

Sayyid al-Istighfar

Every single one of us, regardless of how committed and practicing we may be, is in need of the divine mercy and forgiveness of Allah ﷻ. All of us are guilty of some sort of mistake, sin, poor choice, shortcoming, or act of disobedience. We all have our own personal faults, shortcomings, and weaknesses. The pull of the world, the dunya, temptations, desires, and wants is extremely powerful. The struggle is real. The Prophet ﷺ told us, “Every single son of Adam is a profuse wrongdoer. And the best of profuse wrongdoers are those who repent frequently.”^[1] Meaning, not only do we as human beings sin, but we sin a lot. We sin publicly and privately, knowingly and unknowingly, big and small. The best of those who sin a lot are those who repent frequently.

Although we may not realize it, these sins have a direct impact upon our hearts. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Verily, when the slave (of Allah) commits a sin, a black spot appears on his heart. When he refrains from it, seeks forgiveness and repents, his heart is polished clean. But if he returns, it increases until it covers his entire heart. And that is the ‘Rān’ which Allah mentioned: ‘Nay, but on their hearts is the Rān which they used to earn.’”^[2]

إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ إِذَا أَخْطَأَ حَظِيئَةً نُكِنَتْ فِي قَلْبِهِ نُكْنَةٌ سَوْدَاءٌ فَإِذَا هُوَ نَزَعَ وَاسْتَعْفَرَ وَتَابَ سُئِلَ قَلْبُهُ وَإِنْ عَادَ زِيدَ فِيهَا حَتَّى
(كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ :) تَعْلُو قَلْبَهُ وَهُوَ الرَّانُ الَّذِي ذَكَرَ اللَّهُ

The Prophet ﷺ himself, the one who is free from sin, would seek forgiveness from Allah ﷻ 70 times a day. According to another narration he would do so 100 times a day. He did so to show us the importance of constantly turning back to Allah ﷻ and asking Him for forgiveness. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Glad tidings for the one who finds abundant istighfār in his record of deeds.”^[3]

طُوبَى لِمَنْ وَجَدَ فِي صَحِيفَتِهِ اسْتِغْفَارًا كَثِيرًا

The Prophet ﷺ taught us a very beautiful, powerful, and profound way of seeking forgiveness known as Sayyid al-Istighfār. From Shaddād ibn Aws (ra) who said that the Prophet ﷺ said, “The Greatest Invocation for seeking forgiveness is that a servant says:

اللهم أنت ربي، لا إله إلا أنت، خلقتني و أنا عبدك، و أنا على عهدك و وعدك ما استطعت، أعوذ بك من شر ما صنعت،
أبوء لك بنعمتك علي، و أبوء لك بدنبي، فاغفر لي، فإنه لا يغفر الذنوب إلا أنت

“O Allah, You are my Lord! None has the right to be worshiped but you. You created me and I am Your slave, and I am faithful to my covenant and my promise (to You) as much as I can. I seek refuge with You from all the evil I have done. I acknowledge before You all the blessings You have bestowed upon me, and I confess to You all my sins. So I entreat You to forgive my sins, for nobody can forgive sins except You.”

وَمَنْ قَالَهَا مِنَ النَّهَارِ مُوقِنًا بِهَا، فَمَاتَ مِنْ يَوْمِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُمْسِيَ، فَهُوَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ، وَمَنْ قَالَهَا مِنَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُوَ مُوقِنٌ
بِهَا، فَمَاتَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُصْبِحَ، فَهُوَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ

The Prophet ﷺ then said, “Whoever says this during the day with firm faith in it and dies on the same day before the evening, he will be from the people of Paradise. And whoever recites it at night with firm faith in it and dies before the morning, he will be from the people of Paradise.”^[4]

The Prophet ﷺ termed this particular du‘ā Sayyid al-Istighfār because it is the absolute best and most comprehensive way of asking Allah ﷻ to forgive our sins. Through these words, we are reconfirming our commitment to Allah ﷻ, acknowledging His Lordship over us, humbling ourselves before Allah ﷻ, expressing gratitude for the blessings He has given us, apologizing for our shortcomings, and asking Him for forgiveness. And the Prophet ﷺ is telling us that if we say this dua in the morning and happen to pass away, we will be from the people of Paradise. If we recite this du‘ā in the evening and happen to pass away, we will be from the people of Paradise.

This is a du‘ā that all of us should memorize and make part of our daily morning and evening routine. And most importantly, this is a du‘ā whose meaning we should understand at a deeper level.

We begin by calling out to Allah ﷻ, “O Allah!” This reminds us that Allah ﷻ is near and that we can call out to him whenever we need to. We have a direct line of communication with our Lord and Creator and we can call upon Him morning and evening. We don’t need to go through any intermediary or be in a particular place. I can call upon him from my home, place of work, and the masjid. Allah ﷻ is the All-hearing and the Ever-Near.

We start this beautiful supplication by first calling out to Allah acknowledging that He is our Rabb. “O Allah, You are my Lord!” The word “Rabb” is usually translated as Lord. However, this translation doesn’t do this word justice. Lord sounds very strange and archaic; it is

associated with kings, knights, and folklore. al-Rabb means the Master, the Owner, the One Who arranges all matters, the Nurturer, the Sustainer, and the One Who takes care of His subjects. Allah ﷻ is the owner of this entire universe and everything it contains. That means He owns us and we are His slaves and servants. As our Owner, He ﷻ cares for us, ensures our growth, maintenance, well-being, and looks after all of our affairs. He ﷻ alone is the One who looks after us and takes care of us throughout all of our difficulties and hardships. Allah ﷻ is our Rabb, the One Who created us, nurtures us, teaches us, cares for us, and the One we can turn to in any situation for help, aid, support, and assistance. We open this du‘ā with this very profound recognition and acknowledgement; that I have a Lord I can always turn to and rely upon. “O Allah, You are my Lord!”

“There is no deity except You.” There’s absolutely no one and nothing worthy and deserving of worship, submission, devotion, and obedience except for You. Allah ﷻ and Allah alone is worthy and deserving of our worship, submission, devotion, and obedience. We don’t submit ourselves to any other person, object, philosophy, or ideology.

“You created me and I am Your slave.” We then remind ourselves that Allah ﷻ alone is the One Who created us and brought us into this world; that He alone is al-Khāliq. He is that One who brought us into existence from non-existence; the One Who shaped and fashioned us in the most perfect, balanced, and beautiful way possible giving us the ability to listen, see, feel, smell, speak, and think. He alone is the Creator and Originator of this entire universe and every single thing it contains.

We also remind ourselves that we are His slaves. We remind ourselves that we have been created only to worship Him. We and everything we own belongs to Allah and Allah alone and we are subject to His rules, instruction, guidance, commands, and prohibitions. This is a profound declaration of our relationship with Allah ﷻ; affirming that He is our Lord and Creator and that we are His slaves and servants.

“And I am faithful to my covenant and my promise (to You) as much as I can.” With this statement, we are reminding ourselves of our covenant with Allah and our promise to Him. As soon as we say the shahadah, we have entered into a covenant – an agreement – with Allah ﷻ to live our lives according to His divine guidance and rules. It is a promise to try our best to

fulfill our responsibilities towards Him and others through obeying His commands and staying away from His prohibitions.

But we realize that we are weak, that we have weaknesses, shortcomings, and faults. That is why we say that we are going to be truthful and faithful to our promise to the best of our abilities. And because we will definitely make mistakes we say, “I seek refuge with You from all the evil I have done.” We are asking Allah ﷻ to protect us and save us from the consequences of all the evil we have done. To provide us safety, shelter, and refuge from the harms and negative consequences of sins and acts of disobedience.

“I acknowledge before You all the blessings You have bestowed upon me...” We are being taught how to express gratitude to Allah ﷻ. We recognize and acknowledge that every single blessing we have is from Allah ﷻ. Our iman, health, wealth, well-being, families, children, careers, the ability to pray and worship, everything is from Allah ﷻ and Allah alone. We are reminding ourselves to be grateful to Allah ﷻ morning and evening.

“And I confess to You all my sins.” We are humbling ourselves before Allah ﷻ confessing to all of our sins – big and small, public and private, known and unknown, intentional and unintentional. The first step to earning forgiveness from Allah ﷻ is recognizing and acknowledging our sins.

We then conclude this beautiful and powerful dua by asking Allah ﷻ to forgive us. “So I entreat You to forgive my sins, for nobody can forgive sins except You.” That is why this du‘ā is called Sayyid al-Istighfār; literally the leader of seeking forgiveness.

Reciting this du‘ā with faith and conviction morning and evening is our ticket to Paradise. Perhaps one of the wisdoms behind its greatness is that it helps nurture and develop a mindset of taqwa in the morning and evening. If we recite it in the morning, we begin our day by reaffirming our commitment to Allah ﷻ. We will be more careful and cautious with our speech and behavior. Similarly, if we recite it in the evening, we will be more careful and cautious of our speech and behavior until we sleep. May Allah ﷻ overlook our shortcomings, forgive our sins, and admit us into His Paradise!

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Footnotes

1. ibn Mājah, *k. al-zuhd, b. dhikr al-tawbah*, 4251 ↑
2. Tirmidhī, *k. al-tafsīr ‘an rasūlillah, b. wa min sūrah wayl lī al-muṭaffifīn*, 3334 ↑
3. ibn Mājah, *k. al-adab, b. al-istighfār*, 3818 ↑
4. Bukhārī, *k. al-da‘awāt, b. aḡdal al-istighfār*, 6306 ↑