

Ramadan Immersion



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- In the Qur'an, Allah declares Shaytan as our enemy. He said:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا

Surely Satan is an enemy to you, so take him as an enemy. (35:6)

- This ayah highlights the Shaytan's goal to misguide all of us; individually and collectively. Thus, this is Allah's invitation to proactively, actively and intentionally take him and treat him as an enemy.
- Ways to interact and engage with our enemy:
 - 1. Protect ourselves from their evil
 - 2. Prevent them from harming us
 - 3. Be conscious and aware of their plotting
 - 4. Stay away from the places, people and practices where that enemy may be
 - 5. Surround ourselves with people and resources that guarantee us safety from that enemy

What is Tawbah?

- One of the fundamental steps to tawbah (repentance) is regret. Nevertheless, regret is not possible for someone that constantly listens to Shaytan but someone who constantly listens to what Allah calls them towards.
- Part of tawbah is seeking refuge from Allah from Shaytan, so as to not succumb to the traps of Shaytan.

- On the Day of Judgment, Shaytan will justify himself and declare himself innocent.

وَقَالَ الشَّيْطَانُ لَمَّا قُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَعَدَكُمْ وَعْدَ الْحَقِّ وَوَعَدْتُكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُكُمْ وَمَا كَانَ لِيَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا أَنْ دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَاسْتَجَبْتُمْ لِي فَلَا تَلُمُونِي وَلُومُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ مَا أَنَا بِمُصْرِخِكُمْ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُصْرِخِيَّ إِنِّي كَفَرْتُ بِمَا أَشْرَكْتُمُونِ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

And Satan will say "to his followers" after the judgment has been passed, "Indeed, Allah has made you a true promise. I too made you a promise, but I failed you. I did not have any authority over you. I only called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot save you, nor can you save me. Indeed, I denounce your previous association of me with Allah 'in loyalty'. Surely the wrongdoers will suffer a painful punishment." (14:22)

- Allah has been calling us to Him ever since the day of our conception until our moment of death. Thus, the one who raises the calls of Shaytan and lowers the call of Allah is foolish.
- Tawbah is the lowering of the Shaytan's whispers while raising the volume towards Allah's call instead; to his obedience and things He has prohibited us from.
- Before tawbah is even possible, an individual must first be able to recognize a sin as a sin and acknowledge themselves as a sinner. This means recognizing that at some point in time Shaytan whispered to us and we responded to him. While Allah called upon us but we ignored His call.
- In the month of Ramadan, the major shayateen are chained and locked up, and the doors of Hellfire are closed. As a result, what remains is us being with ourselves and our own.
- Within each and every one of us, we have our own shayateen; which is weaker at any other time of the year. Hence, Ramadan is the time we become familiar with ourselves and our own shayateen as well as how it impacts us.
 - For example, as we actively engage in worship like praying more, the more our internal Shaytan will discourage us by whispering to us "What's the benefit of me praying more?". The more we pray, the more whispers of Shaytan there will be.

- Part of tawbah is the ability to acknowledge these whispers and to break the patterns of these whispers – to see that Shaytan sets us up to disappoint Allah, ourselves as well as our family.
- Listening to Shaytan's whispers will lead us to poverty in every element of our life; moral, social, economic, familial etc.
- Everything in which we allow our guard down, Shaytan will seep into those areas and it will become impoverished, broken and dysfunctional as a result of his presence there.
 - Allah tells us:

الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُم بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُم مَّغْفِرَةً مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلًا وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

The Devil threatens you with 'the prospect of' poverty and bids you to the shameful deed 'of stinginess', while Allah promises you forgiveness and 'great' bounties from Him. And Allah is All-Bountiful, All-Knowing. (2:268)

- It is the nature of Shaytan to wait for our guards to be down; the areas of vulnerability in our life. This is because he is weak and a coward.
- Shaytan doesn't get to us when we are strong but only while we are vulnerable – when we are not proactively and actively preventing his harm.
 - For example, either when we are in the midst of engaging in evil acts or sins, or engaging in good acts like dhikr and we feel safe. Thus, he comes when we least expect it.
- Shaytan prevents us from tawbah by making us feel that our actions do not necessitate tawbah. However, we should never feel like our tawbah is not accepted. The Prophet (ﷺ) debunks this.
 - Abu Hurairah said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) saying,

والله إني لأستغفر الله وأتوب إليه في اليوم أكثر من سبعين مرة

"I swear by Allah that I seek Allah's Pardon and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day." (Al-Bukhari)

- This Hadith teaches us that every single one of us is in need of tawbah – it is a misconception that it is exclusively for those who committed crimes etc. Every sin is healed through tawbah.
- The one that is in need of tawbah, is the one that doesn't think they are in need of tawbah. If one feels that they don't need tawbah, it is a sign that they are perhaps unaware of their sinfulness and not fully aware of their shortcomings with Allah.
- We should really take into account all our sins and shortcomings – and Ramadan is the time to spring clean our souls.
- The phrase we should say immediately after our prayer is, **أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ** (Astaghfirullah wa atubu ilaih). Meaning, "I seek forgiveness from Allah and turn to Him (in repentance)".
- The goal of tawbah is not to become perfect after it. It is recognizing that we fall short with Allah, acknowledge our shortcomings with Him by asking Him to forgive us for it. Thereafter, we make a commitment that we will try our best to overcome it.
- Even if a sin is repeated seventy times or more, and an individual repents each time, their repentance will be accepted and their sin will be erased by Allah.
 - Narrated Abu Hurairah: I heard the Prophet (ﷺ) saying,

"إِنَّ عَبْدًا أَصَابَ ذَنْبًا - وَرَبَّمَا قَالَ أَذْنَبَ ذَنْبًا - فَقَالَ رَبِّ أَذْنَبْتُ - وَرَبَّمَا قَالَ أَصَبْتُ - فَأَغْفِرَ لِي فَقَالَ رَبُّهُ أَعْلِمَ عَبْدِي أَنَّ لَهُ رَبًّا يَغْفِرُ الذَّنْبَ وَيَأْخُذُ بِهِ غَفْرَتُ لِعَبْدِي. ثُمَّ مَكَثَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ، ثُمَّ أَصَابَ ذَنْبًا أَوْ أَذْنَبَ ذَنْبًا، فَقَالَ رَبِّ أَذْنَبْتُ - أَوْ أَصَبْتُ - آخَرَ فَأَغْفِرْهُ. فَقَالَ أَعْلِمَ عَبْدِي أَنَّ لَهُ رَبًّا يَغْفِرُ الذَّنْبَ وَيَأْخُذُ بِهِ غَفْرَتُ لِعَبْدِي، ثُمَّ مَكَثَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ أَذْنَبَ ذَنْبًا - وَرَبَّمَا قَالَ أَصَابَ ذَنْبًا - قَالَ قَالَ رَبِّ أَصَبْتُ - أَوْ أَذْنَبْتُ - آخَرَ فَأَغْفِرْهُ لِي. فَقَالَ أَعْلِمَ عَبْدِي أَنَّ لَهُ رَبًّا يَغْفِرُ الذَّنْبَ وَيَأْخُذُ بِهِ غَفْرَتُ لِعَبْدِي - ثَلَاثًا - فَلْيَعْمَلْ مَا شَاءَ."

"If somebody commits a sin and then says, 'O my Lord! I have sinned, please forgive me!' and his Lord says, 'My slave has known that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes for it, I therefore have forgiven my slave (his sins).' Then he remains without committing any sin for a while and then again commits another sin and says, 'O my Lord, I have committed another sin, please forgive me,' and Allah says, 'My slave has known that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes for it, I therefore have forgiven my slave (his sin). Then he remains without Committing any another sin for a while and then commits another sin (for the third time) and says, 'O my Lord, I have committed another sin, please forgive me,' and Allah says, 'My slave has known that he has a Lord Who forgives sins and punishes for it I therefore have forgiven My slave (his sin), he can do whatever he likes.'" (Sahih al-Bukhari)

- This shows us that the results of tawbah are in the hands of Allah. Thus, the purpose of tawbah is not for the results.
- Allah loves to see this from us; that we are trying, striving, struggling for His sake, and identifying the vulnerabilities that we have to avoid our sins.
- We have to ask Allah to grant us the ability and assistance to leave our sins completely. This is completely at His discretion and it is not on our accord.
- Sometimes, Allah continues to have us falling back into our sins so we can continue repenting to Him; because He loves seeing us retreating to Him and repenting to Him.
- Tawbah is not just in the breaking of bad habits but building new habits, in place of our bad habits.
 - Allah says:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَأَصْلَحُوا وَبَيَّنُّوا فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنَا التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

As for those who repent, mend their ways, and let the truth be known, they are the ones to whom I will turn 'in forgiveness', for I am the Acceptor of Repentance, Most Merciful. (2:160)

- If we consistently make tawbah, Allah will exchange our sins for good deeds. This is because to Him, every step of sin which ended with a step of obedience is a sign of courage and bravery for Him.
 - He declared:

إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ ۖ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

As for those who repent, believe, and do good deeds, they are the ones whose evil deeds Allah will change into good deeds. For Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (25:70)

- The fact that Allah calls all of us to repent to Him, is a sign of His love and mercy for us. Because none of our good deeds can surpass our sins and hence, we are in need of repentance.
- One of the best du'as to make is: اللهم تقبل توبة (Allahuma taqabbal tawbah) meaning, May Allah accept our repentance.

- Tawbah is a U-turn back to Allah; in a specific area of our lives and with regards to specific practices.
- Tawbah can be from:
 - What we do, that we shouldn't do (i.e looking at haram)
 - What we don't do, that we should do (i.e. not giving charity)
- In our tradition, regret and shame are positive emotions that are indicative of our values and beliefs, and us caring about who we are to Allah. It is also a sign of self-love – we love ourselves enough to be ashamed of our sins.
- Our regret and shame should translate productively and positively into actions and change instead of us sitting and sulking in negativity with it.
- We are not defined by our sins but rather how we choose to navigate our sins.

Conditions for A Valid Tawbah

- 1. Our ability to abandon the sin
 - Even if it is once or momentarily, it is important for us to show a concerted effort in abandoning the sin.
 - We cannot abandon the sin with the intention of going back to it. This is problematic.
 - We have to make an intention of never going back to the sin for the sake of Allah.
 - At one point, either the sin will overtake the tawbah or the tawbah will overtake the sin if one is sincere in their repentance.
- 2. Feeling a sense of regret for committing it
 - If we still love the sin deeply, then it becomes difficult to abandon it.
 - We have to remind ourselves that sins are disgusting, disturbing and unnatural etc.
 - Even if the appetite behind the sin is permissible, the way that the appetite is being navigated and managed is not so.
 - For example, we have the desire to eat and drink but it is not a pass for us to drink alcohol.

- 3. Resolve to never return to the sin
 - We are responsible to take appropriate actions to make things better and compensate for our sins.
 - We should restore the rights of others who we've wronged.
 - For example, seeking forgiveness from the one we've insulted; speaking with them and performing good actions on their behalf (i.e. charity).
- Allah wants us to have faith rooted in ourselves, rooted in faith in Him. We have to take action with a sound intention of making tawbah in the beginning, the middle and at the end of the action. If we consistently do this, Allah will accept it from us.
- As soon as we abandon our actions because we feel like we lack sincerity to make tawbah, this is the trap of Shaytan to stop us from doing a good action. Hence, no matter the doubts, we must persistently strive to perform good actions.
- A sign of an accepted tawbah is that Allah allows an individual to keep turning back to Him. He keeps the repentance alive and guides us toward good things instead of bad things, and rectifies our affairs.
- No sin is too small or trivial for tawbah, and no sin is too grand and too big for tawbah. So long as your heart is beating, the door of tawbah is open.