

Regrets and Past Mistakes

Asalam Alikum brothers and sisters,

A brother wrote to me as he often feels remorse and guilt about past mistakes and wondering what Islam truly says about them.

We are all humans and we all make mistakes as prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "Every son of Adam makes mistakes and the best are the ones who repent from their mistakes".

Two four years ago I wrote a poem that started like this:

"Walking away not looking behind
Knowing only too well the play
Satan, Lucifer and my pride
Co-authored the misery of today"

Mistakes are commonly grouped in these main categories:

- 1- Sins before Allah SWT
- 2- Bad things we did to others (even though they also fall in the first category)
- 3- Tragedies that befall us that causes us grief, guilt and regret
- 4- Bad things we did to ourselves through lost opportunities, not working hard, not making the right decisions, not being good to someone before their death, and so forth

I will address each one of these Insha Allah

❖ Dealing with our past sins

Each one of us probably committed a ton of sins in our past and some are worse than others. These, fortunately and due to the mercy of Allah, are the easiest to deal with by knowing two things that I will expand on:

- 1- Allah forgives the sins of those who repent
- 2- Good deeds wash bad ones and we have ample opportunity to do good while we are alive

The forgiveness of Allah:

Allah says in the Holy Quran Chapter 39 Surah Zumar verses 53-54:

"(O Prophet) say: "O My servants who have wronged their own souls....Do not despair of Allah's Mercy! Surely, Allah forgives all sins. He indeed is the All Forgiving, All Merciful. Return to your

Lord and submit to Him before the scourge overtakes you; for then you may get no help from anywhere.”

Allah says in the Holy Quran Chapter 3 Surah Ale Imraan verse 135-136:

“And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except Allah? - and [who] do not persist in what they have done while they know. Those - their reward is forgiveness from their Lord and gardens beneath which rivers flow [in Paradise], wherein they will abide eternally; and excellent is the reward of the [righteous] workers.”

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that “Allah SWT says: ‘O son of Adam, so long as you call upon Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam, were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky and were you then to ask forgiveness of Me, I would forgive you. O son of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins nearly as great as the earth and were you then to face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly as great as it.’”

Good deeds wipe bad ones

Allah SWT says in Surah Hud (verse 114):

“And establish prayer at the two ends of the day and at the approach of the night. Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds. That is a reminder for those who remember.”

Imam Bukhari reported to us the reason for the revelation of this verse. He says: a man kissed a woman (unlawfully) and then went to the prophet (PBUH) and informed him. So Allah revealed this verse. The man asked Allah's Messenger: Is this instruction for me only? He said: "It is for all those of my followers (who encounter a similar situation)."

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also said: “Have Taqwa (fear) of Allah wherever you may be, and follow up a bad deed with a good deed which will wipe it out, and behave well towards the people.” (At-Tirmidhi)

❖ Hurtful things we did to others

In Surah Al-Hujurat Allah SWT says:

““O, you who believe! Let not (one) people laugh at (another) people perchance they may be better than they, nor let women(laugh) at (other) women, perchance they may be better than they; and do not find fault with your own people nor call one another by nick names.”

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) asked his companions: “do you who is bankrupt? They said the one who has no money or belongings. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said the bankrupt is the one who comes in the Day of Judgment with prayers and fasting. Yet he comes having cursed this person and hit this person so he gives this from his good deeds and the other from his good deeds. When his

good deeds are over [and he has yet to satisfy all the ones he hurt] he would take from their sins until he enters the hellfire”.

Here are few options if you wrong someone badly and are struggling with what to do:

If they know what you did and upset about it

In this case there is no better alternative than to talk to them face to face if possible or over the phone. I prefer the personal touch over email so do not resort to it unless you feel you have no other choice.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "If one has wronged his brother's dignity or assaulted his assets unrightfully, he must have himself forgiven before the Doomsday where there is no gold or silver to pay. Otherwise, some of his good deeds (equal to the rights of that person) will be taken away from him and given to that person. If he has no good deeds, then the sins of the wronged one will be given to him."

Please try not to go into the details of what you did and why as that only leads to arguments and even more anger on both sides. Simply state how bad that you feel and ask them to forgive you. Resist the temptation to explain your actions even if they ask you and hold to just saying that it is best not to go into the past as you are reaching out to apologize and mend the hearts.

What if they do not forgive you? Then follow the advice listed in the next section.

What if the person you wronged does not know?

There are two different opinions whether to tell that person or not. I would tell only if doing so does not lead to a worse situation such as anger, hurt, mistrust and so forth.

If you cannot tell that person but you wronged him or her in front of others (gossip) then you must speak nicely about them in front of those same people and recant your earlier statements.

I would make dua'a for the people I wronged or even contribute on their behalf so that I have compensated them for my wrongs.

Allah SWT says:

“And those who say Our Lord forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in lyman and do not put in our hearts any animosity toward the believers”.

What if they wronged me to?

When Abo Bakker (RAA) decided to stop supporting his relative Mastah because he spoke against Um-Al-Mo'mineen Ayesha (daughter of Abo Bakker and wife of prophet Muhammad (PBUH)), Allah SWT revealed in Surah Al-Noor:

“And let not those of virtue among you and wealth swear not to give [aid] to their relatives and the needy and the emigrants for the cause of Allah, and let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful”

❖ Facing tragedies

Facing difficult tests is part of life and each one of us will undoubtedly experience great deal of loss and grief. Allah SWT says:

“We shall test you with some things of fear, hunger, and diminishing of money, life and fruits. And give glad tidings to the patient ones”.

And Allah SWT also says:

“Do people think that they can say we believe without being tested. Don’t they see that they get tested once or twice each year?”

It is one of the articles of Faith in Islam to believe in “Qadar” that certain things are destined to happen by the will of Allah SWT:

“Say nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed upon us.”

There are great benefits in this belief to us. People in the psychology field give 5 stages to grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. However, Muslims based on their belief in Qadar feel the sadness and loss but are already at the acceptance stage.

When prophet Muhammad (PBUH) lost his son Ibrahim, he shed a tear and said:

“The heart aches and their eyes tear up. We are truly sad to lose you O Ibrahim. And we only say what pleases Allah”

It is normal to feel not only the loss of a dear someone but some guilt if we did not spend enough time or feel that we did our best with them. We can compensate Insha Allah by making dua’a for them and by donating on their behalf.

❖ Bad decisions and missed opportunities

We sometimes make bad financial decisions that result in a great deal of monetary loss. These bad feelings may be compounded if we feel that we had fallen prey to trusting a bad individual who played a game on us.

More often than not we may make bad social decisions affecting our family life. These decisions lead to a great deal of regret.

I feel better when I look at my past mistakes in the following lights:

- 1- If it is a monetary loss then that money was never meant for me (see belief in Qadar)
- 2- I ask myself if I had learnt anything from that mistake and, if so, it is a worthy lesson in life
- 3- What others did to me is something they will have to answer in front of Allah. I may reap their good deeds as a compensation when only good deeds matter

- 4- I ask myself whether I made up with those who I myself have wronged in the process. Normally it takes two parties to make an issue. Am I looking in the mirror or am I simply pointing the finger at others?

Honesty with oneself is paramount. I go with the motto: Reflect, Determine and Move Ahead.