

Explanation of Du‘ā 31 from *Sahīfa Sajjādiyya*

Explanation of Imam Al-Sajjād (a)’s Supplication on Repentance¹

Introduction

This prayer known as ‘His Supplication for Repentance’ is one of the master-piece entreaties of Imam al-Sajjād Ali bin Husayn Zaynul ‘Ābidīn (a) cited in *Al-Sahīfa al-Sajjādiyya* (الصَّحِيفَةُ السَّجَّادِيَّةُ), a book containing Imam’s Du‘ās.

Al-Sahīfa al-Sajjādiyya has an important position among the Shī‘a school of thought after the Quran and *Nahjul Balāgha*, and is known as “Zabūr Āl Muhammad” [the Psalms of the family of Muhammad (s)] and “Injīl Ahlul Bayt (a)” [the Gospel of the Household of the Prophet (s)], because of its rich contents describing Tawhīd (Unity) of Allah (swt), the inner splendor and beauty of īmān (faith) and man’s essential relationship with his Creator.

In this supplication on repentance, the Imam al-Sajjād (a) pleads with Allah for forgiveness of sins and repents for errors committed. One may ask why he is asking for repentance when he is Ma‘sum (sinless). The scholars have discussed this argument in detail, and this brief summary is not the right place for this deliberation; however one reason which I must cite is that Imams are our role models and Imam al-Sajjād (a) through this supplication intends to teach us on how should we implore to Allah (swt), ask for forgiveness and repent for our misdeeds.

Meaning of Tawba

Tawba in Arabic terminology literally means ‘to return’, and this Du‘ā of Tawba teaches us how to show remorse, repent for our sins and return to Allah (swt). One of Allah’s Quranic names is al-Tawwāb, ‘He who turns’, and the verb from this root is used both for Allah’s turning toward man and man’s turning toward Allah. Thus, Tawba refers to every level of turning away from self and moving towards Allah (swt).

Tawba or repentance is a part of all compassionate mercies of the Most Merciful Lord. It is one of the avenues of His unbounded indulgence that He has kept open for His slaves. Had it been closed, no one would have ever attained salvation. Such is human inclination towards evil.

The Kind and Wise Lord therefore ordained Tawba to be a cure for diseases of the soul and a means of purifying indecent deeds. While sins takes us away from Allah (swt), Tawba brings us back to Allah (swt). This fact is clearly mentioned in this supplication when Imam says:

وَإِنْ يَكُنْ التَّوْبَةُ لِمَعْصِيَتِكَ إِنَابَةً فَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُتَّيِبِينَ.

If refraining from sins is a turning back to You (O Allah), then I am the first of those who turn back!

According to various traditions, Prophet Muhammad (s) used to pray for forgiveness seventy, or one hundred, times daily by repeating the formula ‘I seek forgiveness from God’ (*astaghfirullāh*). No Muslim can think that he has reached a point where he no longer has need for God’s forgiveness.

In this Du‘ā, the Imam often asks Allah (swt) for success in repentance. The Imam also tells us through this supplication that the best way of ensuring acceptance of Tawba is not to repeat the sins, the strength of which basically comes from Allah (swt).

Ability and Aptitude to do Tawba itself is a blessing from Allah (swt)

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Human being is weak and is many times overwhelmed by worldly attractions and misguided by satanic whisperings. But Allah (swt) with His mercy has not only kept the door of Tawba open forever, but He Himself guides man towards the door of Tawba and grants him the ability (Tawfīq) to do Tawba.

Imam Muhammad Al-Bāqir (a) said: *Prophet Adam (a) requested Allah (swt): 'My Lord! You have imposed Satan on me. So grant something to me also'. Allah Almighty replied: 'O Adam! Yes, I have appointed something for you also. It is that if anyone from your progeny intends to sin, his sin will not be recorded. If he has practically committed that sin, only one offense will be noted. But when he will intend to do a good deed a good will instantly be noted in his account. Then if he will actually do that good deed, ten rewards will be credited to his account'. Adam (a) said: 'My Lord! Grant me something more'. Allah (swt) responded: 'Another bounty for you is that if, after committing a sin, they will seek pardon from Me, I will forgive them'. Adam (a) requested: 'My Lord! Add something more'. Allah (swt) said: 'I have provided Tawba for your progeny and it is so vast that even if they beg My pardon at the last moment of their life, I will forgive them'. He said: 'My Lord! This is enough'.*

To realize ones' weaknesses and mistakes itself is a blessing which Allah (swt) grants to the believers. Imam Zaynul 'Ābidīn (a) through this Du'ā makes us realize that it was due to Allah's vast mercy that we were able to recognize and admit our weaknesses and sins, and He guided us to the door of Tawba.

Imam (a) said:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا انْفَتَحَ لَهُ بَصَرُ الْهُدَىٰ، وَتَفَشَّعَتْ عَنْهُ سَحَابَاتُ الْعَمَىٰ أَحْصَىٰ مَا ظَلَمَ بِهِ نَفْسَهُ، وَفَكَّرَ فِيمَا خَالَفَ بِهِ رَبَّهُ، فَرَأَىٰ كَبِيرَ عَصِيَانِهِ كَبِيرًا، وَجَلِيلَ مُخَالَفَتِهِ جَلِيلًا، فَأَقْبَلَ نَحْوَكَ مُؤَمِّلًا لَكَ، مُسْتَحِييًا مِنْكَ.

Until when the eye of guidance was opened for him, and the clouds of blindness were dispelled, he reckoned that through which he had wronged himself, and reflected upon that in which he had opposed his Lord. He saw his sins to be big (and many) and his disobedience as great. So he turned to You (O Allah), hoping in You and ashamed before You.

Even the strength for not repeating the sins is due to Allah's help and Tawfīq. Imam says:

اللَّهُمَّ وَإِنَّهُ لَا وَفَاءَ لِي بِالتَّوْبَةِ إِلَّا بِعِصْمَتِكَ، وَلَا اسْتِمْسَاكَ بِي عَنِ الْخَطَايَا إِلَّا عَنْ قُوَّتِكَ، فَقَوِّنِي بِقُوَّةِ كَافِيَةٍ، وَتَوَلَّنِي بِعِصْمَةِ مَانِعَةٍ.
O Allah, but I cannot be faithful to my repentance without Your protection, nor can I refrain from offenses without Your strength. So strengthen me with a sufficient strength, and guard me with a defending preservation!

Praise of Allah (swt)

The Imam starts the Du'ā with praise of Allah (swt):

اللَّهُمَّ يَا مَنْ لَا يَصِفُهُ نَعْتُ الْوَاصِفِينَ.

O Allah, O He whom the depiction of the describers fails to describe

Thus he gave us an important lesson that every act including Du'ās should start with the praise of Allah (swt).

Indeed, fortunate is one who appreciates and praises the value of this gate of Divine Mercy – Tawba, and highly unfortunate is the one who remains deprived of Divine Mercy even though the paths leading to it are open to him.

Conditions for the Acceptance of Tawba

People many times complain that despite continuous supplications their prayers are not accepted. The reasons for delay or un-acceptance of prayers could be many but one of the reason is not fulfilling the conditions of prayers. Imam (a) explains some of these conditions in his Du'ā as below:

1) To admit one's sins and consider every sin to be big and an obstacle against progress.

After praising Allah (swt), Imam al-Sajjād (a) teaches us to plead to Allah (swt) by admitting our sins and mistakes. He says in the Du‘ā:

هَذَا مَقَامٌ مَنْ تَدَاوَلَتْهُ أَيْدِي الدُّنُوبِ ، وَقَادَتْهُ أَرْمَةُ الخَطَايَا ، وَاسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ ، فَقَصَرَ عَمَّا أَمَرْتَ بِهِ تَفْرِيطًا ، وَتَعَاطَى مَا كَهَيْتَ عَنْهُ تَغْرِيبًا.

This is the station of him whom sins have passed from hand to hand. Offenses' reins have led him on and Satan has gained mastery over him. He has fell short of what You have commanded through neglect, and has pursued what You have prohibited in delusion.

The late Hājj Shaykh Abbas Qummī (a.r.) writes in his book *Manāzil Ākbara* that a person named Ibn Samad used to take account of himself many times during the day and night. One day when he was calculating the number of days he had lived, he realized that sixty years of his age have passed. He calculated the number of days in sixty years to be 21,500. “Woe upon me!” he said, “Even if I have not committed more than one sin every day, I would still meet Allah with the burden of 21500 sins.” As soon as he realized this he fell down unconscious and died within a short time.

Imam reminds us about this problem in the following citation:

فَرَأَى كَبِيرَ عَصِيَانِهِ كَبِيرًا ، وَجَلِيلَ مُخَالَفَتِهِ جَلِيلًا.

He saw his vast disobedience as vast and his great opposition as great

2) To be fervently hopeful that his sins shall be forgiven.

A sinful person should not despair and should always remain hopeful that his sins however numerous they are. Imam Ja‘far al-Sādiq (a) said: *There is no man who Allah did not forgive who had felt ashamed of his misdeed. Whenever a man feels ashamed of his fault and then begs pardon of Allah He forgives all of his sins.*

Imam Al-Sajjād (a) says:

فَأَقْبَلَ نَحْوَكَ مُؤْمَلًا لَكَ ، مُسْتَنْحِيًا مِنْكَ.

So he turned to You, hoping in You, and (feeling) ashamed before You

Imam Ali al-Ridhā (a) once heard his companions say: *May Allah curse those who fought against Imam Ali (a). He said that they should add: Then he did not reform his soul by repentance.*

3) To supplicate with full trust and certitude.

Imam supplicates thus:

وَوَجَّهَ رَغْبَتَهُ إِلَيْكَ ثِقَةً بِكَ ، فَأَمَكَ بِطَمَعِهِ يَقِينًا.

And he directed his beseeching toward You, having trust in You. He repaired to You in his longing with certitude.

4) Showing ardent Sincerity (*ikhlās*) in pleading.

In this supplication, Imam also emphasizes the need of ardent sincerity in seeking repentance. The following story eloquently describes this. Sabzwārī writes in his book *Misbāhul Qulūb* that when the order prohibiting wine-drinking was revealed, a caller was sent by the Messenger of Allah (s) who announced that henceforth no one shall consume liquor. By chance, one day the Holy Prophet (s) was passing through a by lane when a Muslim man also entered it carrying a bottle of wine in his hand. He was horrified on seeing the Holy Prophet (s) and he fervently supplicated to the Almighty Allah, “I repent for this and I shall never drink again. Please save me from disgrace.”

When the Messenger of Allah (s) came near he asked, “What is there in the bottle?” “It contains Vinegar,” replied the man. The Holy Prophet (s) put forward his hand and asked the man to put a little

bit on his palm. When the Prophet (s) examined it, it was indeed vinegar. The person was overwhelmed with emotion and he began to weep and said, “By Allah! It was wine!” “But before this I had repented and begged Allah not to disgrace me,” He added.

The Messenger of Allah (s) said that it was true: *Allah changes the sins of repenters into good deeds. They are the ones whose sins are changed into good deeds by Allah.*

Imam says:

وَقَصَدَكَ بِخَوْفِهِ إِخْلَاصًا.

and he went straight to You in fear, with full sincerity

5) With a heart full of love of Allah (swt) and devoid of worldly longings.

Imam says in this Du‘ā:

قَدْ خَلَا طَمَعُهُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَطْمُوعٍ فِيهِ غَيْرِكَ.

His longing was devoid of every object of longing but You

6) Pleading with feelings of humility and lowliness.

Imam Al-Sajjād (a) says:

فَمَثَّلَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْكَ مُتَضَرِّعًا، وَعَمَّضَ بَصَرَهُ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ مُتَخَشِّعًا، وَطَاطَأَ رَأْسَهُ لِعِزَّتِكَ مُتَدَلِّلًا.

So he stood before You pleading, his eyes turned toward the ground in humbleness, his head bowed before Your might in lowliness

7) Feeling shame and remorseful of sins.

Imam (a) says:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ يَكُنِ النَّدَمُ تَوْبَةً إِلَيْكَ فَأَنَا أَنْدَمُ النَّادِمِينَ.

O Allah, if remorse is a repentance toward You, then I am the most remorseful of the remorseful!

Pleasure derived from committing sins vanishes, but the consequence remains.

The Imam (a) reminds us through this beautiful Du‘ā that the small pleasure derived from sin vanishes soon but the consequence remains. Yet if we do Tawba sincerely, even the evil consequence can be erased by the Kind and Merciful Lord. That is why we are always instructed to plead for the mercy of Allah and not His justice, because if He serves us with justice then we cannot be saved.

Imam (a) says:

مِنْ ذُنُوبٍ أَدْبَرَتْ لَدَائِهَا فَدَهَبَتْ، وَأَقَامَتْ تَبِعَائِهَا فَلَزِمَتْ، لَا يُنْكِرُ يَا إِلَهِي عَدْلَكَ إِنْ عَاقَبْتَهُ، وَلَا يَسْتَعْظِمُ عَفْوَكَ إِنْ عَفَوْتَ عَنْهُ
وَرَحْمَتَهُ.

The sins whose pleasures have turned their backs and gone, and whose evil consequences have stayed and stuck fast. He will not deny Your justice, my God, if You punish him, nor will he consider Your pardon great if You pardon him and have mercy upon him.

Quranic Verses on Tawba

Imam invokes Allah (swt) by repeating the verses of Holy Quran in regards to Tawba. Definitely, those who read Holy Quran daily are guided and saved from the pitfall of sins.

Imam includes references from the verses of Holy Quran in the supplication thus:

أَدْعُوْنِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ.

You have said, "Supplicate Me and I will respond to you. (Q 40:60).

إِنَّكَ تَقْبَلُ التَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِكَ وَتَعْفُو عَنِ السَّيِّئَاتِ.

Indeed You accept repentance from Your servants and You pardon evil deeds (Q 42:25)

وَتُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ.

And You love the repenters". (Q 2:222)

Asking Tawba for all parts of the body

Imam (a) reminds us in this supplication to guard all our parts of our body from committing sins. He says:

اللَّهُمَّ وَإِنِّي أَتُوبُ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ كُلِّ مَا خَالَفَ إِزَادَتَكَ أَوْ زَالَ عَنْ مَحَبَّتِكَ مِنْ حَطَرَاتِ قَلْبِي وَلِحَظَاتِ عَيْنِي وَحِكَايَاتِ لِسَانِي، تَوْبَةً تَسْلَمُ بِهَا كُلُّ جَارِحَةٍ عَلَيَّ حِيَالَهَا مِنْ تَبَعَاتِكَ.

O Allah, I repent to You from everything opposed to Your will, or (that is) far from Your love - the thoughts of my heart, the glances of my eye, the tales of my tongue - with a repentance through which each bodily part will by itself stay safe from ill consequences with You".

Real Tawba is to give up sins

The meaning of Tawba is not simply repeating the words of Istighfār with the tongue and then repeating the same sin again. To err is human but to repeat the same mistake again is unforgivable. Abu Basīr says: I requested Imam Ja‘far al-Sādiq (a) to explain what was ‘*tawbatan nasūba*’ (Sincere Repentance) ordered by Allah? He said: *A repentance after which he never commits that sin again.*

So real Tawba includes a firm decision to give up sins forever because if a person does not have a strong will to refrain from sins it only indicates that he was not truly ashamed. Amīr al-Mu‘minīn Imam Ali (a) says: *It cannot so happen that a man has really felt ashamed and yet he did not give up sins.*

Imam Al-Sajjād (a) highlights the need of a covenant with Allah (swt) that we shall not repeat the sin again. He says:

وَلَكَ يَا رَبِّ شَرْطِي أَلَّا أَعُودَ فِي مَكْرُوهِكَ، وَضَمَانِي أَلَّا أَرْجِعَ فِي مَذْمُومِكَ.

To You, my Lord, belongs my stipulation that I will not return to what is disliked by You, (to You is) my guarantee that I will not return to what You detest

Imam also says:

اللَّهُمَّ أَمَّا عَبْدُ تَابَ إِلَيْكَ وَهُوَ فِي عِلْمِ الْعَيْبِ عِنْدَكَ فَاسِخٌ لِتَوْبَتِهِ وَعَائِدٌ فِي ذَنْبِهِ وَخَطِيئَتِهِ فَإِنِّي أَعُودُ بِكَ أَنْ أَكُونَ كَذَلِكَ، فَاجْعَلْ تَوْبَتِي هَذِهِ تَوْبَةً لَا أَحْتَاجُ بَعْدَهَا إِلَى تَوْبَةٍ.

O Allah, if any servant repents to You, while in Your knowledge of the unseen, he will break his repentance, and return to his sin and offense (again), I seek refuge in You lest I be like that! So make this my repentance a repentance after which I will need no repentance (again).

All of our deeds are recorded

Imam Al-Sajjād (a) in this supplication draws our attention to the fact that all our sinful deeds small and big are recorded but can be erased.

Imam says:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّكَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا عَمِلْتُ فَأَغْفِرْ لِي مَا عَلِمْتَ، وَاصْرِفْني بِقُدْرَتِكَ إِلَى مَا أَحْبَبْتَ. اللَّهُمَّ وَعَلَيَّ تَبِعَاتٌ قَدْ حَفِظْتُهُنَّ، وَتَبِعَاتٌ قَدْ نَسِيتُهُنَّ، وَكُلُّهُنَّ بِعَيْنِكَ الَّتِي لَا تَنَامُ، وَعِلْمِكَ الَّذِي لَا يَنْسَى.

O Allah, You know better what I have done, so forgive me what You know, and turn me through Your power towards what You love! O Allah, counted against me are claims that stay in my memory, and claims that I have forgotten, while all of them remain in Your eye (record) that does not sleep, and Your knowledge that does not forget!

Ending the Du‘ā with Salawāt on Prophet Muhammad (s)

Imam Al-Sajjād (a) ends the Du‘ā by sending blessings on Prophet Muhammad and his progeny, emphasizing that Ahlul Bayt (a) are our intercessors on the Day of Judgement.

Imam says:

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ كَمَا هَدَيْتَنَا بِهِ وَصَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ صَلَاةً تَشْفَعُ لَنَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَيَوْمَ الْفَاقَةِ إِلَيْكَ، إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَهُوَ عَلَيْكَ يَسِيرٌ.

O Allah, bless Muhammad and his Household just as You have guided us by him! Bless Muhammad and his Household just as You have rescued us through him! Bless Muhammad and his Household, with a blessing that will intercede for us on the Day of Resurrection, the day of neediness toward You! You are powerful over everything, and that is easy for You!

On the Day of Judgement man may find excuses for his sins and say: O My Lord! I was unaware and ignorant; was chained by passions and desires and hence could not remain steadfast in the face of satanic instigations.

In reply to these excuses he will be told: Did We not keep the doors of Tawba always open for you? Were you entrusted highly difficult tasks and ordered to perform a duty beyond your power? Were the conditions of Tawba beyond your ability?

May Allah (swt) grant us the Tawfiq of Tawba before it is too late and return to Allah (swt). Āmīn.

References:

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2. ‘Imam Al-Sajjād (a)’s Supplication on Repentance’ [Du‘ā’u hu Bi-‘l-Tawba] - <http://www.duas.org/sajjadiya/s31.htm>