

## A call to awaken the heart for *tawbah*

□ O man! How sinful and foolish you are not to know the worth of the bounties of your Provider. After having spent years in disobedience and after prolonged disloyalty to such a merciful Lord, Who has provided all the means of your comfort and ease - without that being, *na`udhu bi Allah*, of any imaginable benefit to Him - having violated His sanctities and taken shamelessness and recalcitrance to their extreme, now that you are remorseful, penitent and repentant, God Almighty has taken you for His loved one. What abundance of mercy and what plentitude of bounty is it! O God! We are incapable of thanking You for Your bounties. Our tongues are unable to praise and extol You. All that we can do is to bow our heads in shame and ask Your pardon for our shamelessness. We don't deserve Your mercy. Yet, indeed Your mercy is more abundant and Your bounties are more inclusive than can be described.

□ A wise man should endeavour to intensify the form of contrition and remorse in the heart so that God willing, it enters the burning chamber. That is, through meditation about the terrible consequences of sin, remorse becomes stronger in his heart, thereby voluntarily kindling the holy fire, the fire about which Qur'an says: *The fire of God kindled (roaring) over the hearts covered down upon them, in columns outstretched.* (104: 6-8) In his heart, burning the fire of remorse will incinerate all his sins and burn away all its rust and corrosion. He should know that were he not to kindle himself this fire in this world and were he not to open upon himself the door of this hell - which itself is the main gateway of Paradise - he would inevitably pass from this world into the next world to face the terribly cauterizing fire prepared for him there. Thereupon the doors of Hell shall be opened and the doors of Paradise closed to him.

□ O God! Give us a chest lit with the fire of remorse. Set our hearts aflame with the worldly fire and set it afire by throwing into it the sparks of remorse. Remove the corrosion of our hearts and take us from this world in a state of freedom from the consequences of sins. Verily Thou art the Lord of bounties. [Adopted from Al-Khumayni, 40 hadith, chapter 17, 'Tawbah']

### Conclusion:

□ Imam Zain al-Abidin (a) said: "My God ! You are He who has opened a door to Your pardon and named it 'repentance' for You said, '*Repent to God with unswerving repentance*' (66: 8). What is the excuse for him who remains heedless of entering the door after its opening?" [Sahifa al-Kamilah, the whispered prayers of repenters]

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*O you who believe! turn (in repentance) to Allah a sincere turning; May be your Lord will remove from you your evil...*  
(Qur'an, 66: 8)

Said the Prophet of Allah (s): There are four signs of a repentant:  
1) He is sincere to God in his actions 2) He shuns falsehood 3) He attaches firmly to truth and 4) He is eager to do good.

[Al-Harani, Tohaf al-Uqool, p. 20]

Merits of the Soul ...

# Repentance (*tawbah*)

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a) said: 'When a servant turns to God with sincere repentance (*tawbatan nasuhan*), God loves him and covers him (i.e. his sins) in the world and the Hereafter.' I said, 'And how does He cover him?' The Imam (a) replied, "He makes the two angels (assigned to write his deeds) forget that which they have written of his sins. Then He inspires his bodily members (saying), "Do conceal his sins," and He inspires the earth's places (saying), "Conceal the sins that he used to commit over you." Then he meets God, at the time that he meets Him, in such a manner that there is nothing to give witness against him regarding any sin."

[Al-Kulayni, al-Kafi, kitab al-*iman wa al-kufr*, bab *al-tawbah*, hadith # 1]

## The reality of *tawbah*

*Tawbah* means return to the soul's initial spirituality after the light of its human nature (*fitrah*) and the spirit has been covered by the darkness of sins and disobedience. The human soul in its initial natural state is devoid of any spiritual merits or vices. But it has capability to attain any kind of station and its essence carries an intrinsic luminosity. The commission of sins causes obscurity within the heart, the light of intrinsic nature is extinguished and is changed into darkness. Before total darkness pervades over the tablet of heart, if a person awakens from slumber of negligence, then this results in repentance and the soul gradually returns from the darkness to the light of original nature and its essential spirituality. This is mentioned in the famous hadith from Imam Baqir (a): "**One who repents from sin is like the one who has not sinned..**" [Al-Kulayni, al-Kāfi, *kitab al-'iman wa al-kufr, bab al-tawbah*, hadith # 10]

## The essentials and conditions of *tawbah*

*Tawbah* is not accepted from anyone on the mere verbal declaration, 'I repent.' There are certain essentials and conditions for the acceptance of *tawbah*, and some for its perfection. These are mentioned below in the following hadith:

- It is narrated that someone said: '*Astaghfirullah* (I seek God's forgiveness) before Imam 'Ali (a). He said to him. "May thy mother mourn for thee! Do you know what is *istighfar*? Verily *istighfar* is a degree of the '*illiyyun* (people of high station) and it is a word that means six things. **First** is remorse over the past. **Second**, the resolution not to return to it ever. **Third**, to return to the creatures their rights (usurped in the past) so that you meet God Almighty in such a state of purity that no one has any claim against you. **Fourth**, that you fulfil every duty that was neglected by you, in order to satisfy your obligation in respect of it. **Fifth**, that you attend to the flesh of your body that had grown on unlawful nourishment so that it melts away as a result of grief and mourning and the skin adheres to the bones, after which new flesh grows there between. **Sixth**, that you make your body taste the pain of obedience in the same way as it tasted earlier the pleasure of sinfulness. When you have done these things then say *Astaghfirullah!* [Nahj al-Balagha, saying # 417]

This noble tradition mentions firstly two essentials (remorse and resolution) then the two important conditions for its acceptance (returning the rights of creatures and then of the Creator), and finally two points for the perfection of repentance.

## *Tawbatun nasuh* (sincere repentance)

According to great researcher al-Shaykh al-Bahai (ra), there are several meanings of *tawbatun nasuh*. Few of them are mentioned below:

- *Tawbah* that 'advises' the people, i.e. it invites them to simulate him (the

repenter) on account of the good effect produced in him or that it 'counsels' its performer to root out sins and to never return to their commission.

- *Tawbah* that is done purely (*khalis*) for God's sake, in the same way as pure honey free from wax is called '*asal nasuh*'. The sincerity means that the remorse should be on account of the ugliness of sins or because they are against God's good pleasure and not for the fear of hellfire.

- The word *nasuh* is related to *nasabah*, which means tailoring, because *tawbah* sews together the body of faith torn by sin, or because it joins the penitent person to God's '*awliya*' (friends) and His lovers in the same way as separate pieces of cloth are joined together by tailoring.

- Yet another interpretation says: '*nasuh*' is an attribute of the penitent and *tawbah nasuh* is a *tawbah* whose performer admonishes himself to accomplish it as perfectly as it is worthy of being carried out until the effects of sins are totally purged from the heart. This task is only attained by making the soul melt with regret and grief and by clearing the darkness of vices with the light of virtues.

## The sooner it is, the better...

Success in *tawbah*, meeting all its conditions is a difficult task, rarely attainable. The indulgence in sin, especially the major and mortal ones, causes a person to become totally forgetful of *tawbah*. One should do *tawbah* as soon as possible after a sin is committed. If the tree of sinfulness growing in the orchard of the human heart reaches maturity, its roots becoming strong, the results are calamitous, one of which is to turn away man totally from repentance. Even if once in a while it comes to his mind, he keeps on postponing it from day to next day and from one month to another, telling himself, "I will make a sound repentance at the end of my life and in old age." This is wishful thinking. Such a person cannot perform *tawbah* after the roots of sinfulness have grown deep into his personality. The springtime for *tawbah* is the time of youth when the sins are fewer, the inner darkness of the heart incomplete and the conditions of *tawbah* easier to fulfil. This God-given opportunity should be availed at all costs and one shouldn't pay attention to satanic tricks of postponing *tawbah*. An intelligent person when realizes this fact, certainly abstains from sins and undoes wrongs done by him in the past. His heart would be filled with remorse resulting in firm determination to quit sinful life. God's graceful help becomes his lot and if he is sincere in his *tawbah*, he becomes the beloved of God as mentioned in the holy verse: "*Verily God loves the repentant*" (2: 222)

- Said Imam 'Ali (a): "**If you want to win His blessings in the next world, than today is the day of preparation while tomorrow is the day of reward. The place to proceed to is Paradise while the place of doom is Hell. Is there no one among you to repent for his deeds before his death, compensate for wrongs he has done and do good before the calamity of retribution descends upon him?**" [Nahjul Balagha, sermon # 33]

