

## **Chapter 3**

### **Analysis of Selected Hadiths in the Topic of Repentance (Tawba)**

## Introduction

The scholars have general consensus on that it is obligatory to repent from every sin. However, if people repent only from some, their repentance would still be sound. Repentance is feeling of regret and remorse for one's own sins and his/her effort to return God. In repentance, there is great effort to be saved from opposition to God in feelings, thoughts, intentions, and acts.<sup>139</sup> The servants want to comply sincerely with His commands and prohibitions. If committed sin is not relating the rights of others but God, then there are three conditions to be met in order that repentance is accepted by God.<sup>140</sup>

- To desist from committing it.
- To feel sorry for committing it.
- To decide not to recommit it.

However, if the offense involves the rights of others, there is a fourth condition that needs to be met; absolving oneself from such right. For example, if one has stolen money he/she must return it to its rightful owner. Otherwise feeling remorse for the offense is not sufficient in order repentance is accepted in this case. Similarly, if one has slandered or backbitten about someone he/she could not absolve him/herself by asking forgiveness of God, rather he/she should also ask the pardon of the offended by explaining how he/she violated their rights. In many verses in the Qur'ān God invites His servants to repent Him;

“...O believers, turn to God all together in repentance that you may attain true prosperity.”<sup>141</sup>

“And that you ask your Lord for forgiveness (for the sins you have so far committed), then turn to Him repentant and sincerely, so that He may enable for you a good life for a term appointed, and bestow His grace and bounty more abundantly on whoever is more advanced in virtue and devotion...”<sup>142</sup>

“O you who believe! Turn to God in sincere and reforming repentance. It is hoped that your Lord will blot your evil deeds from you and admit you into Gardens through which rivers flow, on a Day when God will not disgrace nor disappoint the Prophet and those who believe in his company...”<sup>143</sup>

In the last verse the Arabic term *nasūh* is used together with *tawba* (repentance). *Nasūh* literally means pure, sincere, reforming, improving, and repairing. *Tawba nasūh*—sincere, reforming, and improving repentance—means a pure, sincere repentance that perfectly reforms and improves the one who feels it.<sup>144</sup>

Some scholars mention three levels of repentance;

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<sup>139</sup> Fethullah Gulen, *Sufism Emerald Hills of the Heart*, (tr; Ali Unal) New Jersey: Light 2006, vol.1, p. 8

<sup>140</sup> Nawawī, *Riyād al-Sālihīn*, Bab Tawba, Introduction.

<sup>141</sup> Qur'ān 24: 31.

<sup>142</sup> Qur'ān 11: 3.

<sup>143</sup> Qur'ān 66: 8.

<sup>144</sup> Gulen, *Sufism*, p. 9.

## Commentary on Unforgettable Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad

- The repentance of ordinary Muslims who commit sins and ask forgiveness from God for it.
- The repentance of pious people who feel an inward pang of sinfulness right after thinking or doing anything incompatible with the consciousness of always being in God's presence.
- The repentance of the most pious people who live very careful life. 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 their turning to God in contrition.<sup>145</sup>  
This is how the words of the Prophet (pbuh) should be understood when he said: I ask God's forgiveness hundred times a day.

In conclusion, the repentance starts with the feeling of remorse and regret and then it continues with being upset when remembering the past sins. Compensating all kind of injustice and carrying out the responsibilities that are neglected previously is the next step in repentance. Hence every sin causes some kind of spiritual defect it is necessary for a person to reform him/herself frequently. So, repentance is not one-time thing but ongoing process.

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<sup>145</sup> Gulen, *ibid.*

### First hadith

وَعَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: وَاللَّهِ إِنِّي لَأَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ، وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ فِي الْيَوْمِ، أَكْثَرَ مِنْ سَبْعِينَ مَرَّةً

Abu Hurayra heard Messenger of God (pbuh) saying: “By God, I seek God's forgiveness and repent to Him more than seventy times a day.”<sup>146</sup>

### Analysis of the hadith

This hadith is authentic according to the conditions of Bukhari and it is recorded by him in his hadith collections. It is also reported by Ibn Mājah and Tirmidhi. The narrator of this hadith is Abū Huraira and information about him was given previously.

Repentance is feeling of regret and remorse for one's own sins and his/her effort to return God again. The conditions and levels of repentance are addressed in the introduction and it is indicated that the words of repentance uttered by the Prophet should be understood as his sincere penitence or his turning to God in contrition. This hadith contains very important lessons for his followers.

Repentance is a praiseworthy act for with it a person who commits sin and deviates from the straight path recognizes his/her mistake and tries to compensate it. Abandoning sin and feeling regret for it is not sufficient in repentance. People should restore their spiritual life with worship and obedience to God. The duties that are neglected should be carried out and the responsibilities be fulfilled. There is no specific time for repentance but since time of death is unknown it should be done at earliest time. If the Prophet used to repent seventy times a day the Muslims must do it more often. In other narration it is stated that the Prophet used to repent hundred times a day; “The Messenger of God (pbuh) said: ‘turn you people in repentance to Allah and beg pardon of Him. I turn to Him in repentance a hundred times a day’”.<sup>147</sup>

The scholars usually consider the time before dawn is the best to repent God because it indicates the sincerity of the servants. It is not easy for a person to leave the bed in that hour, but if he/she does due to fear and reverence of God it is considered as good sign for the acceptance of repentance. So, waking up before *fajr* time and offering two rak'ah of prayer and then asking God's forgiveness are recommended by the scholars.

The expression seventy is usually used in Arabic to indicate multitude and abundance in that matter but not the actual number. So maybe the Prophet had repented God more than hundred times a day and he encouraged his followers to repent God as much as they could. There is a general consensus on that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was protected from committing sin

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<sup>146</sup> Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Daawāt, 3.

<sup>147</sup> Muslim, *Sahīh*, Zikr, 42.

therefore he never had any sin. Indeed, one of the essential attributes of the prophethood is infallibility (‘ismah) so they can be best examples for what they teach, otherwise people never follow them. Prophets knew God most and therefore worshipped Him best. They are the best examples for their community in every part of life. They were similar to other human beings in regards to the necessities of life such as eating, drinking, marrying etc. but they were exemplary role models in practicing religion. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad is the best role model for all humanity in every aspect of life including repentance. Thus, if the innocent Prophet asks God’s forgiveness hundred times a day his followers should do more. Indeed, God confirmed his high status in the Qur’ān:

“But God would not punish them so long as you were among them; and God is not to punish them while they implore Him for forgiveness for their sins.”<sup>148</sup>

This verse proves that there are two ways to be saved from the punishment of God; one is the presence of the Prophet and the other one is repentance. The verse is an inducement for seeking pardon and forgiveness because whoever repents God sincerely his/her sins will be forgiven. Human beings should call themselves to self-accounting every day and compensate their sins with sincere repentance. In order to remain clean and pure one should constantly repent.

## Second hadith

وَعَنْ أَبِي حَمَزَةَ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ الْأَنْصَارِيِّ خَادِمِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: اللَّهُ أَفْرَحُ بِتَوْبَةِ عَبْدِهِ مِنْ أَحَدِكُمْ سَقَطَ عَلَى بَعِيرِهِ وَقَدْ أَضَلَّهُ فِي أَرْضِ فَلَاةٍ

وفي رواية لمسلم: لَهِ أَشَدُّ فَرَحًا بِتَوْبَةِ عَبْدِهِ جِئِن يَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ أَحَدِكُمْ كَانَ عَلَيَّ رَاجِلِيهِ بِأَرْضِ فَلَاةٍ، فَانْقَلَبْتُ مِنْهُ وَعَلَيْهَا طَعَامُهُ وَشِرَابُهُ فَأَيْسَ مِنْهَا، فَأَتَى شَجْرَةً فَاضْطَجَعَ فِي ظِلِّهَا، وَقَدْ أَيْسَ مِنْ رَاجِلِيهِ، فَبَيْنَمَا هُوَ كَذَلِكَ إِذْ هُوَ بِهَا قَائِمَةٌ عِنْدَهُ، فَأَخَذَ بِخَطَامِهَا ثُمَّ قَالَ مِنْ شِدَّةِ الْفَرَحِ: اللَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ عَبْدِي وَأَنَا رَبُّكَ، أَخْطَأَ مِنْ شِدَّةِ الْفَرَحِ

Anas bin Malik al-Ansari who served the Prophet narrates: Messenger of God (pbuh) said, “Verily, God is more delighted with the repentance of His slave than a person who lost his camel in a desert land and then finds it (unexpectedly)”.<sup>149</sup>

In another version of Muslim, he said: “Verily, God is more pleased with the repentance of His slave than a person who lost his camel carrying his provision of food and drink in a desert. Having lost all hopes to get this camel back he lies down in shade. He is hopeless about his camel, but when all of a sudden, he finds that camel standing before him. He takes hold of its reins and then out of boundless joy blurts out: ‘O God, You are my slave and I am Your Lord’. He commits this mistake out of extreme joy”.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Qur’ān 8: 33.

<sup>149</sup> Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Daawāt, 4; Muslim, *Sahīh*, Tawba, 1.

<sup>150</sup> Muslim, *Sahīh*, Tawba, 7.

## Anas bin Malik

The narrator of this hadith Anas bin Malik was ten years old when the Prophet immigrated to Medina. His mother Ummu Sulaym took his hand and brought him to the Prophet. She stated her sorrow to the Prophet for she could not find anything to give him any gift except her ten years old child. Anas served the Prophet for ten years in Medina. During the day he would stay with the Prophet and in the evenings, go to his home in Quba. His parents were prominent Companions therefore the Prophet would visit their house, pray there, and eat with them and sometimes he even would take a nap there.

Anas was very smart and quick learner. The Prophet liked him as a Muslim and called him as his son. He was never warned by the Prophet for neglecting things; even sometimes the Prophet would joke him by calling 'the one who has two ears'. He received the blessings of the supplication in which Prophet asked God to give Anas long life, many children, wealth and forgiveness. With the blessing of this supplication Anas lived more than a hundred years and had many children and abundant wealth. He used to say 'I saw the first three in the prayer and I am hoping to receive the last one'.

Anas is one of the Companions who transmitted hadiths most. He narrated 2286 a total of hadiths. Hence, he was able to read and write he wrote the hadiths which he heard from the Prophet. He taught these hadiths to hundreds of students in Medina and Basra. He performed the prayers as how he had seen the Prophet performing it. He had a stick and hair belonged to the Prophet. He made a bequest that the stick should be put in his grave and the hair under his tongue when he died. He died in the year 93 of hijra in Basra when he was 103 years old. May God be well pleased with him.

## Analysis of the hadith

Bukhari and Muslim agreed on the authenticity of first narration of hadith while only Muslim reports the second part. But, still in both variations the hadith has the authentic hadith conditions.

The hadith indicates the importance of repentance at the side of God and it uses analogy to elaborate the content. According to this analogy, God is more delighted with the repentance of His slave than a person who lost his camel in a desert and then finds it unexpectedly. In order to convince Muslims about the importance of repentance the Prophet started his statement with an oath. With this style the hadith gives incredible hope for the ones who commit sins to be forgiven. God's joy due to the repentance of His servants is metaphoric expression and it indicates His approval and forgiveness.

The style in the expression of the hadith alludes the high status of human beings at God's side. Indeed, some scholars deemed the value of each human being equal to the universe, because God manifested all His names on human nature besides manifesting them in the

entire universe. So, God cares about people and encourages them to repent Him and seek His forgiveness. Since God and His attributes are beyond human understanding His joy for the repentance is explained with an example that is familiar with us. In this example, a person loses his camel together with his food and drink in the desert. When he was about to lose all of his hope he finds his camel together with food and drink unexpectedly. It is like coming back to life from the edge of death. It is very obvious how people can be happy in such situation. Similarly, God is delighted with the repentance of His servants because He does not want His servants lose eternal happiness by sins therefore He encourages them to repent and correct their mistakes.

Feeling the heaviness of sins on conscience and supplicating to God to get rid of them is important and much appreciated by God. Each sin is taking one step towards disbelief and consequently to Hell. Every sin leaves black point on the heart and if it is not cleaned with repentance the blackness will be increased until the whole heart is covered with sins. This is the state when one's heart is sealed and no longer able to believe God. To avoid such dramatic end, repentance should be utilized very often. God is all merciful and forgives His servants whenever they repent. If the offense is done unintentionally it is forgiven immediately by God. For example, in the hadith the person who found his camel blurts out 'O God, You are my slave and I am Your Lord' out of boundless joy. The hadith did not mention this part as a sin for God already forgave his servant who repented Him sincerely.

### Third hadith

وعن أبي موسى عبد الله بن قيس الأشعري، رضي الله عنه، عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: إن الله تعالى يبسط يده بالليل ليتوب مسيء النهار ويبسط يده بالنهار ليتوب مسيء الليل حتى تطلع الشمس من مغربها

Abū Musa al-Ash'arī reports: The Prophet (pbuh) said, "God, the Exalted, will continue to stretch out His hand in the night so that the sinners of the day may repent, and continue to stretch His hand in the daytime so that the sinners of the night may repent, until the sun rises from the west (meaning the end of days)".<sup>151</sup>

### Abū Musa al-Ash'arī

The narrator of this hadith Abū Musa al-Ash'arī was from Yemen. When he heard the message of Muhammad (pbuh) he wanted to see the Prophet with a group people including his two brothers. For this purpose, they embarked on ship and start to sail towards their destination. However, the storm burst out on the way and drove them to Abyssinia. When they reached the land, they heard that Ja'far bin Abū Tālib and the other Muslims were there too. They were delighted with this news and in the seventh year of *hijra* they came to Medina

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<sup>151</sup> Muslim *Sahīh*, Tawba, 31.

all together. The Prophet informed him that he got double rewards for his emigration for he emigrated twice, one to Abyssinia and one to Medina. He was very happy with this good news. After his emigration to Medina he never separated from the Prophet and joined all the battles together with him.

Abū Musa al-Ash'arī was one of the six most profound scholars among the Companions. He learned the Qur'ān directly from the Prophet and taught it to many disciples in Basra and Kūfa. He had a beautiful voice. The Prophet liked his recitation of the Qur'ān and told him that he was gifted with a voice similar to Prophet Dāwud. The second Caliph 'Umar used to ask him to recite the Qur'ān with his beautiful voice and remind the Muslims their Lord.

Abū Musa was governor of Basra and Kūfa for long time in the time of Caliph 'Umar and 'Uthman. He never paid attention to worldly pleasures; rather he frequently mentioned people the lifestyle of the Prophet and encouraged them to follow it. He was very shy before his Lord and even he would take shower twisted in darkness to cover his private areas due to his deep reverence to God. He always emphasized on to be soft hearted and to cry for fear of God. He believed that only the tears of eyes can extinguish the fire of Hell. Abū Musa reported 360 a total of hadiths. He died in Kūfa or Makka when he was 63 years old in the 42 years of *hijra*. May God be well pleased with him.

### Analysis of the hadith

This hadith is authentic according to the conditions of Muslim therefore he recorded it in his *sahīh* collection. It contains a metaphoric expression for God does not have hands as we understand. So, stretching out the hand in the night and daytime is a metaphoric expression which indicates that God accept repentance whenever the servants make. God loves His servants so much and therefore He answers repentance with His abundant mercy and blessing.

There is no restriction or limitation for repentance. People can repent for their all kind of sins even if they have countless offenses. It is not a condition that the sinner of night must repent in the day time or vice versa. However, sin should be cleaned with repentance as soon as possible so the damage would be less on heart. Usually, the sinner of night feels regrets and remorse in the daytime and the sinner of day in the nighttime. Noticing the evilness of sin is a first step towards repentance and then feeling great remorse for it. Indeed, the feeling of regret for sin is counted as repentance. But the servants should also open their hands to God and implore Him wholeheartedly for their forgiveness.

In Islam, people do not confess or expose their sins to anyone. They keep it secret between them and God. If the sins are mentioned to others they will be witness against them in Judgment Day. There is no medium or clergy as intercessor between God and people, therefore the servants confess their sins only to God and ask His forgiveness alone.



As life continues people may fall into errors and mistakes, but they should not lose their hope from the mercy of God. Maturation and perfection of humankind cannot actualize quickly; rather it is an ongoing process and sometimes it may happen after long struggle. So, people should not be hopeless because of recommitting the same sins, but they should believe that one day they will overcome against their carnal desires and temptations of Satan. The door for repentance is open until the end of times and whoever sincerely repents God will accept it.

### Fourth hadith

وَعَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يَقْبَلُ تَوْبَةَ الْعَبْدِ مَا لَمْ يُغْرُغِرْ

‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar bin al-Khattāb reports: The Prophet (pbuh) said, “God accepts a slave’s repentance as long as the latter is not actually dying (it is a time when a person certainly understand he/she is dying and the soul reaches the throat).<sup>152</sup>

### Analysis of the hadith

The narrator of this hadith is Abdullah ibn Umar and information about him was given previously. The hadith is categorized as *hasan* (fine or good) that is a category between authentic and weak in hadith terminology. Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah recorded this hadith in their Sunan collections.

The previous hadith explained that the repentance for humanity is possible until the end of times and this hadith indicates that a person can repent until his/her very last breath. However, the expression ‘when person certainly understands he/she is dying’ needs to be explained further. Muslim scholars developed two concepts to separate the time of calamity from the time of death. When a person is inflicted with a calamity this is referred with the term ‘state of calamity’ (*halat-i ba’s*) while the moment of death is referred to ‘the state of hopelessness’ (*halat-i ya’s*). This is a state that God does not accept repentance;

“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.”<sup>153</sup>

In a state of calamity such as earthquake, tsunami, fire, hurricane etc. a person can repent God and it is accepted according to the scholars. The state of calamity may be fatal diseases

<sup>152</sup> Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Daawat, 98; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Zuhd, 30.

<sup>153</sup> Qur’ān 4: 18.

such as cancer. In this state the valid repentance can be made even if the doctors tell that the patient could live three months most or something similar to it. People can be inflicted with different types of calamities and in every condition, they can repent unless they are taking the very last breath of their life.

One of the weaknesses of human beings is their desire for long life. They think they would live long regardless of their age and therefore postpone their repentance. Some imagine that they could start worshipping after 50 years old and repent for all their sins. However, there is no guarantee for anyone that they would survive to the next moment. They may die suddenly without making any preparation for the other world. People should repent every day of their life for the Prophet, the best human being, repented God hundred times a day. Therefore, it is not a proper attitude for a person to postpone repentance believing that he/she could live longer and do it at the last segment of his/her life. God warned His servants in the Qur'ān against this type of temptations;

“And spend (in God’s cause and for the needy) out of whatever We provide for you before death comes to any of you and he says: ‘My Lord! If only You would grant me respite for a short while, so that I may give alms, and be one of the righteous!’ But never will God grant respite to a soul when its appointed term has come. God is fully aware of all that you do.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Qur'ān 63: 10-11.