

A CONCEPT OF CLEAN TOILET FROM THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Islam is the official religion of Malaysia and more than half of the population is Muslim. As Muslims, the aspect of cleanliness is one of the most important and basic things that should be followed and practised in everyday life. Allah loves those who cleanse themselves as quoted in the holy Qur'an.

"... God loves those who turn to Him, and He loves those who cleanse themselves".

(Surah Al-Baqarah: 222)

There is a growing awareness of public toilets among the public and authorities which can be seen in the events such as the "A Clean Toilet Campaign Seminar" held at national level end of July 2003 in Johor Bahru, Johor. Criticisms by visitors and locals stirred the level of consciousness among those responsible directly or indirectly for clean and effective public facilities. Nowadays, toilet is no longer perceived as merely a small and insignificant part of a building. It contributes and serves more than the initial purposes intended. Due to socio-economic changes, a toilet has been diversified and become multi-functions. It has surpassed its traditional role as a place to empty bowels or urinates to serve as comfortable vicinity with conveniences. In developed countries such as Japan and Korea, a public toilet has become a communal area where people could do face washing, showering, freshen up or taking care of their kids and so on. In designing a public toilet, some elements should be highlighted particularly on the understanding of users needs. With the various type of users, there is a need for a universal design of a public toilet that is always clean, comfortable and safe as well as relaxing. In Malaysia, it is important to understand the 'Islamic toilet manner' as they can influence and has direct implications for the design and planning of toilet facilities as Islam is a universal and advocates matter of cleanliness.

BACKGROUND

Cleanliness is one of the aspects that must exist in a life of human being. This encompasses physical and mental attributes. Islamic teachings have emphasized the concept of cleanliness in terms of clothing, building and its surrounding area as well as purity in the matter of material possession and administration. The wholesome concept of purity and cleanliness is one of the most important values that must be practised in order to form a healthy and dynamic community and environment.

Physically, an acceptable level of cleanliness in a certain area is very important and must be achieved. In a certain area, for instance in a medical laboratory, radioactive lab or treatment room, the level of cleanliness set out is very high to ensure the satisfactory and expected outcome.

In our daily life, whether at home or at the office or anywhere else like at the public places, one of the most important facilities is a public toilet. But, the questions that always arise are the level of its cleanliness and its design. The design of the toilet sometime does not comply to every user needs for instance a Muslim, children, disabled person, to name a few.

Public toilet has always been a bane to users. It is perceived as dirty, shabby, wet and smelly as well as unhygienic, thus people shy away from it except in the hour of dire need. This unfortunate condition is due to the manner the facilities area used or maintained of inadequacies in design. As a result, we should refer and stress on the Islamic teaching on the aspect of cleanliness and the philosophy of designing of toilet. There are a few guidelines that could be referred to in order to improve the present state of toilet design and its usage. New design guidelines should be outlined that are more suitable and effective hence ensuring a higher level of cleanliness and quality of toilet.

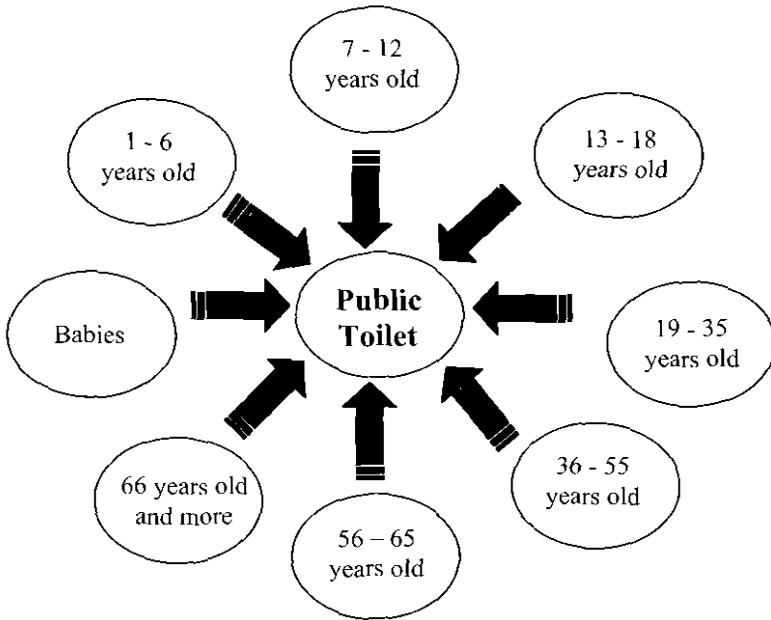


Figure 1: Various categories of public toilet users

TOILET DESIGN ACCORDING TO THE ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES

a) Islam as a holy religion

Islam is the official religion of Malaysia and more than half of the population is Muslim. As Muslims, the aspect of cleanliness is one of the most important and basic things that should be followed and practised in everyday life. Allah loves those cleanse themselves as quoted in the holy Qur'an.

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(Surah Al-Baqarah: 222)

Again Allah has asked all Muslims to always purify themselves by obeying the *syariah* and teaching of Islam as been told in the Qur'an:

“... God does not desire to put you to any hardship, but He desires to cleanse you and to complete. His blessing upon you, that you may be thankful”.

(*Surah Al-Ma'idah*: 6)

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him has also stressed on the importance of washing as quoted in the *hadith*:

“Purity is half of faith”.

(Narrated by Ahmad)

Islam has really emphasized on the matter of purity and cleanliness. It is clearly shown by observing the development of mankind since inside a mother's womb until she dies. Since the time a mother is pregnant, she is taught to consume a healthy and 'pure' food, undergoing a clean path of life. And when the baby is born, she must be bathed and cleansed before moving on in her life and at the end, will be cleansed and adorned in white clothes. Therefore, it is evident that Islam has really stressed upon the importance of keeping oneself clean and pure.

In addition, cleanliness and purification, physical and spiritual, of an individual is stressed out in the Qur'an as:

“... who purifies it prospers, and he who corrupts it is ruined”.

(*Surah Al-Shams*: 9 – 10)

Islam has also encouraged its *Ummah* to cleanse their soul by learning the Islamic knowledge as mentioned in the Qur'an:

“He frowned and turned aside that the blind man came to him. But what should teach thee that he would purify him ...”.

(*Surah 'Abasa*: 1 – 3)

Besides, to purify one's heart for *kufr*' is another kind of cleanliness.

“... then say, 'Hast thou the will to purify thyself?'”

Surah An-Nazi'at: 18)

Another element of purification can be seen in the practice of *sadaqah*. As said in the Qur'an, *sadaqah* cleanse out soul from being tight-fisted.

'O Believers, when you confer secretly with the Messenger, advance an offering before your conferring; that is better and purer for you; however, if you find it not, then God is Forging, Merciful'.

(Surah AlMujadalah: 12)

By purifying oneself from sins, one could avoid from being assaulted by devils as mentioned in the holy Qur'an.

"He said, 'by Thy glory, I shall pervert them all together, except Thy exclusive servants out of them'".

(Surah Sad: 82 - 83)

We are all well aware that most of illnesses whether chronicle or not could be attributed to a state of untidiness like our surroundings, food, lifestyle or the natural environment. Therefore, Islam has taught us the importance of practising cleanliness in our daily life to avoid undesirable things to occur. Cleanliness is an essential element that reach individual must posses as told by Allah:

"... and clean thy clothes, and shun abomination".

(Surah Al-Muddaththir: 4 -5)

Like kitchens, toilets are places where germs of many type breed and multiply, causing infections to the innocent people who use toilets, kitchens and adjoining areas.

In Malaysia where the majority of its population is Muslim and even though we have proper toilet facilities everywhere, most of them are terribly maintained and ill managed posing severe safety risks and hazards to users. Foreigners especially from developed countries always leave a cynical and embarrassing remark for us Malaysians like:

"We love your Petronas Twin Towers, your super expressways and all your world-class infastructure; but, why are so many of your public toilets are so bad and unhealthy?"

With healthy hygienic and well-designed toilets it will not only draw public to use it for whatever reasons, but also attract more customers and tourist to come and spend their money on the places of business for instance in restaurants, petrol station, kiosks and shopping malls.

b) Self-cleansing (*Istinja'*)

Islam has taught a more specific area of cleanliness which is self-cleansing or *istinja'* following the appropriate and correct rules. The utilization of water for self-cleansing has been outlined by Islam, based on:

"Istinja' can be performed by using soil or water".

(Narrated by Tirmizi)

Two main elements that can be used to self-cleanse are water and soil (dust). Water used should be fully sanitized and come from seven natural sources such as rain, ocean and river, as well as water from snow, dew, well and natural spring. Apart from that we can use water from lake, tap, mines, water tank, falling water, natural hot spring, mineral water and many others. As Muslims, *istinja'* (to clean genitals (*qubul*) and posterior areas (*dubur*) after urination or defecate) is another act of cleanliness that must be performed. Our Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in a *hadith* has taught the right method:

"Wash your hands trice (up to wrists) before you put them into a vessel to rinse (water)".

(Narrated by Tarmizi)

"When entering a toilet, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) always covered his head and wore shoes".

(Narrated by Ibn Sad)

"If you are entering a toilet, put forward your left foot first".

(Narrated by Ibn Majah)

"It is better for you to sit or squat when performing istinja'".

(Narrated by Tirmizi)

"And you should neither face nor turn his back towards the Qiblah during istinja'".

(Narrated by Tarmizi)

"During istinja', avoid talking (except when absolutely necessary)".

(Narrated by Mishkaati)

“During istinja’, do not use your right hand, but instead use your left hand to touch your qubul and duhur”.

(Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim)

“When there is no toilet for cleaning, go as far as you can where you cannot be seen”.

(Narrated by Tirmizi)

The best method in performing *istinja’* is by using sanitized water thrice until smell and colour of a urine or excrement fades away. This is a way to clean ‘*mutawassitah*’ filth (i.e. urine and excrement) which is a middle form of filth. However, if there is no water available, it is allowed to use other means of cleaning such as tissue paper, dry leaf, newspaper, stone as a replacement.

“I followed the Prophet while he was going out to answer the call of nature. He used not to look this way or that. So, when I approached near him, he said to me, “Fetch for me some stones for “cleaning the private parts (or said something similar) and do not bring a bone or a piece of dung. “So, I brought some stones in the corner of my garment and placed them by his side and I then went away from him. When he finished (from answering the call of nature) he used them”.

(Narrated by Tirmizi)

c) **Concept of ablution of *Wudu’***

One of the Islamic teachings regarding cleanliness involves a method of performing ablution or *wudu’*. *Wudu’* must be carried out before each prayer. The basic principles of *wudu’* are *niyyah* (motive), wash face thrice and then forearms up to the elbows thrice, then passed wet hands over the head and then, wash each foot thrice and everything must be in order. The concept of *wudu’* is one of the disciplinary acts that could be adopted by each individual in order to stay hygienically clean whether in private or public places.

In term of a public toilet design, an ablution area is always neglected and does not comply with users’ needs, hence, many people have to perform *wudu’* in a toilet cubicle. It is *makruh* (unacceptable but not sinful).

A place for performing ablution is one of the features that need to be taken into consideration when designing a public toilet. However, even at the present state of a toilet that has a place for ablution, it could be redesigned or refurbished to cater to the need of everybody inclusive of senior citizens, pregnant women, children as well as wheelchair users. Refer to the picture below for better understanding:

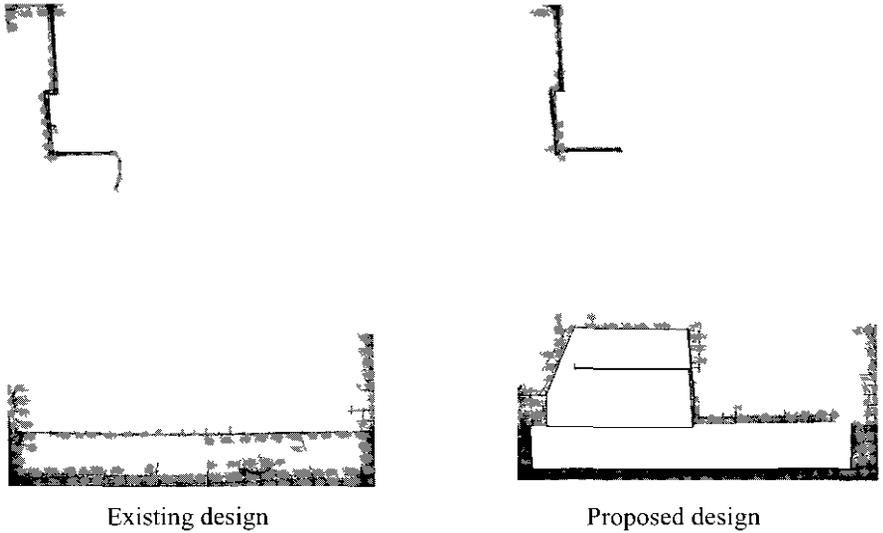


Figure 2: Proposed modification of the ablation area

ASPECT OF DESIGN

The basic philosophy or principle of a toilet design involves water as its major element in self-cleansing and a method of *istinja'*. Thus, a complete water facility must be included when designing a public toilet. Ample water, preferably running water should always be available for cleaning the body and place. The importance of water in toilets is revealed in the Hadith in which the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have entered the toilet and when he came out, he found some water brought to him for ablution. On seeing it, he asked who had brought the water. When told it was 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, he then supplicated for him: "O my Lord, enlighten him as to the matters pertaining to the religion".

a) Universal design

In response to changing lifestyles and growing appreciation for diversity in people, we are moving towards environments that support and adapt to a variety of people. According to Leibrock C.A and Terry J.E, universal design is an ideal that never completely accommodates diversity, but moves in that direction. The accommodation is simple and invisible, never segregating by ability or economic means. Universal design is expansive, integrating users into larger groups; opening markets to more consumers and exceeding code to eliminate disability by design.

Leibrock and Terry describe universal design as follows:

- (i) Simplicity – universal design is intuitive, simple to use, easy to understand.
- (ii) Invisibility - universal design is silent and invisible. Although it must be accessible and barrier free, it must go further to quietly meet the needs of all users.
- (iii) Maximum, minimum design. A universal design is an alternative to the prevailing paradigms of minimum standards and exceptions to the norms.
- (iv) Integration a universal design does not segregate. It encourages the participation of many users.
- (v) Elimination of disability - universal design transcends ability with innovation.
- (vi) Affordability - universal design must be affordable as it offers a choice to all users.
- (vii) Expansion of market – universal design does not limit the market to older and disabled people.
- (viii) Universal – the design can be used by older people, accommodating a variety of abilities, buildings that enhance hearing, designing for visual acuity, environments for mental health, access by wheelchair users, adults of shorter stature and children.

b) Orientation of a toilet according to Islam

From the Islamic perspective, it is necessary to establish the direction of *qiblah* first before locating and designing a toilet. This is due to the best orientation of a toilet is against the direction of *qiblah*. However,

if there are some constraints, one should try to deflect from the *qiblah* direction as much as possible. For a mosque, toilet should not be too near or in front of *mihrab*. Normally, a toilet is located at the rear end or at the side of mosque.

c) Additional design

A public toilet as mentioned before, could serve multiple functions other than for answering nature's calls. It could be a place for socialization or to take a rest after spending time on foot, to breastfeed babies or simply to freshen up. Thus, by adding a few designs of hard and soft landscape, it could promote a toilet as a place for relaxation as well. Perhaps, by adorning a public toilet with elements such as in a five-star hotel, people will appreciate and treat it with more regard and respect.

d) Current requirements and needs

Apart from the philosophy of design as mentioned above, there are several existing building by-laws that must be abided accordingly. As a benchmark and evaluation of the quality level of a public toilet, the responsible authority has already prepared a guideline which could be referred to for instance MS 1184 and MS 1131. By abiding to this guideline, an ideal design of a public toilet can be developed and produced effectively.

Nevertheless, the responsible party must be well informed and sensitive to current requirements and needs of users. Facilities and other building elements that are regarded as nitty-gritty by certain people may have a great impact on users particularly a Muslim and, therefore, the design of a public toilet should be studied further.

Among the essential components in a public toilet that are always overlooked during a design process are shown in the figures below. In addition, the management of toilet sanitization must follow the standard level of quality outlined or abiding a certain condition. Not to forget, a clean and hygienic toilet of five-stars hotel and buildings too must provide facilities that comply to all users particularly Muslims by providing water hose so that *istinja'* and self-cleansing could be performed accordingly.

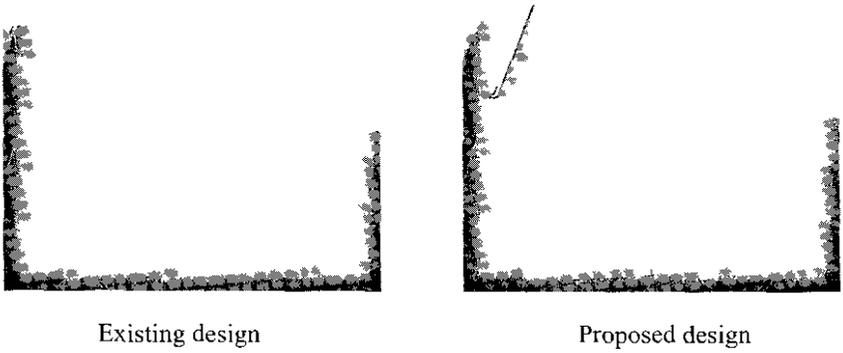


Figure 3: Proposed railing for senior citizens (able to walk)

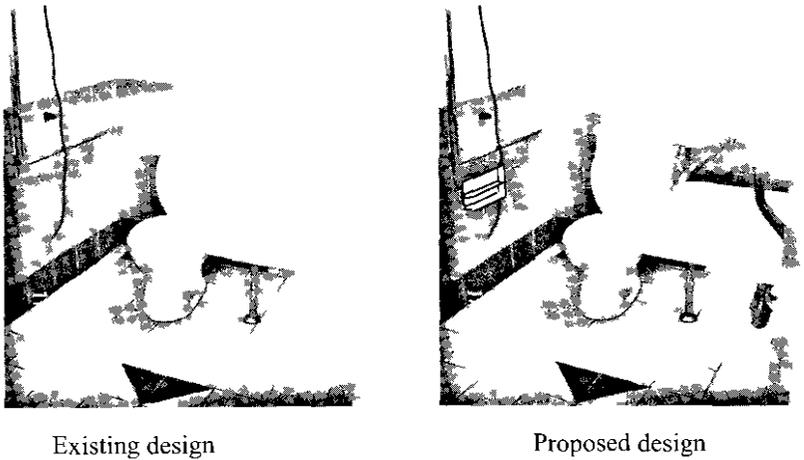
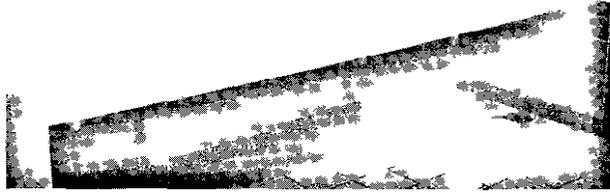
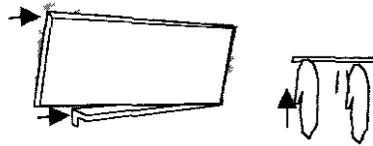


Figure 4: Proposal for a toilet roll holder for disabled users



Existing design



Proposed design

Figure 5: Proposed modification of a public toilet to cater to the needs of Muslim women

CONCLUSION

Islam is the universal religion that sets best examples for everybody regardless of age, belief or race. Hence, the aspects and philosophies of design and cleanliness of a public toilet from the Islamic perspective are applicable and

adaptable as a guideline to everyone and should be taken into account first and foremost.

Islam has taught its *ummah* that purity begins from one's own self. It also teaches us the right method of self-cleansing and cleanliness ever since we were born up until the end of life. Consequently, it is proven that cleanliness is part of Islamic way of life and it is not only physical, but spiritual as well as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has said:

Abu Malik ar-Ash'ari reported: "The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: Cleanliness is half of faith and al-Hamdu Lillah (Praise be to Allah) fills the scale and Subhan Allah (Glory be to Allah) and al-Hamdu Lillah (Praise be to Allah) fill up what is between the heavens and the earth"

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