

Repentance in Language, Law and Meaning

Generally, repentance means to give up sin and is the best way of expressing an apology. Thus an apology is of three kinds:

Either the one apologizing says: 'I did not do'.

Or says: 'I did wrong and condemn the action' and, indeed, gives it up. This last step is called 'repentance'.

Repentance in law means to give up sin for its wickedness; to regret the committed sin and to make the decision not to repeat to it. Thus, whenever these above mentioned points are achieved, the conditions of repentance will be complete.

When one repents to Allah, he should remember what to do in return:

"... and turn (repentant) to Allah all, O believers, so that you may be successful." (Holy Qur'an, 24:31)

"Will they not then turn to Allah and ask His forgiveness? And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (Holy Qur'an, 5:74)

"Then Allah turned to them mercifully ..." (Holy Qur'an, 5:71)

This means before making his repentance to Him. A repentant is one who seeks and accepts repentance. On the one hand, man is the one who repents to Allah; on the other, He turns towards man mercifully.

A repentant is one who repents much and gives up his sins, gradually, until he leaves them, altogether. It may also be said that Allah is He Who frequently accepts His servants' repentance. He says:

"Whoever repents, and does righteous deeds has surely turned to Allah in goodly conversion." (Holy Qur'an, 25: 71)

i.e., an absolute repentance which means to choose between giving up wickedness and the searching for beauty:

“On Him I have put my trust and unto Him is my return. Verily He is the Oft-Pardoning, the All-Merciful.” 1 (Holy Qur’an, 13:30)

Repentance in the Arabic language, means to apologize for doing wickedness, to confess committing it and, also, to promise to give it up, and not return to it. It is the best form of an apology, coupled with righteousness and remaining innocent from doing it.

Repentance in jurisprudence means: “The return from disobedience to obedience with the intention of seeking the absolute approach to Allah, the Most High.”

This return or change can be applied to all actions, speech and behaviour emerging from man and which influences his thoughts, sensations and feelings.

Repentance, in a factual analysis, means transition and change in life and the nature of behaviour, because it is the result of an essential, ideological and psychological change which occurs deep within man.

The acceptance of repentance in its reality expresses Allah's love for His servants and the perfectness of His attributes of forgiveness and mercy.

It, also, expresses Allah's good will and the continuation of His eminence and goodness over man's way of life and to be included in goodness as it came from the 'hand' of its Creator; far from any deviation, haughtiness and deterioration found in the labyrinths of evil and corruption.

Repentance in legitimacy of its existence and man's acceptance of the consequences resulting therefrom, as well as the practical impacts produced by this existence, indicates the greatness of Allah's power, and the possibility of His estimation of the world; expresses the Almighty Allah's ability to forgive in the sphere of universal correlation and existential order without causing an imbalance in the equilibrium of an action or the consequences resulting therefrom.

He, the Exalted, through His wisdom, made the human self a source for human action. Any action starts from an imagination. Thus, the psychological tendency towards any action that is to be done and, then, the choosing of it and the deciding to perform it in preparation of its occurrence, stipulates its regularity in the series of causes and the general universal results.

Thus, man's endurance for the results of an action remains permanent as long as there is a psychological and ideological connection and bodily effort in its personification to bring his essence into existence. Then the connection between an action and its performer remains due to the fact that the action makes its impression on self with a negative and objective achievement occurring outside the will of good...as an extension for the action, itself, and his will.

Therefore, no one has the power to accept repentance; that which nullifies the impact of an action, or to think oneself exempt from responsibility after its occurrence except the One Who created the worlds and their systems and the one who can deal with it and overcome it and removes what He wishes and sets what He wishes. The Almighty Allah says:

“His Command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it, Be, and it is.” (Holy Qur’an, 36:82)

“... Allah indeed does what He pleases.” (Holy Qur’an, 22: 14)

The repentance from the Almighty Allah on His servants means: The acceptance of man's apology and the removing of the results which may occur upon him genetically and penalty.

The Most High says:

“... Surely good deeds tab away evil deeds. This a reminder for the mindful.”(Holy Qur’an, 11:114)

Among the system of soul and behaviour, which the Almighty Allah has made, is that the will of good and behavioral extension are able in the factual world of existence, to eliminate that which what was caused by the will of evil and manifest it in the outside world with His leave and will.

According to the logic of constitutional existence, without the Almighty Allah's legislation through His Mercy and Kindness, there would be no repentance, and man's bearing the results of his deeds would be in harmony with the rules of justice even in the case of man's regretting or asking forgiveness or repentance.

How beautifully Imam Ali bin Al-Hussein (a.s.) describes this idea, in detail, in one of his supplications:

“... he does not deny Your Justice, O Lord, if You punish him, He deems not Your Forgiveness too great, if You forgive him and pity him for verily You, the Gracious Master, Who does not deem it difficult to forgive great sins ...” [2](#)

And, also, he (a.s.) say:

“...I could not deserve, thereby, the obliteration of a single sin out of all my sins! And if You were to forgive me when I should deserve Your Forgiveness and pardon me when I should merit Your Pardon, verily it would not be due to me on account of merit, nor do I deserve it on account of worth for my recompense from You, for the first thing wherein I disobeyed You, was Hell Fire. So, if You chastise me, You would not be unjust to me.”[3](#)

This is a fact attained by modern research and scientific studies and, in which, it is proved that every deed made by man or others, leaves traces and distinguishable movements which are continually repeated in this universe, as long as it exists, because this universe acts like a recorder; recording every deed and movement.

The Holy Qur'an records this fact, which is connected with the universal existence, by saying:

“And the book is placed, and you see the guilty fearing for what is in it, and they say: O woe to us! What a book is this! It leaves out neither a small thing nor a great one, but numbers them (all), and they find what they did confronting them. And your Lord wrongs not anyone.” (Holy Qur'an, 18:49)

“On the Day when Allah will raise them altogether, then inform them of what they did. Allah, words it, while they forget it, and Allah is witness over all things.” (Holy Qur'an, 58:6)

“Surely We give life to the dead, and We write down that which they send before and their footprints, and We record everything in a clear writing.” (Holy Qur'an, 36:12)

“This is Our record that speaks against you with truth. Surely We wrote what you did.” (Holy Qur'an, 45:29)

Thus, man is not eligible for such acceptance of His repentance, nor is it obligatory for Allah to accept his repentance because the foundation in the world of existence, is that there should be regularity, which coincides with Allah's way and adheres to His laws; while deviation and irregularity both contradict this will and remains an irregular declarative testimony for its performer. Therefore, it is not also obligatory for Allah, after sending down the messengers, heavenly Holy Books, warnings and explanations, to eliminate for man his sins or to remove their consequences and punishments.

But, Allah wished to bestow His blessings on His servants through His kindness and His mercy, to eliminate for them the outcomes of their deeds from the record of existence. He, the Almighty, addresses people thus:

“Say: O My servants who have been prodigal regarding their souls, despair not of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives sins altogether. He is indeed the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.” (Holy Qur'an, 39:53)

How delicately Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) explains this fact:

*“If a man sincerely repents, surely Allah will love and protect him. ' Once, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) was asked on how Allah protects man (the repentant). He (a.s.) responded: 'Allah will make His angels (who records his deeds) forget to record his sins and will order his organs and all areas of the land to conceal for him his sins. Therefore, when he meets his Creator on the Day of Resurrection, no one will bear witness against him concerning his sins.”*⁴

This saying and the two above mentioned verses lay stress on the relationship of human action and its genetic connection with universe and with the world around it, in addition to the existence of psychological and intellectual relation in respect to its performer.

Indeed, this saying expresses the force which records and preserves the outcome by an angel⁵ and, also, it considers the bodily existence of man, as a natural existence, and the areas of land as a spatial dimension to the action. Verily, all these will be affected with movement and action and, then, it will be recorded.

Through repentance, man's innocence with his Lord against his evil deed is achieved. Thus, Allah eliminates such a factual outcome after man's intellectual and psychological root is confused and withdraws from it. It will be eliminated from the record of existence by a Powerful Divine Will; above the systems of existence and the laws of his deed, and its outcome will be stopped, despite of its happening on the Day when the universe, itself, will cast its own records and registers of human activities and deeds and counts their outcome along with other universal events, and then, again, repeats the cycle:

“And when the books (records) are spread.” (Holy Qur’an, 81:10)

“And as for him who is given his book in his left hand – he will say: O would that my book had not been given to me!” (Holy Qur’an, 69:25)

“Read your book Your own soul is Sufficient as a reckoner against you this Day.” (Holy Qur’an, 17:14) (Holy Qur’an, 17:14)

^{1.} Al-Raghib Al-Esfahani, al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur’an, Chapter On Repentance.

^{2.} Al-Sahifah Al-Sajjadiyah, p. 282, English Version

^{3.} Ibid, Supplication No. 16, p. 60, section 31.

^{4.} Muhammad Mehdi Al-Naraq, Jami' al-Sa'adat (The Collector of Felicities), vol. 3, p- 60.

^{5.} The existence of two angels who are responsible for recording man's actions is among the essential principles of Islamic Ideology; supported by the Holy Qur’an and Prophetic Tradition (Sunnah).

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