

Tawbah — the door that stays open

The texts put no ceiling on what can be forgiven and no quota on how often you may return. They put only two limits on when: the death-rattle, and the sun rising from the west.



Do not despair

قُلْ يَاعِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا

“Say: O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed Allah forgives all sins.”

Qur'an 39:53

Sincere repentance

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا

“O you who have believed, repent to Allah with sincere repentance.” Nasuh: meant, not merely said — and so turning from the sin, regretting it, resolving not to return.

Qur'an 66:8

All of you, believers

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

“And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed.” Addressed to the believers, not to the strangers — nobody is outside it.

Qur'an 24:31

Exchanged, not merely erased

إِلَّا مَن تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَبْدِلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ

“Except for one who repents, believes and does righteous work — for them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good.”

Qur'an 25:70

How it is received

اللَّهُ أَفْرَحُ بِتَوْبَةِ عَبْدِهِ مِمَّنْ أَحَدِكُمْ سَقَطَ عَلَىٰ بَعِيرِهِ وَقَدْ أَضَلَّهُ فِي أَرْضٍ فَلَاةٍ

“Allah is more delighted at the repentance of His servant than one of you who stumbles upon his camel after losing it in a waterless desert.”

Sahih al-Bukhari 6309

Seventy times a day

وَاللَّهِ إِنِّي لَأَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ فِي الْيَوْمِ أَكْثَرَ مِنْ سَبْعِينَ مَرَّةً

“By Allah, I ask Allah's forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day.” Said by the one with nothing to be forgiven.

Sahih al-Bukhari 6307

Until the sun turns back

“Whoever repents before the sun rises from its place of setting, Allah turns to him in mercy.” One deadline, and it is not in anybody's diary.

Sahih Muslim, Kitab adh-Dhikr wa'd-Du'a' wa't-Tawbah wa'l-Istighfar

Until the throat

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَقْبَلُ تَوْبَةَ الْعَبْدِ مَا لَمْ يَغْرِغِرْ

“Allah accepts the repentance of a servant as long as he has not begun to rattle in the throat.” The personal deadline, and it is not in anybody's diary either.

Sunan at-Tirmidhi 3537 • hasan gharib (at-Tirmidhi)

He loves the returning

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوْبِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

“Indeed Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.” Tawwabin is a plural of habit: those who keep coming back.

Qur'an 2:222