

## Repentance (part 1 of 3): Door to salvation

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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 1: The Islaamic teachings on sin and salvation.

Sin and salvation are issues of profound human concern in all faiths. Unless someone's sense of right and wrong is distorted, human beings are conscious of their sins and realise they will be held accountable. Psychologically, human beings respond to bad behaviour by feeling guilt. Naturally, all religious systems offer some method of releasing man from the burden of sin. Generally, they either guarantee salvation by faith alone or through individual works and striving.

#### What is sin?

How does Islaam view sins? What are major sins in Islaam?

All sins are not equal. They are categorised into grave or major sins and lesser sins. A major sin is one which God threatens with punishment in Hell, His curse, or displeasure. The rest are considered lesser sins.

Some major sins can actually take a person outside the fold of Islaam. An example of this is Shirk, the greatest of major sins. The purpose of human creation is to worship Allaah alone. Shirk defies this purpose. Not only can no one be worshipped apart from Allaah, absolutely no one else can be worshipped along with Him. Once, the Prophet Muhammad (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), asked:

**"Shall I not inform you about the greatest of the major sins?"**

The Companions replied, 'Yes.'

He explained: **"To join others in worship with Allaah and to be undutiful to one's parents."**<sup>1</sup>

Some of the major sins are sorcery, homicide, drinking intoxicants, homosexuality, fornication and theft.

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<sup>1</sup> Saheeh al-Bukhaaree and Saheeh Muslim

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### What is repentance?

Repentance is the process of turning away from sin and amending one's life. It is to feel regret and sorrow. The Arabic word for it is Tawbah which literally means 'to return.' Islaamically, repentance is the act of leaving what Allaah has prohibited and returning to what He has commanded.

A fundamental principle of Islaam is that man is born sinless in a state of submission to Allaah known, as the fitrah:

**“Every child is born in a state of fitrah, then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian.”<sup>2</sup>**

Through sin, man turns away from Allaah, and through repentance, he 'returns' to God. Through repentance, he returns to his original, sinless state of fitrah.

In Islaam, repentance is an act of worship through which humans achieve salvation, as Allaah commands the faithful:

**[“And turn all of you in repentance to Allaah, O believers, in order that you may be successful.”]<sup>3</sup>**

The Prophet of Islaam (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), encouraged his Companions to turn to Allaah in repentance regularly:

**“O people, turn to Allaah in repentance and seek His forgiveness.”<sup>4</sup>**

### The warm embrace of Divine Mercy

Divine mercy wraps all existence in its fold. The Mercy is intimately close to every one of us, waiting to embrace when we are ready. Islaam recognises the human propensity to sin, for God has created man weak. The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), stated:

**“All of Aadam's descendants constantly err, but the best of those who constantly err are those who constantly repent.”<sup>5</sup>**

At the same time, Allaah lets us know He forgives sins:

**[“Say, ‘O My servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allaah: for Allaah forgives all sins, for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most-Merciful.”]<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Saheeh al-Bukhaaree and Saheeh Muslim

<sup>3</sup> Qur'aan [24:31]

<sup>4</sup> Saheeh Muslim

<sup>5</sup> Al-Tirmidhee, Ibn Maajah, Ahmad, Haakim

<sup>6</sup> Qur'aan [39:53]

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Prophet Muhammad (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), was charged to convey this good news to all:

**["Tell My servants that indeed I am the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."]<sup>7</sup>**

### 1. Allaah accepts repentance

**["Allaah wishes to accept your repentance, but those who follow their lusts, wish that you (believers) should deviate tremendously away from the Right Path."]<sup>8</sup>**

**["Know they not that Allaah accepts repentance from His slaves, and receives their gifts of charity, and that it is Allaah who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful."]<sup>9</sup>**

### 2. Allaah loves the sinner who repents

**["For Allaah loves those who turn to Him constantly."]<sup>10</sup>**

The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

**"If mankind were not to commit sins, Allaah would create other creatures who would commit sins, then He would forgive them, for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."<sup>11</sup>**

### 3. Allaah is delighted when the sinner repents because he realises he has a Lord who forgives sins!

The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

**"Allaah is more delighted with the repentance of His slave when he repents, than any of you would be if (he found his) camel, which he had been riding in a barren desert, has escaped from him carrying his food and drink, and he had despaired of it, and come to a tree and lain down in its shade, then while he was despairing of it, the camel came and stood by his side, and he seized its reins and cried out in joy, 'O Allaah, You are my servant and I am your Lord!' – he would make this mistake out of his excessive joy."<sup>12</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Qur'aan [15:49]

<sup>8</sup> Qur'aan [4:27]

<sup>9</sup> Qur'aan [9:104]

<sup>10</sup> Qur'aan [2:222]

<sup>11</sup> Al-Tirmidhee, Ibn Maajah, Musnad of Imaam Ahmad

<sup>12</sup> Saheeh Muslim

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### 4. Gate of repentance is open day and night

Forgiveness for sins is not limited to a specific day of the year. Divine mercy extends forgiveness every day and every night of the year. The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

**“Allaah extends His Hand at night to accept the repentance of one who has sinned during the day; and He extends His Hand during the day to accept the repentance of one who has sinned during the night – until the sun rises from the West”<sup>13</sup>.”<sup>14</sup>**

### 5. Allaah accepts repentance even if sins are repeated

In a hadeeth Qudsee<sup>15</sup> the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

**“A man committed a sin, then said, ‘O my Lord, forgive my sin,’ so Allaah said, ‘My slave has sinned, then he realised that he has a Lord who can forgive sins and can punish him for it.’ Then the man repeated the sin, then said, ‘O my Lord, forgive my sin.’ Allaah said, ‘My slave has sinned, then he realised that he has a Lord who can forgive sins and can punish him for it.’ The man repeated the sin (the third time), then he said, ‘O my Lord, forgive my sin,’ and Allaah said, ‘My slave has sinned, then he realised that he has a Lord who can forgive sins and can punish him for it. Do what you wish, for I have forgiven you.’”<sup>16</sup>**

It should be clear from what was mentioned before that the person in this hadeeth had the intention not to repeat that sin, but fell into it again due to his natural human propensity, and Allaah forgave him due to his sorrow, and belief that God would forgive Him.

### 6. Entering Islaam erases all previous sins

The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), has explained that accepting Islaam effaces all previous sins of the new Muslim, no matter how serious they were with one condition: the new Muslim accepts Islaam sincerely. Some people asked Allaah’s Messenger, “O Messenger of Allaah! Will we be held responsible for what we did during the days of ignorance before accepting Islaam?” He replied:

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<sup>13</sup> A sign of the Day of Judgment. When that day comes and the sun rises from the west, no repentance will be accepted.

<sup>14</sup> Saheeh Muslim

<sup>15</sup> A hadeeth Qudsee is a hadeeth in which the Prophet directly narrates a saying from Allaah, using the first person “I”.

<sup>16</sup> Saheeh Muslim

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**“Whoever accepts Islaam sincerely will not be held to account, but one who does so hypocritically will be accountable for the time before Islaam and after.”<sup>17</sup>**

From the infinite mercy of Allaah, if one repents for their sin or enter Islaam, their previous sins are turned into good deeds. Allaah says:

**[“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.”]<sup>18</sup>**

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<sup>17</sup> Saheeh al-Bukhaaree and Saheeh Muslim

<sup>18</sup> Qur’aan [25:70]