

REPENTANCE (PART 2 OF 3): CONDITIONS OF REPENTANCE

Rating: 4.9

Description: The means of salvation from an Islamic perspective. Part 2: The conditions to be met for repentance to be valid.

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By: Imam Mufti

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Objectives

- Learn the conditions to be met for repentance to be valid.
- Appreciate the manifestation of divine mercy and forgiveness in the observance of Islamic rituals.
- Be aware of the time frame set by Allah within which repentance is accepted.

Arabic Terms

- Salah* - the Arabic word to denote a direct connection between the believer and Allah. More specifically, in Islam it refers to the formal five daily prayers and is the most important form of worship.
- Hadith* - (plural – *ahadith*) is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
- Wudoo* – ablution.
- Hajj* – A pilgrimage to Mecca where the pilgrim performs a set of rituals. The *Hajj* is one of the five pillars of Islam, which every adult Muslim must undertake at least once in their life if they can afford it and are physically able.
- Kabah* - The cube-shaped structure located in the city of Mecca. It serves as a focal point towards which all Muslims face when praying.
- Sawm* – Fasting.
- Ramadan* - The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is the month in which the obligatory fasting has been prescribed.
- Tawbah* – repentance.

As with all acts of worship in Islam, a sinner must repent sincerely to Allah alone, and for His pleasure alone, as only He can pardon sin.

“And who forgives sins besides Allah?” (Quran 3:135)

Love of God should be the motivating force behind the act of repentance, accompanied with hope for His reward and fear of His punishment. The desire should not be to win admiration or praise from people. One must confess his sins to Allah as He alone can forgive them. If Allah has kept a sinner's wicked deeds a secret, he should not expose them by discussing them with friends, as the Prophet said:

“All the people of my Nation may be pardoned for their sins except those who publicize them.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Al-Tirmidhi, Abu Daud)

Certain conditions must be met for repentance to be valid. They ensure sincerity is met and rights of God and men are observed. Due to the various Quranic verses and *ahadith* of the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, repentance is not valid unless these conditions are met.

1st Condition: Stop It

If he is in the midst of performing that sin and he repents, he must immediately stop it. How can a person expect his repentance to be accepted while he is still satiating his desires? A verbal expression of remorse not backed by abstinence is a senseless ritual that lacks sincerity.

2nd Condition: Feel Sorrow

Feeling remorse that one has sinned against God is the essence of repentance. The guilt of having sinned leads to self-condemnation, without which a person will relish the memories of his sins. A person must not regard the sin as miniscule, but rather feel that He has acted against the Magnificent Who created him, provides for Him, guided him, and continues to shower His blessings upon him. Is it befitting that we go against One Who is constantly good to us? If one does not feel remorse, then they are not truly repenting from that sin, but rather they are just saying some words without meaning. Thus the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said:

“Feeling remorse is repentance.” (Ibn Majah)

3rd Condition: Resolve Not to Repeat the Sin

Sorrow should be accompanied with a firm intention not to repeat the sin, or else how can someone feel sorry but plan to sin again? True sorrow produces a strong desire not to repeat the sin again. Allah says:

“...And those who when they commit an indecency or do injustice to their souls, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their faults-- and who forgives the faults but Allah, and (who) do not persist in what they have done...” (Quran 3:135-136)

4th Condition: Returning the Rights of Others

If one had violated the right of a fellow human, it must be restored to guarantee that he is forgiven. For example, a person must return what he stole. If one does not do so, these unfulfilled rights will be taken from the sinner's 'account' of virtuous deeds on the Day of Judgment. If the owner is unavailable, the property should be given to a close relative of his. If no relative can be found, it should be donated to the poor. Backbiting and slander are also rights of fellow human beings that must be restored by seeking forgiveness for him.

The past wrong is corrected by feeling remorse, the present by stopping the sin, and the future is addressed by a firm resolve not to return to the sin.

True repentance involves certain feelings in the heart, words that express it, and deeds to back it. A sinner should be driven to make amends and set things aright. Allah has tied good deeds with repentance:

“Whoever repents and does good deeds has truly repented to Allah.” (Quran 25:71)

If one truly repents and follows that with righteous deeds, not only will that sin be forgiven, but Allah, out of His infinite Grace, erases those evil deeds from his record and changes them to good deeds. Allah, the most Merciful, full of Grace, said:

“Except those who repent and believe (in Islamic Monotheism), and do righteous deeds, for those, Allah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Quran 25:70)

Divine mercy manifests itself in some beautiful ways for the repentant. Islamic ritual observances have a deep spiritual dimension; they continuously expiate sins of the faithful. *Wudoo*, *salah*, fasting, and *Hajj* wipe out sins when they are performed by the letter and spirit of Islamic Law.

Wudoo

“When a servant of Allah washes his face, every sin he contemplated with his eyes will be washed away with the last drop of water; when he washes his hands, every sin they committed will be washed off from his hands with the last drop of water; and when he washes his feet, every sin towards which his feet have walked will be washed away with the last drop of water. So that he comes out pure from all sins.” (Saheeh Muslim)

Salah

“The obligatory prayers of the one who properly performed wudoo as Allah the Exalted enjoined on him, will be an expiation for sins committed between them.” (Saheeh Muslim)

Fasting (Sawm)

“All the previous sins of the one who fasts the month of Ramadan out of faith and seeking his reward from the Lord, will be forgiven.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

Hajj Pilgrimage

“Whoever makes pilgrimage to the House (Kabah) and does not have sexual relations with his wife nor commits sins (during Hajj) will return (sinless) the way his mother bore him.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

Of course, these are all referring to lesser sins^[1] and mistakes that one may look over. As for the greater sins, repentance from God must be sought, or the person may be held liable on the Day of Judgment.

Repent Before It is Too Late

Allah has set a timeframe for repentance. When *tawbah* is not a voluntary act of penitence, but escape from the inevitable, it is no longer accepted.

First, a person has all his living days to repent, but when death approaches, regret and sorrow are useless. Allah informs us:

“But repentance is not [accepted] of those who [continue to] do evil deeds up until, when death comes to one of them, he says, ‘Indeed, I have repented now,’ or of those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We have prepared a painful punishment.” (Quran 4:18)

For this reason, a person must repent for their sin as soon as they realize it. One does not know when they are to die, and death may seize them before they repent. Second, repentance will also not be accepted upon the appearance of some of the major signs of the Judgment Day herald the end of world. Even if the unbelievers were to declare their belief in Islam, it will be futile.

“When three things appear, faith will not benefit one who has not previously believed or has not derived any good from his faith: the rising of the sun from its place of setting^[2], the Anti-Christ^[3], and the beast of the earth^[4].” (Saheeh Muslim)

Footnotes:

[1] The difference between greater and lesser sins will be explained in a later lesson, God willing.

[2] On that day, the Sun will rise from the West instead of the East.

[3] A person who will appear at the end of time who will perform supernatural feats and make false claims.

[4] The appearance of the 'Beast of the Earth' is another sign of Judgment Day.

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