

The Prayer of Repentance *Salāh al-Tawbah* Its Description and Rulings

“The Muslim should endeavor to fear Allāh (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى), be conscious that Allāh is aware of his behavior and abstain from committing acts of disobedience. If he was to sin, then he should hasten to repent and turn to Allāh in penitence.

The Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَىٰ آلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ) legislated this prayer at the time of repentance.”¹

Abū Bakr (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said I heard the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَىٰ آلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ) say,

مَا مِنْ رَجُلٍ يُذْنِبُ ذَنْبًا، ثُمَّ يَقُومُ فَيَتَطَهَّرُ، ثُمَّ يُصَلِّي، ثُمَّ يَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ، إِلَّا غَفَرَ اللَّهُ لَهُ « ثُمَّ قَرَأَ هَذِهِ الْآيَةَ: ﴿وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ﴾

“There is not a man who commits a sin then purifies himself, stands and prays [two *rak'ah*]², and then asks Allāh for forgiveness except that Allāh will forgive him. Then he recited this verse:

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا

لِذُنُوبِهِمْ

¹ Taken from *Bugyah al-Mutatawi* (p. 119-120) of Shaykh Muḥammad Bazmūl.

² The wording “two *rak'ah*” is found in the version of this ḥadīth collected by Abū Dāwūd (no. 1521), Ibn Mājah (no. 390) and others.

‘And those who, when they have committed *Fāḥishah* (illegal sexual intercourse) or wronged themselves with evil, remember Allāh and ask forgiveness for their sins... [Āl-‘Imrān 3:135].’¹

Salāh al-Tawbah

A number of the scholars, past and present, have referred to this prayer as the prayer of repentance (*Salāh al-Tawbah*). From them is Ibn Qudāmah in *al-Mughnī* (2/553), Ibn Taymīyah in *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa* (23/215), al-Mundhirī in *al-Targhīb Wa al-Tarhīb*, al-Suyūṭī in *al-Iklīl* (p. 56), Ibn Bāz in his *al-Fatāwa* (11/420) and numerous others.

فصل : في صلاة التوبة : عن علي ، رضي الله عنه ، قال : حَدَّثَنِي أَبُو بَكْرٍ ،
وَصَدَّقَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ ، قال : سمعتُ رسولَ اللهِ ﷺ يقول : « مَا مِنْ رَجُلٍ يُذْنِبُ ذَنْبًا ،
ثُمَّ يَقُومُ فَيَتَطَهَّرُ ، ثُمَّ يُصَلِّي رَكَعَتَيْنِ ، ثُمَّ يَسْتَغْفِرُ اللهُ تَعَالَى إِلَّا غَفَرَ لَهُ . » ثم قرأ

Ibn Qudāmah in al-Mughnī (2/553)

Imām Ibn Qudāmah (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) said,

“Chapter: Concerning the Prayer of Repentance.” Under this chapter he mentions the ḥadīth narrated by Abu Bakr.

¹ **Ḥasan:** Collected by al-Tirmidhī (no. 406) with this wording, Abū Dāwūd (no. 1521), Ibn Mājah (no. 390) and others. This ḥadīth was declared ḥasan by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (1/128). Shaykh Aḥmad Shākir held this hadith to be Ṣaḥīḥ in *‘Umdah al-Tafsīr* (1/417).

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) stated,

184 of 487 وحديث صلاة التوبة محفوظ في السنن عن علي، عن أبي
الصديق، عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه قال: «ما من مسلم
يذنب ذنباً فيتوضأ^(٣) ويحسن الوضوء، ثم يصلي ركعتين ويستغفر الله
إلا غفر له» وقرأ هذه الآية: ﴿وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا
أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ﴾ [سورة آل عمران: ١٣٥] (٤).

Al-Istiqāmah (2/184)

“The ḥadīth pertaining to *Salāh al-Tawbah* is preserved in the *Sunan* by way of ‘Alī Abū Ṭālib from Abū Bakr who narrated it from the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ)...”¹

Al-‘Allāmah Ibn Bāz (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) said,

“As for *Salāh al-Tawbah*, then it is established upon the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ) by way of the (ḥadīth) of al-Ṣiddīq (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ)...”²

Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajr (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *al-Fath* (11/98) said,

وقد ورد في حديث حسن صفة الاستغفار المشار إليه في الآية أخرجه أحمد والاربعة ومحمد ابن حبان من حديث
علي بن أبي طالب قال سمعتني أبو بكر الصديق رضي الله عنهما وصدق أبو بكر: سمعت النبي ﷺ يقول: ما من
رجل يذنب ذنباً ثم يقوم فيتعلم ليحسب الطهور ثم يستغفر الله من وجع إلا غفر له، ثم تلا (والذين إذا

Al-Fath (11/98)

“There comes in a ḥadīth, which is ḥasan, a description of the modus of seeking forgiveness that was alluded to in this verse. It has been collected by Aḥmad and by the four [Imāms of ḥadīth];

¹ *Al-Istiqāmah (2/184)*.

² *Majmū‘ Fatāwa Ibn Bāz (11/420)*.

it was declared Ṣaḥīḥ by Ibn Ḥibbān. It was narrated by ‘Alī Abū Ṭālib (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) that he said,

‘Abū Bakr (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) narrated to me, and Abu Bakr (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) spoke the truth, that he heard the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ) say,

ما من رجل يذنب ذنباً ثم يقوم فيتنظّر فيحسن الطهور ثم يستغفر الله عز وجل
إِلَّا غُفِرَ لَهُ ثُمَّ تَلَا وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةَ الْآيَةِ

“There is not a man who commits a sin then purifies himself correctly, stands and prays, and then asks Allāh for forgiveness except that he is forgiven. Then he recited this verse: “And those who, when they have committed *Fāḥishah* (illegal sexual intercourse)...”

Al-Suyūṭī (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) stated,

قوله تعالى: والذين إذا فعلوا فاحشة أو ظلموا أنفسهم، فيه مشروعية صلاة التوبة وأخرج أحمد وأصحاب السنن وابن حبان وغيرهم عن علي قال حدثني أبو بكر أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال « ما من عبد يذنب ذنباً ثم يتوضأ ويصلي ركعتين ويستغفر الله إلا غفر له » ثم تلا هذه الآية: والذين إذا فعلوا فاحشة أو ظلموا أنفسهم ذكروا الله فاستغفروا لذنوبهم .

Al-Iklil (p. 56)

“His Saying,

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ﴾

In this is a proof that *Salāh al-Tawbah* is legislated. Aḥmad, the collectors of the *Sunan*, Ibn Ḥibbān and others reported upon the authority of Ali that he said...”

The ruling of this prayer

“It is highly recommended (*mandūb*) for him to pray two *rak'ah* and then repent, as comes in the ḥadīth of Abū Bakr (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ)...”

Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Kathīr (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) stated in his Tafsīr,

“It is highly recommended to perform *Wuḍū* and pray two *rak'ah* when repenting based upon the ḥadīth collected by Imām Aḥmad upon ‘Alī... This ḥadīth is *ḥasan*.”¹

Description of this prayer

It comprises of two *rak'ah* as established in the aforementioned ḥadīth of Abū Bakr (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ).

There is no proof to support the recitation of specific *Sūrahs* or *Āyāt* in this prayer, and Allah knows best.

It is to be prayed before repentance

The strongest position is that the prayer of repentance is to be prayed prior to repentance, as mentioned by Ibn Taymīyah (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) when he said,

“It is recommended (*mandūb*) for him to pray two *rak'ah* and **then** repent, as comes in the ḥadīth of Abū Bakr (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ)...”

This is supported by the apparent wording of the ḥadīth narrated by Abū Bakr because prayer was mentioned prior to asking for

¹ *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (2/108).

forgiveness; the word ثم indicates that seeking forgiveness is after the prayer.

Is it permissible to pray the prayer of repentance during the prohibited times?

The prayer of repentance is considered to be from those prayers that are prayed for a specific reason (*Dhawāt al-Asbāb*).¹ If the servant was to sin at this time, then it is obligatory upon him to repent immediately. So if he was to pray during a prohibited period of time, then this is permissible.²

The reason for the prayer of repentance?

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymīyah (رحمته الله) stated when talking about the prayers that are prayed for a reason,

“Likewise the prayer of repentance. If he was to sin, then it is obligatory for him to repent immediately. It is highly recommended (*mandūb*) for him to pray two rak‘ah and then repent, as comes in the ḥadīth of Abū Bakr (رضي الله عنه)...”³

Is the prayer of repentance a means to draw nearer to Allāh through righteous actions?

This is *tawassul* (seeking a means to draw nearer to Allāh) through one’s actions, because *tawassul* can be through speech and action. So the fact

¹ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa (23/215).

² Refer to the explanation of *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-‘Abād. The Book of Prayer. Chapter: What Has Been Related Concerning Praying When Repenting. (00.20.47)

³ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa (23/215).

that the individual is praying to Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) prior to supplicating to Allāh and asking Him for forgiveness is no doubt from the reasons for this to be accepted.¹

It is not a condition of repentance to pray Salāh al-Tawbah

“It is not a prerequisite for the correctness of one’s repentance that you pray two rak‘ah. Rather, it is a condition to refrain from the sin, be resolute never to return to it, have remorse for what transpired and absolve oneself from the rights of the creation.

However, whoever purifies them self, prays two rak‘ah and then repents to Allāh, having remorse for what has occurred, refraining from this (sin) and truly resolute to never return to it, then this is more complete and closer to this repentance being accepted.

This is based upon the ḥadīth authentically established by way of Abū Bakr (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) who said that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said,

مَا مِنْ رَجُلٍ يُذْنِبُ ذَنْبًا فَيَتَوَضَّأُ فَيُحْسِنُ الوُضُوءَ، ثُمَّ يُصَلِّي رُكْعَتَيْنِ، فَيَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ
عَزَّ وَجَلَّ إِلَّا غُفِرَ لَهُ

“There is not a man who commits a sin then performs *Wuḍū* correctly, stands and prays two rak‘ah and then asks Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ)

¹ Explanation of *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-‘Abād. The Book of Prayer. Chapter: What Has Been Related Concerning Praying When Repenting. (00.16.17)

for forgiveness except that he will be forgiven.” Collected by Aḥmad in al-Musnad.”¹

Al-‘Allāmah Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān (حفظه الله) was asked,

“My companion said to me that if you want to repent then you should go and perform *Wuḍū* and then pray two *rak‘ah*; and that this prayer is called *Ṣalāh al-Tawbah*. Is this action correct?”

He (حفظه الله) responded:

“Yes, there is a hadith found pertaining to this. If a person does this: performs *Wuḍū*, prays two *rak‘ah* and then repents to Allah, then this is more complete; however, it is not mandatory. If he repented to Allah without praying and without performing *Wuḍū*, at any time during the night or the day, then indeed Allah accepts the repentance from his servant, at any time and in any state.”²

Ḥasan As-Ṣomali

28/1/14 (27th Rabī‘ al-Awwal 1435)

¹ *Fatāwa al-Lajnah al-Dā‘imah* (24/310). Shaykh Ibn Bāz (رحمته الله) was the head of the committee at the time.

² <http://www.alfawzan.af.org.sa/node/11418>