

Repentance and Self-cleansing

Prevention and refrainment from sins is the best way for attaining self-refinement. A person who has never been contaminated by Sins and possesses his original purity and righteousness certainly is far superior than a sinner who has repented after committing a sin.

The person who has not yet tasted the pleasure of sin and is not used to it may refrain himself from sinning much more easier as compared to the one who has been contaminated by sins and now wants to refrain from them. The Commander of the Faithful Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said:

قال على عليه السلام: ترك الذنب أهون من طلب التوبه.

“Refraining from sin is far easier than repenting after sinning.”¹

But if a person becomes contaminated after sinning, he should not be disappointed from God's blessings because, the path of spiritual migration, self refinement, and ascent towards God-Almighty remains forever open and is never closed.

The Most Merciful and the Most Benevolent God-Almighty has kept the path of repentance always open for the sinners and have especially asked them to return towards Him after cleaning and purifying the self's tablet from the impurities and contamination of sins through the water of repentance. God-Almighty said in the Holy Qur'an:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ
الرَّحِيمُ

“Say: O My slaves who have been prodigal to their own hurt. Despair not of the Mercy of God, who forgiveth all sins. Lo! He is the forgiving the Merciful. (39:53)

And said:

وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ ۚ أَنَّهُ مَن عَمِلَ مِنكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِن بَعْدِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَنَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

“And when those who believe in our revelations come unto thee say: Peace be unto you! Your Lord hath prescribed for Himself Mercy, that, those whoso of you doth evil and repenteth afterward thereof and doeth right, (for him) Lo ! God is forgiving, Merciful. (6:54)

1. The Need for Repentance

I don't imagine that there exists a thing which is more essential for a sinner than the repentance. The one who believes in God, Prophet, Resurrection, Rewards and Punishment, Accounting of Deeds, Paradise, and Hell does not contradict the urgency and necessity of repentance. Then, how come are, we negligent from repentance, inspite of being knowledgeable about the self and the sins committed by him?

Don't we believe in the existence of Resurrection, Accounting of Deeds and Hell's punishments? Or, Do we contradict the God's promise that He will fill the Hell with sinners? Through sinning the human self becomes dark, black, and contaminated, even there is possibility of loosing the human face and turning into a brute animal.

Then how could we still expect finding the path leading towards Gods–Almighty and sitting in the company of His favorite saints in Paradise with such contaminated, darkened, and polluted self? Because, of indulgence into sins the straight path of human exaltedness and ascension towards God–Almighty has been lost, and now we are wandering into the darkest valleys of ignorance and deviations.

We have parted from God–Almighty and have become close to Satan. In spite of all that we are still expecting to receive eternal salvation in the Next World and would be blessed with Divine bounties in the Paradise! What a wishful and immature thinking indeed?

Therefore, for a sinner who is concerned about his prosperity and salvation there is no choice left except to repent and return towards God–Almighty. This is one of the great blessing of God–Almighty that the path of repentance has been left opened for his servants. A person who has been poisoned does not allow the least delay in his being taken to the hospital for treatment, because, he knows that any negligence would result in his quick demise.

Similarly, sins for human–self are far more fatal than the most deadly poison for human body. If, a poison could threaten the worldly life of a person quickly, sinning would inflict an eternal doom upon the self and would result in the destruction of his eternal life.

If poisoning results in cutting off a person's connection with the transient world instantaneously, likewise sinning makes a person far removed from God–Almighty depriving him from the God's Countenance and Nearness. Therefore, repentance and return to God–Almighty for us is something more urgent and essential than any thing else, because, our eternal prosperity and salvation depends upon it. God–Almighty said in the Holy Qur'an:

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

“And turn unto God–Almighty together, O believers in order that you may succeed. (24: 31)”

And said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيُدْخِلَكُم جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ

“Oh ye who believe! Turn unto God–Almighty in sincere repentance! It may be that your Lord will remit from your evil deeds and bring you into Gardens underneath which rivers flow. (66:8)”

The Holy Prophet (S) said:

قال رسول الله (ص): لكل دا دوا ودوا الذنوب الاستغفار

“There is a medicine for each pain and the medicine for sins is repentance.”²

Imam al–Sadiq (a.s.) said:

قال الصادق عليه السلام: تاخير التوبة اغترار، وطول التسويف حيرة الاعتلال على الله هلكة والاصرار على الذنوب أمن لمكر الله ولا يامن مكر الله على القوم الخاسرون

“Delaying repentance is a sort of arrogance and deceit; continuation of delay results in confusion and astonishment; excuses in front of God–Almighty is total destruction and persistence in sinning is due to feeling secure against Divine punishment and except the people who are losers no one else feels secure against it.”³

In the light of above it would better that we should take an in–depth look within our lives; should remember all our past sins and transgressions; should ponder about the ultimate consequences; should think about the accounting of our deeds and being ashamed before God–Almighty and being insulted in front of angels and mankind; we must momentary manifest before our sight the horrible torture of Hell

and deprivation from the God's Countenance.

This should create a transformation and internal revolution in our lives encouraging us to repent immediately and should return towards God–Almighty. All the past sins and transgressions should be washed with the pure life–giving refreshing water of repentance.

All the self's impurities and contamination must be set aside and forgotten; a firm decision should be made, to refrain from sins to strive for collection of provisions for Hereafter, and start marching upon the path of spiritual ascent towards God–Almighty.

But would Satan leave us alone so easily? Would he ever permit us to repent and return towards God–Almighty? The same Satan who reduced us to indulge into sinning would also prevent us from repentance; would manifest sinning something as minor offense and insignificant; would wipe them out thoroughly from” our mental memory in a manner as though they never happened at all; would completely set aside thoughts related to death, account of deeds and punishments from our mind, keeping us amused in worldly allurements.

So that we never think about the repentance until death approaches suddenly and, thus, being forced to leave this world with a self, contaminated with sins. Woe upon us, our negligence, and misfortune! !

2. Acceptance of Repentance

If repentance is indeed offered correctly it would receive Divine acceptance certainly which is one of the most unique favor of the Most–Compassionate and Most–Merciful Lord. Because, He has not created his servants for Hell and its tortures, rather has created us for Paradise and its eternal prosperity.

Divine Messengers were assigned to guide the mankind towards the path of salvation and to invite the sinners towards repentance and return to God–Almighty. The door of repentance and return always remains opened for everyone inviting them to enter into it.

Divine messengers and saints throughout the human history continuously motivated the mankind towards repentance. The Most Compassionate and the Most–Merciful Lord in plenty of Qur’anic verses invites the sinners to return to Him and had promised them to accept their repentance and His promises are not lies.

The Holy Prophet (S) and Infallible Imams (a.s.) through hundreds of traditions have invited the mankind for repentance and return towards God–Almighty, thus, making them hopeful of Divine blessings. Following are few examples:

God–Almighty said in Holy Qur’an:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَقْبَلُ التَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَعْفُو عَنِ السَّيِّئَاتِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ

“And He it is who accepteth repentance from His bondsmen, and pardoneth the evil deeds and knoweth what ye do. (42:25)

And said:

وَإِنِّي لَغَفَّارٌ لِّمَن تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا ثُمَّ اهْتَدَىٰ

“And lo! Verily I am forgiving towards him who repenteth and believeth and doth good, and afterward walketh aright. (20:82)

And said:

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

“And those who, when they do an evil thing or wrong themselves, remember God–Almighty and implies forgiveness for their sins –who forgiveth sins save God–Almighty only? And will not knowingly repeat (the wrong) they did. (3: 135)

Imam Baqir (a.s.) said:

قال ابو جعفر عليه السلام: التائب من الذنب كمن لا ذنب له والمقيم على الذنب وهو مستغفر منه كالمستهز.

“After repenting a person becomes like some one who has never sinned, and the one who is continuing sinning while reciting the phrase of repentance upon his tongue is like someone who ridicules himself.”[4](#)

There are plenty of verses and traditions dealing with this matter and therefore, one should not have any reservation regarding the acceptance of repentance. Not only God–Almighty accepts repentance from a sinner but also loves him for undertaking this bold initiative. God–Almighty said in the Holy Qur’an:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

“Truly God–Almighty loveth, those who turn unto him, and loveth those who have a care of cleanness. (2:222)

Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) said:

قال ابو جعفر عليه السلام: ان الله اشد فرحا بتوبة عبده من رجل اضل رحلته وزاده في ليلة ظلما فوجدها فاليه

اشد فرحا بتوبة عبده من ذلك الرجل براحلته حين وجدها.

“The happiness of God–Almighty from seeing a sinner repenting is much more than the joy of a lone traveler who finds his missing animal together with the provisions of journey in a dark night.”⁵

Imam Al– Sadiq (a.s.) said:

قال ابو عبدالله (ع): اذا تاب العبد توبة نصوحا احبه الله فستر عليه فقلت و كيف يستر عليه؟ قال ينسي ملكيه ما كانا يكتبان عليه و يوحى الله الى جوارحه و الى بقاع الارض ان اكتمى عليه ذنوبه فيلقى الله عزوجل حين يلقاه و ليس شىء يشهد عليه بشىء من الذنوب.

“When a servant of God offers pure and firm repentance, God–Almighty loves him and deletes all of his past sins. The narrator asked; ‘Oh son of Prophet! How are the sins deleted ?’

‘The two angels responsible for writing of deeds forget about his sins, simultaneously, God–Almighty orders his bodily parts, limbs, and different places upon earth to cancel his sins from their register of deeds. Thus, he meets God–Almighty in a manner whereby nobody and nothing is a witness to his sins. ‘
Replied the Imam.”⁶

3. What is Repentance?

Repentance could be defined as a feeling of being ashamed, sorry, and regretful for past sins. Some one who is indeed ashamed by heart for his past sins may truly be called as a repentant. The Holy Prophet (S) said:

“Feeling ashamed and being sorry (for past deeds) is repentance.”⁷

It is true that God–Almighty accepts repentance and forgives the past sins, but simply recital of the sentence: “I ask God to forgive me” (*Astaghferullah*), being ashamed and regretful or even. crying for past sins may not be considered as sufficient for a pure and sincere repentance, but with the existence of the following three symptoms the repentance could be considered as true and realistic:

- **First:** He must be disgusted by heart for his. past sins and his self should have a feeling of shame, regret, and sorrow.
- **Second:** He must take a firm decision not to indulge into sinning in the future.
- **Third:** If, because of indulgence into a particular sin, he has done something, which could be compensated then he must take a firm decision for its compensation. For example: If he owes dues of people, has usurped property or stolen money, must decide to return it to its owner in the first available opportunity. In case he is not in a position to pay at present, he should try to get the owners consent or

satisfaction through whatever means at his disposal.

If he has committed backbiting against some one, should seek his pardon, if he has oppressed some one, should try to redress the aggrieved. If religious dues have not been paid he must arrange for their payment, and if the daily prayers and the fasting have been missed, he must perform them as make-up (*qadha*) obligations.

If some one has undertaken all the above steps, then he may truly be called as a sincere repentant, who is indeed ashamed for his past deeds and such atonement certainly receives God's acceptance.

But if some one recites the sentence: "I seek God's forgiveness" upon his tongue, but by heart is not ashamed for his past sins, does not decide for avoidance of future sins and is not ready to compensate for those sins which could have been compensated –then such a person has not atoned and should not expect acceptance of his repentance, even though he might appear in a prayer assembly and, thus, being affected sentimentally might shed some tears or may cry loudly.

A person recited the sentence: "I seek God's forgiveness" in the presence of the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali (a.s.). The Imam said:

عن امير المؤمنين عليه السلام: ان قاتلا قال بحضرته: استغفر الله, فقال: ثكلتك امك اتدري ما الاسغفار درجة العليين و هو اسم واقع على ستة معان اولها الندم على ما مضى و الثاني العزم على ترك العود اليه ابدا و الثالث ان تؤدى الى المخلوقين حقوقهم حتى تلقى الله املس ليس عليك تبعه و الرابع ان تعمد الى كلي فريضة عليك ضيعتها فتؤدى حقها و الخامس ان تعمد الى اللحم الذى نبت على السحت فبذيه بالاحزان حتى يلصق الجلد بالعظم وينشأ بينهما لحم جديد و السادس ان تذيب الجسم الام الطاعة كما اذقته حلاوة المعصية, فعند ذلك تقول: استغفر الله

"May your mother lament for you, do you know what is repentance ? The repentance can be defined with the following six parameters:

- 1. Feeling ashamed and regretful for the past sins.*
- 2. Taking firm decision for avoidance of sins forever.*
- 3. Paying all the dues of the people so that when he meets God–Almighty on the Resurrection Day, he does not have any pending claim against him.*
- 4. All the religious obligations (Wajibat) which have not been performed in the past should be discharged as makeup (Qadha) obligations.*
- 5. Should feel so sad about his past sins that all the bodily flesh formed as a result of eating forbidden (Haram) should be melted in a manner that skin should touch the bare bones until the new flesh is reformed again.*

6. The inconvenience and hardship of worshipping should be imposed upon the body as a compensation for the pleasures it fasted because of past sins. Only after performing all the above, you may recite the sentence I seek forgiveness from God. ”[8](#)

Satan is so deceitful that sometimes he even deceives a person regarding repentance. It is possible that a sinner might attend a prayer gathering and after being effected sentimentally may shed some tears or may cry. Then Satan would say:

Great, wonderful! What a great thing have you done? You have already atoned and all your sins have been cleaned. While in reality, such a person neither is ashamed from sinning by heart nor has decided not to commit sins any more, and to remit dues of the creditors. Such act does not constitute a real repentance and would not result one's attaining self-purification and eternal salvation. Such a person has not refrained from sins and has not returned to God-Almighty.

4. Things which Require Repentance

What is sin and what sins should be repented? The answer is that every thing which stops a man from journeying towards God-Almighty, making him attached to worldly-allurements, thus, preventing from repentance should be considered as sin, must be avoided, and self should be thoroughly cleaned from its contamination. The sins might be classified into following two categories:

4.1. Moral Sins

Moral abjectness and obscene characteristics results in self's contamination, thus, preventing him to follow the straight path of human exaltedness leading towards God's Nearness and Countenance. Moral abjectness if gets deep rooted within self gradually becomes his characteristic resulting in metamorphism of his inner essence.

It even influences the ideal; of “what to be” for a human being. Moral sins, because of the excuse of their being only moral, should not be treated as smaller and insignificant, and, thus, being negligent for their repentance, instead self-purification for them is something necessary and of vital importance.

The moral-abjectness consists of: Hypocrisy, wrath, arrogance, egotism, harshness, oppression, deceit and treachery, back-biting, accusation, criticizing, fault-finding, slander, breach of promise, lying, love of world, greed stinginess, parents rights, cutting family ties, ungratefulness, extravagance, jealousy, vilification, cursing, and other obscene characteristics.

Hundreds of Qur'anic Verses and traditions condemn these characteristics and describe their prevention, treatment, symptoms and worldly and eternal punishments. Since this matter has been discussed in details in several books of ethics, it would not be appropriate for us to discuss here, rather the readers are advised to refer to the literature dealing with ethics.

4.2. Practical Sins

Consist of the following: stealing, murder, adultery, homosexuality, paying and receiving interest, usurpation of public property, cheating, running away from the battlefield in a mandatory struggle, breach of trust, drinking alcoholic beverages, eating pork and other forbidden meats, gambling, false testimony or oath, accusing some innocent person for adultery, refraining from offering mandatory prayers and fasting, refraining from Haj Pilgrimage, refraining from the duty to encourage good and forbid evil (*Amr bil-Marooif wa Nahi al-Munkar*), eating unclean food, and other forbidden things.

These sins have been described in detail in the books of traditions and jurisprudence and therefore, it would not be appropriate to discuss them here in detail, rather the readers are advised to refer to the relevant literature.

These are some famous sins which should be avoided by a human being and in case of indulgence he should offer repentance and should return to God–Almighty. Apart from these there are some other types of sins which are not famous and have not been introduced as sins but for God's most favorite saints and exalted pious personalities they are counted as sins e.g.: refraining from recommended acts (*Mostahbbat*), performing acts which are supposed to be avoided although not absolutely unlawful (*Makroohat*), sinful thoughts, attention towards other than God, and selfish whims and Satanic whispers which prevents them from God's Remembrance.

All of them are considered as sins for God's favorite saints and they offer repentance for them. Even higher than the above is their negligence and omission in true recognition of God–Almighty, His essence, Attributes and Actions, which are the pre–requisite for the existence of every created being is regarded as a sin for them and realizing this omission they tremble in fear, shed tears, and offer repentance to return towards God. The repentance offered by the prophets and Infallible Imams (a.s.) might belong to this category. The Holy Prophet (S) had said:

قال النبي (ص): انه ليغان على قلبي حتى استغفرالله في اليوم و اللية سبعين مرة

*“Sometimes it happens that the darkness approaches my heart, and because of this reason I offer repentance seventy times every day.”*⁹

Imam al–Sadiq (a.s.) said:

قال الصادق عليه السلام: ان رسول الله صلي الله عليه وآله كان يتوب الى الله في كل يوم سبعين مرة من غير ذنب.

“The Holy Prophet (S) used to offer repentance seventy times a day, while he had not committed any sin

at all.”^{[10](#)}

- ^{[1](#)}. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 73, p-364.
- ^{[2](#)}. Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 11,p-354.
- ^{[3](#)}. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 73, p-365.
- ^{[4](#)}. al Kafi, vol. 2, p-435.
- ^{[5](#)}. al-Kafi, vol. 2, p-436.
- ^{[6](#)}. al-Kafi, vol. 2, p.-436.
- ^{[7](#)}. Haqayaq, p-286.
- ^{[8](#)}. Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 11, p.361.
- ^{[9](#)}. Muhjatteh, vol. 7, p-71.
- ^{[10](#)}. al-Kafi, vol. 2, p-450.

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