

Ramadan Immersion



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Introduction

- We will be learning about stories of those who repented from Ibn Qudamah's Kitab al-Tawabbin, in hopes we will be inspired by their repentance about our own repentance.
- Sometimes, we are intimidated by repentance. However, everyone is in need of repentance. In the Qur'an, Allah said:

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

Turn to Allah in repentance all together, O believers, so that you may be successful.
(24:31)

- We should engage in repentance and especially use the blessed month of Ramadan as a month of tawbah. Every single night, Allah frees people from the Hellfire.
 - Narrated Abu Hurairah: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said,

إِذَا كَانَ أَوَّلُ لَيْلَةٍ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ صُفِّدَتِ الشَّيَاطِينُ وَمَرَدَةُ الْجِنِّ وَغُلِّقَتْ أَبْوَابُ النَّارِ فَلَمْ يُفْتَحْ مِنْهَا بَابٌ وَفُتِّحَتْ أَبْوَابُ الْجَنَّةِ فَلَمْ يُغْلَقْ مِنْهَا بَابٌ وَيُنَادِي مُنَادٍ يَا بَاغِيَ الْخَيْرِ أَقْبِلْ وَيَا بَاغِيَ الشَّرِّ أَقْصِرْ وَلِلَّهِ عِتْقَاءُ مِنَ النَّارِ وَذَلِكَ كُلُّ لَيْلَةٍ

"On the first night of the month of Ramadan, the devils are chained and the jinn are restrained, the gates of Hellfire are closed and none of its gates are opened, the gates of Paradise are opened and none of its gates are closed, and a heavenly caller announces: O seeker of good, come near! O seeker of evil, stop short! Allah has those He saves from the Hellfire, and that is during every night."(Sunan al-Tirmidhi)

- One of the scholars says within each one of us there is a seeker of good and a seeker of evil. And tawbah is the process of stopping the seeker of evil and accelerating the seeker of good.
- While those who persist in their sins will be punished in Hellfire, Allah has given an exception to those who made tawbah — He allows them to enter into Jannah by His mercy.
- Allah describes about those who make tawbah in this verse:

إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ 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)

- Tawbah is responding to Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ). Allah has been calling upon us since the day we were born until today to respond to Him. He said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ ۚ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

O believers! Respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life. And know that Allah stands between a person and their heart, and that to Him you will all be gathered. (8:24)

- Tawbah literally means making a U-turn back to Allah; not the entirety of our life but a particular area of life that we are in need of making a U-turn. Thus, we have to embrace tawbah.

Ibn Qudamah al-Maqsi

- He is a renowned Hanbali scholar and has contributed in the ulum of fiqh and other sciences as well.
- He comes from the land of Palestine; he was born in Nablis.
- He authored Kitab al-Tawwabin (The Book of Those Who Repented).
- He was committed to seeking knowledge.
 - There is a correlation between seeking knowledge and abandoning sin.

- The teacher of Imam Shafi'i said: "Know that this knowledge is light and the light of Allah is not given to those who are consistently in a state of sin."
- The more an individual commits to seeking knowledge, it will continue minimizing their sins. Thus, it is important to continuously seek knowledge.
 - Allah said:

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

Of all of Allah's servants, only the knowledgeable 'of His might' are 'truly' in awe of Him. Allah is indeed Almighty, All-Forgiving. (35:28)

- According to a scholar, Shaytan has two main paths towards our spiritual destruction; the path of doubts and desires. He will begin with one and it will fuel the other. However, seeking knowledge helps an individual overcome doubts and desires.
- Allah allows us to experience sinfulness, because sometimes sins are the pathway to obedience.
- Another scholar said that a sin brings you closer to Allah is better for you than an act of worship that takes you away from Allah.
- This is why tawbah is a lifeline of a believer that never fails so long as we are alive, and therefore, we should encourage others to retreat to repentance as well.

The Story of Malik ibn Dinar

- Malik ibn Dinar's story is one of redemption and his transformation was most unexpected.
- He started his journey as an individual no one could imagine being repentant, but he found his way back to Allah multiple times after returning to his sins.
 - This teaches us that we have to remind others to never be hopeless of the mercy of Allah.

- Allah finds it more sinful that we give up hope on others and ourselves, thinking that the doors of repentance are closed. We should not take away the rights of Allah.

- Allah said:

قُلْ يٰعِبَادِيَ الَّذِيْنَ اَسْرَفُوْا عَلٰٓى اَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوْا مِنْ رَّحْمَةِ اللّٰهِ ۚ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوْبَ جَمِيْعًا ۗ اِنَّهٗ هُوَ الْغَفُوْرُ الرَّحِيْمُ

Say, 'O Prophet, that Allah says,' "O My servants who have exceeded the limits against their souls! Do not lose hope in Allah's mercy, for Allah certainly forgives all sins. He is indeed the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (39:53)

- Even if we are off track and we give up on ourselves, Allah never gives up on us. Hence, we should not give up on Allah.
- He was a man known for public sins that impacted others, as well as sins that were impacting him directly; it went against the commands of Allah and His creation.
- He had an issue with alcohol, he engaged in theft, robbery and cheating people etc.
- Despite his public and personal persona, he eventually became a prominent figure in our tradition.
 - This teaches us that every sinner has a pathway back to Allah. Hence, we should never feel that the door to turn back to Allah is closed for anyone who is engaging in any types of sins.
 - Ibn Umar reported: The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَقْبَلُ تَوْبَةَ الْعَبْدِ مَا لَمْ يُغْرَضْ

"Verily, Allah accepts the repentance of his servants, as long as they are not on their deathbed." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi)

- This is glad tidings for the believers; we should remain hopeful and turn to Allah so long as we are alive.
- His sins became so known that people wanted to avoid him. However, at some point of time, his inner fitrah to life.
- One day, he witnessed a young girl and her family. Since then, he wished he had a daughter like her and that he could have an established family like hers.

- He made the intention that he would change his lifestyle and live in a way that is pleasing to Allah should he be blessed with a daughter and a family.
 - This teaches us that everyone has the fitrah of 'La Ilaha Illallah' — believing in Allah, submitting to Allah, loving what Allah loves and hating what Allah hates.
 - The shariah and tawhid of Allah is natural; it is an instinctive human disposition that leads us back to Him.
 - Everything is a reminder for us to turn back to Allah. It could be the small things that lead people back to Allah and hence, we should not undermine anyone's journey back to Allah.
 - If an individual is on their journey back to Allah, regardless of how their journey looks, we should encourage them to continue turning to Allah and returning back to the path of Allah.
 - We should think of how kind Allah was in fulfilling our needs. It is a reminder of our need to turn back to Him after all the blessings He had enumerated us with.
 - We should think about the dreams we had that Allah made into a reality for us each time we made a bargain with Him.
 - Allah was kind and gentle in fulfilling our desires and needs. Thus, we shouldn't overlook or undermine them once they have become a reality. Instead, we should see them as a testament of Allah's greatness and our reminder and need to turn back to Him.
- Allah gifted him a daughter whom he loved and loved him so much. Although he rectified areas in his life and did things pleasing to Allah, he particularly had a hard time leaving alcohol.
- He narrated: "I remember my daughter knocking the alcohol away in my hands, telling me how she didn't like the way I became when I began to drink."
 - This is an example of Allah's invitation. There are so many invitations Allah sends to us to turn us back to Him and opportunities to abandon sin. But we become numb until we don't feel the weight of the choices we make.

- While he enjoyed his life with his daughter, he continued to drink until she passed away. He said: “I remember the devastation, heartbreak, anger and frustration that I felt as a result of the death of my daughter. Was this my fault? Why did this happen?”
- His world fell apart and he escaped it by further drinking his life away until he fell completely unconscious on the eve of Ramadan and had a horrible dream.
 - “I saw a huge beast chasing him. I ran faster in terror, desperate for my life, the beast was still running after me and drawing closer. I saw an old man, dressed in elegant clothes with rich perfumes wafting all around his person. I greeted him saying, ‘Assalamu Alaikum’ and he returned my greetings. I said, ‘For the sake of Allah, help me in my misery’. He said ‘I am too weak to help you against such a mighty foe; it is beyond my powers. But you must go on running to the mountain; perhaps you may find some help.’”
 - After running wildly from mountain to mountain, he came to a pass. There, he saw his beloved daughter and retreated to her. “Next moment, she was standing by my side and I took her to my bosom; she lifted her left hand towards me and with her right hand motioned the beast away. The beast went away immediately. Then she gave me a seat and sat in my lap.”
 - “I asked her ‘My dear child, what was this beast?’ She said ‘It was your own evil deeds which had made it so strong that it was about to push you into Jahannam’. I asked ‘And who was that white-robed old man?’ She replied ‘Those were your good deeds and you had made them so weak with your scanty good deeds that he could not help you against the beast.’
 - “She began to stroke my beard with her right hand saying, ‘My dear father, ‘Has not the time come for the believers (who indulge in sins) that their hearts should submit in all humility to the remembrance of Allah and to the truth which is revealed’ (Al-Hadid:16)”.

- He woke from the dream, repeating the same ayah his daughter was reciting in the dream. He responded by repeatedly saying, 'Now, O Allah'. Thus, he rushed to the masjid. When he stood in salah, the imam began reciting the same ayah.
 - This ayah is a wake-up call. When the heart trembles, it is an indication that it has iman.
 - Ibn Qayyim said, "The heart in its journey to Allah is like a bird. Love is its head, and fear and hope are its two wings. When the head is healthy, then the two wings will fly well. When the head is cut off, the bird will die. When either of the two wings is damaged, the bird becomes vulnerable to every hunter and predator."
 - This is the type of iman that we should have.
 - Umar ibn al-Khattab, said:

لَوْ نَادَى مُنَادٍ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّكُمْ دَاخِلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ كُلُّكُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا وَاحِدًا لَخِفْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ هُوَ وَلَوْ نَادَى مُنَادٍ أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّكُمْ دَاخِلُونَ النَّارَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا وَاحِدًا لَرَجَوْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ هُوَ

"If a caller from heaven announced that all people would enter Paradise together but for one man, I would fear that I am him. And if a caller announced that all people would enter Hellfire together but for one man, I would hope that I am him." (Hilyat al-Awliyā')

- Since then, Malik ibn Dinar became one of the greatest scholars of his time and continues to become a source of inspiration for many until today.
- This story teaches us that Allah wants to forgive us and He wants to accept our repentance. That is His nature.
 - He said:

وَاللَّهُ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَتُوبَ عَلَيْكُمْ

And Allah wants to grant you repentance and accept it from you (4:27)

- This is why we should constantly seek His repentance daily.
 - 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." (Sahih al-Bukhari)