

DO STILL WATERS RUN DEEP?

When my English husband lived in Syria back in the early eighties, he used to travel around a lot, and the two things he always took with him were a light bulb, for nighttime reading, and a sink plug. A sink plug? Well, where I come from in the Middle East, plugs are only used when you want to hand-wash your underwear!!

This stems from the time-honoured Muslim tradition of washing, bathing and drinking only with running water. The primal cleansing practice in Islam *wudhou'*, the ritual ablution preceding a prayer, must be performed with running water. It's an image seen in every child's schoolbook, and is still imprinted on my 30-something mind.

Living in Britain has always been a challenge. Never mind the separate hot and cold taps in most sinks. I know that one is supposed to mix the water in the basin with the plug 'in', but I have always managed to get by with a quick manual mixing technique with both taps running. What I cannot live without is my shower. Have you ever paused and thought about all the scum and grime attached to the rim of your bathtub? I admit that I too find myself listening to the shipping forecast while enjoying my well-deserved end of day bath. There is one difference, however. Every relaxing soak must be followed by a quick rinsing shower. Then and only then am I clean, both hygienically and ritually.

It may seem strange then that Arabs live in some of the most drought-ridden countries. But this very scarcity of water has lead Arab scientists to devise incredibly sophisticated irrigation techniques, which date back centuries.

Before I get carried away, I mustn't over-sanitise the glories of the Middle East. I have to admit that the state of public lavatories in most of its countries leave something to be desired.

But while we're on toilets - what about the washing of your private parts? Maybe we can leave the exact details for another programme - but we use running water of course. In the meantime, may your water run free!