

# Cleanliness



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Cleanliness of body is necessary for physical health. Dirt and disease go together. Disease germs breed and thrive in dirt; and the epidemic diseases which sweep over a country and carry off thousands, are generally the results of the dirty habits and surroundings of the people. This is why cholera, for instance, is such a scourge in beautiful Kashmir; for the river Jhelum is made an open sewer by the people of the hundreds of villages along its banks. No one can keep healthy who is afraid of soap and water. Not only the regular washing of hands and face, but the frequent and thorough bathing of the whole body, and the wearing of clean clothes, are conditions of good health. Moreover, cleanliness of body is also necessary for self-respect. No one can expect to mix with decent society if he is not clean and neat in dress and person. It is an insult to respectable people to meet them with dirty face and hands, and soiled and evil-smelling clothes. A gentleman would feel ashamed if he could not keep himself scrupulously clean. An old proverb says, "Cleanliness is next to godliness." This means that cleanliness comes next to godliness in importance. But in practice it has been interpreted in a different way, and made to mean that godliness can dispense with cleanliness. In the middle Ages in Europe, and in some places and classes in India, godliness was associated with dirt. The old ascetic monk, and the Indian fakir, was considered to be all the more holy for being filthy. They lived in "the odour of sanctity", and a pretty foul odour it must have been! But true godliness surely means cleanliness of soul and body; and the old proverb should read, "Cleanliness is a part of godliness." But even more important than cleanliness of body is cleanliness of mind. To call a mind clean or dirty is to use metaphorical language. Just as light is a symbol of truth and goodness, and darkness of ignorance and evil, so dirt is

a symbol of moral evil and cleanliness of moral purity. Sin is dirt; and in all religions the sinner prays to God for cleaning. " Wash me, and I shall be whiter than thou," cries the psalmist; " Cleanse Thou me from secret faults"; " Create a clean heart in me, O God!" A man may be clean in body; but if his mind is full of impure desires, dirty thoughts and unclean imaginings, he is a " dirty" man, however much he may wash his skin. " Woe unto you, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones and all un-cleanliness." Cleanliness has taught me self-discipline. I also associate it with beauty. It is difficult to keep things clean and in order in today's frenetic world. It takes effort and effort takes self-discipline, but when I walk around my home or wear clean and neat clothes I feel better about myself. It gives me a sense of order and I think it says something about me to people I meet or who come to my home. Beauty makes life bearable and I find it everywhere. I have found it in the slums of Calcutta which is the dirtiest place I have ever lived; I found it in the smile of the dying or the gentleness of those who cared for them, or from the love I saw on the streets of a mother for her child..... in so many places and in so many ways. My life has not been a cheerful one. The thing that has made it endurable has been the beauty I have found; the beauty in music has been life sustaining, and in spite of all the dirt and sorrow in the world, you can still find beauty if you have the eyes to see it. It has kept me alive.