



## Tawbah<sup>1</sup>

*Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylī*

Translated by Abbas Taylor

Released by [www.marifah.net](http://www.marifah.net) 1428 H

*Tawbah* is leaving what the *Sharī‘ah* finds blameworthy for what it finds praiseworthy. It is the beginning of the path of the *sālikīn* (spiritual travelers), the key to the happiness of the *murīdīn* (spiritual aspirants), and the condition that makes the passage to Allah the Exalted sound.

In many ayats, Allah the Exalted orders the believers to perform *tawbah*, making it a means for success in both this world and the next. Allah says:

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعاً أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

*And turn to Allah all of you, O believers! so that you may be successful.*<sup>2</sup>

اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ

*And ask forgiveness of your Lord, then turn to Him.*<sup>3</sup>

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحاً

*O you who believe! Turn to Allah a sincere turning.*<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Tawbah: Turning to Allah for Forgiveness. Excerpted from Shaykh ‘Abdal Qādir al-Jaylī’s ‘*Haqā’iq al-Tasawwuf*’ (Realities of Sufism).

<sup>2</sup> Qur’ān: 24:31

<sup>3</sup> Qur’ān: 11:90

The Messenger, the Faultless ﷺ, often renewed his *tawbah*, repeatedly asking Allah for forgiveness in order to teach the *Ummah* and establish the *Sunnah*. Al-Aghār ibn Yasar al-Muznī ؓ related that the Prophet of Allah ﷺ said, “O mankind, make *tawbah* to Allah and ask him for forgiveness, for surely I make *tawbah* a hundred times each day.” Imam Nawawī (may Allah show him mercy) said:

*Tawbah* is required for every wrongdoing. If the *tawbah* is for a disobedience committed only between the servant of Allah and Allah the Exalted, the following three conditions must be met: the servant stops doing the disobedience, regrets having done it, and resolves to never do it again. If the disobedience is connected with another person then it has four conditions: the three conditions mentioned above, plus, the obligation of giving the wronged person his right. If this right is money or anything similar, it must be given back. If the wronged person was verbally or physically abused, then Allah's servant seeking *tawbah* should submit himself to the right of the wronged person, or ask him for forgiveness. If the abuse is *ghaybah* (backbiting), then he should ask the wronged person to pardon him. He must turn away from all wrong actions.

Among the conditions of *tawbah* is leaving the company of those who encourage committing wrongs and discourage obedience to Allah, and joining the companionship of the good and truthful so that their companionship deters one from returning to one's old life of disobedience.

The Sūfī does not look at the smallness of his sin; rather, he looks at the greatness of his Lord, following the example of the companions of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah be pleased with all of them). Anas ibn Malik ؓ said, “You might do something that seems, in your opinion, to be smaller than a strand of hair; but in the time of the Messenger of Allah, we considered it to be very big.” Abū ‘Abd Allah said, “He meant by this ‘something’ anything that leads to destruction.”

The Sūfī not only does *tawbah* from his outward disobedience, which, in his eyes, is the *tawbah* of the common people, but in addition, he performs *tawbah* from everything that distracts his heart from being occupied with Allah the Exalted. When Dhu al-Nūn al-Misrī ؓ was asked about *tawbah* he said, “*Tawbah* of the common is from wrong actions while *tawbah* of the elite is from heedlessness.”

‘Abd Allah al-Tamīmī ؓ said, “A difference exists between those who make *tawbah*: one may be making *tawbah* from his wrong actions, while another may be making *tawbah* from his heedlessness, while still another may be making *tawbah* from seeing himself doing good and being obedient.”

Know that whenever the Sūfī corrects his knowledge of Allah the Exalted and increases his works, his *tawbah* becomes more precise. So, no blemishes can be hidden from the one whose heart has been purified from the filth of sin and has had the lights of *īmān* shone upon it. He won't feel at ease when he tries to commit slips. Immediately, he will make *tawbah* from the shame he feels from the knowledge that Allah is seeing him. The Sūfī has to increase in his asking for forgiveness night and day, thus making him feel both

---

<sup>4</sup> Qur'ān 66:8

his actual servanthood to Allah and his shortcomings in giving His Lord His rightful due. From this he acknowledges servitude (*'ubūdīya*) and confirms Lordship (*rubūbīya*). Allah the Exalted says:

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا ، يُرْسِلُ السَّمَاءَ  
عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا ، وَيُمْدِدْكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ  
جَنَّاتٍ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ أَنْهَارًا

*Then I said, Ask forgiveness of your Lord, surely He is the most Forgiving: He will send down upon you the cloud, pouring down abundance of rain: And help you with wealth and sons, and make for you gardens, and make for you rivers.*<sup>5</sup>

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ ، آخِذِينَ مَا آتَاهُمْ مِنْ  
رَبِّهِمْ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ  
الَّذِينَ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ ، وَالْأَسْحَارَ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ

*Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in gardens and fountains. Taking what their Lord gives them; surely they were before that, the doers of good. They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the morning they asked forgiveness.*<sup>6</sup>

When the Sūfī reads these verses and others like them, he sheds tears of regret for his shortcomings in his life and for his remissness in his relationship to Allah. He turns to his faults and shortcomings, correcting them before it is too late. Then he turns to his soul (*nafs*) and purifies it. He follows this with increased acts of obedience and goodness, as the Prophet ﷺ has said, “Performing acts of goodness (*ḥasanah*) immediately after wrong actions (*sayyi'ah*) erases wrong actions.”

Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq (may Allah have mercy upon him) said in his book of rules:

The claim of the claimer is known by its result. If the claim manifests itself then it is correct; otherwise, the one who alleges his claim is a liar. *Tawbah* not followed by godfearingness (*taqwā*) is considered unaccepted. *Taqwā* not free of doing wrong actions (*istiḳāma*) is admixed and imperfect. *Istiḳāma* without scrupulousness (*warā'*) is incomplete. *Warā'* that is not a result of *zuhd* is limited. *Zuhd* that is not built upon trust in Allah (*tawakkul*) is dry and dead. *Tawakkul* whose fruits do not manifest by completely cutting off everything that does not lead to Allah and referring to Him, is a picture without truth in it (it is a form without reality). So, sound *tawbah* manifests through the servant turning away from the forbidden (*ḥarām*); perfection in *taqwā*

<sup>5</sup> Qur'ān 71:10–12

<sup>6</sup> Qur'ān 51:15–18

manifests through the servant finding no observer except Allah; *istiqāmah* exists through the servant taking precautions to perform his religious exercises (*wird*) without innovation (*bid'a*); and *warā'* exists when the servant, at the point of experiencing strong desires for something that may be unacceptable, leaves it.

