

A less extreme form of love for the life of this world is that in which it simply distracts the servant from his true source of happiness: which is to dedicate his heart to the love of his Lord, and his tongue to remembering Him. Love for and obsession with the life of this world inevitably limit the servant's chances in the next world, in the same way that love for the next world limits his life in this world.

**Fifth**, love for the life of this world makes it the servant's chief preoccupation. Anas ibn Malik, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Whoever is preoccupied with the next life, Allah will place his wealth within his heart, and gather his people around him, so that life will come and offer itself to him. Whoever is preoccupied with this life, Allah will make his poverty apparent in his eyes, and scatter his people from around him, and only what has been written for him in this world will come to him." <sup>10</sup>

**Sixth**, the one who loves the life of this world the most is the one who suffers from it the most. His suffering is of three kinds: his suffering in this life itself as a result of his striving to achieve worldly gains and his competing with its people over them; his suffering in the *barzakh* because he missed out in this life and regrets his lost opportunities – for now he is on his way to meet Allah in such a state that he wishes he will never meet Him; and his suffering because he did not succeed in finding a substitute for Him in this life. Such a man suffers the most severe torment in the grave as sorrow, grief and regret all eat away at his soul, just in the same way as the worms who are eating away at his body.

To summarise, the one who loves the life of this world suffers in this world, in his grave, and on the Day that he

meets his Lord. Allah, the Most Exalted, says:

◀ So do not let their wealth and their children dazzle you. Surely Allah intends to punish them in the life of this world through this, and they themselves will perish while they are disbelievers. (9:55) ▶

One of our righteous predecessors said about this *ayah*, "Allah 'punishes them' through their striving to acquire this world; 'they will perish' as a result of their love for it; 'while they are disbelievers' because they have denied the rights which are due to Allah in it."

**Seventh**, the one who loves the life of this world and prefers it to the next life is the lowest of creation and the least intelligent: he prefers illusion to reality, dreaming to being wide awake, the short-lived shade to eternal bliss, and the temporary shelter to the everlasting abode. He exchanges his life in the *akhira* for one which is no more than an illusion. A life that is no more than a passing shadow cannot fool any Muslim who has an intellect.

Some of our predecessors have often quoted this verse of poetry:

O people who take pleasure  
in a world that will vanish,  
falling in love  
with a fading shadow  
is sheer stupidity!

Yunus ibn Abdal-'Ala said, "To me the life of this world can be compared to a man who falls asleep, and in a dream he sees whatever he likes and whatever he dislikes, and while he is in this state, he suddenly wakes up!"

One of the things to which this life can most easily be compared is a shadow: it appears to be permanent, but in reality it is in a constant state of growing smaller or larger,

and when you try to chase it and catch it – you cannot! It can also be compared to a mirage in a desert which:

◀ The thirsty one imagines is water until he reaches it and finds that it is nothing and instead of it he finds Allah Who pays him what is due to him – and Allah is swift in the reckoning. (24:39) ▶

The life of this world can also be compared to a deformed, repulsive, old woman who is untrue and deceitful to whomever proposes to her. She dresses in all manner of adornment and beautiful attire in order to conceal her ugliness and fickleness. Her suitors, deceived by her outward appearance, eventually propose to her.

She tells them, “I want no dowry from you – except that you give up the *akhira*: I and the *akhira* are deadly enemies, and we are neither permitted nor allowed to meet each other.”

The suitors, completely taken in by her words, reply, “There is no blame on those who must unite with their beloved.”

When, however, they lift her veil, and her disguise is revealed, they find themselves in all sorts of difficulties. Some of them divorce her and free themselves from the burden, while others on the other hand, decide to remain with her – only to end up, on the morning after the wedding, sad and sorrowful.

By Allah! Her invitation invites the whole world to hurry and come not to success, but to failure – and yet her admirers seek union with her day and night. They rush to join her in the darkness, only to awake the next morning demoralised and with their hopes shattered.

They fall right into her trap, and she consigns them to their fate.

## Notes

1. *Sahih*, at-Tirmidhi.
2. *Sahih*, at-Tirmidhi, *Kitab az-Zuhud*, 7/48; al-Hakim, *Kitab ar-Riqaq*, 4/310; on the authority of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and of Umar, may Allah be pleased with them.
3. *Sahih*, al-Bukhari.
4. *Sahih*, Muslim, *Kitab al-Imaara*, 12/207; and ascribed to Mu'adh.
5. *Da'if*, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al-Musnad, 4/412; al-Hakim, *Kitab ar-Riqaq*, 4/308; it is classified as *sahih*, but adh-Dhahabi rejected it due to its having a break in its *isnad*.
6. Abu Nu'aym, *al-Hilya*, 1/136.
7. *Da'if*, see *Majmu'at al-Fatawa*, 18/123.
8. A verse of poetry with the same meaning says:

Your wealth and your family  
are only with you on trust,  
And whatever is held on trust  
must inevitably be returned.
9. Muslim, *Kitab al-Jihad*, 13/50.
10. *Sahih*, at-Tirmidhi, *Kitab az-Zuhud*, 6/165; Ibn Ma'jah, *Kitab az-Zuhud*, 2/1375.



## TWENTY-ONE

### REPENTANCE

Turning away from wrong actions by turning to the Concealer of faults and the Knower of all secrets is the basis of those who travel to Him, the initial investment of those who finally profit, the first step in the quest for His Face, the key to putting right whatever is not correct, and the primary stage in the selection of those who will be brought close to Him.

The station of turning in repentance is at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. The servant who seeks Him never abandons it. He remains in it until his death. If he moves on to another station, he takes it with him and arrives with it. Turning in repentance is the beginning of the servant and his end. Allah, the Most Exalted, says:

◀ And turn to Allah altogether, O you who believe, so that you may succeed. (24:31) ▶

This *ayah* is in a Madinan *surah* in which Allah addresses the people of *iman* and those who have been honoured from amongst His creation. He called upon them to turn in repentance to Him after they had already believed, made *hijra*, and fought *jihad*. Then He made success conditional on repentance, using the word 'may' in order to make the believers aware that they could only hope for success if they turned to Him in repentance, may Allah make us follow in their footsteps. Allah says:

◀ And those who do not turn in repentance are indeed wrongdoers. (49:11) ▶

He distinguishes between servants who are repentant and those who are wrongdoers, and makes no other distinction. He calls those who do not turn in repentance, wrongdoers and transgressors, and says that no one is more of a wrongdoer than such a person, because of his ignorance of his Lord and of the rights that are due to Him, as well as because of his own faults and the harmfulness of his actions.

The Prophet ﷺ said, "O people, turn in repentance to Allah! I swear by Allah that I turn in repentance to Him more than seventy times each day." <sup>1</sup>

Repentance is the servant's turning to Allah and his turning away from the company of those who stray away from the straight path and those who invite Allah's anger.

There are three conditions for repentance to be valid if the wrong action is to do with what is due to Allah, Exalted and Glorious is He: feeling regret, abandoning the wrong action, and resolving never to repeat it again.

Repentance is invalid without regret because if there is no regret for having done something wrong, then this implies that it is considered acceptable, as well as being alright to do again. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Feeling regret is a part of repentance." <sup>2</sup>

Abandoning the wrong action is crucial, because repentance is meaningless if the bad deed continues to be committed.

The third condition, resolving never to repeat the wrong action again, depends in essence on the sincerity of this resolve and its honesty. Some *ulama'* have said that repeating the wrong action nullifies the repentance, arguing

that if someone who has repented returns to the wrong action, whenever that may occur, then this shows that his repentance was false and therefore invalid. The majority, however, conclude that this is not necessarily a condition.

If the wrong action was committed against a fellow human being, then the one who repents must either put right whatever damage he has caused or make amends to the person whose rights he has infringed. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Any one of you who is indebted to his brother in Islam must settle his debt today, before the time comes when there will be no money, and only good deeds and bad deeds will count." <sup>3</sup>

This kind of wrong action is a transgression against two parties, each of whom have their own particular rights. The wrongdoer shows his repentance by paying his fellow human being his due, and by paying what is due to Allah by inwardly regretting his wrong action. This regret is a private matter, between him and his Creator.

There are a number of particular types of repentance, of which we mention the following:

**First**, the repentance for back-biting or slander, where the question arises as to whether the person who has been maligned in his absence should be informed of the repentance of the wrongdoer, and so consequently come to know about a wrong of which he would otherwise have remained oblivious.

Both the *madhdhahib* of *Imam* Abu Hanifa and *Imam* Malik make informing the person who has been maligned a precondition for the validity of the repentance. They rest their argument on the above mentioned *hadith*.

The other opinion, which is that of Ibn Taimiyya, does not consider this necessary. Instead, he judges that it is enough for the wrongdoer to repent in private to Allah,



and to speak of the person whom he has slandered in the same company as the one in which he had previously maligned him, but this time in terms which are the opposite of those which originally caused the trouble; and he must also ask Allah to forgive him.

His argument is that if the person who has been maligned is told about it, then this brings the wrong to his attention, and only causes more trouble without achieving any good. Allah does not make precipitating such a state of affairs permissible, let alone make it compulsory or command us to act like this.

**Second**, the repentance for stealing money must include the return of that money to its rightful owners. If the one who repents does not know to whom the money belongs, or if it is not possible for the money to be returned for any other reason, then he must give away the equivalent in charity on their behalf.

On the Day of Judgement they will have the choice of either approving of his action – in which case the reward for the charity goes to them – or of disapproving of it and having whatever they are entitled to in it from his reward – in which case the reward for the charity goes to the one who repented, for Allah never annuls the reward for charity.

It has been related that Ibn Mas'ud, may Allah be pleased with him, once bought a woman slave from a man. When he went to pay him, he found that the man had disappeared. Ibn Mas'ud waited in vain for the man to return, and eventually gave the money away in charity, saying, "O Allah, this *sadaqa* is on that man's behalf. If he approves of this *sadaqa* then its reward is his, and if he does not, then the reward is mine and he receives a reward equal to my reward."

**Third**, what is the position of someone who receives payment for doing something *haram*, such as selling alcohol, singing, or making a false testimony, and who then repents while the payment is still in his possession?

One group of the *ulama'* say that he should return the payment to whomever gave it to him, since it still belongs to the one who made the payment because the transaction was not *halal* and it did not result in any *halal* reward from Allah.

Another group of the *ulama'* say – and this judgement is more correct – that his repentance can only be valid if he gives away the payment in charity, for how can he return money which was spent in being disobedient to Allah?

The same principal applies to someone whose *halal* and *haram* money become so mixed up that he is no longer able to distinguish between the two: he should give away in charity whatever amount he thinks is *haram*, and purify what is left. Allah knows best.

Another question is this:

When a servant turns in repentance for a wrong action, does he return to the station in which he was before he committed that wrong action?

One group of the *ulama'* say that he does return to the same station he was in before committing the wrong action, because repentance wipes away the wrong action completely, and it becomes as if it had never taken place.

Another group say that he does not return to the same station, arguing that since he had been moving forward before committing the wrong action, and since committing it made him go backwards, then when he repents he loses the equivalent of the distance that he could have covered in the meantime, had he not committed the wrong action!