

Repentance

Repenting from sin by turning back to the Concealer of Faults and the Knower of the Unseen is the beginning of the path of spiritual travellers and the first step of the novices. Furthermore, turning back to goodness after falling into evil is a human exigency. He who devotes himself to goodness is close to the Requirer King, while the one who devotes himself to evil is a devil, and the person who avoids evil by turning to goodness is truly human.

Owing to the great importance of repentance in religion, it was necessary that it be treated at the beginning of the quarter on the Qualities Leading to Salvation. Its elucidation shall be treated by expounding on its **four pillars**:

1. The Reality of Repentance.
2. That which is Repented from (i.e. sins);
3. The Conditions of Repentance;
4. The Treatment by Repentance and the Cure for Persistence

1. The Reality of Repentance

An Exposition of the Reality of Repentance

Be aware that repentance encompasses three successive elements: knowledge, a state, and an action. Each of the initial two elements suggests what follows, in accordance with Allah's constant law within His realm—the motivating desire. Additionally, the solidity of the religious motivation is articulated, which derives from the understanding that desires are the opposites and adversaries of the pursuits of happiness both in this life and the hereafter.

Regarding knowledge, it entails understanding the gravity of the harm caused by sins and recognizing that they serve as a barrier between the servant and the Beloved. When the servant comprehensively realizes this, armed with a certainty that pervades his heart, such knowledge induces suffering due to the absence of the Beloved. If this absence results from his own actions, he will feel remorse for the deed that caused it, and this remorse is referred to as regret. When this remorse dominates and overcomes the heart, it manifests as a resolve or determination to refrain from a specific action within the present, past, and future contexts. **Its relation to the present** involves immediate cessation of the sin under consideration; its **connection to the future** is reflected in the intention to abstain from that sin for the duration of his life; and its **association with the past** is through reconciliation and restitution for past wrongs, provided they are reconcilable or remediable.

Therefore, knowledge, regret, and resolution regarding abstention in the present, future, and the restitution of past actions are three sequential concepts. The term 'repentance' collectively signifies all three. Nevertheless, the term 'repentance' is frequently used to refer solely to regret. In this regard, Allah's Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, stated: "Regret is repentance."

The Obligatoriness and Merit of Repentance

The obligation of repentance is evident from numerous Prophetic traditions and Qur'anic verses. Additionally, it becomes apparent, through spiritual insight granted by Allah to those whose hearts are illuminated with faith, that true felicity is found solely in the meeting with Allah, exalted is He. The only barriers to this divine encounter are the pursuits of worldly desires and the comfort found within this transient life.

Sins—those acts of turning away from Allah—are the primary reasons for one's distance from and concealment from Allah, exalted is He. Such individuals must recognise that abandoning this remoteness is essential to attaining God's proximity.

This transition can only be achieved through knowledge, remorse, and firm resolve. Without understanding that sins cause this separation, one will not experience regret or remorse; without remorse, turning back to Allah becomes unlikely. Repentance involves abandoning the sinful acts and making a resolute commitment not to revert to them. These principles are vital for reaching the Beloved. Allah, exalted is He, states: {And turn all together to God, O you believers; haply so you will prosper}, which is a comprehensive command. Furthermore, Allah, exalted, says: {Believers, turn to God in sincere repentance}, denoting a sincere and blemish-free return to Allah.

The virtue of repentance is derived from the statement of Allah, exalted is He: "Truly, God loves those who repent, and He loves those who cleanse themselves ..."

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, stated: 'Allah is more pleased with the repentance of a believing servant than a man who travels to a desolate, perilous land with his mount, carrying provisions of food and water. He rests his head and sleeps for a while; upon awakening, he discovers that his mount is gone. He searches for it, and as the heat and thirst intensify, he resolves to return to his original location and to sleep there until death. He then places his head on his arm in resignation. However, upon waking again, he finds his mount, laden with his provisions, standing right there. Allah, exalted be He, is more pleased with the repentance of the believing servant than the man is with seeing his mount.'

There is a consensus within the Muslim community that repentance is obligatory, as it entails the acknowledgement that sins and transgressions lead to destruction and distance oneself from Allah, exalted is He. This understanding is encompassed within the obligatory nature of faith.

The Obligatoriness of Repentance Instantly and Perpetually

It is unequivocal that repentance must be undertaken without delay, as recognizing the destructive nature of sins constitutes a fundamental aspect of faith, which is obligatory to acknowledge promptly. The consciousness of the harm inflicted by sin is solely essential to

motivate individuals to abandon such acts. An individual who does not abstain from sins lacks this component of faith, as exemplified in the saying of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him: 'The fornicator does not fornicate and still remain a believer at that moment when he is fornicating.' It is important to note that the faith referenced in this hadith does not pertain to the attributes or Oneness of Allah. These attributes are not negated by acts of fornication or transgressions; rather, faith is invalidated in this Prophetic tradition because fornication distances an individual from Allah, exalted is He, and provokes Allah's disapproval.

This situation is analogous to when a physician advises someone:

This is poison, do not swallow it.' If the individual then proceeds to swallow the substance, it can be inferred that they did so lacking faith. This deficiency of faith does not pertain to the existence of the physician or their status as such, but rather to the individual's disbelief that what they ingested was indeed a lethal poison. Clearly, no one consumes poison with full knowledge that it is poisonous. Therefore, a transgressor is necessarily deemed to be lacking in faith.

Furthermore, faith encompasses approximately seventy different categories, with the highest being the testimony that there is no deity but Allah, and the lowest involving the act of removing harmful objects from the street.

Transgressions concerning faith are comparable to detrimental nourishment for the body. Such harmful substances continually accumulate within the individual's gastrointestinal system until they begin to influence their disposition unexpectedly. Consequently, their mood will deteriorate, potentially leading to sudden illness and death. Similarly, transgressions and an adverse end are interconnected.

Please be advised that the apparent message of the Scripture indicates that the obligation of repentance is broadly applicable to all individuals and in all circumstances. Allah, exalted is He, states: {And turn all together to God. O you believers; haply so you will prosper ...}. His address is therefore generally applicable. The illumination of spiritual insight further guides individuals to this understanding, for repentance signifies turning away from the path that distances one from Allah and draws one toward Satan, and a sound intellect necessitates this.

The assertion that repentance is perpetually obligatory under all circumstances is evident from the fact that no individual is exempt from transgressing with his limbs. Even the prophets were not exempt and were required to repent, as documented in the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions. However, even when a person is sometimes immune to transgressing with his limbs, he is not immune to contemplating sin with his heart. Furthermore, when he is occasionally immune to this latter, he remains susceptible to Satan's insinuations, which lead to thoughts that divert him from the remembrance of Allah. All of these considerations indicate a deficiency, and this deficiency has its reasons.

It is virtually impossible for a human being to be entirely free from such a deficiency; however, individuals vary in the degree of this imperfection, even though it remains inevitable. For this reason, the Messenger of Allah, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, stated: 'My heart becomes burdened, and I seek forgiveness from Allah seventy times a day and night.' This is also the reason why Allah, exalted is He, honored him by saying: {...

that God may forgive thee thy former and thy latter sins ...}. If this is the case with him, how much more so with others?

It is important to recognize that, due to human nature, individuals are susceptible to the influence of desires. Repentance does not consist solely of abstaining from desires; rather, authentic repentance also involves making amends for previous transgressions. Each instance of indulgence in desire causes darkness to accumulate in the heart, akin to the blurriness produced when one's breath fogs a polished mirror. If the darkness of desire persists, it manifests as rust, comparable to condensation on a mirror that eventually turns into dirt. As Allah, exalted is He, states: {No indeed; but that they were earning has rusted upon their hearts ...}. Therefore, it is insufficient merely to refrain from desire in the future to rectify past indulgence; it is also necessary to seek the removal of the rust imprinted on the heart. The Holy Prophet, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, indicates this through his statement: "Follow a bad deed with a good one, and it will erase it."

Therefore, under no circumstances can a servant neglect the necessity of eliminating the imprint that sins leave on his heart by engaging in virtuous deeds that offset the effects of these sins. This must be done immediately to prevent one from becoming among those described by His saying, exalted be He: {And a barrier is set between them and that they desire}. Allah, exalted is He, indicates this when He states: {But God will never defer any soul when its term comes}. Allah, exalted is He, further affirms: {God shall turn only towards those who do evil in ignorance, then shortly repent; God will return towards those; God is All-knowing, All-wise. But God shall not turn towards those who do evil deeds until, when one of them is visited by death, he says, indeed now I repent.}

A Valid Repentance is Accepted

Any repentance that fulfills all its conditions is accepted, for the illumination of good deeds eradicates the darkness of sin from the heart's surface, and the darkness of transgression is powerless before the light of good deeds, just as the night's darkness yields to daylight. All that is required is for an individual to cleanse and purify oneself; in such cases, acceptance is inherently granted—precluding the unavoidable pre-eternal decree—and this is encapsulated in the saying of Allah, exalted is He: {Prosperous is he who purifies it}. He who believes that valid repentance cannot be accepted is akin to one who considers that the sun can rise without the dissipation of darkness.

As far as repentance is concerned, this exposition should suffice for individuals endowed with insight. Nevertheless, we shall reinforce this by citing relevant Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions, and sayings of the Predecessors, since any consideration not supported by the Qur'an or the Prophetic Sunnah cannot be regarded as reliable. Allah, exalted is He, states: {It is He who accepts repentance from His servants, and pardons evil deeds.}

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, stated: 'Allah is most pleased with repentance... , and happiness signifies more than mere acceptance, as it serves as evidence of acceptance and even surpasses it. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, also mentioned: 'Allah, the Glorious and Majestic, extends His hand during the night so that those who have transgressed during the day may repent;

and He extends His hand during the day so that those who have transgressed during the night may repent.

“This ongoing process will continue until the sun rises from its western setting.” The extending of the hand serves as a metaphor for seeking repentance, and Allah would not extend His hand to repentant transgressors unless He was willing to accept it. Conversely, Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyib stated: "Allah, exalted is He, revealed the verse {..for He is All-forgiving to those who are penitent . . .} concerning a man who commits sins and subsequently repents, and then sins again and repents once more."