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Is it Possible for Yazīd ibne Mu‘āwiyah to ever be Forgiven?

Did Imām as-Sajjād Teach Yazīd ibne Mu‘āwiyah
the ‘Secret’ for the Latter to be Forgiven?¹

Question

In regards to the spiritual power and worth of *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah*, we have heard something to the effect that apparently Yazīd ibne Mu‘āwiyah said to Imām ‘Alī ibne al-Ḥusayn as-Sajjād, “I have killed the son of the Messenger of Allāh ... is it possible for me to still attain salvation?!” To this, Imām as-Sajjād has been reported to have replied, “Yes, if you perform *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah*, then you will be

¹ Hujjatul Islam Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi of the Jaffari Community Centre (www.jaffari.org) spoke about this alleged incident in detail on January 29, 2014. This lecture can be found at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GfEmY0Deo4 from the 19:47 to 24:10 mark of the lecture.

redeemed.” After this conversation transpired, Sayyida Zaynab binte ‘Alī said to her nephew, Imām as-Sajjād, “You are showing the means of salvation to the person who was directly responsible in the killing of your father!?” To this question from his aunt, the Imām replied, “All I have taught him is *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah*, however [I know that] Yazīd [due to him being hard-hearted] will never have the Divine providence (*tawfiq*) to perform this prayer.”

Is this historical event true and if so, where is this event narrated (in which books)?²

Answer

In researching those things which are frequently related and believed (to be true) by the masses, sometimes we come across issues which have been erroneously attributed to the infallibles Imāms and are definitely not found within their traditions and sayings.

Undoubtedly, *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah* is one of the highly recommended prayers for which there are numerous traditions³

² This event, as you will see, is a fabricated narration. The Arabic text of this can be found on numerous websites and has been recorded as below:

وكان مما روي في فضلها: أن يزيد بن معاوية لعنة الله عليه، سأل الإمام زين العابدين سلام الله عليه، هل لي من توبة وقد قتلت أباك أبا عبد الله (عليه السلام)؟ فقال له الإمام السجاد عليه السلام: نعم لك من توبة؛ وهي أن تصلي صلاة "الغفيلة" أربعين ليلة أو قال أربعين جمعة! فغضبت العقيلة زينب سلام الله عليها، وعاتبته الإمام السجاد سلام الله عليه؛ كيف يدّل الطريد بن الطريد على طريق التوبة! فقال لها سلام الله عليه: لا عليك يا عمّة، إنه لا يوفق لها.

³ The late Sayyid ibne Ṭāwūs, in his book, *Falāḥ al-Sā'il* has mentioned numerous traditions in regards to this recommended prayer. Please refer to page 244 of his monumental work.

from the *Imāms* of the Ahlul Bayt, and it is based on such reports that all of the jurists (*marajī' taqlīd*) have offered their verdicts (*fatawā*) that this is a prayer which should be performed.⁴

However in regards to what has been mentioned in the question in regards to the level of merit which is contained in the performance of this prayer is definitely not correct, and it must be noted that the details which formed the question do not appear in any of the reliable books of traditions and in actuality, there is nothing even remotely close to this contained in any of our books!

At this point, regardless of whether the details which are mentioned in the question are present or not in the books of traditions, if we were to merely study the contents of the question posed, we will see that from many points of view, it contradicts with the realities of the religion for the following reasons:

1. There is definitely an inconsistency between the crime and the process of asking for forgiveness for it: One of the things which is agreed upon amongst the sagacious of the faith of Islām and is also an acknowledged fact among the principles of religion is that there must be constancy between the crime and its punishment, or in this case, between the offense and the method of penitence. For example, if a person steals some money from someone, then as the religion of Islām has legislated within its teachings, the way that a thief will seek forgiveness is that one must return the wealth (or whatever was taken) back to its owner. If this is not possible, then some other way must be agreed upon which will satisfy the one who had his goods misappropriated. If a person engaged in back-biting, then the method of seeking forgiveness will entail one to either directly

⁴ Lankarānī, Muḥammad Fādhil, *The Book of Ṣalāt*, pg. 54

inform the person whom one spoke ill about and ask to be forgiven for the ill words spoken; but if this is not possible, then the person who engaged in back-biting would have to pray to Allāh to forgive that person's bad deeds and to grant that person His goodness. Finally, if someone's reputation was ruined in the society, then the form of asking forgiveness for this major sin is that one must seek to reinstate the individual's position among those people. These are just some of the ways in which sins needs to be compensated for, however obviously there is much more which could be said in these regards [but we will not cover other instances here].

Of course, in many occurrences, Allāh—the Grand—forgives the major sins through the performance of even minor acts of goodness, however in regards to the issue at hand as was posed in the question, we see a huge lack of congruency between the crime and the way of making amends for it, and thus there is no way that we can bring forth a logical justification [for this event ever transpiring].

How is it possible that a person goes forth and sullies his hands in killing the *Imām* of the Muslims—and that too the (grand) son of the Messenger of Allāh—and is then told that the way for his sin to be removed is merely to perform *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah* and that his asking of forgiveness (in this method) will be accepted!?

How is it conceivable that a person like Yazīd ibne Mu'āwiyah who ordered the destruction of the City of the Prophet (*Madīna al-Munawwarah*), and allowed his soldiers to attack and rape the women of the city or that such a person could make his way to Mecca and destroy the house of Allāh and then turn around and perform the *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah* and have all of his sins washed away!?

2. There are some people who claim that traditions exist which state that on numerous occasions in his life, Yazīd ibne Mu‘āwiyah intended to perform *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah* as a means of asking for forgiveness from his despicable crimes, however because he had intense stomach pains, he was never actually able to perform this prayer.

We know that there is a credible and accepted tradition in which it states that the intention of an individual who simply intends to perform a good deed is even better than the good action which wants to perform.⁵ This shows us that even if a person does not have the ability to perform a good deed, however if one had an intention to perform that action, then such an intention will actually be even greater and spiritually admirable than the performance of that good deed! Therefore based on this tradition, if a person had the intention of repenting for his sins, however never had the opportunity to perform that specific act of asking forgiveness (in this case *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah*), then does this mean that his inner intention will not be accepted and that he will not be granted salvation from the acts of transgression which he had performed? Of course it would! It is highly possible that there are some sins which a person performs by which one falls into the pit of spiritual darkness and through this, one loses the ability to even try and repent for one’s sins.

In various traditions—which if we were to go into their details would require an entirely separate discussion—some specific sins have been mentioned which we are told that the performance of

⁵ Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have said: “يَبْتِغِي الْمُؤْمِنُ خَيْرًا مِنْ عَمَلِهِ” – “The intention of a believer is even better than his action.” - see al-Kulaynī, Muḥammad ibne Ya‘qūb, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, pg. 84.

those evil deeds will actually prevent an individual from ever having the ability to ask for forgiveness. Some of these sins include the performance of actions which are considered as innovations (*bid'ah*) in the religion⁶ – innovations which are not only performed by an individual, but even ones which a large number of people may perform after which multitudes end up being deflected from the path of truth—throwing them into the valley of spiritual darkness and religious obscurity.

At this juncture, another question can also be posed: Principally, is it correct to say that such an individual (Yazīd ibne Mu'āwiyah and those like him) who suffered such an illness (that apparently he could not perform *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah* due to intense stomach pains) should be reprimanded due to his sickness? How is it possible that for other jurisprudential rulings such as fasting (*ṣawm*), pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*) and other such acts which a person needs to have the physical means to perform for it to be considered an obligation, however if one is sick and is not able to, for example, carry out the fast because it is dangerous to one's health, then not only is it not obligatory to refrain from fasting, but rather, it will actually be considered forbidden (*ḥarām*) for one to fast; however in regards to performing this recommended act (*Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah*), if a person is not well and has a pain in a specific place in one's body (and this is something which is out of one's control), that one should be blamed and not be forgiven (for one's past transgressions) due to something one does not have the ability to perform?

3. In this discussion, a tradition has been attributed to Lady Zaynab binte 'Alī which definitely does not befit her status. In the

⁶ Al-Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 69, pg. 216

“narration”, we are told that after Imām ‘Alī ibne al-Ḥusayn as-Sajjād encouraged Yazīd ibne Mu‘āwiyah to perform *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah* “so that his repentance for the killing of Imām al-Ḥusayn will be accepted,” Lady Zaynab apparently objected to Imām as-Sajjād for giving this advice and said to him, “What, do you really intend to forgive the killer of your father!?”

How is it possible for one to conceive that Lady Zaynab whose spiritual roots are planted in the family of revelation and who is a woman who clearly knows and respects the station of Divinely-appointed leadership (*Imāmah*) could raise such an objection to her *Imām*—something which we may not even expect from a common person to do—let alone a woman of her status to do?

Yes indeed it is possible that sometimes an infallible *Imām* or one of the saints of Allāh (*awliyā*) may perform an act which may, at face value, look like they are going against the religious code (*sharī‘ah*), and if this were to occur then not only is it not a problem for a person to question or object to what they are doing and the reality of their actions, rather this is something which is acknowledged as being something which should be done. This has been seen in the event of the objections raised by Prophet Mūsā to al-Khidr in the story in which Prophet Mūsā accompanied al-Khidr in his journey. In his travels, a point came when al-Khidr killed a young boy to which Prophet Mūsā protested that he had no right to kill an innocent child [and he was justified in raising this objection]. However in regards to the opposition which we are told Lady Zaynab levied against the *Imām* of her time, she is shown to have protested against one of the actions of Imām as-Sajjād which, first off: it was an action which was not expected from her in that an infallible *Imām* would never show the worst human being the ways

to felicity and the means to having his forgiveness accepted; secondly that Imām as-Sajjād, who as his position as the *Imām* and then one who is the defender of the blood of Imam al-Ḥusayn, has the right to forgive his murderer.

4. Another dilemma which this question poses is the reply which we are told was given by Imām as-Sajjād to his aunt, Lady Zaynab, in which we are told that he said, “I said that Yazīd could be granted salvation through *Ṣalāt al-Ghufaylah*, however do not worry as he will never have the Divinely-granted ability to perform this prayer!”

In reality this is a form of enticement which the Imām used as he had been requested to show an act through which an individual would be forgiven of his sins, and the infallible Imām, despite knowing that Yazīd did not have the ability to perform, still went ahead and encouraged him to perform this specific religious act of worship. In reality, it is entirely possible that if Yazīd actually felt true remorse for his actions, then Imām as-Sajjād should have guided him to perform some religious actions which he actually had the ability to perform so that he would have been absolved of his sins.

In addition to all of this, we know that throughout the life of Yazīd [after the events of Kerbalā’], he never once lamented for his actions in killing Imām al-Ḥusayn and his noble family and friends. Rather, his atrocities continued in the years after the tragic events of Kerbalā’ in the disastrous event of *Ḥarrah*⁷, and therefore, there is no

⁷ One of the acts of sheer barbarity and inhumanity Yazīd brought down on the Muslims was the event of Harrah. This incident resulted in the brutal killing of thousands of Muslims of Medina and was a massacre for which the order was issued by Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiyah himself. The deplorable atrocity of Harrah, which blackened the pages of history, took place in the 63rd year of the Islamic calendar

during the reign of Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiyah between the powerful armies of the Levant (Shām) and the people of Medina. Yazīd gave the following order to Muslim ibn ‘Aqabah, “Invite the people of Medina to pay allegiance to me – and do this three times. If they respond positively and pay allegiance, then let them go free. However, if they do not respond positively and refuse to pay allegiance, then fight them. If you triumph over them, continue the massacre for three days. Anything that belongs to the city will be permissible for your army to loot. Do not stop the Levant army from doing whatever it wishes with its enemy. After three days, stop the killing and pillaging. Then, again ask for allegiance from the people. They should promise to be Yazīd’s slaves and servants. When you leave Medina, move towards Mecca for another attack and confrontation.”

Ibn Qutaybah recounts that, “The Shām army entered Medina on the twenty-seventh day of *Dhul Hijjah* in the year 63 AH. For three days Medina was plundered by the Levant army up to the appearance of the new moon of the month of *Muḥarram*.”

Following Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiyah’s orders, and after the seizure of Medina, Muslim ibn ‘Aqabah told his soldiers, “Your hands are open and you are free to do whatever you want. You must plunder and loot Medina for three days.” Thus, the city of Medina was subjected to wholesale murder and plundered by the Shām army. Everything was permissible for the Shām soldiers and no man or woman remained safe from their harm. The civilians of Medina were killed and their property was looted. In this invasion of the Prophet’s city, thousands of women were raped from which, thousands of children were born whose fathers were not known and these children later became known as ‘the Children of Harrah [*Awlād al-Harrah*].’ The streets of Medina were filled with dead bodies; blood flowed on the ground up to the Prophet’s mosque; children were mercilessly killed in their mothers’ arms; and elderly companions of the Prophet were exposed to torture and dishonor. The scale of the killings was so great that because of his extravagance in killing the people, Muslim ibn ‘Aqabah was from then onwards nicknamed “*Musrif*” ibn ‘Aqabah, which in the Arabic language means ‘the one who is extravagant’. After this horrendous event, the people of Medina wore black mourning clothes and the sounds of their weeping could be heard from their homes for up to one year.

proof that Imām as-Sajjād ever showed such an individual, whose crimes continued to persist even after the tragic event of Kerbalā’ the ways to seek forgiveness, or at least to a partial extent, exonerate him in the public sphere.



O Allāh! Send Your prayers upon Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad!

Ibn Qutaybah narrates, “On the day of Harrah, eighty companions of the Prophet were killed and after that day there was no *Badrī* (person that took part in the Battle of Badr) left. Seven hundred members of the *Quraysh* and *Anṣār* [the early Muslims who were local inhabitants to the city of Medina where Prophet Muḥammad and his family and companions migrated to] were put to death and ten thousand innocent people of the community were killed from among the Arabs, the *tabiʿīn* (the generation of people who came after the companions of Prophet Muḥammad) and other virtuous people of Medina.” (Extracted from www.wikipedia.com with changes)