

I Want to Repent, But ... **- Sheikh Muhammed Salih Al-Munajjid**

Introduction

Praise be to Allaah, we praise Him and seek His help. Whomever Allaah guides cannot be led astray, and whomever He leaves astray, cannot be guided. I bear witness that there is no god except Allaah alone, with no partner or associate, and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.

Allaah has commanded all the believers to repent, as He says (interpretation of the meaning): “... *And all of you beg Allaah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful.*” [al-Noor 24:31]

People may be divided into two types, those who repent and turn to Allaah, and those who do wrong; there is no third category. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “... *And whosoever does not repent, then such are indeed zaalimoon (wrong-doers, etc.).*” [al-Hujuraat 49:11]. We are living in a time when many people have strayed far from the religion of Allah, and sin and immorality have become so widespread that there is no one who remains free from the taint of evil except for the one who is protected by Allaah.

However, Allaah will not allow but that His light should be perfected, thus many people have awoken from the slumber of negligence. They have become aware of their failure to fulfil their duties towards Allaah, have regretted their carelessness and sin, and so have started to move towards the beacon of repentance. Others have grown weary of this wretched life of misery, and so they are looking for a way out of darkness and into the Light.

But these people face many obstacles which they think stand between them and repentance, some of which exist within their own selves, and others in the world around them.

For this reason I have written this brief work, hoping to clear up this confusion, dispel doubts, explain wisdom and drive away the Shaytaan.

Following an introduction which discusses the dangers of taking sin lightly, I then explain the conditions of repentance, psychological cures, and *fataawa* (rulings) based on evidence from the Qur’aan and Sunnah which are addressed to those who repent. This is followed by quotations from some of the scholars’ comments, and my own concluding remarks.

I ask Allaah to benefit me and my Muslim brothers through these words. I ask no more from my brothers than that they should pray for me and offer me sincere advice (*naseehah*). May Allaah accept the repentance of us all.

The danger of taking sin lightly

You should know, may Allaah have mercy on me and on you, that Allaah has commanded His slaves to repent sincerely and has made doing so obligatory. He says (interpretation of the meaning): “*O you who believe! Turn to Allaah with sincere repentance...*” [al-Tahreem 66:8].

Allaah has given us time to repent before the honourable scribes (*kiraaman kaatibeen* – recording angels) record our deeds. The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The (scribe) on the left hand raises his pen (i.e., delays writing) for six hours [this may refer to six hours of 60 minutes as measured by astronomers, or it may refer to short periods of time during the day or night – *Lisaan al-‘Arab*] before he records the sinful deed of a Muslim. If he regrets it and seeks Allaah’s forgiveness, the deed is not recorded, otherwise it is recorded as one deed.” (Reported by al-Tabaraani in *al-Kabeer* and al-Bayhaqi in *Shu’ab al-Eemaan* (The Branches of Faith); classed as *hasan* by al-Albaani in *Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth al-Saheehah*, 1209). A further respite is granted after the deed has been recorded, up until the moment before death approaches.

The problem is that many people nowadays do not place their hope and fear in Allaah. They disobey Him by committing all manner of sins, day and night. There are those who are being tested by the idea of regarding sins as insignificant, so you may see one of them regarding certain “minor sins” (*saghaa’ir*) as inconsequential, so he might say, “What harm can it possibly do if I look at or shake hands with a (non-mahram) woman?” They think nothing of looking at women in magazines and on TV shows. Some of them, when they are told that this is haraam, may even facetiously ask, “So how bad can it be? Is it a major sin (*kabeerah*) or a minor sin (*sagheerah*)?” Compare this attitude with that reflected in the following reports narrated by Imaam al-Bukhaari (may Allaah have mercy on him):

Anas (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: “You do things which in your eyes are less significant than a hair, but at the time of the Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), we used to count them as things that could destroy a man.”

Ibn Mas’ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: “The believer regards his sin as if he were sitting beneath a mountain which he fears may fall on him, whereas the sinner regards his sin as if a fly lands on his nose and he swipes it away.”

Will these people then understand the seriousness of the matter when they read the following hadeeth of the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)? “Beware of the minor sins which are often thought of as insignificant, for they are like a group of people who stopped in the bottom of a valley. One of them brought a stick, and another brought a stick, until they had gathered enough to cook their food. These minor sins, if a person is called to account for them, will destroy him.” According to another report, he said: “Beware of minor sins, for they will pile up until they destroy a person.” (Reported by Ahmad; *Saheeh al-Jaami’*, 2686-2687).

The scholars said that when minor sins are accompanied by a lack of shame or remorse, and with no fear of Allaah, and are taken lightly, then there is the risk that they will be counted as major sins. Hence it is said that no minor sin is minor if you persist, and no major sin is major if you keep on seeking forgiveness.

So we say to the one who is in this situation: Do not think about whether the sin is major or minor; think about the One Whom you are disobeying.

In sha Allah, these words will benefit those who are sincere, and who are aware of their sins and shortcomings, and do not insist upon doing wrong and adhering to their faults.

These words are for those who believe in the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): “*Declare (O Muhammad) unto My slaves, that truly, I am the oft-Forgiving, the Most-Merciful.*” [*al-Hijr 15:49*] and in His words “*And that My Torment is indeed the most painful torment.*” [*al-Hijr 15:50*]. It is essential to keep this balanced view in mind.

Conditions for the acceptance of repentance

The word *tawbah* (“repentance”) conveys a profound meaning, one which carries great implications. It is not, as many people think, the matter of mere lip-service, after uttering which a person may then continue in his sin. If you ponder the meaning of the aayah (interpretation of the meaning): “... *Seek the forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance...*” [Hood 11:3], you will see that repentance is something which is over and above seeking for forgiveness.

Such a great and important matter must necessarily have conditions attached to it. The scholars have described the conditions of repentance, based on the Qur’aan and Sunnah. They include:

Immediate cessation of the sin.

Regret for what is past

Determination not to return to the sin

Restitution of victims’ rights, or seeking their forgiveness

Some scholars have also mentioned more details as conditions of sincere repentance, which we quote below with some examples:

1. That the sin should be given up only for the sake of Allaah, not for any other reason, such as being unable to do it, or being afraid of what people will say.

The person who gives up his sin because of its negative impact on his reputation and standing among people, or on his work, cannot be described as one who repents.

The person who gives up his sin for reasons of health and strength, such as one who gives up promiscuity and immorality because he is afraid of contagious killer diseases, or because it weakens his body and his memory, cannot be described as one who repents.

The person who refuses to accept a bribe because he fears that the person offering it may be from the law enforcement agency, operating under cover, cannot be described as one who repents.

The one who does not drink wine or take drugs just because he does not have the money with which to buy them cannot be described as one who repents.

The one who does not commit a sin because of reasons beyond his control cannot be described as one who repents. So the liar who is robbed of the power of speech, the adulterer who becomes impotent, the thief who loses his limbs in an accident... all of them must feel remorse for what they have done and give up any wish to do it again. The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Remorse is repentance.” (Reported by Ahmad and Ibn Maajah; *Saheeh al-Jaami*’, 6802).

In the sight of Allaah, the one who is incapable of committing a deed but has the desire to do it is the same as one who does do it. The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “There are only four kinds of people in this world. (The first is) a slave whom Allaah has blessed with wealth and knowledge, and he fears Allaah with regard to them, and uses them to uphold family ties, and acknowledges the rights that Allaah has over them. He has the highest status. (The second is) a slave to whom Allah has given knowledge, but not wealth. His intention is sincere, and he says, ‘If only I had wealth, I would do (good deeds) like so-and-so (the first slave).’ He will be rewarded according to his intention, so their reward will be equal. (The third is) a slave to whom Allaah has given wealth, but not knowledge. He spends his money aimlessly, neither fearing Allaah with regard to it nor using it to uphold family ties nor acknowledging the rights that Allaah has over it. He has the lowest status. (The fourth is) a slave to whom Allaah has given neither wealth nor money. He says, ‘If only I had wealth, I would do (bad deeds) like so-and-so (the third slave). He will be punished according to his intention, so their burden of sin will be equal.” (Reported by Ahmad and al-Tirmidhi, and classed as saheeh in *Al-Targheeb wa 'l-Tarheeb*, 1/9).

2. The one who repents should feel that his sin is repulsive and harmful. This means that if a person repents sincerely, he cannot derive any feelings of pleasure or enjoyment when he remembers his past sins, or wish to repeat them in the future. In his books *Al-Daa' wa 'l-Dawaa'* and *al-Fawaa'id*, Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) mentions many of the harmful effects of sin, including the following:

Loss of knowledge – feelings of alienation in the heart – difficulty in all one’s affairs – physical weakness – loss of the desire to obey Allaah – absence of blessing – lack of success by the help of Allaah (*tawfeeq*) – tightness in the chest, i.e., unhappiness – generation of evil deeds – habituation to sin – disgrace in the sight of Allaah – disgrace in the sight of people – the curse of the animals – the dress of shame – sealing of the heart and being included in the curse of Allaah – not having *du'aa*'s answered – corruption on land and on sea – lack of self-respect or honour – loss of a sense of shame – loss of blessings – incurring the wrath of Allaah – feelings of alarm and dismay in the heart of the sinner – falling into the clutches of Shaytaan – an unhappy end – the punishment of the Hereafter.

This description of the harmful consequences of sin would make anyone want to keep away from sin altogether, but some people no sooner give up one kind of sin but they fall prey to another kind, for numerous reasons, including the following:

They think the new sin is less serious

They have a greater inclination towards it, and their desire for it is stronger

Because circumstances are more conducive to this sin than others, which may require more effort; the means of committing it are readily available and widespread

His friends are all committing this sin, and it is too hard for him to separate himself from them

Because the sin is a means of gaining status among his companions, and he is not willing to give up his status, so he continues in his sin. This is what happens to some of those who are in positions of what may be described as gang leadership. Such a thing happened to the shameless poet Abu Nawaas, when (another poet) Abu'l-'Ataahiyah sought to advise him concerning some of his sins. Abu Nawaas

responded:

“Do you see me, O ‘Ataahi, giving up these amusements,

Do you see me losing my status among my people for a life of piety?”

The slave should hasten to repent, because delay is in itself a sin for which repentance is required.

He should have the fear that his repentance may have been lacking in some way, and he should not assume that it has been accepted, so he cannot remain complacent or feel secure against the Plan of Allaah.

He should make up for duties that he has neglected in the past, such as payment of zakaat which he withheld in the past – because it is due to Allaah and it is the right of the poor – and so on.

He should avoid the place where the sin was committed if his presence there will lead to him committing the same sin again.

He should shun those who helped him to commit the sin.

(The above is taken from *Fawaa'id hadeeth qaatil al-mi'ah* (what we can learn from the hadeeth about the one who killed a hundred people), which we will quote below).

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “*Friends on that Day will be foes one to another, except al-muttaqoon (the pious).*” [al-Zukhruf 43:67]

Bad friends will curse one another on the Day of Judgement, which is why when you repent, you should keep away from them, shun them, and warn others about them if they do not respond to your da'wah and advice. You should not let Shaytaan tempt you to go back to them on the grounds that you want to advise them, especially when you know yourself to be weak and unable to resist this temptation. There are many cases of people falling back into sin because they went back to the company of bad friends.

He should destroy the haraam things in his possession, such as alcoholic drinks, musical instruments (like ‘*ood* – a stringed instrument - and *mizmaar* – a wind instrument), haraam pictures and films, worthless literature and statues. They should be broken, destroyed and burnt. This getting rid of all the trappings of *jaahiliyyah* at the point of turning over a new leaf is absolutely essential. How often has the keeping of such things been the cause of their owners reneging on their repentance and going astray after having been guided! May Allaah help us to remain steadfast.

He should choose righteous friends who will help him, instead of those bad friends. He should strive to attend gatherings where Allaah is remembered and where he may gain more knowledge. He should fill his time with worthwhile pursuits so that Shaytaan will not find ways to remind him of the past.

He should rebuild his body which has been fed on unlawful things, by obeying Allaah and striving to nourish it with only lawful things, so that it will become strong.

He should repent before the death-rattle appears in his throat (i.e., before death is imminent), and before the sun rises in the West [one of the major Signs of the Day of Judgement], as the

Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever repents before the death rattle reaches his throat, Allaah will accept it from him” (reported by Ahmad and al-Tirmidhi, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, 6132) and “Whoever repents before the sun rises in the West, Allaah will accept his repentance” (reported by Muslim).

Great acts of repentance

Here we will look at examples of repentance among the early generation of this ummah, the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him):

Buraydah (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that Maa'iz ibn Maalik al-Aslami came to the Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: “O Messenger of Allaah, I have wronged myself by committing adultery, and I want you to purify me.” The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned him away. The next day, he came back and said: “O Messenger of Allaah, I have committed adultery,” and the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned him away a second time. The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) sent for his people and asked them, “Do you know of anything wrong with him mentally? Have you ever noticed any strange behaviour on his part?” They said, “What we know is that he is of sound mind. He is among the righteous people, as far as we can see.” Maa'iz came back a third time, and the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) sent for his people too, and they told him that there was nothing wrong with him or with his mind. On the fourth day, the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) had a hole dug for him, and commanded that he should be stoned. The Ghaamidi woman came and said, “O Messenger of Allaah, I have committed adultery, so purify me.” The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned her away. The next day, she came back and asked, “Why are you turning me away? Perhaps you are turning me away as you turned Maa'iz away, but by Allaah I am pregnant.” He said, “Then no (I will not carry out the punishment). Go away until you have given birth.” When she had given birth, she brought the child wrapped in a cloth and said, “Here, I have given birth to him.” The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Go away and breastfeed him until he is weaned.” When she had weaned him, she brought the child, holding a piece of bread in his hand, and said: “O Messenger of Allaah, here he is, I have weaned him and he is eating solid food now.” The child was given to one of the Muslims to take care of, then the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) ordered that a chest-deep hole be dug for her, and that she be stoned. Khaalid ibn al-Waleed picked up a stone and threw it at her head. Blood spurted out onto his face and he swore at her. The Prophet of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) heard what he said, and told him: “Take it easy, O Khaalid! By Him in

Whose hand is my soul, she has repented in such a way that if the tax-gatherer had done so, he would have been forgiven.” (Reported by Muslim). Then he gave orders that the (funeral) prayer should be offered for her, and she was buried.

According to one report, ‘Umar said: “O Messenger of Allaah, you had her stoned and now you will pray for her!” He said: “She has repented in such a way that if it were to be shared out among seventy people of Madeenah, it would be sufficient for them. Can you find anyone better than one who gives up her soul for the sake of Allaah?” (Reported by ‘Abd al-Razzaaq in *al-Musannaf*, 7/325).

Repentance wipes out whatever came before it

One might say: “I want to repent, but who can guarantee that Allaah will forgive me if I do so? I want to follow the Straight Path, but I feel very hesitant. If I knew for sure that Allaah would forgive me, I would definitely repent.”

I would say in response that these feelings of hesitation are the same as those experienced by the Sahaabah themselves. If you think seriously about the following two reports, the feelings you have will be dispelled, in sha Allaah.

Imaam Muslim (may Allaah have mercy on him) reported the story of how ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas (may Allaah be pleased with him) came to Islam: “...When Allaah put the love of Islam into my heart, I came to the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: ‘Stretch forth your hand so that I may give *bay’ah* (pledge of allegiance) to you. He stretched forth his hand, but I pulled my own hand back. He asked, ‘What is the matter, O ‘Amr?’ I said, ‘There is a condition.’ He asked, ‘What is the condition?’ I said: ‘That I be forgiven.’ He said: ‘Do you not know, O ‘Amr, that Islam wipes out whatever came before, hijrah (migration for the sake of Allah) wipes out whatever came before, and Hajj wipes out whatever came before?’”

Imaam Muslim reported from Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with them both) that some people among the mushrikeen killed, and killed a great deal, and they committed adultery, and did it a great deal. Then they came to Muhammad ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: “What you say and advocate is good, if only you could tell us that there is any expiation for what we have done.” Then Allaah revealed the words (interpretation of the meanings): “*And those who invoke not any other god along with Allaah, nor kill such life as Allaah has forbidden, except for just cause, nor commit illegal sexual intercourse – and whoever does this shall receive the punishment.*” [al-Furqaan 25:68]; “*Say: ‘O My slaves who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allaah...*” [al-Zumar 39:53].

You might say: “I want to repent, but my sins are many indeed. There is no kind of immoral act, no kind of sin, imaginable or otherwise, that I have not committed. It is so bad that I do not know if Allaah can forgive me for the things that I have done over the years.”

In response, I would tell you that this is not a unique problem; it is one that is shared by many of those who wish to repent. Let me give you the example of a young man who asked this question once. He began his career of sin at a very early age, and by the time he was only seventeen, he already had a long record of committing every kind of immoral act, major and minor, with all kinds of people, old and young alike. He had even abused a little girl. Added to this was a long list of thefts. Then he said: “I have repented to Allaah. I now pray tahajjud some nights, and I fast every Monday and Thursday, and I read Qur’aan after Fajr prayers. Will my repentance be of any avail?”

The guiding principle for us Muslims is to refer to the Qur’aan and Sunnah when we look for rulings, solutions and remedies. When we refer this matter to the Qur’aan, we find that Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “*Say: ‘O My slaves who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allaah, verily Allaah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And turn in repentance and in obedience with true faith to your Lord and submit to Him...’ [al-Zumar 39:53-54].*

This is the answer to this particular problem. The matter is quite clear and needs no further explanation.

The feeling that one’s sins are too great to be forgiven by Allaah stems from a number of factors:

The absence of certain faith on the part of the slave in the vastness of Allaah’s mercy

A lack of faith in the ability of Allaah to forgive all sins

Weakness in one aspect of the heart’s action, namely hope

Failure to understand the effect of repentance in wiping out sins

We will answer all these points here:

It is sufficient to quote the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): “... *and My Mercy embraces all things...*” [al-A’raaf 7:156]

It is sufficient to quote the saheeh hadeeth qudsi: “Allaah says: “Whoever knows that I am able to forgive all sins, I shall forgive him, and I shall not mind, so long as he does not associate anything with Me.” (Reported by al-Tabaraani in *al-Kabeer*, and by al-Haakim; *Saheeh al-Jaami*, 4330). This refers to when the slave meets his Lord in the Hereafter.

This may be remedied by referring to the hadeeth qudsi: “ ‘O son of Adam, so long as you call upon Me and put your hope in Me, I will forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam, if your sins were to reach the clouds of the sky, and you were to ask me for forgiveness, I will forgive you and I shall not mind. O son of Adam, if you were to come to Me with sins nearly the size of the earth, and you were to meet Me not associating anything with Me, then I would bring you forgiveness nearly the size of (the earth).’ ” (Reported by al-Tirmidhi; *Saheeh al-Jaami*, 4338).

It is sufficient to quote the hadeeth of the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): “The one who repents from his sin is like the one who did not sin in the first place.” (Reported by Ibn Maajah; *Saheeh al-Jaami*, 3008).

For those who find it hard to comprehend how Allaah may forgive such an accumulation of sin, we quote the following hadeeth:

The repentance of one who killed a hundred

Abu Sa’eed Sa’d ibn Maalik ibn Sinaan al-Khudri (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “There was among the people who came before you a man who killed ninety-nine people. Then he asked about the most knowledgeable person on earth, and was directed to a hermit, so he went to him, told him that he had killed ninety-nine people, and asked if he could be forgiven. The hermit said, ‘No,’ so he killed him, thus completing one hundred. Then he asked about the most knowledgeable person on earth and was directed to a scholar. He told him that he had killed one hundred people, and asked whether he could be forgiven. The scholar said, ‘Yes, what could possibly come between you and repentance? Go to such-and-such a town, for in it there are people who worship Allaah. Go and worship with them, and do not go back to your own town, for it is a bad place.’ So the man set off, but when he was halfway there, the angel of death came to him, and the angels of mercy and the angels of wrath began to argue over him. The angels of mercy said: ‘He had repented and was seeking Allaah.’ The angels of wrath said: ‘He never did any good thing.’ An angel in human form came to them, and they asked him to decide the matter. He said: ‘Measure the distance between the two lands (his home town and the town he was headed for), and whichever of the two he is closest to is the one to which he belongs.’ So they measured the distance, and found that he was closer to the town for which he had been headed, so the angels of mercy took him.” (Agreed upon). According to a report in *al-Saheeh*: “The righteous town was a hand-span closer, so he was counted as one of its people.” According to another report in *al-Saheeh*: “Allaah commanded (the evil town) to move away, and (the righteous town) to move closer, and said: ‘Measure the distance between them,’ and they found him to be a hand-span closer to the righteous town, so he was forgiven.”

What then can come between a person and repentance? Do you think that your sins are any greater than the sins of this man, whose repentance Allaah accepted? So why despair? The matter is even greater than this. Think about the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): “*And those who invoke not any other god along with Allaah, nor kill such life as Allaah has forbidden, except for just cause, nor commit illegal sexual intercourse – and whoever does this shall receive the punishment. The torment shall be doubled to him on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein in disgrace; except those who repent and believe, and do righteous deeds; for those, Allaah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allaah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*” [al-Furqaan 25:68-70].

Stop and think about that phrase: “... *Allaah will change their sins into good deeds...*” [al-Furqaan 25:70]. This will explain to you the immense grace and favour of Allaah. The scholars have defined this change as being of two types:

Changing bad characteristics into good ones, so that *shirk* is changed into true faith,

fornication into chastity, lies into truthfulness, treachery into trustworthiness, etc.

Changing evil deeds that one has committed into good deeds on the Day of Resurrection. Think about the words “...*Allaah will change their sins into good deeds...*”. It does not say that one bad deed will be exchanged for a good deed (of equal weight). It could be less, the same, or more, in number or in weight. It will depend on the sincerity of the one who repents. Can you imagine any greater favour than this? See how this divine generosity is further explained in the following hadeeth:

‘Abd al-Rahmaan ibn Jubayr reported from Abu Taweel Shatb al-Mamdood that he came to the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) [another report states that a very old man whose eyebrows had fallen over his eyes (i.e., he had sunken eyes) came and stood before the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) supporting himself with a stick] and said: “What do you think of a man who has committed every sin, not leaving out any sin, major or minor [according to another report: if his sins were to be divided among all the people of the world, they would destroy them]. Can such a man repent?” The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) asked, “Have you become Muslim?” He said: “I bear witness that there is no god except Allaah and that you are the messenger of Allaah.” The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Do good deeds and keep away from evil deeds, and Allaah will turn them all into good deeds for you.” He asked, “What about my acts of treachery and immorality?” The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Yes, (those too).” The man said, “*Allaahu akbar* (Allaah is most great)!” and kept glorifying Allaah until he was out of sight.

(Al-Haythami said: a similar version was reported by al-Tabaraani and al-Bazzaar. The men of al-Bazzaar’s *isnaad* are the men of *saheeh* apart from Muhammad ibn Haaron Abi Nasheetah, who is *thiqah*. *Al-Majma’* 1/36. Al-Mundhiri said in *al-Targheeb*: its *isnaad* is *jayyid qawiy*, 4/113. Ibn Hajar said in *al-Isaabah* 4/149 that it meets the conditions of *saheeh*.)

At this point the one who is seeking to repent may ask: “When I was astray and not even praying, which meant I was beyond the pale of Islam, I did do some good deeds. Will I be rewarded for these deeds after I repent, or are they lost in the wind?”

The answer to this question may be found in the following hadeeth: ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr reported that Hakeem ibn Hizaam told him that he said to the Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): “O Messenger of Allaah, do you think that I will be rewarded for the (good) things like giving charity, freeing slaves and upholding family ties that I did during the Jaahiliyyah (days of ignorance before Islam)?” The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “You became Muslim because of the good that you had already done.” (Reported by al-Bukhaari).

These sins will be forgiven, these evil deeds will be turned into good deeds, and these good deeds that were done during the days of jaahiliyyah will still count in your favour after you repent. What more could anyone possibly want?

What should I do when I have sinned?

You might ask: “If I commit a sin, how can I repent from it straightaway? Is there anything that I should do straight after committing a sin?”

The answer is that there are two things which should be done after committing a sin. The first is to feel remorse in one's heart and to be determined not to repeat the sin. This is the result of fearing Allaah. The second is to undertake some physical action to do different kinds of good deeds, such as praying *salaat al-tawbah* (the prayer of repentance). Abu Bakrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: “I heard the

Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say: ‘There is no man who commits a sin, then gets up, purifies himself, prays two rak’ahs then asks Allaah to forgive him, but Allaah will forgive him.’” (Reported by the authors of *Sunan*; see *Saheeh al-Tagheeb wa'l-Tarheeb*, 1/284). Then he recited this aayah (interpretation of the meaning): “*And those who, when they have committed faahishah (illegal sexual intercourse, etc.) or wronged themselves with evil, remember Allaah and ask forgiveness for their sins; - and none can forgive sins but Allaah – and do not persist in what (wrong) they have done, while they know.*” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:135]

Other saheeh reports describe how to perform the two rak’ahs which will expiate for sin. In summary:

He should perform wudoo’. “There is no-one who performs wudoo’ and performs it well, but his sins will fall from the washed limbs with the water or with the last drop of water.”

He should do wudoo’ well. Doing wudoo’ well includes saying “Bismillaah” at the beginning, and reciting some du’aa’s afterwards, such as “*Ash-hadu an laa ilaaha ill-Allaah wahdahu laa shareeka lah, wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadan ‘abduhu wa rasooluhu*” or “*Allaahumma j’alni min al-tawwaabeen wa j’alni min al-mutahhareen* (O Allaah, make me one of those who repent and make me one of those who are purified)” or “*Subhaanak Allaahumma wa bi hamdika ash-hadu an laa ilaaha illa anta, astaghfiruka wa atoobu ilayk* (Glory and praise be to you O Allah. I bear witness that there is no god but You. I seek Your forgiveness and I repent to You).” Saying any of these du’aa’s after wudoo’ will bring a great reward.

He should stand and offer two rak’ahs of prayer.

He should not make any mistakes or forget any part of the prayer.

He should not let his thoughts wander.

He should concentrate properly and think of Allaah whilst praying.

Then he should seek the forgiveness of Allaah.

The result will be that his previous sins will be forgiven, and he will be assured of Paradise. (*Saheeh al-Targheeb*, 1/94,95)

This should be followed with more good deeds and acts of obedience to Allaah. When ‘Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) realized that he had made the mistake of disagreeing with the Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) during the Campaign of al-Hudaybiyah, he said: “Because of that I did many deeds,” i.e., righteous deeds, as expiation for that sin.

Think about the example given in the following saheeh hadeeth:

The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The one who does bad deeds then does good deeds is like a man who wears a tight coat of mail which almost chokes him; when he does a good deed, it becomes a little looser, and as he does more good deeds it becomes even looser, until it falls off him and drops to the ground.” (Reported by al-Tabaraani in *al-Kabeer*; see also *Saheeh al-Jaami*, 2192).

So good deeds release the sinner from the prison of disobedience, and bring him forth into the brave new world of obedience to Allaah.

Ibn Mas’ood said: “A man came to the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: ‘O Messenger of Allaah, I found a woman in a garden and I did everything with her (kissing and fondling) except that (intercourse), so do with me as you will.’ The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not say anything, and the man went away. ‘Umar said: ‘Allaah covered his sin. He should have covered it himself.’ The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) followed the man with his gaze and said: ‘Bring him back to me.’ So they brought him back, and (the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) recited to him: ‘*And perform al-salaah (prayer) at the two ends of the day and in some hours of the night. Verily, the good deeds remove the evil deeds (i.e., small sins). That is a reminder for the mindful (those who accept advice)*’ [Hood 11:114 – interpretation of the meaning].” According to the report narrated by ‘Umar, Mu’aadh said: “O Messenger of Allaah, is this just for him or does it apply to all the people?” The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “No, it applies to all the people.” (Reported by Muslim)

Evil people pursue me

You might say, “I want to repent, but evil friends are pursuing me wherever I go. As soon as they learn of any change I have made, they launch an attack against me, and I feel too weak to resist them. What can I do?”

Our answer is: bear this with patience, for this is how Allaah tests His sincere slaves, so that He may distinguish the truthful from the liars, the good from the evil.

As you have taken the first step on the Straight Path, stand firm and persevere. These people are the devils of men and jinn, who will conspire with one another to turn you away from this path. Pay no heed to them. At the beginning, they will tell you that this is just a passing fancy, a temporary crisis that will not last. Strangely enough, such people have been known to say of friends who were setting out on the road of repentance, “What evil he has fallen into!”

One of these evil people, when her former boyfriend put the phone down on her because he had repented and wanted nothing more to do with this sin, called him back a few days later to say, “Maybe the evil insinuations have stopped now!”

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Say: I seek refuge with (Allaah) the Lord of mankind,

The King of mankind,

The ilaah (God) of mankind,

From the evil of the whisperer (devil who whispers evil in the hearts of men) who withdraws (from his whispering in one's heart after one remembers Allaah),

Who whispers in the breasts of mankind,

Of jinns and men."

[al-Naas 114:1-6]

Is your Lord more deserving of obedience, or these people who call to evil?

You should know that they will pursue you wherever you go and will use every means at their disposal to try to bring you back to the way of sin. One young man told me that he had had a girlfriend who, after he repented, used to tell her driver to follow him, and she would call to him from the window of her car whilst he was on his way to the mosque!

But Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Allaah will keep firm those who believe, with the word that stands firm in this world (i.e., they will keep on worshipping Allaah alone and none else) and in the Hereafter." [Ibraaheem 14:27]

They will try to remind you of the past and make your past sins appear attractive, by means of reminders, earnest pleas, pictures, letters... Do not pay any attention to them. Be on your guard against the ways in which they will try to tempt you. Remember the story of Ka'b ibn Maalik, one of the great Companions of the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) commanded all his Companions to cut off ties with Ka'b because he had stayed behind and had not joined the expedition to Tabook. This boycott was to last until Allaah decided concerning him. The kaafir king of Ghassaan sent a letter to Ka'b, in which he said: "We hear that your master has treated you badly. Allaah has not put you in a house of humiliation and loss, so come to us and we will provide for you." The kaafir wanted to win over the Muslim so that he would leave Madeenah and be lost in the land of kufr. How did this great Sahaabi react to this? Ka'b said: "When I read it, I said, 'This is also a test,' and I threw it in the oven and burned it."

This is how the Muslim, male or female, should deal with everything that is sent by bad people: burn it to ashes, and whilst you are burning it, remember the Fire of Hell.

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"So be patient. Verily, the Promise of Allaah is true, and let not those who have no certainty of faith,

They threaten me

You may say: "I want to repent but my old friends are threatening to reveal my past and publish my secrets to everyone. They have pictures and other papers they can use against me. I am worried about my reputation, and I am scared!"

Our advice is: fight back against these friends of Shaytaan. The tricks of Shaytaan are weak, and all the pressure that the helpers of Iblees may bring against you will soon crumble in the face of the patience and perseverance of the true believer.

You should realize that if you try to placate them, this will only give them more evidence to use against you, and you will be the loser sooner or later. Do not pay any heed to them, ask Allaah to help you to deal with them and say: "*Hasbi Allaah wa ni'm al-wakeel* (Allaah is Sufficient for me and He is the Best Disposer of affairs)." When the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was afraid of a people, he would say: "*Allaahumma innaa naj'aluka fi nuhoorihim wa na'oodhu bika min shuroorihim* (O Allaah, we ask You to seize them by their throats and we seek refuge with You from their evil)." (Reported by Ahmad and Abu Dawood; see also *Saheeh al-Jaami*, 4582).

It is true that this is a difficult situation. Take the poor girl who has repented, but her former boyfriend calls her on the phone and threatens her by saying: "I have recorded our conversations and I have pictures of you. If you refuse to go out with me I will disgrace you in front of your family." She is certainly in an unenviable position.

Look at the way in which the friends of Shaytaan wage psychological war on those singers and actors, male and female, who have repented. They distribute the worst of their former productions in the marketplace, to put pressure on them. But Allaah is with those who fear Him and those who repent. He is the Friend and Supporter of the believers. He will not abandon or forsake them. Never has anyone sought His protection and been refused. Remember that with hardship there is ease, and after every difficulty comes relief.

The following moving story offers clear testimony in support of what we are saying. This is the story of the great and heroic Sahaabi Marthad ibn Abi Marthad al-Ghanawi, who used to help oppressed Muslims flee from Makkah to Madeenah in secret.

There was a man called Marthad ibn Abi Marthad, who used to smuggle Muslim prisoners-of-war from Makkah to Madeenah. There was a prostitute in Makkah, called 'Anaaq, who had been a friend of Marthad's. Marthad had promised to take one of the prisoners from Makkah to Madeenah. He said: "I came to the shade of one of the gardens of Makkah on a moonlit night, then 'Anaaq came and saw my shadow by the garden. When she reached me, she recognized me and said: 'Marthad?' I said, 'Marthad.' She said: 'Welcome! Come and stay with us tonight.' I said, 'O 'Anaaq, Allaah has forbidden *zinaa* (unlawful sexual relations)' She called out, 'O people of the camp! This man is taking your prisoners away!' Eight men came after me, and I climbed al-Khandamah (a mountain outside one of the entrances to Makkah) and hid in a cave. They came and stood right over me, but Allaah blinded them and they did not see me, so they turned back. I came back

to my companion (the prisoner he was planning to take to Madeenah) and picked him up, and he was a heavy man. When we reached al-Udhkhar, I released him from his chains. Then I carried him again and I found the journey difficult. When I reached Madeenah, I came to the Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and asked him, ‘O Messenger of Allaah, should I marry ‘Anaaq?’ I asked him twice.

The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) remained silent and did not answer me at all, until the aayah ‘*Let no man guilty of adultery or fornication marry any but a woman similarly guilty, or an Unbeliever; nor let any but such a man or an Unbeliever marry such a woman; to the Believers such a thing is forbidden*’ [al-Noor 24:3 – Yusuf ‘Ali’s translation] was revealed. Then the Messenger of Allaah ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: ‘O Marthad, *Let no man guilty of adultery or fornication marry any but a woman similarly guilty, or an Unbeliever; nor let any but such a man or an Unbeliever marry such a woman, so do not marry her.*’”

(*Saheeh Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, 3/80).

Do you see how Allaah protects those who believe and how He is with those who do good?

But if the worst comes to the worst, and the thing you fear happens – they broadcast bad things about you – what you need to do is to be honest and explain your situation to others. Tell them, “Yes, I was a sinner, but now I have repented to Allaah, so what do you want?”

We should all remember that true disgrace will occur not in this world, but in the Hereafter, on the Day of Judgement, the Day of the Greatest Humiliation, not in front of one or two hundred people, not in front of one or two thousand, but in front of the whole of creation, angels, jinn and mankind, all the people from Adam to the last man.

Let us remember the du’aa’ of Ibraaheem:

“And disgrace me not on the Day when (all the creatures) will be resurrected;

The Day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail,

Except him who brings to Allaah a clean heart”

[*al-Shu’araa’* 26:87-89 – interpretation of the meaning]

At moments of distress, seek help with the du’aa’ of the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him):

“Allaahumma ustar ‘awraatanaa wa aamin raw’aatanaa. Allaahumma aj’al tha’ranaa ‘ala man zalamananaa wa’nsurnaa ‘ala man baghiya ‘alaynaa. Allaahumma la tushammit binaa’l-a’daa’ wa laa’l-haasideen (O Allaah, cover our faults and calm our fears safe. O Allaah, avenge us over those who have oppressed us, and grant us victory over those who have wronged us. O Allaah, do not cause our enemies or those who envy us to take malicious joy in our misfortune).”

My sins haunt me

You might say: “I committed many sins, and I have repented, but my sins pursue me and I am haunted by what I have done. My memories disturb my sleep and do not let me have any rest. How can I free myself?”

My advice to you is that these feelings are evidence of your sincere repentance. This is essentially remorse, and remorse is repentance. But you can look at your past with hope: the hope that Allaah will forgive you. Do not despair of the mercy of Allaah, for He says (interpretation of the meaning): “*And who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord except those who are astray?*” [al-Hijr 15:56]

Ibn Mas’ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: “The gravest of major sins are to associate partners with Allaah, to feel secure against the plan of Allaah and to despair of the mercy of Allaah. (Reported by ‘Abd al-Razzaaq and classed as saheeh by al-Haythami and Ibn Katheer).

In the process of moving towards Allaah, the believer is always motivated by both fear of Allaah and hope of His mercy. One or other of them may prevail at times of need. If he sins, the fear of Allaah overwhelms him, and so he repents. When he repents, the hope of Allaah’s mercy fills his heart and he seeks the forgiveness of Allaah.

Should I confess?

A person may sorrowfully ask: “I want to repent, but do I have to go and confess the sins I have committed? Is it a condition of repentance that I should tell the *qaadi* (judge) in the court about everything that I have done, and ask him to carry out the appropriate punishment on me? What is the meaning of the story I have just read about the repentance of Maa’iz, of the Ghaamidi woman and of the man who kissed a woman in the garden?”

My response to you is that the slave’s direct relationship with Allaah, with no intermediaries, is one of the most important aspects of the belief in Tawheed (Divine Unity) with which Allaah is pleased. He says (interpretation of the meaning): “*And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad) concerning Me, then (answer them), I am indeed near (to them by My knowledge). I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me (without any mediator or intercessor)...*” [al-Baqarah 2:186]. If we believe that repentance is only for Allaah, then confession is only for Allaah too. In fact, the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to pray in his *du’aa*’s asking for forgiveness: “*Aboo’u laka bi na’matika wa aboo’u bi dhanbi* (I acknowledge Your blessings and I acknowledge (i.e. confess) my sin to You).” This is a confession to Allaah.

We are not, by the grace of Allaah, like the Christians, with the priest, the chair of confession, the documents of forgiveness, etc.

Indeed, Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “*Know they not that Allaah accepts repentance from His slaves...?*” [al-Tawbah 9:104], i.e., He accepts repentance from His slaves without any mediator or intercessor.

As regards the carrying out of punishments, if the deed has not come to the official attention of the imaam, ruler or qaadi, a person does not have to go to them and confess. If Allaah has covered the sins of a person, there is nothing wrong with him covering his own sins. It is sufficient for him to repent to Allaah, and the matter is between him and his Lord. One of the Names of Allaah is *al-Sitteer*, meaning the One Who covers or conceals (the faults of His slaves), and He likes His slaves to conceal sins too. As far as the Sahaabah such as Maa'iz, the Ghaamidi woman who committed *zinaa*, and the man who kissed the woman in the garden are concerned, all of them did something which they were not obliged to do, may Allaah be pleased with them, because they were so keen to purify themselves. The evidence for this is the fact that the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned away from Maa'iz and from the Ghaamidi woman at first. When 'Umar said to the man who had kissed the woman in the garden, "Allaah covered his sin. He should have covered it himself?" the Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) remained silent, indicating that he concurred with these words.

So it is not necessary to go to the court and register an official confession, if Allaah has covered one's sins. Nor is it necessary to go to the imaam of a mosque and ask him to carry out the appropriate punishment, or to ask a friend to carry out the punishment of lashing inside the house, as some people imagine.

The following story will teach you how important it is to be careful of the attitude of some ignorant people towards those who repent: a man who wanted to repent went to the ignorant imaam of a mosque, confessed his sins to him and asked him what he should do. The imaam said, "Go to the court and confess your sins officially. They will carry out the appropriate punishment on you. Then we will see what to do next." The poor man saw that he would not be able to do this, so he forgot about repenting and went back to his old ways.

Here I will take the opportunity to add an important comment: knowing about the rules of Islam, and seeking them from the correct sources is a trust. Allaah says (interpretation of the meanings):

"... so ask of those who know the Scripture, if you know not." [al-Nahl 16:43]

"... The Most Beneficent! Ask Him, as He is al-Khabeer (the All-Knower of everything)." [al-Furqaan 25:59]

Not every preacher is qualified to issue fataawaa (rulings or edicts). Not every imaam or muezzin, speaker or storyteller, is qualified to deliver rulings to the people. But the Muslim is responsible for knowing from where he can take rulings. This is an important matter of religion. The Prophet ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) feared what might befall his ummah at the hands of misguided imaams. One of the salaf (early generation of Islam) said: "Knowledge is religion, so pay attention to who it is you are taking your religion from." Beware of these pitfalls, and only consult trustworthy scholars when you are in doubt about an issue. And Allaah is the source of help.
