



TAWBAH

Repentance

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at-tazkiyah

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

‘Allāmah Nawawī رحمته, in his epic collection of Aḥādīth, Riyāḍuṣ-Ṣāliḥīn, has quoted from the ‘Ulamā,

التَّوْبَةُ وَاجِبَةٌ مِّنْ كُلِّ ذَنْبٍ

Tawbah (repentance) is wājib (incumbent) from every sin. (Riyāḍuṣ-Ṣāliḥīn)

This statement is based on the verses of the Glorious Qur’ān, the Aḥādīth of Rasūlullāh ﷺ and the consensus of the Ummah.

Tawbah literally means to return; and the reason for repentance being given this name is that man’s original condition is to be free from sin and disobedience to Allāh ﷻ, and he is expected to continually be in this state. So, when he happens to sin, by repenting he returns to that original state.

As Muslims, we believe that only the Ambiyā ﷺ were immune from sins and infallible. The rest of mankind are vulnerable and prone to sin. The

Rasūlullāh ﷺ has said,

كُلُّ ابْنِ آدَمَ خَطَّاءٌ وَخَيْرُ الْخَطَّائِينَ التَّوَّابُونَ

Every son of Ādam is a sinner; and the best of the sinners are those who repent. (At-Tirmidhī)

Regarding the ability to refrain from sins, we are all created equal; however, some may err more than others. Those who possess the highest degree of taqwā will very rarely sin, whilst those with less taqwā will sin much more frequently. The Awliyā, the special friends of Allāh ﷻ, whose hearts are infused with the nūr of taqwā seldom make mistakes. The higher the status of the walī, the less mistakes he will make. And the special quality of the Awliyā is that as soon as they make a mistake, they immediately repent and seek forgiveness from Allāh ﷻ.

From amongst those who make mistakes there are two distinct groups. Firstly, those who after sinning don't give it a second thought. There is no feeling of guilt or remorse whatsoever. They are not perturbed by the fact that they have sinned.

Such people never repent as they have no regret over what they have done.

The second group are those people who, if they commit a sin, repent immediately. They cannot rest until they have mended their relationship with Allāh ﷻ. Sayyidunā ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd ؓ described both groups in a statement wherein he said,

إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنَ يَرَى ذُنُوبَهُ كَأَنَّهُ قَاعِدٌ تَحْتَ جَبَلٍ يَخَافُ أَنْ
يَقَعَ عَلَيْهِ، وَإِنَّ الْفَاجِرَ يَرَى ذُنُوبَهُ كَذُبَابٍ مَرَّ عَلَى أَنْفِهِ

The believer sees his sins as if he was sitting under a mountain and he fears it may fall upon him; whereas, a sinful person sees his sins like a fly around his nose (which he swats away). (Al-Bukhārī)

Similarly, regarding the second group, Allāh ﷻ says,

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ
فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ ۗ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ اللَّهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۗ وَلَمْ
يُصِرُّوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

And those who, when they happen to commit a shameful act or wrong themselves, remember Allāh, then seek forgiveness for their sins. And who is there to forgive sins except Allāh? And they do not persist in what they have done, knowingly; (3:135)

The pious are those who fear that if they were to stay in the state of sin, their hearts will become engulfed in darkness and then void of guidance. This is mentioned in a Ḥadīth in which Nabī ﷺ says,

إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ إِذَا أَخْطَأَ خَطِيئَةً نُكِّتَتْ فِي قَلْبِهِ نُكْتَةٌ سَوْدَاءٌ،
فَإِذَا هُوَ نَزَعَ وَاسْتَعْفَرَ وَتَابَ سُقِلَ قَلْبُهُ، وَإِنْ عَادَ زِيدَ فِيهَا
حَتَّى تَعْلُوَ قَلْبَهُ

Indeed, whenever a servant commits a sin, a black dot appears on his heart. If he refrains, asks for forgiveness and repents, then his heart will be cleaned. But if he returns (commits another sin), it will increase until it engulfs his whole heart. (At-Tirmidhī)

Allāh ﷻ makes mention of this in the Qur'an

when He says,

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

No! But that which they used to commit has covered their hearts with rust. (83:14)

Therefore, if we happen to sin, we should repent immediately, following the example of the pious as quoted in the verse above. It should not be the case that we wait for Ramaḍān or any other blessed time, or until we visit a blessed place like Makkah, Al-Madīnah or even the masjid; rather, we should repent immediately as by doing so we will earn the great rewards promised by Allāh ﷻ for repenting to Him:

أُولَئِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَجَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ

Their reward is forgiveness from their Rabb and gardens beneath which rivers flow where they shall live forever. And excellent is the reward of those who work. (3:136)

This opportunity to repent is available to us until

we reach the last stages of our lives when we begin to witness the scenes of the Hereafter. After this, no repentance will be accepted from anyone. Therefore, as we do not know when this moment will come for us, we should repent immediately upon making a mistake.

Benefits of Tawbah

- A person who, after sinning, does tawbah, becomes the beloved of Allāh ﷻ.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ

...Surely Allāh loves those who are most repenting... (2:222)

- The one who repents becomes clean and pure from sins. In a Ḥadīth Rasūlullāh ﷺ has said,

التَّائِبُ مِنَ الذَّنْبِ كَمَنْ لَا ذَنْبَ لَهُ

The one who repents from sins is like the one who has no sins. (Ibn Mājah, Al-Bayhaqī)

Subḥānallāh! The Mercy of Allāh ﷻ is such

that when a person repents sincerely to Allāh ﷻ, then all his past sins are erased. Rasūlullāh ﷺ has also said,

إِذَا تَابَ الْعَبْدُ أَنْسَى اللَّهُ الْحَفَظَةَ ذُنُوبَهُ وَأَنْسَى ذَلِكَ
جَوَارِحَهُ وَمَعَالِمَهُ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ حَتَّى يَلْقَى اللَّهَ وَلَيْسَ
عَلَيْهِ شَاهِدٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ بِذَنْبٍ

When a servant repents, Allāh makes the angels forget his sins and makes his limbs and the places on earth where he committed the sins forget until he meets Allāh in a state that there will not be against him a witness from Allāh of a single sin. (Tārīkh Dimishq)

- If a person repents sincerely from sin and then does good actions, inshā'allāh, his bad deeds will be transformed into good deeds.

إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ
سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

... except the one who repents and believes and does good deeds, then Allāh will

replace the evils of such people with good deeds, and Allāh is Ever-Forgiving, Most-Merciful. (25:70)

- Another benefit is that through repentance the soul is nourished; it becomes healthy, and in turn it becomes easier for it to stay away from sins. The similitude is that of a person who wishes to run ten kilometres. Initially, because he is unfit he cannot do so. However, if he slowly builds up his stamina, a time will come when he will be able to do so easily. Similarly, although at the beginning a person won't be able to refrain from sinning despite trying, but if and when he does falter, he continually repents sincerely, then, inshā'allāh, a time will come when he will be able to refrain from sins.

Difference between Tawbah and Istighfār

Two commonly used terms are *tawbah* and *istighfār*. However, they are often misunderstood and even used in place of one another. Tawbah means to repent to Allāh ﷻ, whilst istighfār is to ask for forgiveness from Allāh ﷻ. Therefore,

it can be said that istighfār is part of tawbah, as repenting will include seeking forgiveness. But istighfār in itself will not be enough for repentance to be accepted unless Allāh ﷻ wishes. In order for tawbah to be complete the following conditions must be met:

1. There should be a feeling of remorse and regret over the sin committed.
2. There should be complete disassociation from the sin that was being committed.
3. A firm resolve should be made not to commit the sin again.
4. Sometimes, there is also a fourth condition - that together with the above conditions a person has to make up for the wrong he committed. For example, if he had been missing ṣālah then he will have to perform the qaḍā for these. Similar would be the case with ṣawm, zakāh, etc. If the sin was connected to the violation of the rights of another person, such as stealing, swearing, etc. then he must make up to the person whose rights he violated by seeking

his forgiveness and not stopping until he has completely forgiven him.

Maintaining Hope

We should never become despondent from repenting and mending our relationship with Allāh ﷻ. Often, after repenting to Allāh ﷻ a few times, we begin to think that it is of no use to repent as we will falter again. This is an incorrect mindset. Remember, when we repent all our sins are forgiven and all Shayṭān's work goes to waste, yet despite knowing this Shayṭān never stops trying to make us commit sins. Furthermore, there is a stark contrast in the two efforts made by us in trying to refrain from sin and that made by Shayṭān in attempting to make us sin. If we make a mistake and falter, all we need to do is repent sincerely and our sin will be forgiven. And it is not the case that when we happen to sin again all the sins come back that we had previously repented from - no! Once we repent sincerely those sins are banished from our account never to return. Therefore, when we repent we have

absolutely nothing to lose; whilst Shayṭān knows when trying to make us sin that we can very easily repent and make all his efforts go to waste. Yet this does not stop Shayṭān making effort, so why should we become despondent of repenting to Allāh ﷻ?

A lesson from the Aḥādīth, in order to teach us not to become despondent and continue to mend our relationship with Allāh ﷻ whenever we falter, is that Rasūlullāh ﷺ would turn to Allāh ﷻ in repentance, according to one Ḥadīth seventy times (Al-Bukhārī), and according to another a hundred times a day. (Muslim)

May Allāh ﷻ allow us to understand the reality of tawbah and continually mend our relationship with Him, and make us from His Awliyā who seldom sin. Āmīn.

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