

Ibn Taimiyya said, "The correct judgement is that some of those who repent do not return to their former station, while others move on to an even higher station and become better than they were before they committed the wrong action."

For example, the Prophet Daw'ud, peace be on him, was in a better station after he had turned in repentance than he was in before he committed his wrong action.

Here is a metaphor to shed more light on the matter:

A traveller was making his way, feeling confident and safe, walking a while and then running a while, and then resting or sleeping. He came across a shady place, with abundant cool water and a blossoming garden, and decided to rest for a while. While he was relaxing, he was attacked by an enemy who seized him and tied him up. He saw destruction looming and thought that his end had come, that he would become a feast for lions and never reach his destination.

While he was in this state, troubled by thoughts of despair, his merciful and caring father suddenly appeared before him. He untied him and told him to be on his way and to be wary of the enemy which lurked in ambush along the road. He assured him that as long as he remained alert and vigilant he would not be overcome, but that if he was negligent he would once again be captured.

His father said that he would go ahead and lead him to his destination. If the traveller stayed alert and kept his presence of mind and remained prepared for his enemy, then his journey would be better than it had been before, and he would arrive more quickly. If, on the other hand, he forgot about his enemy and returned to his former state of inattention and forgetfulness, indifferent to danger and

only mindful of the pleasant garden, then he would once again become an easy target.

Sincere Repentance

Allah, Glorious and Mighty is He, says:

◀ O you who believe, turn to Allah with sincere repentance so that your Lord may free you from your bad deeds and bring you into Gardens underneath which rivers flow, on the Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believe with him. (66:8) ▶

For repentance to be true and sincere it must be free from deceit, defects and corruption. Al-Hasan al-Basri said, "It is when the servant regrets what has happened and resolves never to repeat it again." Al-Kalbi said, "It is when the servant asks for forgiveness with his tongue, feels regret in his heart, and restrains his limbs." Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib said, "Sincere repentance is what you purify your souls with."

Ibn al-Qayyim said, "Being sincere in turning in repentance consists of three things: it must include all the wrong actions of the one who is repenting, leaving none of them aside; it must be accompanied by complete truthfulness and resolve, so that the one who repents does not hesitate or delay, but summons up all his will and determination and embarks upon it wholeheartedly; and it must be free of any impurities and faults that might taint its sincerity, so that it is inspired by fear of Allah, hope for what He has, and dread for whatever punishment He might inflict -- and not by any desire to safeguard his possessions, or his family, or his social status, or his influence, or to attract people's praise or escape their blame, or to avoid being bothered by nuisances, or to satisfy his appetite for life, or

because of his bankruptcy or inability to cope, or any other such ills that would affect the validity of his repentance and his sincerity towards Allah, Mighty and Exalted is He.

“The first element of sincere repentance concerns the action for which the repentance is made. The second concerns the person who repents himself. The third concerns the One to Whom he repents.

“The sincerity of the repentance means that it is true and includes all wrong actions. There is no doubt that such turning in repentance requires, and includes, seeking forgiveness, and that it leads to all of the sins that have been committed being wiped out. It is a most excellent and perfect repentance.”⁴

A servant’s sincere turning in repentance to Allah is guaranteed both with forgiveness from Allah even before it takes place, and with forgiveness from Him after it is completed. In other words, the servant turns in repentance between two acts of forgiveness from Allah which secure his salvation. Allah’s first act of forgiveness is a permission, an inspiration and a means of assistance which lead to the servant’s turning in repentance – which then in turn results in more forgiveness from Allah. The second act of forgiveness is one of acceptance and recompense. Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He, says:

◀ (He also turned in mercy) to the three who were left behind, when the earth, for all its spaciousness, seemed narrow to them, and their own selves were constricted for them, until they realised that there is no escape from Allah except to Him. Then He turned to them in forgiveness, so that they could turn to Him in repentance; surely Allah is Relenting, Compassionate. (9:118) ▶

Here, Allah, Exalted is He, informs us that His turning to them in forgiveness preceded their turning to Him in repentance, and that it was this that made it possible for them to turn in repentance in the first place. He was the cause of their turning in repentance – which is part of the secret of why He is called '*al-Awwal wa'l-Akir*' – 'the First and the Last'. It is He Who makes things possible and helps to make them happen; the cause is from Him and the consequence is from Him.

The servant is oft-repentant and Allah is oft-Forgiving. The repentance of the servant is his turning back to His Lord after his having turned away. The forgiveness of Allah is of two kinds, one being permission and assistance, and the other being acceptance and reward.

Repentance has a beginning and an end:

Its beginning is turning to Allah by taking the straight path which He has commanded His servants to follow:

◀ And surely this is My straight path so follow it; and do not follow any (other) paths, lest you are separated from His path. (6:153) ▶

Its end is to return to Him on the Day that has already been decreed by taking the path which He has commanded, and which leads to His Garden. Whoever turns in repentance to Allah in this life, Allah will turn to him and reward him at the appointed Time:

◀ Whoever turns in repentance and does good has truly turned to Allah in true repentance. (25:71) ▶

The Subtle and Hidden Aspects of Repentance

If a sensible servant happens to commit a wrong action, there are a number of things he should take into account:

First, he should consider Allah's commands and prohibitions and conclude that it was a wrong action and admit that he has done it.

Second, he should consider Allah's promises and warnings which will arouse fear in him and make him turn in repentance.

Third, he should consider the fact that Allah has given him the possibility and the ability to turn in repentance, when He could have prevented him from doing wrong in the first place.

This gives him some insight into the nature of Allah – His Names, His Attributes, His wisdom, His mercy, His tolerance and His generosity. This gives him a quality of worship of Allah which he could never have possessed had he remained ignorant of these matters. The servant recognises the relationship between Allah's Creation and His promises and His warnings and His Names and His Attributes, and sees that this relationship requires these Names and Attributes, and their manifestation in the Creation.

This insight opens the servant up to such gardens of knowledge, and faith, and the secrets of the decree, and wisdom, that the domain of words is too limited to encompass and express them.

Some of what can be said is that the servant learns about Allah's Might, which is manifested in His decree – that is, that He, Exalted and Mighty is He, decrees whatever He wishes. He also learns that through the perfection of His Might, He has decreed that the servant's heart must turn, and will be directed towards whatever He wishes, and that He comes between the servant and his own heart.

By recognising some of the manifestations of Allah's Might that are made apparent through His decree, he sees

that he is part of an ordered, patterned creation, the control of which is in hands that are not his own. He is only safe when Allah safeguards him, and he is only successful when Allah gives him success. He is unimportant and insignificant, in the hands of the Mighty, the Praiseworthy.

By gaining insight into the Might manifested through His decree, the servant witnesses the fact that all perfection, praise and might is Allah's, and that it is he himself who is the one with all the shortcomings and blameworthy qualities, full of faults, imperfections and needs. The more he perceives his own insignificance and his defects and weaknesses, the more he witnesses Allah's might and wealth and the more aware he is that Allah alone is perfect.

The servant learns that Allah, Exalted is He, conceals the wrong action when it is committed even though He is all-Seeing and perfectly able, if He so wishes, to expose it. In recognising that Allah gives time to the wrong doer – even though He could have been swift in punishment had He so wished – Allah's forbearance is revealed to the one who turns in repentance, and he gains an insight into the meanings of His Name, '*al-Haleem*' – 'the Forbearing'.

The servant becomes acquainted with Allah's gift of forgiveness. It is a blessing from Him. When He judges with severity, He is Just and Praise-Worthy, but His forgiveness arises out of His mercy, and the servant is not entitled to it as of right. This means that the servant should be grateful to Him, and love Him and turn to Him in repentance, recognising and relying on His Name, '*al-Ghaffar*' – 'the Often-Forgiving'.

Allah leads His servant through the stations of humility, submission, surrender and expressing his need for assistance – which are in four stages: the humility that arises

out of need and poverty, which is a general attribute of all creatures; the humility of obedience and of submission, which only belongs to those who obey Him; the humility of love, for the lover is especially humble, and the degree of his humility is in direct proportion to his love; and the humility that arises as a result of disobedience and wrong action which are themselves a consequence of the poverty and need in which they result.

When all four stages are complete, humility before Allah and submission to Him is complete and perfect. The servant realises that Allah's Name, '*ar-Razzaq*' – 'the Sustainer' necessitates what is sustained, and that His Names, '*as-Samee*', '*al-Baseer*' – 'the all-Hearing, the all-Seeing', necessitate what is seen and heard.

In the same way, His Names, '*al-Ghafur*', '*al-Afu*', '*at-Tawwab*' – 'the Forgiving, the Effacer of wrong actions, the One Who Relents and Turns in Forgiveness', necessitate someone whom Allah forgives, and whose wrong actions are effaced, and who is forgiven again and again. It is impossible for the servant to ignore the implications and requirements of these Names and Attributes.

This was pointed out by the most knowledgeable of all in the creation of Allah, His Messenger ﷺ, when he said, "If you did not have wrong actions, Allah would remove you and replace you with a people who did have wrong actions, so that they could seek Allah's forgiveness and He could grant them His forgiveness." ⁵

Anas ibn Malik al-Ansari reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Allah is more pleased with the repentance of His servant than a person riding a camel in a waterless desert who loses his camel and all his provisions of food and drink which it is carrying. Having abandoned all hope of ever finding the camel, he lies down in the shade

of a tree that he happens to come across. While he is resting, he suddenly sees the camel standing right in front of him. He grasps hold of its reins and then, in sheer joy, blurts out, 'O Lord, You are my Servant and I am Your lord!' He makes this mistake out of extreme joy." 6

Let us assume that a person whom you love dearly has been captured by an enemy and prevented from joining you, and you know that this enemy will inflict all manner of tortures on your beloved and destroy him, and that you are far better for him than this enemy – for he is someone whom you have nurtured.

Then imagine that he escapes from this enemy and comes to you without letting you know in advance, so that you are amazed to find him at your front door, praising you, and hoping for your pleasure, with his cheeks smudged with the dust from your door step. How happy would you be at his return, seeing that you had already made him yours before, approved of his closeness to you, and favoured him above everyone else?

That is the feeling that you experience – even though it was not you who brought him into existence and granted him your blessings. Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He, is the One who brought His servant into existence, created him, and granted him His blessings – and He likes to complete His blessings on him!

Our final wish is that you do not forget to ask Allah for us to have truthfulness, sincerity, certainty, forgiveness, and health in this world and in the next world. We ask Allah that we will be among those whose final *du'a* is:

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

Yours is the Glory, our Lord, and to You all praise belongs. I bear witness that there is no god but You, and I seek Your forgiveness and I turn in repentance to You.

Notes

1. *Sahih*, al-Bukhari, *Kitab ad-Da'awat*, 11/101.
2. *Sahih*, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, 1/376, on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud. *Shaykh Shakir* says that its *isnad* is *sahih*. Also reported by al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak*, 4/243.
3. Al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Madhalim*, 5/101 and *Kitab ar-Riqaq*, 11/395, on the authority of Abu Huraira.
4. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madarij as-Salikin*, 1/310.
5. Muslim, *Kitab adh-Dhikr wa'd-Du'a*, 17/65.
6. Al-Bukhari, *Kitab ad-Da'awat*, 11/102; Muslim, *Kitab adh-Dhikr wa'd-Du'a*, 17/63, on the authority of Anas, may Allah be pleased with him.

**وأخر دعوانا
أن الحمد لله رب العالمين**