

The Concept of Repentance Imam Al-Ghazali's Perspective

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Abstract

This article aims to explain the concept of repentance according to Imam al-Ghazali. The method used is *library research* with a descriptive-analytical approach to al-Ghazali's works, especially in the field of Sufism and Islamic ethics. The results of the study show that according to al-Ghazali, repentance is a spiritual process consisting of three main elements: knowledge of sin, deep repentance, and a strong determination not to repeat mistakes. True repentance must be accompanied by a change of behavior and a sincerity of heart in returning to the way of God. For al-Ghazali, repentance not only serves as a cleanser for sins, but also as a means of purifying the soul and forming a pious personality. This concept reflects the depth of Islamic spirituality that emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and sustainable moral development.

Keywords: *Repentance; Al-Ghazali*

Abstrak: Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan konsep taubat menurut Imam al-Ghazali. Metode yang digunakan adalah *library research* dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis terhadap karya-karya al-Ghazali, khususnya dalam bidang tasawuf dan etika Islam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa taubat menurut al-Ghazali merupakan proses spiritual yang terdiri atas tiga unsur utama: pengetahuan tentang dosa, penyesalan yang mendalam, dan tekad kuat untuk tidak mengulangi kesalahan. Taubat sejati harus disertai perubahan perilaku dan kesungguhan hati dalam kembali kepada jalan Allah. Bagi al-Ghazali, taubat tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai pembersih dosa, tetapi juga sebagai sarana penyucian jiwa dan pembentukan kepribadian yang bertakwa. Konsep ini mencerminkan kedalaman spiritualitas Islam yang menekankan pentingnya kesadaran diri dan pembinaan moral secara berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *Taubat; Al-Ghazali*

Introduction

Every human being who lives in this world must have made mistakes and sinned, either intentionally or unintentionally, except for the prophets and apostles, because the prophets and apostles have the nature of *ma'sum*. We don't feel like we're getting older, getting older, getting older, and getting closer to our end of life. It also does not feel that there are more and more mistakes that we may make, both mistakes that we are aware of and those that we are not aware of, both the *dzahir* and the inner ones. If we cannot prevent this, we will live in losses.

Repentance is actually an entrance for a slave to get closer to Allah Azza wa Jalla, because in repentance there is regret for the despicable deeds that have been done in the past as well as there is a dance (*ikhtiar*) of the soul awakening of a slave to do good in the future. One of the reasons is why then the concept of repentance of Imam al-Ghazali is interesting to be discussed.

Repentance immediately is a requirement for a true believer. It is not permissible to delay repentance (*ta'khir*) or postpone (*tawsit*) repentance, because according to Yusuf Qardhawi, these rights can disturb the hearts of religious people. The mistakes and sins that humans often commit are the result of human negligence itself. Throughout the life that humans have lived, if in one day humans have committed one sin, then in a month humans have committed 30 sins, but if in one hour humans have sinned, it means that humans have committed as many as 24 sins in a day and a night.

Humans are creatures who often commit sins and mistakes, whether intentional or not. Humans also have human nature and limitations such as eating, drinking, sex, security, happiness and others. Which will later be inherent in their daily lives. Therefore, this article will try to describe what repentance is according to Imam al-ghazali.

Method

This type of research is *library research*, which relies on search and literature review as the main source of data. Primary and secondary data are obtained from various relevant literature sources, such as theses, dissertations, scientific journals, and books that discuss directly or indirectly the concept of *repentance* according to Imam al-Ghazali.

The data analysis process is carried out through several stages, namely: (1) data collection from various credible literature; (2) data reduction by sorting out relevant information and in accordance with the focus of the study; (3) interpretation of data to understand the meanings contained in the text in depth; and (4) drawing conclusions based on the results of the analysis that has been carried out. This approach aims to gain a thorough understanding of Imam al-Ghazali's thinking on *repentance* in the context of Islamic spirituality and ethics.

Results and Discussion

Definition of repentance

The word repentance (توبة) is the masdar form of the verb taba (تاب). In addition to the word repentance, the verb taba still has other forms of mashdar, namely tauban (توبا), mataban (متابا), tabatan (تابة), and tatwibatatan (تتوبة). Etymologically, the word can mean return (الرجوع), or regret (الندم). Terminologically, repentance means to return from immoral deeds or sins to obedience to God, and repent of all sinful deeds he has committed. And the one who repents is called at-ta'ib (التائب). Therefore, a ta'ib is a person who returns from something that Allah forbids to what He commands, one who returns from something that Allah hates to something that He is pleased with, or one who returns to Allah after separation, to obey Him, after committing a transgression or iniquity (al-mukhalafat).

The word "repentance" in Arabic means "to return". Repentance to Allah means returning to God, returning to His day, and drawing closer to Him. Repentance itself contains the meaning of "return", he repents, means he returns. Repentance is a return from something that is reproached by the sharia to something that is praised by it. Repentance is doing istighfar in daily life in the sense of asking Allah for forgiveness for all sins.

The true meaning of repentance is self-remorse for all evil behaviors that have been committed in the past. Furthermore, a repentant person is required to abstain from all immoral acts and eliminate all impulses of anger that can lead a person to evil acts.

Repentance is to return from a distant path to a near path. The basic principle of repentance is faith. Which means the light of ma'rifat radiates to the heart, so that the sins in it are destructive poison. From there are the embers of fear (khauf) and regret (nadam), then from these embers emanate a vigilant attitude and an attitude of correcting mistakes.¹ There are many verses of the Qur'an and hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that contain the obligation and encouragement of repentance. In addition, the problem of repentance is also conveyed in the Qur'an Surah At-Tahrim verse 8, the Qur'an Surah Al-Maidah verse 74, the Qur'an Surah Al-An'am verse 54, the Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah verse 222, the Qur'an Surah Al-Munafiqun verse 10-11, the Qur'an Surah Al-Qasas verse 67, the Qur'an Surah an-Nisa' 17-18 and the Qur'an Surah al-Ahzab verse 73. Why should man repent? The answer is because the sinful deeds committed by a person can have bad consequences for the perpetrator.

Reasons for Repentance

Every act of worship must begin with intention, because all work depends on the intention of a person. Similarly with repentance, if

¹ Ibid., 210.

repentance is carried out without any sincere intention from the heart, it will certainly feel heavy.

In intention, we must do some preliminary to make our intentions stronger. Therefore, Imam al-Ghazali said that there are three precursors to repentance, namely: We realize that sin is a very bad thing. Be aware and remember the severity of Allah's punishment and wrath. Realize our weaknesses and lack of energy to endure all of that.

Every Muslim is obliged to repent, because humans are creatures full of sin. What if we do not repent while every day our sins continue to increase. And if it is left unchecked, it will be able to plunge us into accidents.

According to Imam Al-Ghazali, there are two things that a person is obliged to repent of:

First, that we may be obedient. When our sins accumulate and we do not repent immediately then our hearts will become hard, there will be no cleanliness and sincerity. Thus it will prevent us from being obedient to God, and also a hardened heart will prevent us from doing good. In addition, a person will not be able to worship solemnly if he continues to commit vices and arrogance.

Second, so that our worship is accepted by Allah SWT. How can a person be accepted for his worship, if in him he still leaves what is halal and always does what is haram in his daily life. Repentance is one of the basic cores so that our worship is accepted by Allah SWT. So in order for our worship to be accepted by His side, we must first repent. It is true that if a person continues to commit vices and does not perform repentance, it will feel heavy if he worships Allah SWT and not with a feeling of pleasure. Prayer is a means for a servant to communicate with his God. Prayer is a form of worship to Allah with the intention of asking for help from the Almighty. In general, praying is stating what a person wants to Allah to obtain benefits or reject harm.

The following is the prayer of a person who repents according to Imam al-Ghazali:

إِلٰهِي عَبْدُكَ الْآبِقُ رَجَعَ إِلَىٰ بَابِكَ، عَبْدُكَ الْعَاصِي رَجَعَ إِلَى الصُّلْحِ، عَبْدُكَ الْمُذْنِبُ أَتَاكَ بِالْعُذْرِ فَأَعْفُ عَنِّي بِجُودِكَ، وَ تَقَبَّلْنِي بِفَضْلِكَ، وَ انْظُرْ إِلَيَّ بِرَحْمَتِكَ اللَّهُ اغْفِرْ لِي مَا سَلَفَ مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ وَ اعْصِمْنِي فِيمَا بَقِيَ مِنَ الْأَجَلِ فَإِنَّ الْخَيْرَ كُلَّهُ بِيَدِكَ وَ أَنْتَ بِنَا رَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

Meaning: "O my Allah, this is Your servant who wandered back to face Your mercy, the sinner returned to the truth. Your sinful servant turned to ask for forgiveness. Forgive me with Your mercy, and accept me with Your grace, and look at me with Your mercy.

O Allah, forgive my past sins, and preserve the remainder of my life. Indeed, all goodness is entirely in You, and You are the Most Merciful and Most Loving of us."

And continue by reading the prayer below:

Meaning: "O Allah, the one who places great problems, which the confused people ultimately lead to. O Allah, the very power, if you want

something, then just say "be" and it will be. Sins have plagued us, and it is You who we ask to remove various difficulties. I make myself available, accept my repentance, because You accept repentance and are Most Merciful. O Allah, who is beyond doubt with many affairs, and with perfect hearing. O Allah who is never wrong with the number of people who ask. O Allah, who never gets tired of receiving continuous requests, pour out on me a feeling of calm because of Your forgiveness and the deliciousness of Your forgiveness with Your grace. O Allah, the most merciful of all who love. You are Almighty over all things."

Then read prayers on the Prophet Muhammad saw. and his family. Then, ask forgiveness for all the believers, then return to obedience to Allah. From the explanation above, it is clear that prayer is a part of worship, because it is a servant's communication with Allah. Imam al-Ghazali said a prayer for people who repent to Allah as written above.

Repentance Prayer

The following are some examples of repentance prayers:

- a. Prayer of repentance of the Prophet Adam a.s.

قَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنْفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

They said: "O Our God, We have wronged ourselves, and if You had not forgiven Us and given Us mercy, We would have been among the losers.

- b. Prayer of repentance of the Prophet Ibrahim a.s.

رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمَيْنِ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

Meaning: O Our Allah, Make Us two people who are obedient to You and (make) among Our descendants a people who are obedient to You, and show Us Our ways and places of Hajj, and accept our repentance. Verily, You are the Most Repentant and the Most Merciful.

- c. Prayer of repentance of Prophet Jonah a.s.

وَذَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغَاضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَىٰ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ۝

And when he went out in anger, he thought that We would not narrow him down, so he cried out in a very dark state: "That there is no God but You. Blessed are You, I am of the wrongdoers".

- d. Prayer of repentance for oneself, the elderly, and the Muslims.

رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْحِسَابُ

It means: "O Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and all the believers on the day of hisab (the Day of Judgment)".

- e. Prayer of repentance for oneself, the elderly, the believer, the believers who enter the house.

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِي مُؤْمِنًا وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَلَا تَرِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا تَبَارًا

Meaning: "O my Lord! forgive me, my parents, those who enter My house with faith and all those who believe, men and women. and thou shalt not add to the wrongdoers anything but destruction."

In addition, there are several repentance prayers, both listed in the Qur'an and hadith as follows:

f. Q.S. al-Baqarah verses 286

لَا يَكْفِيكَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ ۗ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِن نَّسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا ۚ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إَصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا ۚ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ ۚ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَارْحَمْنَا ۚ أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

Meaning: Allah does not burden a person except according to his ability. He gets a reward (from the virtue) he strives for and he gets the punishment (for the evil) he does. (they pray): "O Our Lord, do not punish Us if We forget or We make a mistake. O Our Lord, do not burden Us as You did those before us. O Our Lord, do not burden upon Us what We are not able to bear. forgive us; forgive us; and have mercy on us. You are Our helper, so help Us against the disbelievers.

g. Q.S Ali-Imran verses 147

وَمَا كَانَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَإِسْرَافَنَا فِي أَمْرِنَا وَثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَنَا وَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

" There is no prayer for them except the saying: 'O Our Lord, forgive Our sins and Our excesses in our affairs and establish Our stand, and help Us against the disbelievers'"

h. Q.S Ali-Imran ayat 193

رَبَّنَا إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلْإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ فَآمَنَّا ۖ فَاعْفُ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَقَّعْنَا مَعَ الْآبِرَارِ ۚ رَبَّنَا

Meaning: O Our Lord, Indeed, We hear the call to faith, (i.e.: "Believe in your Lord", so We also believe. O Our Lord, forgive Us Our sins and take away from Us Our sins, and put Us to death with those who are devoted.

i. HR. Bukhari and Muslim

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي ظُلْمًا كَثِيرًا وَإِنَّهُ الْيَعْفُورُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ فَاعْفُ رَحْمَةً مِنِّي عَنْكَ وَإِذْكَ أَنْتَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ (روه البخاري)

Meaning: O Allah! I have sinned with many sins, and indeed no one can forgive sins except You. So forgive (my sin) with maghfirah from Your side and give me mercy, indeed You are Forgiving, Most Merciful (HR. Bukhari).

Repentance in the view of Imam al-Ghazali is to abandon sin, to be determined not to repeat it again and to repair what has passed. So the repentant person should not repeat the sins of the past. Because repentance is a form of confession or repentance of a servant for all the sins he has committed.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said that repentance is repentance, but if repentance is not intentional, then it is only with the lips, so that a person who repents must be intentioned in the deepest heart. According to Imam al-Ghazali, repentance must be done solely because of Allah, not because of creatures, not because of fear of imprisonment and not anything else. Because if we repent we are afraid of being imprisoned by Allah, then we repent to prison and not to Allah. From the above description, it is very clear that repentance is a form of self-remorse for all the sins that we have committed in the past with the intention only of Allah SWT, so that we can get maghfiroh from Allah SWT.

Conclusions

The conclusion on the concept of repentance according to Imam al-Ghazali can be summed up as follows. Repentance is the process of returning a person from sinful deeds to obedience to Allah, which involves deep remorse for the sins that have been committed, abandoning bad deeds, and being determined not to repeat them. Imam al-Ghazali emphasized that repentance should be done with sincerity of heart and full awareness, and should be accompanied by good deeds that replace sinful deeds. True repentance, according to al-Ghazali, can cleanse the soul and bring a person closer to God, as well as restore damaged spiritual relationships.

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