre-seminal fluid flows upon the arousal of a sexual desire in order to neutralize the acidic nature of the vagina so that it becomes a suitable place for sperm-drops



(notfah), which do not live in acidity. Since the vaginal discharge is different from the pre-seminal fluid, it does not have the same ruling of the latter's impurity.

### **Normal discharges in normal conditions:**

The structural nature of the women's genital organs makes it difficult to differentiate between these discharges, unless the accompanying condition is known. Contrary to that is what happens to the man; there is no question that the semen comes out of him in a flow and the pre-seminal fluid comes out in a sticky, drop-like manner.

Therefore, if we take into consideration the state accompanying the flowing out of the discharge, then it would be easy to give a rule. When the sexual desire becomes stronger and reaches its climax, or during sexual intercourse, and a discharge (fluid) comes out, then this discharge is the (water) that is stated in the hadith when Umm Salamah asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying:

**(‘Is it obligatory for a woman to perform full ablution (take ritual bath) (ghusl) if she has a wet dream?’). The Prophet answered: jYes, if she sees ‘water’.),** i.e., a discharge. This ‘water’ is considered pure, similar to man's semen. It obligates full ablution. However, if a discharge (fluid) comes out of a woman upon flirting with, or arousing any sexual excitement, this discharge



is called (mathie) - a pre-seminal fluid - and it is considered impure; it nullifies ablution (wudu), similar to man's "mathie" (a pre-seminal fluid).

However, in normal situations, during the day or night, when a woman is performing her routine daily chores, or performing acts of worship, such as prayer (salah), (tawaf) - walking around the kaabah seven times - and (sa'ee) - walking seven times between the hills of As-Safaa and Al-Marwah -, these discharges are considered pure because of the absence of sexual excitements.

**In conclusion,** women's normal discharge is considered pure and its outflow does not obligate ablution or purification of the affected part of the body or clothes, unless they are done for personal cleanliness.

Allah knows the best and He is the Guide to the right path.

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