

دليل المريدين

إلى كتاب منهاج العابدين للإمام حجة الإسلام الغزالي

للعبد الفقير إلى ربه الغني الحميد

رمزي بن محمود عجم

A Mureed's Guide

to Al-Ghazali's Minhaj Al-Abideen

By Ramzy Ajem

CHAPTER TWO

عقبة التوبة

The Second Hurdle:

Repentance (Tawba)

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1. Realization of Shortcomings, Sins and Transgressions

After having acquired sacred knowledge and realizing all that is required of you, inwardly and outwardly, you will inevitably come to realize your own shortcomings, sins and transgressions. Imam al-Ghazali says that seekers in this stage of their spiritual journey will wonder to themselves:

“How could I engage in worship while being persistently disobedient and defiled by sins? I must, therefore, first repent to Him so that He may forgive me my sins and deliver me from their captivity. Once I have purified myself from its filth, I can then be fit to serve God and approach the door of His proximity.”

It is here that the seeker encounters the second hurdle on the path, and in order to successfully pass it, he must ensure he is penitent.

2. Why must one repent from sin?

Tawba is required of the servant so that he may receive two things:

a. Divine Succor (*Tawfiq*) in obeying God

Sin blackens the heart and causes heaviness in the performance of good deeds. Without repenting, you should not expect to be granted ease, stability and growth in worship.

b. Acceptance (*Qabul*) in one's worship

Sin is the servant's disobedience to God Most High, and hence considered an unsettled liability. The one to whom you are indebted will be more likely to accept offerings only after the debt has been settled.

3. What is the reality of repentance and its conditions?

God the Transcendent says,

“Believers, turn to God in sincere repentance.” (Quran 66:8)

The *sincere repentance* (*tawba nasuh*) is the spiritual activity of the heart which liberates it from sin. Imam al-Ghazali’s Shaykh, Imam Abu Bakr al-Tartusi, defines *sincere repentance* as:

“The renunciation of choosing a sin that was previously committed (and the likeness of it in legal rank), out of venerating God and fearing His wrath.”

From this definition the following preconditions are inferred:

a. Resolve in Renunciation

One who is genuinely penitent is unequivocal, having no uncertainty in abandoning his option to sin.

b. Previously Committed Sin

One who is genuinely penitent repents *after* committing the sin.

c. Comprehensive of other offenses in kind

One who is genuinely penitent renounces the sins that are legally comparable¹ to the one he committed.

d. Renunciation Out of Veneration or Fear

One who is genuinely penitent renounces choosing the sin out of veneration and fear of God Most High, not out of attaining some worldly benefit such as status or praise from people.

Imam al-Ghazali says:

“These are the conditions and basic principles of repentance. If you meet them and fulfill them your repentance will be real and genuine.”

¹ Sins such as fornication, highway robbery, slander, lying etc. are in a single category which is legally distinguished from sins categorized under heretical innovation (*bid'a*) or disbelief (*kufr*).

4. How do I get myself to repent?

The way towards repentance is *mindfulness* of three things:

- a. The vileness of the sin;
- b. The severity of God's punishment for committing the sin;
- c. Your intolerance of pain and inability to withstand God's wrath.

5. Is it possible to leave sin altogether?

Imam al-Ghazali answers,

“You must realize that this matter is possible and not inconceivable. It is actually quite easy, as God confers His mercy upon whomsoever He wills.” It is also important to keep in mind that sinning absent-mindedly or by mistake, is pardoned by the gracious favor of God Most High.

6. “I know from myself that I shall return to the sin, so I cannot truly repent.”

Recognize that this is one of the deceptions of Satan in order to keep you from repenting. You have no sure knowledge of the future or the time of your death. Is it not conceivable that death comes to you after having repented? Imam al-Ghazali's says,

“As for the fear of reverting to sin, you must be firmly resolved and truthful in that regard, and entrust the outcome to God. If He grants you complete success², the purpose will be fully achieved by His gracious favour. Even if He does not grant complete success, all your previous sins will have been forgiven³, you will be delivered from them and purified, and you will not be guilty of any sin, except the one you have committed now.

² Meaning, if He grants you an outcome of never reverting to sin.

³ Which means that one should regard the previous sins as being forgiven even if one reverts to sin thereafter.

7. What should I do if I keep reverting back to the sin?

Imam al-Ghazali answers,

“If you do repent, but then break your repentance and revert to sin, you must return to repentance in haste, and say to yourself: ‘Perhaps I shall die before I revert to sin this time.’ You must do likewise if this happens a third time and a fourth. Just as you have adopted sin and reversion to it as a profession, you must also adopt repentance and returning to it as a profession. You must not be less competent in repentance than you are in sin. You must not despair, nor let Satan bar you from repentance on that account, for that is the best profession. You have surely heard the saying of the Prophet ﷺ:

*The best of you is every sorely tempted person
[mutafattin] who is devoutly penitent [tawwâb].*

In other words: “[The best of you is] frequently afflicted with sin, yet frequent in repentance thereof, and in returning to God (Magnificent is His Majesty) with remorse and the plea for forgiveness.”

God Most High says:

*Say: "O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls!
Despair not of the Mercy of God: for God forgives all sins: for
He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Quran 39:53)*

8. What about sins that involve harm to others?

Sins are of three types:

- a. Omitting the obligatory duties assigned to you by God (such as delaying an obligatory prayer or not paying zakat);
- b. Sins between you and God (such as the lustful glance or consuming the haram);
- c. Sins between you and people (such as slander or theft).

Sins of this last category is the most problematic because repentance from them involves restoring one or more of the following rights:

- a. Property;
- b. Life;
- c. Reputation;
- d. Family Honour, and;
- e. Religion.⁴

9. How do I pass this hurdle?

Imam al-Ghazali says:

“Next, you must know for certain that this hurdle is a difficult hurdle, of which the importance is great and the potential harm is enormous.”

Passing this hurdle successfully entails that you:

- a. Examine yourself carefully and call yourself to account for all sins; the omission of legal obligations, the sins between you and your Lord, and the sins between you and others;
- b. Be mindful of the ugliness of sin, its affect on your heart, and the punishment that awaits you;
- c. Hasten to repentance without delay;
- d. Beseech God the Exalted to absolve your heart of all sins⁵;
- e. Have the firm resolve to never revert to sin again, apart from any unintentional mistake;
- f. Do what you can to satisfy your legal claimants concerning the sins between you and them;
- g. Make up for the omissions to the best of your ability, and continue to appeal to God with humble supplication for strength, acceptance and *tawfiq*.

⁴ For instruction on how to restore these rights, please review pages 36 and 37 in Muhtar Holland's translation.

⁵ Perform a complete wudu with mindfulness and a four cycle prayer alone where no one can see you but your Lord. While in the prostration venerate and glorify your Lord with a heart that is ashamed and fearful, beseeching Him for His mercy and love. Then after completing the prayer, recall your sins one by one, as far as you are able, blaming and scolding your disobedient self for them, then raise your hands and beseech Him to forgive you for your sins.