

REPENTANCE (PART 1 OF 3): DOOR TO SALVATION

Rating: 4.9

Description: The means of salvation from an Islamic perspective. Part 1: The Islamic teachings on sin and salvation.

Category: [Lessons](#) › [Increasing faith](#) › [Repentance](#)

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Objectives

- Learn the Islamic view with regards to sins.
- Learn the meaning of repentance from an Islamic perspective.
- Appreciate the Mercy of Allah with regards to repentance.

Arabic Terms

- Shirk* – a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.
- Tawbah* – repentance.
- 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.

Sin and salvation are issues of profound human concern in all faiths. Unless someone's sense of right and wrong is distorted, human beings are conscious of their sins and realize they will be held accountable. Psychologically, human beings respond to bad behavior by feeling guilt. Naturally, all religious systems offer some method of releasing man from the burden of sin. Generally, they either guarantee salvation by faith alone or through individual works and striving.

In this lesson, we will learn the Islamic teachings on sin and salvation. In the second lesson, we will learn the condition to be met for repentance to be valid. In the third and last part, we will learn some beautiful words of penitence from the Quran and the Prophet.

What is Sin?

How does Islam view sins? What are major sins in Islam?

All sins are not equal. They are categorized into grave or major sins and lesser sins. A major sin is one which God threatens with punishment in Hell, His curse, or displeasure. The rest are considered lesser sins.

Some major sins can actually take a person outside the fold of Islam. An example of this is *Shirk*, the greatest of major sins. The purpose of human creation is to worship Allah alone. *Shirk* defies this purpose. Not only can no one be worshipped *apart* from Allah, absolutely no one else can be worshipped *along with* Him. Once, the Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, asked:

“Shall I not inform you about the greatest of the major sins?”

The Companions replied, ‘Yes.’

He explained: “To join others in worship with Allah and to be undutiful to one’s parents.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)

Some of the major sins are sorcery, homicide, drinking intoxicants, homosexuality, fornication and theft.

What is Repentance?

Repentance is the process of turning away from sin and amending one’s life. It is to feel regret and sorrow. The Arabic word for it is *tawbah* which literally means ‘to return.’

Islamically, repentance is the act of *leaving* what Allah has prohibited and *returning* to what He has commanded.

A fundamental principle of Islam is that man is born sinless in a state of submission to Allah known, as the *fitrah*:

“Every child is born in a state of fitrah, then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)

Through sin, man turns away from Allah, and through repentance, he ‘returns’ to God. Through repentance, he returns to his original, sinless state of *fitrah*.

In Islam, repentance is an act of worship through which humans achieve salvation, as Allah commands the faithful:

“And turn all of you in repentance to Allah, O believers, in order that you may be successful.” (Quran 24:31)

The Prophet of Islam encouraged his Companions to turn to Allah in repentance regularly:

“O people, turn to Allah in repentance and seek His forgiveness.” (Saheeh Muslim)

The Warm Embrace of Divine Mercy

Divine mercy wraps all existence in its fold. The Mercy is intimately close to every one of us, waiting to embrace when we are ready. Islam recognizes the human propensity to sin, for God has created man weak. The Prophet stated:

“All of Adam’s descendants constantly err, but the best of those who constantly err are those who constantly repent.” (Al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Ahmad, Hakim)

At the same time, Allah lets us know He forgives sins:

“Say, ‘O My servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins, for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most-Merciful.’” (Quran 39:53)

Prophet Muhammad was charged to convey this good news to all:

“Tell My servants that indeed I am the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Quran 15:49)

1. Allah Accepts Repentance

“Allah wishes to accept your repentance, but those who follow their lusts, wish that you (believers) should deviate tremendously away from the Right Path.” (Quran 4:27)

“Know they not that Allah accepts repentance from His slaves, and receives their gifts of charity, and that it is Allah who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.” (Quran 9:104)

2. Allah Loves the Sinner who Repents

“For Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly.” (Quran 2:222)

The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said:

“If mankind were not to commit sins, Allah would create other creatures who would commit sins, then He would forgive them, for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Musnad)

3. Allah is *Delighted* When the Sinner Repents Because He Realizes He Has a Lord Who Forgives Sins!

The Prophet said:

“Allah is more delighted with the repentance of His slave when he repents, than any of you would be if (he found his) camel, which he had been riding in a barren desert, has escaped from him carrying his food and drink, and he had despaired of it, and come to a tree and lain down in its shade, then while he was despairing of it, the camel came and stood by his side, and he seized its reins and cried out in joy, ‘O Allah, You are my servant and I am your Lord!’ – he would make this mistake out of his excessive joy.” (Saheeh Muslim)

4. Gate of Repentance is Open Day and Night

Forgiveness for sins is not limited to a specific day of the year. Divine mercy extends forgiveness every day and every night of the year. The Prophet said:

“Allah extends His Hand at night to accept the repentance of one who has sinned during the day; and He extends His Hand during the day to accept the repentance of one who has sinned during the night – until the sun rises from the West^[1].” (Saheeh Muslim)

5. Allah Accepts Repentance Even If Sins Are Repeated

In a *hadith qudsi*^[2] the Prophet said:

“A man committed a sin, then said, ‘O my Lord, forgive my sin,’ so Allah said, ‘My slave has sinned, then he realized that he has a Lord who can forgive sins and can punish him for it.’ Then the man repeated the sin, then said, ‘O my Lord, forgive my sin.’ Allah said, ‘My slave has sinned, then he realized that he has a Lord who can forgive sins and can punish him for it.’ The man repeated the sin (the third time), then he said, ‘O my Lord, forgive my sin,’ and Allah said, ‘My slave has sinned, then he realized that he has a Lord who can forgive sins and can punish him for it. Do what you wish, for I have forgiven you.’” (Saheeh Muslim)

6. Entering Islam Erases All Previous Sins

The Prophet has explained that accepting Islam effaces all previous sins of the new Muslim, no matter how serious they were with one condition: the new Muslim accepts Islam sincerely. Some people asked Allah’s Messenger, “O Messenger of Allah! Will we be held responsible for what we did during the days of ignorance before accepting Islam?” He replied:

“Whoever accepts Islam sincerely will not be held to account, but one who does so hypocritically will be accountable for the time before Islam and after.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)

From the infinite mercy of Allah, if one repents for their sin or enter Islam, their previous sins are turned into good deeds. Allah says:

“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)

Footnotes:

[1]

A sign of the Day of Judgment. When that day comes and the Sun rises from the West, no repentance will be accepted

[2]

A *hadith qudsi* is a *hadith* in which the Prophet directly narrates a saying from Allah, using the first person “I”.

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