

The Meaning of Repentance According to Imam Ghazali and Semantic Analysis in the Qur'an: A Comprehensive Study

Nabilah Nuraini
Universitas Islam Bandung

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the meaning of repentance as articulated by Imam Ghazali and its semantic representation in the Qur'an. By analyzing Imam Ghazali's interpretation of "taubat," the research delves into the spiritual, ethical, and psychological dimensions of repentance in Islamic teachings. The study uses analysis descriptive as the method and it's further conducts a semantic analysis of relevant Qur'anic verses to elucidate the concept's theological implications, including divine mercy, forgiveness, and justice. This comprehensive examination aims to bridge classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary semantic analysis, offering a nuanced understanding of repentance's role and significance in Islam. The findings contribute to Islamic studies, religious studies, and theological scholarship, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of repentance or "taubat" and its contemporary relevance.

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Corresponding Author:

Name: Nabilah Nuraini, S.Ag., M.Ag.
Institution: Jl. Tamansari No.1, Tamansari, Kec. Bandung Wetan, Bandung City, West Java 40116
Email: nabilahnuraini@unisba.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The background of this study focuses on the concept of repentance (taubat) in Islam, which is a crucial aspect of the spiritual and moral life of Muslims. Repentance is not merely about feeling remorse for past wrongdoings; it also involves a change of heart, mind, and actions to avoid repeating those mistakes and to return to the righteous path.

The concept of "taubat" (repentance) is central to Islamic teachings, crucial for understanding the spiritual, ethical, and psychological aspects of the faith. My research focuses on "taubat" because it is essential for a Muslim's spiritual journey, fostering a closer relationship with Allah through soul purification and renewal.[1] It embodies key

moral principles like accountability, humility, and self-improvement, influencing both individual and communal behavior.

This research aims to examine the meaning of repentance according to the perspective of Imam Ghazali, a prominent scholar and philosopher in Islamic history who has had a significant influence on Islamic theological and spiritual thought. Imam Ghazali's works often serve as primary references for understanding the deeper aspects of Islamic teachings, including repentance.

Furthermore, this study employs semantic analysis of the Qur'an to explore and understand the meaning of repentance within the context of the sacred text. The Qur'an, as the holy book of Muslims, contains numerous

verses discussing repentance, where a deep understanding of the terms and contexts used can provide a richer insight into this concept.

Specifically, this research combines the classical approach of Imam Ghazali's thought with a modern approach of semantic analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the meaning and implications of repentance in the life of a Muslim. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the field of Islamic studies, both theologically, ethically, and spiritually.[2]

The purpose of this research is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the concept of repentance within the Islamic tradition. This study aims to explore the meaning of repentance according to Imam Ghazali, a renowned Islamic scholar and philosopher, whose theological and spiritual insights provide a profound grasp of this essential concept. Additionally, the research employs a semantic analysis of the term "repentance" and its related concepts as they appear in the Qur'an[3], seeking to uncover the layers of meaning and contextual usage within the holy text.

By combining the classical interpretations of Imam Ghazali with modern linguistic and semantic analytical methods, the study offers a holistic view of repentance, bridging traditional theological insights with contemporary analytical techniques. Through this integrative approach, the research aims to illuminate the theological significance, ethical implications, and spiritual dimensions of repentance in Islam. Ultimately, this comprehensive exploration is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the field of Islamic studies, enhancing scholarly understanding and providing valuable insights for both academics and practitioners within the Islamic tradition.[4]

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Imam Ghazali's Perspective on Repentance*

Imam Ghazali, a renowned Islamic scholar, provides an in-depth analysis of repentance in his seminal work "Ihya' Ulum

al-Din" (The Revival of the Religious Sciences). Ghazali views repentance as a three-step process: recognizing the sin (ilm), feeling remorse (hal), and resolving not to repeat the sin (fi'l) (Ghazali, 1981). He emphasizes that true repentance must be accompanied by sincere remorse and a firm intention to amend one's ways. Ghazali also discusses the psychological and spiritual dimensions of repentance, highlighting its role in purifying the soul and fostering a closer relationship with Allah.

2.2 *Repentance in the Qur'an*

The concept of repentance is extensively addressed in the Qur'an, appearing in various forms and contexts. Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis highlights repentance as a return to Allah after straying from His commandments. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of repentance by promising numerous benefits, such as divine guidance, Allah's love, the replacement of evil deeds with good ones, and entry into Paradise (Izutsu, 1966). The Qur'an also details the proper way to repent, including sincere repentance (taubatan nasuha), performing righteous deeds, seeking forgiveness, and making amends (Qur'an 66:8, 25:70-71).

2.3 *Contemporary Scholarship*

Recent scholarly works have further explored the concept of repentance in Islam. For instance, Winter (2008) [5] examines the role of repentance in Islamic spirituality, emphasizing its transformative power. He argues that repentance is not only a means of seeking forgiveness but also a way to achieve spiritual growth and moral development. Additionally, Murad (2000)[6] discusses the social implications of repentance, suggesting that it fosters community cohesion by encouraging individuals to rectify their wrongs and seek reconciliation.

3. METHODS

This research employs a combination of classical textual analysis and modern semantic analysis to comprehensively understand repentance in Islam using qualitative method.[7] It begins with a

literature review focused on Imam Ghazali's works, followed by a detailed examination of his texts to interpret his views on repentance. Concurrently, semantic analysis is used to study repentance-related terms in the Qur'an, exploring their meanings and contexts.[8] The findings from Ghazali's works and the Qur'an are then compared to identify similarities and differences. These results are contextualized within broader Islamic theology and spirituality, and finally synthesized to form a cohesive understanding, bridging classical and modern approaches. This integrative methodology aims to provide a nuanced and in-depth understanding of repentance, contributing significantly to Islamic studies.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Al-Ghazali's Perspective

Imam al-Ghazali asserts that repentance is an endeavor involving several inner actions of the heart.[9] In essence, according to scholars, repentance involves cleansing the heart of sins. Our teacher, may Allah have mercy on him, stated that repentance means refraining from committing previous sins or any sins of a similar nature, out of reverence for Allah and fear of His wrath.[10]

Imam al-Ghazali emphasizes that worshippers are required to repent for two reasons:[11] [12]First, to obtain divine assistance in achieving obedience. Sins can lead to misfortune and bring calamity upon the sinner. Additionally, sins can hinder our efforts to obey and serve Allah because a continuous accumulation of sins can darken the heart, resulting in darkness, hardness, and a lack of sincerity, delight, and purity. Without Allah's grace and mercy, these sins could lead one to disbelief and misery.[13][14]

Al-Ghazali divides the conditions and pillars of repentance into four categories. [14]First, one must abandon sinful actions with a firm determination not to commit them again. If there is still a lingering possibility in the heart of repeating the sin, the person cannot be considered repentant, only as having ceased the sin temporarily.[13]

Second, one must stop all the sins previously committed before repenting. If one abandons a sin they never committed, they are merely being cautious, not repentant. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who was always free from disbelief, cannot be said to have repented from it since he never committed it. In contrast, Sayyidina Umar (RA) repented from disbelief because he had previously engaged in it.[3]

Third, the sin being abandoned must be equivalent to the sin previously committed, not in form but in severity. For instance, an elderly man who once engaged in adultery and robbery cannot be said to have repented merely because he can no longer perform these acts due to old age. He must abandon other sins he is still capable of, such as lying or slandering, as a form of repentance from his past actions.[15]

Fourth, repentance must be done out of reverence for Allah (SWT), not out of fear of other consequences such as imprisonment or financial hardship. Repentance motivated by worldly concerns is not genuine repentance. True repentance must stem from the fear of Allah's wrath alone. When these four conditions are met, it constitutes genuine repentance, referred to in the Qur'an as *taubatan nasuha*, which is the true form of repentance.[16]

According to Ghazali,[14] before repentance in Islamic teachings involves several crucial steps that must be thoroughly understood. Firstly, one must reflect on the abhorrence and enormity of the sins committed. This serves as the initial point of awareness regarding past mistakes and the necessity for rectification.[17] Secondly, it is essential to contemplate the greatness of Allah SWT. and the severity of His punishment and anger towards those sins. This underscores the importance of recognizing the consequences of one's actions in the sight of the Creator. Thirdly, a servant must constantly remember their sins and feel ashamed for having committed them before Allah. This reflects a deep spiritual responsibility in facing one's transgressions.

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that mere remorse is not sufficient as the primary criterion for repentance. The essence of genuine repentance lies in remorse rooted in a desire to glorify Allah's power and a fear of His just punishment. This signifies a serious commitment to repentance and a determination to avoid repeating past mistakes. This process involves continuous reflection on one's wrongdoings and a sincere effort to improve oneself.[15]

The dangers of delaying repentance are also highlighted, as sins left unchecked can harden the heart and lead one to spiritual ruin. This serves as a reminder of the fate of Iblis, who despite his lofty position, fell due to his sins. Therefore, it is crucial to strive to maintain purity of heart and resist the temptations of sin.[10]

Understanding that forgiveness and cleansing from sins are great blessings from Allah allows one to overcome the fear of falling back into past sins and strengthens the resolve to repent sincerely. This demonstrates that repentance is not the end of one's spiritual journey but the beginning of self-improvement towards seeking Allah's pleasure.[9]

4.2 *Semanthic Analysis*

The Quranic ontology was created to convey the meanings of words and their relationships, intending to enhance database queries with information retrieval systems to ensure accuracy and reliability in the results.[18]

The word "repentance" appears 87 times in the Qur'an, spread across 70 verses and 25 surahs.[19] [20]It is found in 23 different derivations. The word "تَابَ" (repentance) appears in various verses of the Qur'an. In Al-Baqarah 37, Allah accepts Adam's repentance after he commits a mistake. Al-Baqarah 54 narrates that Allah instructs the people of Moses to repent after they worship the calf. Al-Baqarah 187 discusses the regulations regarding eating and drinking during fasting and the time for repentance. Al-Maidah 39 states that Allah accepts the repentance of those who commit wrongdoing if they repent and amend their

ways. In Al-Maidah 71, it is mentioned that the people of Israel did not repent despite being warned by the prophets. Al-An'am 54 emphasizes that Allah is Forgiving and accepts the repentance of His servants who commit mistakes and then repent.

In At-Taubah 117, Allah accepts the repentance of the Prophet, the Emigrants, and the Helpers after they almost lost hope. This is reiterated in At-Taubah 118, where Allah accepts the repentance of three individuals who stayed behind during the Battle of Tabuk. Hud 112 mentions that Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to remain steadfast and continue to repent. Maryam 60 narrates that those who repent, believe, and perform righteous deeds will enter Paradise. Thaha 82 and Thaha 122 also mention that Allah is Forgiving to those who repent and follow His guidance. Al-Furqan 70-71 asserts that Allah will replace bad deeds with good for those who repent, believe, and do righteous deeds.

In Al-Qasas 67, those who repent, believe, and perform righteous deeds are promised Paradise. Al-Mujadalah 13 and Al-Muzammil 20 highlight the importance of repentance in the context of Allah's commands and prohibitions. The form "تَابَ" appears in An-Nisa 16, which mentions the punishment for wrongdoers and the encouragement to repent.

The word "تَابُوا" appears in Al-Baqarah 160, which explains that Allah accepts the repentance of those who mend their ways after committing mistakes. Ali-Imran 89 and An-Nisa 146 also mention the importance of repentance for sinners. In Al-Maidah 34 and Al-A'raf 153, it is mentioned that Allah accepts the repentance of those who regret their sinful deeds and strive to amend their ways.[19]

The form "تَابْتُمْ" is found in An-Nisa 18 and Al-A'raf 143, emphasizing that Allah accepts the repentance of His servants who commit mistakes. The word "تَابْتُمْ" appears in Al-Baqarah 279, explaining the consequences of usury and the importance of repentance. At-Taubah 3 also emphasizes the importance

of repentance in the context of Allah's covenant with humanity.[19]

The word "أَتُوبُ" in Al-Baqarah 160 states Allah's promise to accept the repentance of those who return to Him. The form "تَتُوبَا" in At-Tahrim 4 reminds of the need for repentance for those who transgress the limits set by Allah. The form "يَتُوبُ" in Al-Hujurat 11 and "يُتُوبُ" in Ali-Imran 128 emphasize that Allah accepts the repentance of His servants who return to Him.[20]

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According to Toshihiko Izutsu[22], the basic meaning is something inherent in a word that always accompanies it wherever the word is placed. Therefore, the author understands that the basic meaning is the essence of a word that remains attached to it regardless of its position. Based on the author's findings, the word "taubat" and its derivatives have two basic meanings: regret (الندم) and return (الرجع). This is supported by evidence found in various reliable dictionaries.

The word "taubat" itself is a verbal noun derived from the root verb "taabayatuubu-taubatan-wa mataaban تَابَ - يَتُوبُ - تَوْبَةً". This verb is rooted in the letters ta (ت), wa (و), and ba (ب). According to the maqayis dictionary, "taubat" means return (الرجع).

Thus, when someone repents from their sins, it signifies their return to Allah from the sins they committed.[23]

The relational meaning of the word "taubat" developed after the advent of the Quran. This is evidenced by the fact that before the Quran, there was only one relational meaning associated with "taubat," which was wrongdoing (dzalim). However, after the Quran was revealed, the relational relational meaning can take the form of words, phrases, or sentences that express similarity of meaning, contradiction of meaning, multiple meanings, inclusiveness of meaning, and sound similarity.[24] Here, the author will explain the concept of "tauba meaning expanded to encompass seven conceptual relational meanings: meanings related to significance, urgency, manner, time, consequences, subject, and cause.[20]

According to Abdul Chaer, using the theory of relational meaning focusing on contradiction of meaning or antonymy. The antonym of the word "taubat" based on relationality of meaning is the word تَوَلَّوْا found in Surah Hud verse 3 and Surah At-Taubah verse 74.[20]

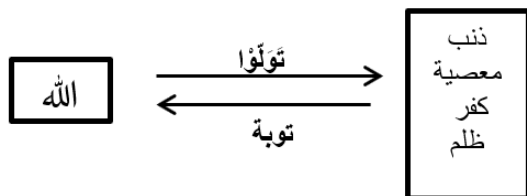


Figure 1: The meaning of Taubat according to Quranic Semantic

In semantic perspective, there are also relational meanings[25] related to subjectivity because every sentence must have a subject or agent. Similarly, sentences related to the word "taubat" in the Quran exhibit two types of subjectivity: the first involves the giver of repentance, and the second involves the subject receiving repentance.[22] Apart from subjectivity, there are also instances where "taubat" functions as an attribute inherent to someone. To elaborate on this discussion of subjectivity, the author categorizes the subjectivity of the word "taubat" into five subjects: Allah, the Prophet

Muhammad, the believers, the disbelievers, and the sinners.

The first is relational meanings of the word "taubat" in the Quran related to the virtues and numerous benefits for those who repent:[20]

1. Forgiveness of past sins (Surah At-Tahrim 66:8)
2. Admission to paradise (Surah Maryam 19:60)
3. Sending down rain and granting strength (Surah Hud 11:52)
4. Being among the fortunate (Surah An-Nur 24:31, 28:67)
5. Transformation of sins into good deeds (Surah Al-Furqan 25:70)
6. Being loved by Allah (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:222)
7. Continuous enjoyment of blessings (Surah Hud 11:3)
8. Being guided (Surah An-Nisa 4:26)

Furthermore, there are relational meanings[22] related to the timing of repentance in the Quran. This includes repenting before the arrival of death, as explained in Surah An-Nisa verse 18, and repenting as soon as possible, as stated in Surah An-Nisa verse 17.

إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهْلَةٍ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ فَأُولَئِكَ يَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا وَلَيْسَتِ التَّوْبَةُ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ إِنِّي تُبِّئْتُ اللَّهَ وَلَا الَّذِينَ يَمُوتُونَ وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ أُولَئِكَ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا

17. The repentance accepted by Allah is only for those who do wrong in ignorance [or carelessness] and then repent soon after. It is those to whom Allah will turn in forgiveness, and Allah is ever Knowing and Wise.

18. But repentance is not [accepted] of those who [continue to] do evil deeds up until, when death comes to one of them, he says, "Indeed, I have repented now," or of those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We have prepared a painful punishment.

Furthermore, within the relational context of the term "taubat" in the Quran[26], various methods of repentance are delineated, each emphasizing a unique aspect of returning to Allah. Quranic verses illustrate these methods: Al-Baqarah (2):160 stresses rectifying relationships and seeking reconciliation with others, which is

fundamental in Islam. An-Nisa' (4):92, At-Tawbah (9):104 highlight fasting, performing prayers, and giving zakat as acts that purify the soul and demonstrate devotion to Allah, crucial in seeking forgiveness. Ali-Imran (3):135 emphasizes the importance of remembering Allah and actively seeking His forgiveness as integral components of repentance.

It's also underscores Al-Furqan (25):70-71 as a means to expiate sins and earn Allah's mercy through performing righteous deeds. At-Tahrim (66):8 underscores sincere repentance, emphasizing the necessity of heartfelt remorse and a firm resolve to avoid wrongdoing. Additionally, An-Nasr (110):3 encourages glorifying Allah and seeking His forgiveness, underscoring the spiritual renewal achieved through constant praise and supplication. Together, these Quranic teachings provide a comprehensive framework for repentance, encompassing both personal spiritual growth and harmonious social interactions in accordance with Islamic principles.

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5. CONCLUSION





A comparative analysis of Ghazali's views and the Qur'anic semantic approach reveals both similarities and differences. Both perspectives underscore the necessity of sincere repentance and the importance of returning to Allah. However, Ghazali's approach is more detailed, offering a step-by-step process and emphasizing the emotional and spiritual aspects of repentance. The Qur'anic approach, on the other hand, provides a broader framework, highlighting the benefits and urgency of repentance.

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Nabilah Nuraini     Nabilah Nuraini completed her undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the State Islamic University Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. During her studies, she also attended Ma'had Quran wa Dirasah Islamiyah (MAQDIS) in Bandung. She is currently pursuing a career as a lecturer in Quranic Studies and Interpretation at the Islamic University of Bandung (UNISBA). She has written several scholarly articles and books on the Quran, Tafsir, Education, and Gender.

email: nabilahnuraini@unisba.ac.id