

3. The Conditions of Repentance;

It has been stated previously that repentance equates to remorse, which, in turn, fosters determination and resolution. This remorse stems from knowledge. Both knowledge, as well as remorse and resolution, can be eternal and comprehensive: their completeness bears a mark, and their perpetuity is subject to a condition, the delineation of which is consequently essential. Concerning knowledge, its delineation involves elucidating the rationale for repentance, a topic that will be addressed subsequently.

Regret constitutes the sorrow experienced when the heart longs for the Beloved, characterised by grief, sadness, tears, and introspection. It is anticipated that the atonement of sins aligns with the suffering endured; one indicator of regret is when the bitterness of sins supplants their former sweetness, causing the individual to despise them and develop an aversion to them.

These are the conditions for the completeness of remorse, and they ought to persist until death. One should experience the aforementioned bitterness in all transgressions, even if they have not been previously committed.

Resolution, rooted in regret and a desire for reparation, pertains to the present, past, and future. In the present, it necessitates refraining from violating commitments and fulfilling obligations. Regarding the past, it involves addressing neglect. For the future, it signifies continued obedience and abstention from disobedience until death.

The criterion for the validity of such a resolution concerning the past stipulates that one must retrospectively consider the day on which puberty was first attained. One should systematically examine each day of one's life, identifying neglected acts of obedience and engaged acts of disobedience. This process enables one to rectify missed opportunities for obedience and to substitute transgressions with virtuous deeds.

Regarding the resolution for the future, it is essential to establish a clear covenant with Allah and to make a steadfast commitment not to revert to those sins or similar transgressions.

The Categories of People Concerning the Completeness of Repentance

Be aware that, with respect to repentance, the individuals who repent are classified into four distinct categories.

The First Category

The individual who commits sins demonstrates repentance and perseveres in this repentance until the conclusion of his life; he rectifies any neglects from the past and resolutely refrains from reverting to previous transgressions, except, of course, for lapses that are inevitable for all humans.

The Second Category

An individual seeking repentance adheres to righteousness through obedience, forsaking major sins; however, they may unknowingly commit faults due to circumstances. They reprimand their conscience, experience regret, and resolve to avoid temptations. Such a soul is considered 'reproachful' as it chastises unintentional misconduct.

This rank is below the first category but remains lofty, encompassing most repentant individuals. The objective is for their virtuous actions to surpass their misdeeds, as complete avoidance of bad deeds is improbable. Allah assures those in this category that avoiding major sins and seeking forgiveness upon their errors will earn His love and praise, as He cherishes their repentance despite their shortcomings. As stated, '... and God loves the good doers; who, when they commit an indecency or wrong themselves, remember God, and pray forgiveness for their sins.'

This statement provides conclusive evidence that this extent neither invalidates repentance nor classifies the individual among those who persist in sin.

The Third Category

The individual repents and endeavours to adhere to the righteous path; however, he occasionally succumbs to temptations, resulting in sinful acts. Despite these lapses, he persists in obedience and refrains from many sins, even though he harbours desires and possesses the capability to commit them. His principal challenge is yielding to one or two temptations, trusting that Allah will help him resist evil. After satisfying these desires, he experiences remorse and intends to repent, but continues to defer. Such an individual is referred to as 'the luring soul,' and Allah characterises him as mixing good with evil. If he remains steadfast and dislikes his sins, Allah may accept his repentance. Nevertheless, postponing repentance can be perilous, as he might die before repenting, thereby risking an adverse ending.

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The Fourth Category

The individual demonstrates repentance and temporarily adheres to righteousness; however, he subsequently reverts to sinful behaviour without remorse or the intention to repent. Such a person belongs to those who persist in sin, and his soul is one that incites evil and shuns goodness. It is concerning that such an individual might encounter a detrimental end. Nevertheless, his ultimate fate rests with Allah; if Allah concludes his life as an unbeliever, he will endure eternal suffering. Conversely, if his final moments are blessed, he will depart from this life professing the oneness of God and may be spared from eternal damnation, even if only after some time.

What a Repentant Person Does after Sinning

Never look down upon even the smallest act of obedience, lest you neglect it; and never treat even the smallest sin as insignificant, lest you fall into it without concern.

Seeking Allah's forgiveness with the heart is a righteous deed that will be treasured with Him. Seeking forgiveness with the tongue is likewise a righteous act, for even when uttered in a state of distraction, it is still better than occupying the tongue with backbiting, idle speech, or vain talk. Indeed, it is even better than remaining silent.

Regarding the saying of Allah, exalted is He: **{But Allah would not punish them while you were among them, nor would He punish them while they sought forgiveness.}** a Companion of the Prophet said: **"We were once given two safeguards. One of them has gone—the Messenger of Allah being among us—but the second still remains. If it too is taken away, we will perish."**

Good deeds that erase bad deeds may be performed through the **heart**, the **tongue**, or the **limbs**. The good deed that counters a sin should not only oppose the wrongdoing itself but also address the causes that led to it. The expiation of the **heart** is to turn sincerely to Allah, exalted is He, imploring His mercy and asking for His forgiveness and pardon. The expiation of the **tongue** is to admit one's wrongdoing and seek forgiveness for it, saying: **"My Lord, I have wronged myself and committed evil, so please forgive my sins."** The expiation of the **limbs** is through righteous actions such as acts of obedience, giving in charity, and other forms of worship.

The essence of the matter is that repentance brings about **two great outcomes: first**, it expiates sins until a person becomes as though they had never sinned; and **second**, it elevates them to **lofty spiritual ranks**. The expiation of sins varies in degree. Some forms of expiation completely erase the sin itself, while others only lessen its burden. This difference corresponds to the varying درجات of repentance. Seeking forgiveness with the heart is never without benefit, so do not imagine that its presence is the same as its absence. Rather, the people of reflection and those endowed with living hearts know with certainty that the saying of Allah, exalted is He, is true: **{And whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it.}**

They know that not even the smallest measure of goodness is without effect, just as even a single grain of barley has weight when placed on a scale. For if the first grain carried no weight at all, then the second would carry none either, and the balance would never tip—even if loads of barley were added. This is self-evidently impossible.

Therefore, never look down on even the smallest act of obedience, lest you abandon it; and never regard even the slightest sin as insignificant, lest you fail to guard yourself against it. Imploring Allah and seeking His forgiveness with the heart is a righteous deed that will surely be found with Him. Indeed, seeking forgiveness with the tongue is also a righteous act. Even when the tongue utters words of repentance in a state of distraction, it is still better than using it for backbiting a fellow Muslim or indulging in excessive and idle speech. In fact, it is better than silence itself. Regarding the saying of Allah, exalted is He, **{But Allah would not punish them while you were among them, nor would He punish them while they sought forgiveness}**, one of the Companions said: **"We once had two sources of**

safety. One of them has gone—the Messenger being among us—but the second still remains. If it too departs, we will perish.”

4. The Treatment by Repentance and the Cure for Persistence

A Summary Description of the Disease

The only reasons for persistently engaging in sin are negligence and desire. Negligence can be remedied solely through the acquisition of knowledge, whereas desire can only be subdued through patience and by eliminating the triggers that provoke it.

Therefore, this treatment is founded on two principles: knowledge and patience, both of which necessitate elucidation. Knowledge, in its entirety, functions as a remedy for the ailments of the heart; however, each illness correlates with specific knowledge pertinent to it, and the same applies to persistent sin.

The Physician and the Method of Treatment

In this context, learned individuals are considered the true physicians. However, if a physician lacks knowledge or skill, the medications they prescribe might do more harm than good due to possible misuse. Likewise, hope and fear serve as two separate therapeutic strategies, but they are used to treat two different groups of people with opposite ailments.

A person overwhelmed by fear, to the point of abandoning life and making things difficult for himself, can find balance again by being reminded of hope. Likewise, someone who sins repeatedly but feels too despairing to repent should be encouraged with hope until they accept and seek forgiveness. However, attempting to inspire hope in those overly attached to sin is like feeding honey to a hot-tempered person—ineffective and unwise, because the real issue is their ignorance of the true remedies.

The four types of treatments that are effective in resolving persistent issues and motivating individuals to forsake sins are as follows:

The initial step involves citing Qur'anic verses that admonish sinners and transgressors, in addition to Prophetic traditions and sayings of the Predecessors that criticize sinners and endorse repentance. These references are abundant.

The second method involves sharing the stories of prophets and righteous ancestors, highlighting the hardships they endured because of certain missteps—like Adam's disobedience and his banishment from paradise. These stories leave a strong impression and are meant to benefit people's hearts. Many such stories exist, and the Qur'an presents them not just for nighttime tales but to serve as lessons and warnings. They show that if prophets, peace be upon them, are not excused for the slightest errors, then others cannot expect forgiveness for major sins.

The third point is to remind sinners that it is likely their punishment has already been inflicted in this world, with all calamities befalling them stemming from their sins. Many servants neglect the afterlife because of their profound ignorance, yet they still fear Allah's punishment in this life. These individuals should be cautious of such punishment, as in most cases, a change in their fortunes is very possible in this worldly life.

The fourth point emphasizes addressing the legal penalties connected to personal transgressions such as drinking wine, fornication, arrogance, haughtiness, and rancor. A knowledgeable person should be like a skilled doctor; discussing irrelevant topics to the listener is comparable to giving medicine for the wrong purpose. A doctor diagnoses internal issues by observing clues such as the pulse, external appearance, and movements, and then begins treatment. Likewise, he infers hidden traits from visible signs.

One should imitate Allah's Messenger; may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him. A man asked him, "Advise me, O Messenger of Allah, but please keep it brief." He responded, "Do not get angry." Another individual was also given advice: "Despair of what is in people's possession, for that is wealth, and be cautious of greed, for that leads to immediate poverty. Pray the prayer of someone who is about to die, and beware of that for which an excuse is sought." It appears the Prophet, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, observed signs of anger and greed in the first and second questioners, respectively.

Abundance of the Sick of Heart

The ailment of the hearts has become more prevalent than the ailment of the bodies due to three reasons.

The primary reason is that the individual who is unwell in heart does not recognize his illness.

The second reason is that the affliction of the heart is imperceptible, unlike that of the physical body. The consequence affecting the body results in death, which is visible to all and subject to natural fear. Conversely, the sinful consequence impacting the heart—the death of the heart—is concealed, thereby reducing people's deterrence from sins, even when they recognize them. This elucidates why individuals depend on Allah's mercy for the ailment of the heart, whilst attempting to treat the body independently.

The third and most significant cause is the shortage of physicians. These individuals are the knowledgeable professionals who, in contemporary times, have become severely ill themselves and have been unable to treat their own ailments. They take solace in the fact that illness has become a widespread condition, thus concealing their own deficiencies. Consequently, they are compelled to mislead others by presenting remedies that ultimately exacerbate their own sickness. This situation arises because love of worldly possessions is the mortal disease that has incapacitated all physicians. Their failure to warn others against this disease is rooted in the fear of being questioned: 'How is it that you prescribe treatments for others while neglecting your own?'

Indeed, the physicians have engaged in various misleading practices. It is regrettable that they fail to provide proper guidance through advice. Furthermore, their failure to implement necessary reforms has led to corruption. It would be preferable if they remained silent rather than speak without purpose. Their speech seems to serve only to arouse the desires of the masses and to win their hearts, often prioritizing hope over fear and emphasizing God's mercy. Consequently, individuals depart from the assemblies of admonition with increased confidence to commit transgressions and with greater trust in Allah's graciousness, exalted be He.

The Causes and Treatment of Persistence in Sin

Please note that giving in to sin is not due to a lack of faith, but rather its vulnerability. Every believer acknowledges that sin causes separation from Allah, the Most High, and can lead to punishment in the hereafter. However, there are two main factors that can lead a believer to commit sins.

The primary reason is that the retribution for sin is not immediate but rather intangible, thereby making the soul more susceptible to perceptions of immediacy. Consequently, the influence of anticipated punishment diminishes when compared with the effect of present circumstances.

The second point pertains to the fact that the desires leading to sin are inherently demanding and may appear overwhelming when they initially manifest. These desires often become exceedingly intense, exerting dominance over the (unrefined) soul through habitual repetition. Resisting immediate temptations while considering future consequences proves to be a formidable challenge for the soul. Allah, exalted is He, states: {No indeed; but you love the hasty world and leave the hereafter}. The Prophet Muhammad, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, underscored the seriousness of this matter by asserting: Paradise is surrounded by hardships, and hellfire by desires.

Therefore, the explicit reasons for persisting in sin while faith endures are the suppression of desire and the deferment of punishment to the afterlife. Not all individuals who drink cold water when ill, motivated by intense thirst, question the efficacy of medicine or consider it detrimental. Instead, such actions are driven by desire's dominion over them, and the suffering involved in resisting it becomes overwhelming, consequently reducing their awareness of future pain.

The third point posits that, in the majority of cases, no believing sinner lacks the intention to repent and to make amends for their wrongful actions through virtuous deeds, as they have been assured that such actions will offset previous transgressions. Nevertheless, human nature is governed by enduring hope, which leads individuals to postpone repentance and atonement for their sins.

The fourth point is that every believer believes sins inherently involve unavoidable punishment. Therefore, he commits sins and expects Allah's mercy, trusting in His generosity.

These four reasons elucidate why individuals persist in sinning despite maintaining their faith. I believe that the solution resides in reflection. The first reason pertains to the delay of punishment: individuals must recognise that all pending matters are imminent—their death is closer than their shoelaces, and the certainty of the Hour remains unknown. He should remind himself that, with regard to worldly affairs, he continually exhausts himself in the present out of fear of future uncertainties. Accordingly, he travels by sea and endures the hardships of journeying for profit, which he considers may be necessary in the future.

With this consideration, he can remedy the pleasure that has overwhelmed him and resolve to abstain from it, contemplating: 'If I am unable to forsake my pleasures during the few days of my life, how can I do so for eternity?' As for delaying repentance, this is addressed by reflecting on the fact that much of the suffering of hell's inhabitants is due to procrastination. Concerning the fourth reason, which is relying on Allah's pardon, exalted is He, it is comparable to a person who expends all his wealth and leaves himself and his family in destitution, while expecting that Allah will grant him a treasure in a wasteland. Such a person hopes for something quite possible, yet he is an utter fool and an ignoramus.