Repentance

And (remember) Jonah when he went forth enraged and thought that We would have no power over him, then he called out, "There is no God but You. Glory be to You. I have done evil." So We answered him and delivered him out of grief even so do We deliver the believers. (Quran 21:87-8) In my last two discourses, I explained that worship and prayer, if correctly performed, eventually leads to a true affinity to God. The human being, through worship, will be a real servant of God and a real servant has a true affinity to God. In other words, to be a real servant of God implies a sacred journey which culminates in affinity to God.

Tonight I wish to discuss the first stage of the sacred journey, the point where we must begin our journey towards affinity to God. And this is what we need today. We who have not taken any steps in this sacred path, will not benefit from discussing the higher stages of those travelling this path.

If we are practical beings, we should realize the first step and the first stage and how we should begin our worship.

The first step on the path of affinity to God is repentance, which is the topic of my talk tonight. What does repentance means and what is its nature psychologically and what is its consequence spiritually? For many of us, it seems a simple matter but have we ever thought of analyzing it psychologically? Repentance is a characteristic of the human being that sets it apart from animals. The human being possesses certain high aptitudes and distinctive qualities which are not found in animals. One of these is the ability to repent. It does not mean only uttering the phrase, "I seek forgiveness from God, the Most High and I repent to Him." It is not something verbal. It is a psychological and spiritual state, a revolution of the mind and the above phrase describes that state but it is not the state itself. So if we utter this phrase several times a day, it does not mean we are penitent. True repentance once a day brings us stage by stage nearer to God.

As an introduction, let me say that there is a difference between inanimate and living things in the fact that inanimate things have not the ability to change the course they follow by their own power such as the revolution of the earth around the sun or the movement of the stars in their orbits or a stone which is dropped from a height and pulled down by the force of gravity. There must be an external factor to be able to deliver them from their habitual course.

On the other hand, living things such as plants and animals have the ability to change their course from within themselves and if they meet conditions which do not accord with their life

and its continuation, they themselves change their course. When a sheep, a pigeon or even a fly meets an obstacle in its way, it will change its course even to the extent of a hundred and eighty degrees, thus moving in quite the opposite direction. Even plants can choose and change their course within certain limits and conditions. When the roots of a tree reaches a stone, they change its course.

The human being, too, is similar to plants and animals in this matter. Repentance is in fact a change of the course, not a simple one like that of plants and animals, rather something much more complex and worthy of analysis.

Repentance is an internal revolution of the human being against the self. Plants and animals do not act against themselves yet the human being has the ability to do so. The rise of one group of human beings against another group is a natural and obvious matter since we expect the oppressed to arise against the oppressor. This is also true of the rise of one country or nation against another country or nation. But the rise of a person against the self is not so simple and obvious. Why does it happen?

The reason is that, in spite of having one body, a human being is intellectually and spiritually a complex being. The human being is a mixture of animal ferocity and passion, on the one hand, and of angelic qualities on the other. Sometimes the pig takes over the command as a lustful being, giving no choice to the ferocious beast, devil or angel within to act. Suddenly one part rebels against this rule and subverts it in favor of the domination of another of its aspects.

A sinful being is one who is dominated by the beast or devil within by which the angel and its noble qualities are imprisoned. Repentance is the arising of the noble qualities within against one's own mean and wicked aspects, putting an end to their domination and destroying all their force. The converse is also true and the base aspects of the human being can defeat the noble aspects and govern the person to its own destruction. It is true that all the instincts and forces granted to human beings have some use and must be employed in their proper place and time. But there is a limit for each of them which must be observed.

A horse and dog must be taken care of in order to be useful. There are conditions for proper attention to them and a limit to using them. For a child, play is a necessity for the excess of energy to be spent and for the child to learn. It would be mis-education to hinder the child from its natural playfulness. It would be unnatural to force it to attend the society of adults. It would be wrong of a clergyman to compel his young son to wear the garment and turban of a mullah and to prevent him from following his natural desire of playing with other children.

You may have come across children who, at their father's persistent suggestion, engage in ritual prayer and other acts of devotion for many years but when they attain manhood they are

suddenly changed into libertines who know no limit in their debauchery. Why is it so? Because natural instincts have long been suppressed on the excuse of promoting higher spiritual education. Of course, inclination towards godliness and worship forms a part of a child's nature but these should not be strengthened at the price of checking all his other natural instincts, each of which has a share and importance in developing a perfect human being. Otherwise, when by chance a child sees a sexy film or meets a woman, the whole of the structure which has been forcefully imposed upon him will collapse causing irreparable damage and ruin.

Repentance is quite the reverse of the above conduct. When a person sinks deeply into sin and lust, and the angel within is not satiated, a catastrophe suddenly occurs. A human being does not have only one mouth; it has hundreds of mouths to be fed, the mouth of desire, the mouth of love, and the mouth of worship.

The spirit must be fed with worship and devotion. But when it is starved, the subsequent uneasiness is terrible. A young man who is well off and for whom everything has been provided, suddenly commits suicide. Everyone wonders why he did so. The reason is that a holy power had been imprisoned in him causing him so much pain that it was beyond his endurance and he chose that way out. You meet someone living a luxurious life in a lovely garden and yet he is dissatisfied and uncomfortable. For he lacks the spiritual pleasures which he needs and which must be produced from within him, not from the outside.

Thus, repentance is a reaction of the holy, and noble spirit of the human being against the lower animal self; a holy rebellion of the angelic side against the evil and beastly vices within.

How does this retrocession occur? You should firstly remember that if the holy elements in the human being's personality go wholly out of action and are so completely fettered as to make release impossible, then one cannot gain the divine favor of repentance. But just as the presence of only a few virtuous and chaste people in a country may motivate a revolution, so the existence of a few fine and noble elements in a human being will make repentance possible. If one knows God, this repentance may take the form of turning to God. If not, it will take some other form and may even lead to madness.

We called repentance a reaction. When you throw a ball down, it rebounds. Throwing it is an action and the rebound is its reaction. How high the ball rebounds depends on two things: Firstly, the intensity of the action, namely the sin. If it is small, the reaction will be small and if it is great, the reaction in the spirit will be great. So the more cruel a person is, and the bigger his crime, the more intense will be the reaction. The American pilot of the plane which bombed Hiroshima,

on looking down at the city he had bombed and the old and young people he had destroyed, felt such a pang of conscience that when he returned to his country to receive his countrymen's welcome and the wreath around his neck, he was a changed man altogether, even though he had been picked for that task in the first place for his cruelty and indifference. He may have smiled at the words of praise showered on him but in the privacy of his home when he was alone with his conscience he felt such a criminal that he ended his life in a lunatic asylum.

Bushr ibn Artas was a most cruel general of Muawiyyah. A policy of Mu'awiyah was to send him or other equally hard-hearted men at the head of an army to penetrate the frontiers of Ali's realm and do as much damage as possible; They were given a free hand to kill, burn, pillage and destroy. This Bushr once attacked Yemen, committing many crimes including the capture and beheading of the two small sons of Ubaidullah ibn Abbas, Ali's cousin, who was the governor there. Later his conscience troubled him so much for this ugly deed that neither in his sleep nor while awake even for a moment could he forget this bloody action. Finally he went out and rode a wooden horse in the street with a wooden sword in one hand and a whip in the other, followed by groups of children hooting and laughing at him.

The second factor on which the intensity of the reaction of repentance depends is the nature of a person's conscience and the strength of his faith. That is why even small blunders which may hardly be called sins rouse the conscience of those who are spiritually firm and strong, while most of us may commit hundreds of these blunders everyday without worrying about them.

Chaste and spiritually strong people are constantly in a state of penitence. One such man was my great teacher, the late Haj Mirza Ali Agha Shirazi. Once he visited us at Qum and then invited me to accompany him to a gathering, where, as it happened, the choicest pieces of both Persian and Arabic poetry were recited . He took an active part in the discussions and was amongst those who recited some poetry.

Never did I realize that he had such a profound knowledge in this field. The poetry was of the poets Sa'di and Hafiz and others like them. Of course, to recite poems, especially poems like this, is no sin. But to recite poems at night is undesirable and when we left that house he kept on repeating words of repentance as if he had committed a great sin while many of us would not have worried about acts which may have been considered even more wrong.

The punishment that God has appointed for such beings is such that we are not worthy of them. This man was in the habit of rising two hours before dawn and it was by his example that I understood the meaning of devotion, godliness, penitence and complete absorption in God. But the next morning he happened to wake up later than his habitual hour for prayer and he declared that this was God's punishment for his listening to poetry the night before. In this

man's belief, a man who wastes two hours at such an occupation is not worthy of two hours of necessary convocation with God.

I can cite you another example. If you leave a clear mirror in a place where you think, the air is pure and fine, you will see a layer of dust collected on it an hour later even though you had not felt that any dust was in the air before or on the wall or furniture. When a wall is dirty no stain shows on it in an obvious way and if it is blackened with tar, you cannot distinguish any trace of dirt or stain on it.

When the Prophet sat in a gathering, he uttered the following words of penitence many times: I feel traces of turbidity on my heart and everyday I repent for them seventy times." Such things seem like a clear mirror to us while for him they are dimness and turbidity. Even talking to us human beings about God may seem turbidity to him inspite of seeing God in the mirror of our existence.

It has been narrated by Umm Salmah and others that for two months before his death, wherever the Prophet sat or did something, he always uttered the following prayer, "Glory be to God. I seek forgiveness from Him and I repent to Him." She says, "I asked him why he uttered words of repentance so often and he answered that he was commanded to do so. It was later that we realized that the last chapter of the Quran had been revealed to him and he felt that it was a declaration of his end." This was Sura 110, having those three verses, "When comes the help of God and victory and you see men entering God's religion in throngs, then proclaim the praise of your Lord and seek His forgiveness for He is the Acceptor of Forgiveness."

This chapter was revealed to him even later than the verses concerning the completion of religion of Islam and the succession of Ali, peace be upon him, and it informed him that his task was done and it was time for the Prophet to think of himself and this is why he continually glorified God and sought His forgiveness.

But we poor creatures are like that tarred wall and repeated sins produce no reaction in our spirit. I do not know where and for how long in our spirit we have been imprisoned that we see no signs of regret for our dark past and realize that we had gone astray and must now turn to God. Then we will be at the starting point of our heavenly journey.

A man came to Ali, peace be upon him, asking for advice. He said, "Be not one of those who long for the next life but do nothing for it." This is actually what some of us are like. We claim to love Ali, peace be upon him, but it is not real love for if it were, we would accompany it with action. Such people suppose that Ali, peace be upon him, needs a crowd, even if they are not true followers. The same behavior is true of those who weep for Imam Husain, peace be upon him, unaccompanied by good deeds. But if it were true love, they would do something to prove

it.

The second advice of Ali, peace be upon him, was, "Be not one of those who feel repentance to be necessary and yet they postpone it." People often think that they are too young to start repenting for they see old people engaged in worship and penitence.

But the truth is that the time for repentance is youth. A young branch can be straightened, but when it grows thicker it does not lend itself to a change of shape. In old age no strength is left to make penitence practicable. By that time, our back is too bent with sin to make repentance effective. Rumi, the poet, tells a story about a man who had planted a bramble on the people's path. When it grew up, he was asked to uproot it but he said, "It is too early, There is no hurry. It is easily uprooted." He kept on offering the same excuse year after year. But the brambles grew thicker and its roots firmer and its thorns sharper and more dangerous, while the man grew older and weaker and unable to pull it out by the root. The poet means that vices take root rapidly in a person. You can remove them when you are young but as you grow older, you become more and more helpless against them. It is then too late to do anything.

I swear by God that even one hour's delay is important; so is one night and one day. Today is better for repentance than tomorrow and tonight better than tomorrow night. Worship is no use without repentance. Just as one washes oneself for ritual prayer, so one should first repent before one performs an act of devotion whether it is praying, fasting, reading the Quran, going on a pilgrimage or even attending sermons.

Someone came to Ali, peace be upon him, claiming strongly his intention to repent. The Imam realized that he was not serious and asked him, "Do you know what repentance is? It is an act worthy of exalted being; it is a holy state of mind which makes you feel that God has bestowed His grace on you and that you are surrounded by angels. You lose your egoism and feel you are purified." In repentance there is no need to go to a clergyman or to another human being. Repent to your God as it is said in the Quran,

Say, " Oh my people who have been prodigal against yourselves, do not despair of God's Mercy," surely God forgives sins altogether. (Quran 39:53) The following sentence has been quoted in a Sacred Tradition,

The groan (of repentance) of sinners is dearer to Me than the glorified glorifications (of Me) so you should sigh and groan in these precious nights. Be your own judge and censor, confess all your sins and be sure that God will forgive you and purify your soul. Then you taste the sweetness of worship and sin and the pleasure obtained from them will seem to you so trifling that you will never feel inclined to commit them any more nor to lie or slander or accuse others.

Ali, peace be upon him, has considerd six conditions necessary for repentance: Two form its

basis, two are the requisites for its acceptance and two for its completion. These six points will be explained in my next discourse.

The greatest joy of chaste people has always been to admit to God their shortcomings, their faults, their needs and their poverty, saying that they show nothing but negligence, while God grants nothing but favor and grace. The following prayer is quoted from Imam Husain, peace be upon him, My Master, when I glance at my sins I am overcome by fear but when I glance at Your Grace I am filled with hope.

Let me say a few words about the tragedy of Karbala. On the 9th of Muharram, the day before the martyrdom of Imam Husain, peace be upon him, the army of Umar Ibn Sa'd launched their assault on the orders of Ubidullah Ibn Ziad intending to give battle at night. Imam Husain, peace be upon him, asked through his brother, Abu'l Fadl al-Abbas for a respite of one night. To remove suspicion that he intended to delay the fight, he said, Dear brother, God Himself knows that I love to offer my ritual prayers to Him and tonight which is the last night of my life, I am more eager to do so and to offer my repentance and beg His Forgiveness.

It was a wonderful night of joy for them, full of hopes of martyrdom. They made themselves neat and tidy and even cut their hair. They set aside one of the tents especially for this. One person would be inside and two men were standing outside when one of them began joking. The other one told him that it was no occasion for mirth and joy. He answered that as a rule he did not joke but he felt that night to be a night for mirth.

When others (the enemy) approached the tents, they heard sounds like the buzzing of bees and asked what it was. They were told that the Imam, his household and companions were busy praying and invoking God's Name. The Imam spent that night in devotion and worship. He saw to the affairs of his family and it was then that he delivered his last, eloquent sermon to his followers.

Let me mention a penitent of Karbala that night, a real penitent whose repentance was accepted: Hurr ibn Yazid Riahi. He was a brave warrior of Kufa. When Ibn Ziad wanted to send a thousand men for the first time against Imam Husain, peace be upon him, Hurr was the man chosen. In doing so he oppressed and mistreated the Prophet's household. It is said that Hurr was seen to be trembling like a leaf. The same narrator was surprised and, approaching him, asked him the reason and whether he was afraid. Hurr told him,

No. I have no fear of fighting but I see myself at a cross roads between heaven and hell and I am wondering which route to take.

At last he chose the right route. Slowly, slowly he turned his horse away in such a way that no one knew what he intended to do. When he reached a certain point, he spurred his horse on

until he reached the Imam's tent with his shield turned backward as a sign of coming in peace. On seeing the Imam, he cried out, "Is my repentance acceptable?" Then the Imam said, "Yes." His chivalry was such that he did not put one word of blame upon him for his past conduct. Hurr begged the Imam to let him go and fight. The Imam said, "You are our guest. Get down off your horse and stay with us awhile." But he felt shy, whispering to himself with shame for his past, for having sinned against the family of the Prophet. That is why he again requested that Imam Husain let him go and fight the attacking foes lest one of the children look at him and cause him to die of shame.

Lord we have wronged ourselves and if You do not forgive us, and have mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the lost. (7:23) In my previous discourse, I explained that repentance is the first step of the devotees on the journey of affinity to God and I promised to mention in this discourse the explanation of Imam Ali (as), peace be upon him, about the conditions and phases of repentance. Before doing so, I wish to answer this question, "When is the time for repentance and when is it accepted?"

A person has the opportunity to repent as long as that person is alive and before death comes. When a person is in the cluches of death, no time is left to be saved through repentance. According to traditional interpretations, this death time is the moment that one feels and sees death and gets a glimpse of the next world.

Repentance in the next world has no meaning for one is not in a position to repent nor can it be real. But the reason why at the time of death repentance is not acceptable, is explained in the Quran.

Then when they saw Our might, they said, 'We believe in God alone and we disbelieve in that we were associating with Him. ' But their belief when they saw Our might did not profit them ... (40:84)

Why is it so? Because repentance does not mean simply regret or a return from the wrong path due to one factor or another. Repentance is real when an internal revolution takes place in a person, causing a rise against all lustful, evil forces and wicked deeds, and domination over them all. Seeing divine vengeance approaching and then experiencing belief and repenting is not an internal revolution. The Quran says about Pharaoh, Till when the drowning overtook him,

he said, 'I believe that there is no god but He in whom the Children of Israel believe. (10:90)

As long as Pharaoh alive he acts like a despot and nothing and no counsel convinced him. He resorts to a contest between his magicians and Moses; he shows more rebelliousness and decides to kill Moses and his tribe. He chases them in their flight and, when he is at the point of drowning in the sea and there is no escape, he repents and expresses his belief in the God

of Moses. But it is too late for his repentance to be acceptable for it is not a real, internal revolution. His repentance is only due to his helplessness in a calamity. So they say to him, "Now? When you previously rebelled?"

In other words, "Why did you not repent an hour before when you were quite free to do so?" For, then, it would have been a true change of heart. What criminal in the world is not penitent at the moment of punishment? But if he shows a regret and penitence before he is caught, then we can say he is changing spiritually.

Now, as for why repentance in the next world is unacceptable, this is because the criminal witnesses punishment there and the consequence of his deeds and therefore his repentance would not be a true revolution. Moreover, death is like the fall of a fruit from the tree. As long as it is a part of the tree, it is dependent on the air, water and nourishment that the tree obtains. Even an hour before falling, there is the chance for that fruit to become more ripe and sweet but the moment it falls every possibility of development comes to an end for it.

The human being is the fruit of nature with all the potentials for that person to be good or bad. If we adopt worship and devotion, we are being ripened. If we sin, we are plagued like a rotten fruit. Repentance is one of the ways by which one is nourished when one is alive, not in death or after it. All the changes and revolution and ups and downs are connected with this world while in the next world, they all come to an end and stop.

Another example is a baby in the mother's womb. All its nourishment and health are through the mother but the moment it is born, total dependance comes to an end and, a new order is established for its life that is quite different from the previous one. In the next world, too, everything is different from the order of this world.

Imam Ali (as), peace be upon him, says, 'Today is the time of deeds and not reckoning and tomorrow (in the hereafter) is the time for reckoning and not for deeds.' He does not mean that there is no punishment in this world. Some of the misfortunes which befall us are punishments. But again it does not mean that all punishments for wicked deeds are inflicted in this world. Therefore, if one receives no punishment here it does not mean that one is quite chaste and that one's account is clear.

On the other hand, if a happening like a flood destroys people, is it due to their deeds and their punishment in the world? No. The above saying of Imam Ali (as) says that as this world is for deeds and not for reckoning, the next world is for reckoning and not deeds. That is the reason why repentance must take place before death to be valid, that is, it must take place where there is still time and opportunity for it.

God says in the Quran, He promises them and fills them with fancies but there is nothing satan

promises then? except delusion. (4: 120) A man came to Hadrat Imam Ali (as) to repent and when the Imam realized that the man was ignorant of the importance of repentance, he said to him, "Do you know the meaning of repentance? It has an exalted position. It has six conditions for its acceptance and the last two are the conditions of its completion." What are those six points?

The first one is regretting what has passed. It means looking at the dark deed and being so sorry and ashamed of it that it makes your heart burn. The Quran says, Oh believers, wine and arrow-shuffling, idols and divining arrows are an abomination, some of satan's work, so avoid it; haply you will prosper. (5:90)

Everyone knows how despicable dead flesh is and there is nothing more fitting than comparing backbiting with it. Calumny is in the same category of sins. Some people in accusing others begin their words by the phrase, "It is said," and suppose that in this way they acquit themselves of the sin of calumny and later on they disclaim their remark and say that they have quoted others' words. This too is a sin and the Quran has forbidden it in the following verse. Those who love that indecency should be spread abroad concerning those who believe there awaits them a painful chastisement. (24:19) Those who spread accusations of others are committing a great sin. The same applies to unclean glances at people's wives or daughters to the abandonment of prayer and fasting and showing indifference to sacred rites in the months of mourning and fasting. Being inadequately dressed in public is another such sin.

The Prophet in speaking of his ascension says, "I saw women there hung by their hair and beaten with fiery scourges and women who were hung by their breasts and beaten with whips. I asked who they were and was told, "These are the women who exhibited their bodies in public." Of what worth is this brief span of life to expose oneself to such heavenly punishments. Is it not time to come to oneself, to feel humble and show interest in what is ordained by God? The Quran says,

Is it not time that the hearts of those who believe should be humbled to the remembrance of God and the Truth which He has sent down (57: 16) What is the use of shedding one tear drop occasionally for appearance's sake instead of repenting and checking ourselves and others from sinning? The second condition that forms the basis of reference is a decisive resolution not to repeat the foul deed again. Repentance does not depend on the enormity of sin. Every kind of sin, whether big or small, lends itself to repentance provided the Penitent is serious in his or her intention .

One of the two conditions for the acceptance of repentance is to return what belongs to others, whether it is something that is seized or a right that has been trampled on. It must either be

returned itself or, at least, the rightful owner must be given satisfaction. God will not forget him and the same applies to a person who has been backbitten. He must be given satisfaction. He must accept the apology.

I wish to narrate something that concerns myself. I was a young religious student attending a group in which someone started to slander the late Ayatullah Hujjat whose pupil I had been for years. I felt this to be quite wrong but I did nothing about it. One day I went to his house and asked to see him.

I was let in and I explained that he had spoken about him behind his back a great deal and had done nothing to stop them. I felt penitent about it and asked for his forgiveness. With the greatness that this man had, he said, "There are two kinds of slander about people like us, one is an insult to Islam and the other concerns our person." I explained that he had not said anything offensive about Islam but had spoken only of his person.

He told me I was forgiven.

In repentance everything that is unlawfully acquired belongs to others whether it is a religious task, bribery or any illegitimate gain or any damage done and it must be repaid and amended so that the rightful owner or the person who has received the damage should be satisfied. If you have nothing left to give back and for example the rightful owner is no longer living, seek forgiveness from God. God willing, He will make that person satisfied. Similarly, heavenly rights must also be restored. What are heavenly rights? If you have failed to observe the fast or perform your ritual prayer or failed to make your obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca inspite of being able to bear it physically and financially, you must make up for all these failures. This is the second condition for the acceptance of your repentance.

A lady who attended one of my discourses had written to me saying that she was deeply influenced by my remarks about a total change of heart. She confessed that inspite of the higher education and her job as the head of a school, she was unfortunate enough not to be properly acquainted with the Quran and she asked for guidance and advice.

Allow me to give a general answer. It is necessary for every Muslim to know Arabic in order to understand the Quran and his own prayer. But as it happens English is at present the international language and a means of increasing one's income and every school boy and girl is taught that language, while Arabic is entirely neglected even though it is religiously and spiritually greatly needed by us.

The next point Imam Ali (as), peace be upon him, mentioned about the condition for the acceptance of repentance is to rid oneself of all the flesh that has grown on one by illegitimate means. This requires the mortification of the flesh, abstinence and self-discipline. It means

benefitting from what is legitimate, honest and proper.

My father narrated that the late Razavi Khorasani, who was a religious sage, had a very corpulent body. In the last years of his life he met a devout ascetic and through his influence, he decided to get rid of his extra flesh to such an extent that he became quite lean and thin. I am not so insolent as to say that his fatness was due to loose living, but anyhow he himself had come to the conclusion that a religious person must not be so corpulent.

The last condition that I wish to explain is to let the body which has tasted the sweetness of sin, also taste the pain of deviation and worship. Fasting is not an easy matter especially if you spend the night in prayer. The Quran in speaking of repentance mentions the following points: God loves those who repent and He loves those who cleanse themselves. (2:222) This means that you must cleanse yourself not only physically but also spiritually. The Prophet was a fine example of both kinds of cleanliness. The Quran also speaks of reforming oneself in connection with repentance.

And he who repents, after his evil doing and makes amends, God is All-compassionate. (5:39)

I have already mentioned that sometimes one half of a person rebels against the other half and this rebellion may be by the lower side of a person such as his lust, anger or devilry or by his higher side like his intellect, conscience, his true nature and his depth of heart.

Those who have suffered sexual deprivations in the name of worship and virtue suddenly turn into libertines and make rebels of themselves. But a revolution which is started by a belief in God by recognizing the higher side of the human being, is holy and accompanied by reform.

One of the peculiarities of the Prophets as compared with other human leaders is that their revolution is different from a revolution begun by leaders in a society. The latter manage only to arouse one group or class against another class or classes of society and equip them with the means or vanquishing the adversaries. This kind of revolution has its use in cases where a class of oppressors and a class of the oppressed have come into existence. Calling upon the oppressed to seize the right is human and this action has been both recommended and carried out by Islam and all the Prophets. One of the testaments of Imam Ali (as), peace be upon him, to his two sons, was, "Always be an enemy of an oppressor and an ally of the oppressed."

But what revolutionary leaders are unable to do what Prophets can do is to arouse the human being against the self and make him or her repent, they can also make the oppressors rise against their own wicked deeds. You meet many figures like Abu Sufiyan and Abu Jahl in the history of Islam against whom the poor and weak people have arisen and also tyrants like these have rebelled against themselves.

Imam Musa ibn Ja'far was passing through a market in Baghdad. He heard the sound of music

and merry-making from a house. As he was passing by it, he saw a girl servant coming out with a bucket of rubbish. He asked her whether the owner of the house was a free man or a slave. The girl was surprised at this question and answered that he was naturally a free man and a man of consequence in that town. It took her some time before she returned to the house.

The master asked her why she had been away so long. She told him about her talk with the man and gave a description of him. She said that his last remark was that if the master of the house did not consider himself a free man, he would not engage in such revelry and merry-making.

The man realized by her description that the man was none but the Imam. He gave himself no time even to put on his shoes and hurried to the door, bare-footed to see the Imam. He ran in the direction that he was told the Imam had taken and on catching up with him, knelt down and said, "You were quite right. I am a slave but I knew it not. I want from this hour to be God's slave and begin again with my repentance."

He returned home and threw away all the means of revelry and from then on he walked the streets of Baghdad in his bare feet receiving the nickname, 'the barefooted Bashar'. He was asked the reason for not wearing shoes and he answered, "As I had the honor of meeting the Imam as I am now I wish to preserve the memory of it by going bare-footed."

Concerning the affair of the Jewish tribe of the Bani Quraida who had acted treacherously against Islam and the Muslims, the Prophet decided to settle the question for good. They asked him to dispatch Abul Babah who had an inclination towards them for consultation. The Prophet agreed and sent him to them. He betrayed this trust by some remark which was in favor of the Jews and against the Muslims. As he was returning to Medina he felt ashamed of his action and went home, not to see his wife and children, but to get a piece of rope to go to the mosque of the Prophet. He tied himself to a pillar and cried, "Oh God I will not untie myself until my repentance is accepted." Only at the time of ritual prayers or to ease nature did his daughter untie him tor a few moments and gave him some food and again he asked to be bound, spending long hours lamenting and regretting what he had done and wishing to be dead unless he was absolved from his sin.

They reported this to the Prophet and he said, "If he had come to me I would have begged God to forgive him but as he has made a direct request of God, He will deal with him." After two or three days, divine revelation informed the Prophet that Abul Babah was forgiven. When the people of Medina heard this, they poured into the mosque to release him but he requested the Prophet to do so, which he did.

Those who have made a pilgrimage to Medina know that on one of the pillars of the Prophet's mosque it is written, 'pillar of repentance'. This is the pillar where Abul Babah repented and in his time it was a wooden column. After his absolution, Abul Babah, as a sign of gratitude offered all his wealth to be used in the way of God but the Prophet did not agree. He offered two-thirds of it. Again the Prophet refused. For the third time he offered one third and the Prophet agreed. This was just since Abul Babah had the duty of supporting his family.

It is narrated that a man died and the Prophet went to perform his burial prayer. He asked how many children the man had and what wealth he had left. They said he was well-off but had given away his wealth for charity before his death. The Prophet said, "If I had known this before, I would not have prayed for him since he has bequeathed hungry children to society."

It is also said that if a sick man intends to leave more than one third of his wealth to charity, his bequest is not acceptable since he has done so on his death bed even if this is not done by bequest but as an ordinary act of transfer.

I have discussed the question of repentance throughout these nights hecause these sacred nights of staying awake are the best time for penitence and begging God's forgiveness so that you may be absolved from your sins. But in this repentance all the conditions that I mentioned before must be fulfilled.

Another example of repentance was Zuhair ibn alQain who became a companion of Imam Husain, peace be upon him. He was one of the followers of Uthman who believed that Imam Ali (as), peace be upon him, God forbid, had a hand in the murder of Uthman. He was returning from Mecca to Iraq and as Imam Husain, peace be upon him, was taking the same route, he wondered whether he should meet the Imam or not. As he was at heart a true believer he feared that the Imam, as the grandson of the Prophet, might ask him something which he would be unwilling to perform which would be very bad so he kept away from the Imam. But in one of the stopping places on their way they happened to alight by a well at the same time. The Imam sent someone to bring Zuhair to him. Zuhair, as the head of the tribe, was dining in his tent with his family and companions. He went pale on hearing the summons and said, "What I did not wish for has happened."

He did not know what to say. He had a wife full of belief who said to him, 'Are you not ashamed by showing hesitation in obeying the call of the Prophet's grandson which you should consider an honor? Go at once.' Zuhair unwillingly arose and went to meet the Imam. No one knows what passed between them but when Zuhair returned he looked quite a different man. He was now very cheerful and happy.

We do not know how the Imam transformed him but a holy revolution had taken place in him.

At once he started giving instructions about his will concerning his wealth and members of his family and hastened to join the Imam. In Karbala he was in the front line of the Imam's followers, where he achieved martyrdom with them all. When his wife sent a servant with a shroud for his body, the servant saw a shameful sight. They discovered that not only Zubair's body but also his master's body lacked a shroud .

In conclusion I pray to God for a good end for us all and for the chance of true repentance by us and forgiveness by Him.