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Atonement, Returning, and Repentance in Islam

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to demonstrate how in Islam the principle mechanism for atonement lies in *tawba* (returning, repentance). Divided into four sections, and drawing primarily on the literature of classical Sufism, the analysis begins by defining some key terms related to the idea of atonement, with special attention to the language of the Quran. Then it outlines three conditions of returning, repentance, and atonement, delineated by classical Muslim authorities, before turning to a brief overview of the concept of amending wrongs or settings matters aright. It concludes with some final remarks about the possibilities of atonement available until death, and the soteriological role divine mercy is believed to play in the posthumous states of the soul.

Keywords: *tawba*; repentance; returning; atonement; forgiveness; divine mercy; *islam*

> *Jesus preached to the Israelites.*
> *They wept and began to tear their clothes.*
> *Jesus said, 'What sin have your clothes committed?*
> *Turn instead to your hearts and reprove them.'*[1]

The ensuing analysis is divided into four parts. It begins with (1) an introduction that defines some key terms, with special attention to the language of the Quran. Then it (2) outlines three conditions of returning and repentance in Islam, followed by (3) a brief overview of the concept of amending wrongs or settings matters aright. It concludes with (4) some remarks about the possibilities of atonement while one is still in this world, and the final, soteriological role of divine mercy in life after death.

1. Introduction: Semantic Considerations

In Islam, the primary mechanism for atonement, for setting aright one's relationship with God, lies in *tawba*.[2] While the Arabic word is usually rendered "repentance", the translation, while viable, is slightly misleading for two reasons.

First of all, repentance derives from a combination of the intensifying prefix *re* and the Latin *paenitere*, which means to experience sorrow, regret, dissatisfaction, or even torture. From it we get such words as "penitent" and "penitentiary". The root allows us to appreciate the principle lexical sense of the English term, one that places an accent on the psychological aftermath of the commission of a wrongful act, whether it be by way of commission or omission. Karl Burger highlights this sense of repentance when he observes that it is "the feeling of pain experienced by man when he becomes conscious that he has done wrongly or improperly in thought, word or deed . . . It is a natural and involuntary feeling of pain."[3]

Tawba on the other hand stems from the trilateral Arabic root t-w-b, which means to "turn" or "return" (Ibn Faris 1969, vol. 1, p. 357 (t-w-b); Zabidi 1966, vol. 2, p. 161 (t-w-b); Zamakhshari n.d., p. 80 (t-w-b)). At its heart, we encounter a spatial metaphor that involves not so much a feeling but a doing, not so much an emotion but an act (Denny 1980; Zilio-Grandi 2013, p. 73). It should not surprise us therefore that in the Quran, one of the most frequently coupled concepts with *tawba* is *islah*, literally "setting things aright", "making amends", or "rectifying wrongs" (see Q 2:160, 4:146, 3:89, 24:5, 4:16, 5:39, 6:54).

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The emphasis in the Quranic conceptualization of *tawba* is therefore on making a change, undoing past mistakes, and taking concrete steps to ameliorate the consequences of one's own crimes or misdemeanors. This is not to say that remorse, contrition and regret play no role in the process—far from it, as we shall see below. Nevertheless, when we probe into the linguistic and Quranic dimensions of *tawba*, the primary emphasis lies, as noted, not on an emotion but an act. In this respect, the semantic and conceptual field generated by the Arabic word provides us with a close equivalent of its Hebrew cognate, *teshubah*.[4]

The second and more important reason we cannot easily translate the Arabic word "repentance" is because in the Quran, God frequently engages in *tawba,* that is to say, He turns and returns to the human being. "Then He turned (*taba*) to them", we read in one passage (Q 9:118), and "God desires to turn (*yatubu*) towards you" (Q 4:27), we read in another. But no Muslim would state God repents because that would imply He erred or made a mistake, and then felt remorse for what He did. The doctrine of divine perfection in Islam precludes such a possibility. He does, however, participate in *tawba*, an idea that denotes, in the final order of things, a dialectical relationship between God and the human being, of a mutual, reciprocal, and circular turning and returning between the two.

In fact, not only does God engage in *tawba*, He is described in the Quran as *tawwab*, the "Oft-Returner" or "Frequently Returning One" (Q 2:37, 2:54, 2:128, 2:160, 4:16, 4:64, 9:104, 10:3, 9:118, 24:10, 49:12), with the intensive active participle forming one of the divine names in Muslim theology.[5] This is unlike the human being, who on almost all occasions is described in the revelation of the faith simply as a *ta'ib*, as a "returner" (through the active participle).[6] In his monumental *Meccan Revelations*, Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE) asks why this is the case: why is God *tawwab* while the human being only *ta'ib*?[7] For the Andalusian mystic, in order to answer this question, we have to step back and answer another one, namely, how does one know when he is the object of divine *tawba*? The answer is perhaps best illustrated by a story from the life of the early mystic Rabi'a (d. 801).[8] Once a man came to her and asked, "If I turn to God, will He turn to me?" To his surprise, she replied "No". Then she immediately qualified her negation by adding, "however, if He turns to you, you will turn to Him" (Qushayri 2002, p. 215). That is to say, the priority of *tawba*, its genesis, must always be retraced to God, a view underscored in the Quran when it says, "Then He turned to them *that they might turn* to Him" (Q 9:118).

But this still does not explain why the Quran uses the emphatic *tawwab* for God. How does this make Him the Oft-Returner? Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain that when the human being turns to God in *tawba*, through a returning that was itself catalyzed by a divine turn, that this act of the human being is then met by another divine *tawba*, one of acceptance. Hence the *tawba* of the human being lies stranded in between two arcs of divine *tawba*, making God the first to turn (*al-tawwab al-awwal*) and the last to return (*al-tawwab al-akhir*), the Alpha and the Omega of this dialectical relationship. Within the context of sin—and human *tawba* is not just any turning but a turning from sin to God—what this means is that when the human being falls into an act of wrongdoing (be it major or minor, mortal or venial), the desire to make amends and set aright one's relationship with God is itself made possible by an act of divine mercy, grace, and guidance—the original *tawba*. The human being then turns in *tawba*, through a desire that wells up within the heart, to God, only for the return to be met with another turn of God, now a *tawba* that entails an effacing of the sin (*'afw*), forgiveness (*maghfira*), final approval, and acceptance (Ibn 'Arabi 1999, vol. 3, pp. 208–14; cf. Khalil 2006, pp. 404–6).

Yet the matter is not so simple. The interpretive authorities of Islam strain to point out that God does not just accept every *tawba*. There are conditions for the atonement of sins the human being must strive to fulfill, to the best of her ability. After all, the Quran declares, "As for those who return (in *tawba*), set matters aright (through *islah*), and make manifest the truth, it is to them I return (in *tawba*)" (Q 2:160), that is to say, "it is them I forgive", or "it is them whose atonement I accept". In another verse, the Quran makes clear that it is not enough for the human being simply to turn in *tawba*—he must turn through a *tawba* that is "earnest", "pure" or "sincere" (*nasuh*) (Q 66:8). What then is such a pure *tawba*?

2. The Conditions of Returning, Repentance, and Atonement

In his *Treatise*, the early authority Qushayri (d. 1072) outlines the requirements of *tawba*. To quote his words directly:

> Those versed in the fundamentals of religion from the people of Sunna[9] have said, 'There are three conditions of *tawba* for it to be sound: remorse (*nadam*) for the violations that have been committed, an immediate abandonment of the slip (*zalla*), and a firm resolve ('*azm*) not to return to similar acts of disobedience'.[10]

The first of these conditions is based on a famous tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. When he was asked about the mark or sign of *tawba*, he replied, "remorse". In one sense, we might say this is repentance proper. As already noted, contrition and regret are not absent in the process of *tawba*, but *tawba* is broader in scope than repentance. The former includes the latter, but cannot be confined to it. Nevertheless, as far as the human dimension of returning to God in the wake of sin is concerned, *nadam* forms an essential component of atonement. Most importantly, it signifies the sincerity behind one's acknowledgement of having done wrong, of having violated divine law. Without it, one could reasonably question the genuineness of the sinner's desire to make amends and set aright his relationship with God. The importance of contrition is drawn attention to in a story from Muslim tradition. When the Prophet was with the Angel Gabriel on the night of his nocturnal ascent, he was shown in vivid detail the posthumous states of the inhabitants of the paradisiacal and infernal realms. As they both flew over the fires of hell, Gabriel took out a handful of water and poured it over the flames, causing them to extinguish. In astonishment, the Prophet asked about this mysteriously potent substance, to which the Angel replied, "the tears of the penitent", that is to say, the "tears of the people of *tawba*".[11]

We also find contrition in the Quran's account of Adam and Eve, in the aftermath of the sin that forced them into exile from Paradise. Remorse formed part of their acknowledgement of having transgressed a divine prohibition, since they confessed, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves" (Q 7:23). While the Quran does not explicitly identify their sentiment as *nadam* (or *nadama*), it is nevertheless implied in their response, in their pleas and petitions for forgiveness. The role of *nadam* in turning to God from a misdeed cannot, therefore, be minimized. Regret, after all, serves as proof one has taken ownership of an offence. On the other hand, when one blames another, especially for a significant misdeed, one is consumed not by remorse but anger, not by contrition but rage. And for Muslims, there is no better illustration of this than the devil, Iblis, when in reaction to his own act of disobedience, his refusal to bow before the primordial Adam, he remained unwilling to accept any fault of his own. "For leading me astray", he promised God, "I shall surely tempt them on the earth and lead them all astray" (Q 15:39; cf. 7:16).

Curiously, Rumi (d. 1273) and other thinkers, particularly within the mystical tradition of Islam, recognizing the subtle role God plays in human guidance, observed that Iblis was not entirely mistaken in his protests, nor were Adam and Eve entirely correct in taking responsibility. After all, God is both the Guide (*al-Hadi*) and Misleader (*al-Mudill*). Nevertheless, Iblis lacked courtesy (*adab*) before God, and this absence of propriety or etiquette played a defining role in his own downfall. Conversely, it was the *adab* of Adam and Eve, their reticence to impute blame onto anyone other than themselves, even though it was Iblis who tempted them, and God who created that temptation, that was the ultimate reason for their forgiveness and exaltation.[12] As Rumi would write,

> God said to him, 'Oh Adam, did I not create that sin and trial within you? Was that not My destiny and decree? How is it that when asking forgiveness you kept this fact hidden?' Adam said, 'I feared lest I be discourteous'. God replied, 'I also have observed courtesy toward you'. Whoever brings respect receives it. Whoever brings sugar eats almond candy. (Chittick 1983, pp. 84–85).

One of the effects such an attitude has on the human soul, particularly when viewed through the eyes of the more inward-turning thinkers of Islam, is that it helps create a tendency not to fault-find others, to assume responsibility out of courtesy before God for

one's seeming mistakes, while striving to become a more conscientious person. The contemplatives of Islam note that as human beings, especially when we are spiritually underdeveloped, we have a proclivity to see the moral blemishes of others with great clarity while remaining blind to our own. We tend to lay the blame at the feet of everyone and everything but our ourselves. The story of Adam and Eve illustrates the saving grace of the opposite, of accepting responsibility even when we might not be entirely guilty. This is especially so because within the wrong there is often a good chance that at least *some* culpability must fall on our shoulders, whether it be direct or indirect.

The second condition of *tawba*, of seeking atonement (as outlined by Qushayri), is rather self-evident, namely to immediately abandon the sin. Dhu-l Nun (d. 859) did not mince his words when he declared, "To seek forgiveness without refraining from the wrong is the *tawba* of liars" (Qushayri 2002, p. 214).

As for the third condition, a firm resolution not to return to the offence in the future, while Muslim authorities generally agree on its necessity (Ibn 'Arabi being a notable exception (Ibn 'Arabi 1999, vol. 3, pp. 208–14; cf. Khalil 2006, pp. 411–14)) there is some difference of opinion on how faithful one has to be to the resolution for *tawba* to be accepted by God. Some argue that one has to remain faithful to the vow for the rest of one's life, or at least a good part of it. "The aspirant is not genuinely a *ta'ib*", said an early figure, "until the angel on his left does not record a sin for twenty years".[13] Others, more cognizant of the frailties of human nature, stipulated that it was enough to genuinely resolve, no matter how often or soon one slipped afterwards. This view came to predominate the tradition. Hujwiri (d. circa 1072) expressed it in his *Unveiling of the Veiled*, when he observed that *tawba* "does not necessarily continue after the resolution not to return to the sin has been duly made. A penitent who in those circumstances returns to sin has in principle earned the divine reward for repentance". He then relates the story of "a certain sheikh", who "repented seventy times and went to sin on each occasion, until at the seventy-first time he became steadfast" (Hujwiri [1911] 1992, p. 298).

3. Amending Wrongs, Expiation, and Atonement

As we have seen, an essential component of *tawba* in the Quran lies in *islah*, in amending mistakes, redressing wrongs, and setting matters aright. This is particularly the case for atonement involving interpersonal offences. Islamic Law after all classifies human responsibilities into two categories: those involving God and those involving others. The former type is usually defined as the "rights of God" (or "the rights one owes God"), while the latter is "the rights of God's servants" (or the "rights one owes God's servants"). Wrongdoing against human beings, a violation of the rights they have over us, almost always requires some form of restitution (*radd al-mazalim*), to the best of one's ability. Thus, for theft, one has to return the stolen goods; for the desecration of another's property, one must restore it to its original state; for having slandered someone's good name, one is obliged to repair and rebuild the slandered party's honor. This is, no doubt, a rudimentary moral principle, and certainly not unique to the religion in so far as we are concerned with outlining the ethics of interpersonal relations. The responsibilities involved here are so critical to the reparative process of *tawba* and atonement, Muslims believe God will meticulously hold one accountable after death for misdeeds against others that were not atoned for, in some measure, in this world. If one is negligent, the prevailing view is that one's own good deeds may be transferred to the victim, commensurate to the extent and scope of the malefaction, so that the offended party will gain after death for enduring the harm of another, while the victimizer, in turn, will lose, either through temporary divine punishment, or the loss of a spiritual rank in Paradise. In the final order, God will have the last say, since the rights one's owes others are ultimately subsumed under the rights of God. In other words, an offence against the other is ultimately an offence against the divine Other, in the same way that kindness towards another, as a famous tradition states, is ultimately a benefaction to one's Maker.[14]

The importance Islam attaches to the wise, arbitrating role God will play in the next world in "settling scores" cannot be overstated. The value of this may be appreciated by those cognizant of how easily we misinterpret not only the intentions but actions of others. An individual who suffers from a victim-complex, who continuously casts doubt on the good-will of those closest, will naturally have a different view of the extent to which he has been injured than one who tends to overlook the mistreatment of his peers. Similarly, a self-absorbed man who fails to recognize the extent to which he falls short in fulfilling the moral obligations he has towards those around him will have a different opinion of where he stands, in relation to a woman acutely attentive to her responsibilities, whether it be to parents, children, friends, neighbors, co-workers, strangers, or even animals. In the next life, divine judgement, factoring in every element of the equation, including our own self-deceptions, will be decisive. This is why the moral authorities of Islam emphasize that in order to sufficiently prepare for death—and the faith is thoroughly centered on the idea that life is a preparation for dying—one should strive to ensure that no one will have a claim against him when he leaves this world. And the way to do this is to scrupulously take an account of one's own actions though an examination of conscience and reproving of the heart—recall the words of Christ above—while still here, not only to identify the harms one may have inflicted on others, but to take adequate measures to atone for them, even if it might involve nothing more than a heartfelt apology for cruel words, or charity on behalf of another. When Fudayl b. 'Iyad (d. 803) the highway bandit turned in *tawba* to God, the first thing he did was search for all of his victims to make amends. To quote Hujwiri, "having written a list of those whom he had robbed, he satisfied all their claims upon him" (Hujwiri [1911] 1992, p. 97).[15]

As for sins that involve only God, they are easier to atone for, for the simple reason that God is infinitely more merciful and forgiving than any of His creatures. Nevertheless, there are acts of expiation (*kaffara*) identified both in the Quran and the hadith for specific breaches of religious law, such as intentionally eating in the month of fasting (Ramadan) without a valid excuse, breaking an oath, or an improper divorce.[16] Yet, as important as these propitiatory acts are, God is not, technically speaking, bound to punish the sinner if she fails to carry them out, at least not in the dominant strands of Islamic theology. Nevertheless, it would be unwise to ignore them, since there is no guarantee that one's negligence will be overlooked, and the greater likelihood for inexcusable neglect is divine judgement, unless divine compassion intervenes (this occurring through a competing interplay of divine names).[17]

It is clear therefore that there must be an *islah*, an amending of wrongs alongside *tawba*, and the particular manner in which it is to be carried out requires some discernment, contingent on the nature of the offence. The early moral psychologist Muhasibi (d. 857) argues that there should be a correspondence or correlation (*munasaba*) between the sin and the good deed that follows in its wake. In the case of fornication, for example, he suggests arranging for the marriages of the poor and helping them in their livelihood. In this manner, just as one fell into an unlawful sexual exchange, by facilitating the lawful sexual relationships of others, one can work toward ameliorating one's own wrong. Likewise, if one succumbed to the allure of alcohol or a prohibited intoxicant, Muhasibi recommends freely distributing pure, wholesome, healthy drink.[18] Along similar lines of reasoning, Makki (d. 996), writing more than a century later, declares that "the *tawba* of the God-servant should be the opposite of his disobedience" and "contrary to the corruption he was responsible for" (Makki 1995, vol. 1, p. 380). The corresponding *islah*, moreover, must not only be qualitative, since *tawba* requires "some good deeds for some evil deeds, and many good deeds for many evil deeds" (Ibid.).[19]

Despite the emphasis given to correspondence, there is no strict equation for atonement, excluding the small class of sins for which the faith specifies particular acts of *kaffara*.[20] In general, one of the benefits of supererogatory forms of devotional piety (*nawafil*), notes Muhasibi (on the basis of numerous prophetic traditions), is that they serve to atone for sins

in general (Muhasibi 2000, p. 72). To neglect supererogatory modes of religious observance, on the other hand, is to render oneself vulnerable to the rigors of divine accounting.

4. The Atoning Power of *Tawba* & the Role of Divine Mercy

In Islam, the capacity to turn to God in *tawba* is viewed as a divine gift. It is a mechanism for healing and purification, a protection for the soul from the consequences of its own misdeeds. And it is a gift available so long as one is alive. An old man once came to the saintly Shaqiq al-Balkhi (d. 809) and confessed, "I have sinned much and now wish to repent". The spiritual master replied, "you have come late". No sooner did he hear this, he retorted, "No, I have come soon. Whoever comes before he is dead comes soon, though he may have been long in coming" (Hujwiri [1911] 1992, p. 112). The reason for his swift response was due to his conviction that the doors of *tawba* remain open until one's final breaths (cf. Q 4:18).[21] Indeed, as the hadith runs, "God accepts the *tawba* of the human being until the throes of death".[22]

This view is further confirmed by the exegetical authorities, in their commentary on the verse, "The *tawba* of God is incumbent on Him for those who do wrong in a state of ignorance, and then turn in *tawba* soon afterwards (*min qarib*)" (Q 4:17). The exegetes ask, how soon is soon, how *qarib* is *qarib*? "Soon" is after all relative. Tomorrow is soon in relation to the day after, and the day after is soon in relation to the following year. Most commentators answer that *qarib* is any time before death. Yet, since one does not know when one will breathe one's last, they adjure one not to delay *tawba*, since the Angel of Death may come all of a sudden, while one is unprepared to meet God and account for one's life. Thus, the Muslim contemplatives encourage one to renew *tawba* with regularity, as a concerted and disciplined spiritual exercise, so that one is always ready for the divine encounter. And the precedence for this lies in the custom of the Prophet, who said, "O people, turn to God in *tawba*, for verily I turn to Him in *tawba* a hundred times a day".[23]

Finally, a recurring motif in Muslim meditations on returning, repentance, and atonement, is to never lose hope in God's mercy, no matter how serious one's crimes. "Despair not of the Mercy of God", the Quran states, "for verily God forgives all sins" (Q 39:53). To despair of divine Mercy is, in a sense, to lose faith in God Himself, since Mercy is His prevailing attribute, as the revelation of Islam reiterates repeatedly.[24] In fact, the devil was given the name Iblis because he despaired—"Iblis" deriving from the quadrilateral root *ablasa*, to "become despondent" or "lose hope".[25] And how can one despair, ask many of the classical authorities, when the Quran goes so far as to state, "God *desires* to turn to you in *tawba*" (Q 4:27), indicating that He has a *pathos* (to use the language of Henry Corbin (1969, pp. 112–20)) to forgive—a longing and yearning to exonerate, excuse and pardon the human being, who "was created weak" (Q 4:28). All that one must do is exercise *tawba*, since, as the Prophet said, "he who turns in *tawba* from a sin is as if he had never sinned".[26]

For Ibn 'Arabi, in fact, God is so desirous of exercising forgiveness, the reason He revealed 9:118—"And He turned to them that they might turn to Him"—was so that those who failed to exercise *tawba* would have an excuse on the Day of Judgement for their own negligence. The scenario, for the mystic, is like that of an interlocutor who furnishes an opponent, who also happens to be dearly beloved to him, with a counter-argument beforehand, for his own preplanned interrogation. Thus, when God asks sinners why they were remiss in returning through *tawba*, they may say to Him, "We would have turned to You, *had You turned to us*".[27] In response to such a plea, God will be embarrassed to take them to task for a *tawba* that was not entirely in their hands. For just as they will stand ashamed for their own misdeeds, God will be ashamed to punish them for their failure to repent, return, and atone for wrongs in which His determination of events was mingled in with their own culpability. While Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of the verse was far from mainstream in the exegetical history of the faith, it was nevertheless rooted in the overarching vision of the soteriological role that *rahma* (divine mercy, compassion, and benevolence), it was believed, would play after death—a perspective that animated the thinking of many of the greatest luminaries of the Islamic tradition.[28]

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Notes

1 An account of Christ from the Islamic tradition that appears in Tawhidi (Khalidi 2003, p. 146).

2 For more on *tawba*, see Khalil (2018), Mensia (2004b, pp. 107–23), Zargar (2017, pp. 153–76), and Zilio-Grandi (2013).

3 *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge,* s.v. "Repentance".

4 The Hebrew term derives from the root *shub* which conveys the same meaning as the Arabic root. *Shub*, in fact, is used in the Hebrew Bible in much the same way t-w-b is used in the Quran. This would lead one modern scholar to write, "I have as much as possible, tried to avoid translating *teshuvah* [=*teshubah*] as 'repentance'. Our English 'repentance' comes to us from the Latin. Its basic meaning is 'to make sorry'. To feel sad and sorry about our sins is indeed an essential part of the process of regeneration. But, as Bible and Talmud see it, it is only a part" (Petuchowski 1978). For an extensive comparative analysis of these two terms, see Khalil (2018, pp. 13–22).

5 For a representative overview of the divine names in Islam, see Ghazali (2008), as well as the translation of this work by Burrell and Daher ([1992] 1995).

6 The one exception here is Q 2:222; cf. Zilio-Grandi (2013, p. 74).

7 See Ibn 'Arabi (1999, vol. 3, pp. 208–14(chapter 74 on the station of tawba)); cf. Khalil (2006, pp. 404–6). For a recent study of the mystic's thought, see Ali (2021).

8 For the most recent study of her, see Cornell (2019).

9 *arbab al-usul min ahl al-sunna* (the "people of the Sunna" being for him representatives of orthodoxy).

10 Qushayri (2002, p. 207). Similarly, Hujwiri (d. circa 1072) writes in his *Unveiling of the Veiled,* there are "three things which are involved in *tawbat* [=*tawba*], namely remorse for the disobedience; immediate abandonment of sin; and determination not to sin again" (Hujwiri [1911] 1992, p. 294 (with minor edits in translation)).

11 On the role of *nadam/nadama* in *tawba*, see Khalil (2018, pp. 87–88).

12 For a concise treatment of *adab* in Sufism, see Huda (2004), and the comprehensive collection of essays in Chiabotti et al. (2017), especially the useful introduction in that volume by Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen and Luca Patrizi (pp. 1–44).

13 The position is attributed to an anonymous authority by Makki (1995, vol. 1, p. 366).

14 "God will say on Judgement Day, 'O son of Adam, I was sick but you did not visit Me'. He will say, 'My Lord, how could I have visited You when You are the Lord of the worlds?' To this, God will respond, 'Did you not know that My servant was sick, yet you did not visit him. Had you done so, you would have found Me by his side. O son of Adam, I asked for food, but you did not feed Me'. He will say, 'My Lord, how could I feed You when You are the Lord of the worlds?' God will respond, 'Did you not know that My servant asked for food, yet you did not feed him. Had you fed him, you would have found Me by his side? O son of Adam, I asked for drink, but you did not provide for Me'. He will say, 'My Lord, how could I give You drink, when You are the Lord of the worlds?' God will respond, 'My servant asked for drink. Yet you did not provide for him. Had you provided it, you would have found Me by his side'". The tradition appears in Muslim, no. 2569.

15 On his conversion, see Khalil (2018, pp. 67–68).

16 A good description of expiatory acts for the various categories of sins, some of which involve interpersonal relations (such as unintentional homicide), can be found in Lange (2011–). For more on *kaffara*, see Hawting (1994) and Mensia (2004a). It should be noted that *tawba* does not, by itself, absolve the need for *hadd* punishments, atleast for those crimes that might require them. In fact, genuine *tawba* may require a willingness to be subjected to the full force of the law, this being a mark of the sincerity of the *ta'ib*. The issue is addressed, albeit in cursory fashion, in Husain (1969).

17 On the relations between the divine names, see Ali (2021, pp. 55–72).

18 Muhasibi, *Ihkam al-tawba*, MS Berlin, 1435, fol. 9a.

19 For a comprehensive treatment of his views on this subject, see Khalil (2014).

20 One must keep in mind here disagreements among juridical schools regarding the precise form of *kaffara* required for the sin in question.

21 A key difference between *tawba* and asking for divine forgiveness (*istighfar*) is that while the opportunities for the former end at death, they do not for the latter. In one instance, the Quran has the believers asking God on the Day of Judgment to "perfect our light for us and forgive us" (Q 66:8). This leads Ibn 'Arabi to argue that an individual may be qualified by *tawba* only until the

"moment of death", while other virtues may carry over into the next world (such as gratitude and love) (Chittick 1989, pp. 279–80; cf. al-Kashani 1995, p. 48).

22 Tirmidhi, no. 3537.

23 Muslim, no. 2702.

24 See Shah-Kazemi (2007), and the more recent treatments of Musa (2021) and Mir (2016).

25 *Iblas* refers to "utter despair". Some, however, argue the name derives from the Greek *diabolos*. See Badawi and Haleem (2008, p. 6).

26 Ibn Majah, no. 4250.

27 *Law tubta 'alayna la tubna* (Ibn 'Arabi 1999, vol. 3, p. 208); cf. Khalil (2006, p. 404).

28 For an analysis of this idea with specific reference to Mulla Sadra, see Rustom (2012). On existence as the "breath of the All-merciful" in Ibn 'Arabi, see Chittick (1989, pp. 127–32).

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