

Words Have Multiple Meanings

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One reason for the apparent contradictions in the hadiths is that there are many words that are sometimes used in the literal sense and at other times in the technical or figurative sense. Allah's Messenger (salallahu alayhi wa sallam) used to say something using a particular word in one context, while some of the Companions considered the usage in a different context. There are not a few, but thousands of instances of this nature.

To give one example, the word wudu' is quite common in its technical sense (of ablution before prayer). However, literally, the word wudu' means cleanliness, purity, and washing of the hands. In a narration of the Shama'il of Imam Tirmidhi, Salman (radiallahu anh) once told Allah's Messenger (salallahu alayhi wa sallam) that according to the Torah, wudu' after meals brings about blessings [baraka] in one's food. Allah's Messenger (salallahu alayhi wa sallam) added, **'Wudu' before as well as after the meal is a source of blessing in ones food.'** (Shama'il al-Tirmidhi 186) In Salman's statement as well as the statement Allah's Messenger (salallahu alayhi wa sallam), the word wudu' unanimously refers to the washing of the hands.

In addition, there is a lengthy hadith narrated by 'Ikrāsh in Sunan al-Tirmidhi (1848). At the end of the hadith he says, **"After partaking of this meal, water was brought before Allah's Messenger (salallahu alayhi wa sallam). He washed his hands and thereafter rubbed them over his face and arms. He thereafter addressed me, 'O 'Ikrāsh, the injunction of making wudu' after partaking of something cooked over the fire refers to this (form of) wudu'."** In spite of this narration being somewhat disputed [mutakallam fih], we can still establish that the word wudu' is not used in its technical sense but in its literal sense.

Similarly, it is narrated in Jam' al-Fawa'id (677), on the authority of Bazzar, that Mu'adh (radiallahu anh) was asked, **"Do you perform wudu' after partaking of something cooked over the fire?"** He replied, **"We wash our hands and mouth after meals and interpret it as wudu."** For this reason, all four of the Imams have unanimously agreed that the narrations which mention (the obligation of performing) wudu' after eating something cooked over the fire refers to wudu' in its literal sense (i.e. just washing the hands and mouth). Otherwise such an injunction could have been abrogated.

Likewise, on one occasion, 'Ali (radiallahu anh) washed a few parts (of those normally washed during wudu') of his body. Thereafter, he commented, **"This is the wudu' of one whose wudu' is still intact."** (Nasa'i 130) Therefore, washing only a few parts of the body is not referred to as wudu' in the technical sense. These are just a few examples where the word "wudu'" is not used in its technical sense. My aim in presenting these examples is to show that the word "wudu'" and other words have been utilized in their literal as well as their technical sense. From this, one can understand the principle cause of differences as well. Quite frequently, certain narrators will consider the word wudu' in a certain hadith in its technical sense, and they will most probably add an explanation like "wudu' such as wudu' for salat." This is to ensure that no doubt remains and those listening are not left in any confusion. On the other hand, if the word wudu' is not intended in

its technical sense but in its literal sense, a narrator will most probably explain that it refers to the washing of the mouth and hands, etc. This is explained in order to avoid confusion.