

Repentance (part 2 of 3): Conditions of repentance

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

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

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

[“And who forgives sins besides Allaah?”]¹

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 Allaah as He alone can forgive them. If Allaah has kept a sinner’s wicked deeds a secret, he should not expose them by discussing them with friends, as the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) said:

“All the people of my Nation may be pardoned for their sins except those who publicise them.”²

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 Qur’aanic verses and hadeeths of the Prophet, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah 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

¹ Qur’aan [3:135]

² Saheeh al-Bukhaaree, Al-Tirmidhee, Aboo Daawood

Repentance (part 2 of 3): Conditions of repentance

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 peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

“Feeling remorse is repentance.”³

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. Allaah says:

[“...And those who when they commit an indecency or do injustice to their souls, remember Allaah and ask forgiveness for their faults - and who forgives the faults but Allaah, and (who) do not persist in what they have done...”]⁴

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. Allaah has tied good deeds with repentance:

[“Whoever repents and does good deeds has truly repented to Allaah.”]⁵

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

³ Ibn Maajah

⁴ Qur’aan [3:135-136]

⁵ Qur’aan [25:71]

Repentance (part 2 of 3): Conditions of repentance

[“Except those who repent and believe (in Islaamic Monotheism), and do righteous deeds, for those, Allaah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allaah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”]⁶

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

Wudoo'

“When a servant of Allaah 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.”⁷

Salaah

“The obligatory prayers of the one who properly performed wudoo' as Allaah the Exalted enjoined on him, will be an expiation for sins committed between them.”⁸

Friday Prayer (Jumu'ah Salaah)

“If anyone performs wudoo' well, then comes to the Friday prayer, listens and keeps silent, his sins between then and the next Jumu'ah plus those of three extra days will be forgiven.”⁹

Fasting (Sawm)

“All the previous sins of the one who fasts the month of Ramadhaan out of faith and seeking his reward from the Lord, will be forgiven.”¹⁰

Hajj Pilgrimage

“Whoever makes pilgrimage to the House (Ka'bah) and does not have sexual relations with his wife nor commits sins (during Hajj) will return (sinless) the way his mother bore him.”¹¹

⁶ Qur'aan [25:70]

⁷ Saheeh Muslim

⁸ Saheeh Muslim

⁹ Saheeh Muslim, Aboo Daawood

¹⁰ Saheeh al-Bukhaaree

¹¹ Saheeh al-Bukhaaree

Repentance (part 2 of 3): Conditions of repentance

Of course, these are all referring to lesser sins 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

Allaah 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. Allaah 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."]¹²

For this reason, a person must repent for their sin as soon as they realise 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 Islaam, 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 setting¹³, the Anti-Christ¹⁴, and the beast of the earth¹⁵."¹⁶

¹² Qur'aan [4:18]

¹³ On that day, the Sun will rise from the West instead of the East.

¹⁴ A person who will appear at the end of time who will perform supernatural feats and make false claims.

¹⁵ The appearance of the 'Beast of the Earth' is another sign of Judgment Day.

¹⁶ Saheeh Muslim