

TAWBA– REPENTANCE

QUR'AN - (The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Ünal)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

Surely God loves those who turn to Him in sincere repentance (of past sins and errors), and He loves those who cleanse themselves. (Surah Al-Baqarah 222)¹

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ
لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ
وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ

Those (angels) who bear the Supreme Throne (of God), and the others around it glorify their Lord with His praise; and they believe in Him (as the Unique Deity, Lord, and Sovereign of all creation), and ask for His forgiveness for those (among His creation) who believe, saying: "Our Lord! You embrace all things with mercy and knowledge (having perfect knowledge of every creature's need, and answering that need with mercy), so forgive those who repent (of their sins) and follow Your way, and protect them from the punishment of the Blazing Flame. (Surah Al – Mumin, 7)²

وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَدْعُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ وَلَا يَقْتُلُونَ النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ
وَلَا يَزْنُونَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ يَلْقَ أَثَامًا () يُضَاعَفْ لَهُ الْعَذَابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَيَخْلُدْ فِيهِ
مُهَانًا () إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ
وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

And who invoke no other deity along with God, and do not kill any soul which God has made forbidden except by right (for just cause and after due process), and do not commit unlawful sexual intercourse. Whoever commits any of these will face a severe penalty. His punishment will be greater on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide in it in ignominy, except he who gives up his way in repentance and believes (without associating partners with God), and does good, righteous deeds such are those whose (past) evil deeds God will efface and record virtuous deeds in their place (and whose faculties which enabled the evil deeds He will change into enablers of virtuous deeds). God is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (Surah Al – Furqan, 68 – 70)³

¹ http://mquran.org/index.php?option=com_quran&action=viewayat&surano=2&min=220&show=10

² http://mquran.org/index.php?option=com_quran&action=viewayat&surano=40

³ http://mquran.org/index.php?option=com_quran&action=viewayat&surano=25&min=60&show=10

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا

O you who believe! Turn to God in sincere and reforming repentance. (Surah At – Tahrim, 8)⁴

HADITH

Narrated Al-Harith bin Suwaid:

`Abdullah bin Mas`ud related to us two narrations: One from the Prophet (ﷺ) and the other from himself, saying: A believer sees his sins as if he were sitting under a mountain which, he is afraid, may fall on him; whereas the wicked person considers his sins as flies passing over his nose and he just drives them away like this." Abu Shihab (the sub-narrator) moved his hand over his nose in illustration. (Ibn Mas`ud added): Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Allah is more pleased with the repentance of His slave than a man who encamps at a place where his life is jeopardized, but he has his riding beast carrying his food and water. He then rests his head and sleeps for a short while and wakes to find his riding beast gone. (He starts looking for it) and suffers from severe heat and thirst or what Allah wished (him to suffer from). He then says, 'I will go back to my place.' He returns and sleeps again, and then (getting up), he raises his head to find his riding beast standing beside him."⁵

It was narrated from Safwan bin `Assal that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

"Towards the west (i.e., the place of the setting of the sun) there is an open door, seventy years wide. That door will remain open for repentance until the sun rises from this direction. When it rises from this direction, faith will not benefit any soul that did not believe before or earn anything good through its faith."⁶

Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated:

Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "He who repents before the sun rises from the west, Allah will forgive him".⁷

[7](#)

Abu Musa (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Allah, the Exalted, stretches His Hand during the night so that those who commit sins by day may repent, and He stretches His Hand in the day so that those who commit sins by night may repent. He keeps doing so until the sun rises from the West".⁸

⁴ http://mquran.org/index.php?option=com_quran&action=viewayat&surano=66

⁵ <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/80/5>

⁶ <http://sunnah.com/ibnmajah/36/145>

⁷ <http://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/1/17>

⁸ <http://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/1/437>

It was narrated that Abu Sa'eed Al Khudri said:

“Shall I not tell you what I heard directly from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ)? I heard it and memorized it: 'A man killed ninety-nine people, then the idea of repentance occurred to him. He asked who was the most knowledgeable of people on earth, and he was told of a man so he went to him and said: “I have killed ninety-nine people. Can I repent?” He said: “After ninety-nine people?!” He said: 'So he drew his sword and killed him, thus completing one hundred. Then the idea of repentance occurred to him (again), so he asked who was the most knowledgeable of people, and he was told of a man (so he went to him) and said: “I have killed one hundred people. Can I repent?” He said: “Woe to you, what is stopping you from repenting? Leave the evil town where you are living and go to a good town, such and such town and worship your Lord there.” So he went out, heading for the good town, but death came to him on the road. The angels of mercy and angels of punishment argued over him. Iblis (Satan) said: “I have more right to him, for he never disobeyed me for a moment.” But the angels of mercy said: “He went out repenting.” (One of the narrators) Hammam said: “Humaid At-Tawil narrated to me from Bakr bin Abdullah that Abu Rafi said: 'So Allah (SWT) sent an angel to whom they referred (the case). He said: “Look and see which of the two towns was he closer, and put him with its people.” (One of the narrators) Qatadah said: “Hasan narrated to us: 'When death came to him he strove and drew closer to the good town, and farther away from the evil town, so they put him with the people of the good town.’”⁹

Anas narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

"Every son of Adam sins, and the best of the sinners are the repentant."¹⁰

Anas bin Malik narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

“Allah, Blessed is He and Most High, said: ‘O son of Adam! Verily as long as you called upon Me and hoped in Me, I forgave you, despite whatever may have occurred from you, and I did not mind. O son of Adam! Were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky, then you sought forgiveness from Me, I would forgive you, and I would not mind. So son of Adam! If you came to me with sins nearly as great as the earth, and then you met Me not associating anything with Me, I would come to you with forgiveness nearly as great as it.’”¹¹

Abu Ayyub Khalid bin Zaid (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:

Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Were you not to commit sins, Allah would create people who would commit sins and ask for forgiveness and He would forgive them".¹²

⁹ <http://sunnah.com/urn/1269390>

¹⁰ <http://sunnah.com/urn/678050>

¹¹ <http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/48/171>

¹² <http://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/1/423>

Abu Huraira reported from Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) that his Lord, the Exalted and Glorious, thus said. A servant committed a sin and he said:

O Allah, forgive me my sins, and Allah (the Exalted and Glorious) said: My servant committed a sin and then he came to realise that he has a Lord Who forgives the sins and takes to account (the sinner) for the sin. He then again committed a sin and said: My Lord, forgive me my sin, and Allah, the Exalted and High, said: My servant committed a sin and then came to realise that he has a Lord Who would forgive his sin or would take (him) to account for the sin. He again committed a sin and said: My Lord, forgive me for my sin, and Allah (the Exalted and High) said: My servant has committed a sin and then came to realise that he has a Lord Who forgives the sins or takes (him) to account for sin. O servant, do what you like. I have granted you forgiveness. 'Abd al-'Ala said: I do not know whether he said thrice or four times to do " what you desire".¹³

Anas (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:

Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Allah, the Exalted, has said: 'O son of Adam, I forgive you as long as you pray to Me and hope for My forgiveness, whatever sins you have committed. O son of 'Adam, I do not care if your sins reach the height of the heaven, then you ask for my forgiveness, I would forgive you. O son of 'Adam, if you come to Me with an earth load of sins, and meet Me associating nothing to Me, I would match it with an earthload of forgiveness.'"¹⁴

Narrated Abu Huraira:

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "A man used to do sinful deeds, and when death came to him, he said to his sons, 'After my death, burn me and then crush me, and scatter the powder in the air, for by Allah, if Allah has control over me, He will give me such a punishment as He has never given to anyone else.' When he died, his sons did accordingly. Allah ordered the earth saying, 'Collect what you hold of his particles.' It did so, and behold! There he was (the man) standing. Allah asked (him), 'What made you do what you did?' He replied, 'O my Lord! I was afraid of You.' So Allah forgave him. " Another narrator said "The man said, Fear of You, O Lord!"¹⁵

COMMENTARIES

From the Risale-I Nur Collection by Beduizzam Said Nursi – a thematic tafseer

¹³ <http://sunnah.com/muslim/50/33>

¹⁴ <http://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/1/442>

¹⁵ <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/60/148>

The Flashes, Second Flash, First Point

Corresponding to the outer wounds and sicknesses of Job (Upon whom be peace), we have inner sicknesses of the spirit and heart. If our inner being were to be turned outward, and our outer being turned inward, we would appear more wounded and diseased than Job. For each sin that we commit and each doubt that enters our mind, inflicts wounds on our heart and our spirit.

The wounds of Job (Upon whom be peace) were of such a nature as to threaten his brief worldly life, but our inner wounds threaten our infinitely long everlasting life. We need the supplication of Job thousands of times more than he did himself. Just as the worms that arose from his wounds penetrated to his heart and tongue, so too the wounds that sin inflicts upon us and the temptations and doubts that arise from those wounds will – may God protect us! – penetrate our inner heart, the seat of belief, and thus wound belief. Penetrating too the spiritual joy of the tongue, the interpreter of belief, they cause it to shun in revulsion the remembrance of God, and reduce it to silence.

Sin, penetrating to the heart, will blacken and darken it until it extinguishes the light of belief. Within each sin is a path leading to unbelief. Unless that sin is swiftly obliterated by seeking God's pardon, it will grow from a worm into a snake that gnaws on the heart.

For example, a man who secretly commits a shameful sin will fear the disgrace that results if others become aware of it. Thus the existence of angels and spirit beings will be hard for him to endure, and he will long to deny it, even on the strength of the slightest indication.

Similarly, one who commits a major sin deserving of the torment of Hell, will desire the non-existence of Hell wholeheartedly, and whenever he hears of the threat of Hell-fire, he will dare to deny it on the strength of a slight indication and doubt, unless he takes up in protection the shield of repentance and seeking forgiveness.

Similarly, one who does not perform the obligatory prayer and fulfil his duty of worship will be affected by distress, just as he would be in case of the neglect of a minor duty toward some petty ruler. Thus, his laziness in fulfilling his obligation, despite the repeated commands of the Sovereign of Pre-Eternity, will distress him greatly, and on account of that distress will desire and say to himself: "Would that there were no such duty of worship!" In turn, there will arise from this desire a desire to deny God, and bear enmity toward Him. If some doubt concerning the existence of the Divine Being comes to his heart, he will be inclined to embrace it like a conclusive proof. A wide gate to destruction will be opened in front of him. The wretch does not know that although he is delivered by denial from the slight trouble of duty of worship, he has made himself, by that same denial, the target for millions of troubles that are far more awesome. Fleeing from the bite of a gnat, he welcomes the bite of the snake.

There are many other examples, which may be understood with reference to these three, so that the sense of,

Nay but their hearts are stained(83:14)

will become apparent.¹⁶

¹⁶ <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203.22>

Fethullah Gulen – Reflection On The Quran – a thematic tafseer

“But of no avail is the repentance of those who commit evil...” (An-Nisā’ 4:18)

“But of no avail is the repentance of those who commit evil (for a lifetime) until, when one of them is visited by death, he says, “Indeed now I repent.” Nor (likewise does the repentance avail) of those who (spend their lives in unbelief and offer to repent just at the time of death, but) die as unbelievers (since such repentance is not acceptable). For such We have prepared a painful punishment.” (An-Nisā’ 4:18)

The last moment of the life of a person who has not believed until that very moment—the moment when the belief of the person is no longer accepted—is called “the state of despair.” However, it is important to define the limits of this moment very well. This is the moment when it is certain both for the dying one and those around them that it is impossible for the dying one to go back to life and live long enough to believe consciously and practice it even for a very short while.

Indeed, the belief of a person is accepted provided he believes at least for a moment in full consciousness even before it is certain that the person will die. It was this moment when Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, offered belief to his uncle Abū Tālib. Having retained his consciousness, Abū Tālib—under the influence of the polytheist Makkans around him—responded that he was dying in the old religion of his forefathers. Another example worth mentioning is young Jewish boy who was sick. Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, visited the sick Jewish boy and offered him to profess “*lā ilāha illa’ llāh*”—There is no deity but God. Then the boy looked into his father’s eyes expecting a response. The father made a gesture of acceptance. The young boy declared faith in a loud voice, repeating the words God’s Messenger said to him.^[17] Therefore, unless one does not lose one’s consciousness, the heavenly doors are open to faith.

The state of despair, that is, the moment when belief is not accepted, begins when it is certain that a sick person will die and will not have even a new conscious moment of returning to life when that person can believe. But if there is still even a little hope of return to life when one can believe consciously and practice it even by saying a good word, this may be a blessed seed to grow into a tree of blessings and rewards in the intermediate world of grave and in the Hereafter.

However, if the eyes are about to close unto the world and open unto the other realm, any opportunity to believe and practice it even by saying a good word has been lost.

There are those who constantly darken their horizons with sins after they have believed. It is hoped from God’s all-encompassing mercy that they may be referents of the Divine declaration, **“Say: (God gives you hope): ‘O My servants who have been wasteful (of their God-given opportunities and**

¹⁷ Bukhārī, Mardā, 11; Abū Dāwūd, Janāiz, 2.

faculties) against (the good of) their own souls! Do not despair of God's Mercy” (Az-Zumar 39:53).¹⁸

Fethullah Gulen - Sufism 1 – a thematic tafseer

Tawba (Repentance), Inaba (Sincere Penitence), and Awba (Turning to God in Contrition)

Repentance (tawba) means that one feels regret and, filled with remorse for his or her sins, turns to God with the intention to obey Him. According to truth-seeking scholars, repentance signifies a sincere effort to no longer oppose the Divine Essence in one's feelings, thoughts, intentions, and acts, and to comply sincerely with His commands and prohibitions. Repentance does not mean being disgusted with what is bad or prohibited and thus no longer engaging in it; rather, it means remaining aloof from whatever God hates and prohibits, even if it seems agreeable to sense and reason.

Repentance is usually used with nasuh, literally meaning pure, sincere, reforming, improving, and repairing. Tawba nasuh sincere and reforming repentance means a pure, sincere repentance that perfectly reforms and improves the one who feels it. One who feels such a sincere, heartfelt, and true remorse for the sin committed seeks to abandon it, thereby setting a good example for others. The Qur'an points to this when it mentions true repentance: O you who believe! Turn to God in true, sincere repentance (66:8).

There are three categories of repentance:

- The repentance of those who cannot discern Divine truths. Such people are uneasy about their disobedience to God and, conscious of the sinfulness clouding their hearts, turn toward God in repentance saying, for example: I have fallen or committed a sin. Forgive me, or I ask for God's forgiveness.
- Those half-awakened to Divine truths beyond veils of material existence who feel an inward pang of sinfulness and remorse right after thinking or doing anything incompatible with the consciousness of always being in God's presence, or after every instance of heedlessness enveloping their hearts, and who immediately take refuge with the Mercy and Favor of God. Such people are described in the following Tradition:

God's Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, declared: One who sincerely repents of his sin is as if he had never committed it. When God loves one of His servants, his sins do not harm him. Then he recited the verse: Assuredly, God loves the oftrepentant and those who always seek to purify themselves. When asked about the sign of repentance, he declared: It is heartfelt remorse.¹⁹

¹⁸ <http://fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-works/faith/fethullah-gulen-reflections-on-the-quran/1522-suratun-nisa-women/33123-an-nisa-4-18>

¹⁹ Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri, Al-Risalat al-Qushayriya fi 'Ulum al-Tasawwuf (Cairo, 1972), 91.

- Those who live such a careful life that, as declared in a Tradition: My eyes sleep but my heart does not²⁰, their hearts are awake. Such people immediately discard whatever intervenes between God and their hearts and other innermost faculties, and regain the consciousness of their relation to the Light of Lights. They always manifest the meaning of: How excellent a servant! Truly he was ever turning in contrition (to his Lord) (38:44).

Repentance means regaining one's essential purity after every spiritual defilement, and engaging in frequent self-renewal. [The stages of] repentance are:

- Feeling sincere remorse and regret
- Being frightened whenever one remembers past sins
- Trying to eradicate injustice and support justice and right
- Reviewing one's responsibilities and performing obligations previously neglected
- Reforming oneself by removing spiritual defects caused by deviation and error
- Regretting and lamenting the times when one did not mention or remember God, or thank Him and reflect on His works. Such people are always apprehensive and alert so that their thoughts and feelings are not tainted by things that intervene between themselves and God. (This last quality is particular to people distinguished by their nearness to God.)

If one does not feel remorse, regret, and disgust for errors committed, whether great or small; if one is not fearful or apprehensive of falling back into sin at any time; and if one does not take shelter in sincere servanthood to God in order to be freed from deviation and error into which one has fallen by moving away from God, any resulting repentance will be no more than a lie.

On sincere repentance, Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi says:

I have repented and turned to God so sincerely that I will not break [the vow of penitence] until my soul leaves my body. In fact, who other than an ass steps toward perdition after having suffered so much trouble (on account of his sins)?

Repentance is an oath of virtue, and holding steadfastly to it requires strong willpower. The lord of the penitents, upon him be peace and blessings, says that one who repents sincerely and holds steadfastly to it has achieved the rank of a martyr, while the repentance of those who cannot free themselves from their sins and deviations, although they repent repeatedly, mocks the door toward which the truly repentant ones turn in utmost sincerity and resolution.

One who continues to sin after proclaiming a fear of Hell, who does not engage in righteous deeds despite self-proclaimed desires for Paradise, and who is indifferent to the Prophet's way and practices despite assertions of love for the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, cannot be taken seriously. This is also the case with one who claims to be sincere and pure-hearted, but spends his or her life oscillating between sin and repentance.

²⁰ Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, "Tahajjud," in *Al-Jami' al-Sahih*, 4 vols. (Beirut, n.d.), 16; Abu al-Husayn Muslim ibn Hajjaj al-Qushayri Muslim, "Musafirin," in *Sahih al-Muslim*, 5 vols. (Beirut, 1956), 125.

An initiate's first station is repentance, while the second is inaba (sincere penitence). In common usage, inaba also refers to the ceremony held when one submits to a spiritual guide (as a murshid). While repentance requires the training of feelings, thoughts, and acts in order to move them from opposition to acceptance and obedience, sincere penitence demands a critique of the authenticity, sincerity, and sufficiency of that acceptance and obedience. Repentance is a progressing or journeying toward God that is, seeking to do what is pleasing to God and refraining from what is forbidden by Him. Sincere penitence is an ascension through the stations of journeying in God in other words, striving to live an upright life in self-annihilation and absorption in God so that one may seek His pleasure in all actions and thoughts.

Awba (turning to God in contrition) is an ascension through the stations of journeying from God meaning being responsible for guiding others after having embodied the Islamic way of belief, thought, and conduct. In other words, taking refuge with God in fear of dying as a non-Muslim and deserving eternal punishment is repentance; annihilating one's self in God in the hope of preserving one's spiritual rank is sincere penitence; and closing one's self to any desires, ambitions, or aims other than God's pleasure is turning to Him in utmost contrition.

The first is the state of all believers, and is expressed in: Repent to God, O believers! (24:31). The second is an attribute of saints and the foremost in belief and good conduct who have been brought near unto God. Its beginning is seen in: Turn to your Lord repentant (39:54), and its end is stated in: He comes with a contrite heart (50:33). The third is for the Prophets and Messengers, all of whom are appreciated and praised by God in the words: How excellent a servant! Truly he was ever turning in contrition (to his Lord) (38:44).

The words of repentance uttered by those who are always conscious of being in the presence of God express the individual's sincere penitence or turning to God in contrition. This is how the words of the best of creation, upon him be peace and blessings, should be understood when he said: I ask God's forgiveness seventy (or one hundred, according to another narration or version) times a day.

Repentance is the act or manner of those trying to live an upright life while remaining unaware of God's constant supervision of His servants and what nearness to Him really means. Those who live in awareness of God's nearness regard it as heedlessness to turn to God as ordinary people do, for He directs them as He wishes, constantly supervises them, and is nearer to them than anything else. Their station is not that of the people of the Unity of Being ecstatic saints who view the creation while living in a state of being completely annihilated in God and therefore accept God as the only truly existent being. Rather, it is the station of the people of the Unity of the Witnessed scholarly saints who accept that the truly existent one is He Who is witnessed or discerned beyond the creation. More than that, it is the station of those progressing in the light of the Prophet Muhammad's practice, upon him be peace and blessings.

It is merely an assertion and a groundless claim when those who have not attained this station, and thus live [merely] on the outer surface of their existence, talk of awba and inaba, and especially of the final points of these two stations.²¹

²¹ <http://fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-works/sufism/key-concepts-in-the-practice-of-sufism-1/24722-tawba-repentance-inaba-sincere-penitence-and-awba-turning-to-god-in-contrition>