



Forgiveness in Islam: A Pathway to Positive Religious Coping

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Abstract

Forgiveness, as a religious coping mechanism, plays a pivotal role in the Islamic tradition, providing a framework for emotional and spiritual resilience. This paper explores the concept of forgiveness within Islamic teachings, examining its significance as a tool for managing interpersonal conflict and personal suffering. Drawing on Quranic verses, Hadith literature, and contemporary scholarly interpretations, the study highlights how forgiveness is not only a moral virtue but also a strategic response to adversity. The article analyses the religious texts and theological discourses to elucidate the mechanisms through which forgiveness operates in Islamic contexts. Key findings reveal that forgiveness in Islam is intricately linked to concepts of mercy, divine justice, and social harmony. By integrating forgiveness into religious practice, individuals are able to mitigate stress, enhance social relationships, and achieve spiritual tranquillity. The paper concludes that forgiveness serves as a profound coping strategy, aligning personal well-being with broader religious and ethical principles. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how religious practices can support psychological health and interpersonal harmony.

Keywords: forgiveness, positive religious coping, Islam.

Introduction

The intersection of religion and health is a fascinating area of study for researchers. The health system has historically overlooked the spiritual aspect of individuals, leading to a significant gap between health practices and religious beliefs. However, there has been a shift in this paradigm as researchers and healthcare professionals increasingly recognize the importance of considering



the religious and spiritual dimensions in health. There has been a surge in research focusing on how religion and spirituality can impact both physical and mental health, contributing to a substantial body of evidence suggesting their significant role in influencing an individual's overall well-being and health status.

In 1997, Kenneth Pargament's *The Psychology of Religion and Coping* explored how religious involvement aids coping. He defined religion as a "search for significance related to the sacred" and defined coping as a "search for significance in times of stress" (Pargament & Raiya, 2007). and involves religious methods to understand and handle negative events (Pargament, 1996). Religious coping can be positive or negative (Pargament et al., 1998). Positive coping includes fostering a relationship with a transcendent force, maintaining a benevolent worldview, and reinterpreting stressors positively (Pargament et al., 2011). Pargament et al. (2004) identified religious forgiveness as a positive coping strategy, helping individuals move from anger and hurt to peace through religious solace.

Forgiveness is defined as "willfully giving up resentment despite considerable injustice and responding with beneficence" (Baskin & Enright, 2004) and as "a suite of prosocial changes in motivations towards an offender" (McCullough et al., 2007). These changes involve reducing desires for revenge, negative affect, and avoidance (McCullough et al., 2001). Forgiveness helps overcome anger and thoughts of revenge (Amanze & Carson, 2020; McCullough et al., 1998; Miceli & Castelfranchijtsb, 2011). It promotes healing, empathy, and reconciliation, enhancing emotional well-being and harmonious relationships. Religious-based forgiveness interventions strengthen faith and provide spiritual resilience (Keshavarzi et al., 2020). They help victims avoid blaming perpetrators, focus on their own well-being, and reduce maladaptive behaviors (Exline et al., 2003; Lundahl et al., 2008).

Studies on religion and forgiveness

Forgiveness is strongly linked to religion and spirituality (Choe et al., 2020). Research consistently shows a significant connection between forgiveness and religion, with major world



religions promoting forgiveness (Rye, 2005). Religious literature often highlights forgiveness as beneficial for emotional healing and spiritual growth (Luskin et al., 2005). Researchers have investigated whether spiritual connections with the sacred and humanity are crucial for coping with disruptions to one's view of self, others, or the world (Brown, 2010; Krajca, 2015). The study found that spiritual and social support were key to participants' genuine emotional forgiveness of major transgressions, as these connections provided both courage and new perspectives on painful events. Studies reveal that religious individuals tend to show higher levels of forgiveness and seek it more actively than non-religious individuals (Toussaint & Williams, 2008), which may explain their positive attitudes towards forgiveness (Matuszewski & Morón, 2022). Strong religious faith is positively related to a tendency to forgive others (Edwards et al., 2002; Fox & Thomas, 2008). This connection is due to religious teachings that emphasize compassion and forgiveness.

Practicing forgiveness not only demonstrates commitment to one's faith but also fosters inner peace and spiritual growth, enhancing the sense of fulfillment and connection within a faith community. This relationship is evident in both trait forgiveness and attitudes towards forgiveness (Macaskill, 2007; Witvliet et al., 2008). Islam is a comprehensive way of life that influences behavior, relationships, and governance. Seeking forgiveness from Allah is a positive coping mechanism linked to lower anxiety, depression, and increased mindfulness (Awaad et al., 2021). *Tawbah* and *istighfar* have been shown to improve mental health in college students (Uyun et al., 2019) and Muslim patients with anxiety and depression (Saged et al., 2022). Practicing forgiveness also helps manage stress and enhances psychosocial well-being (Fatimah et al., 2023; Long et al., 2020).

Positive psychology underscores the importance of embedding a forgiving attitude due to its beneficial effects on mental health, relationships, physical health, and overall well-being. Similarly, Islamic teachings advocate for continuous forgiveness, exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who demonstrated that forgiveness and prayer for others lead to divine blessings. Both positive psychology and Islam thus emphasize the value of forgiveness (Warsah, 2020). Studies conducted from an Islamic perspective on forgiveness, involving couples, have



shown a positive correlation between satisfaction and forgiveness (Hamidi, Makwand, & Hosseini, 2010). Interpersonal forgiveness is linked to lower depression and revenge, while revenge is also tied to lower psychological well-being. Islamic forgiveness attitudes enhance the effect of devotional practices on forgiveness, leading to more forgiveness and less revenge. These findings suggest that forgiveness can improve psychological outcomes for Muslim war survivors and that belief in Islam's forgiving nature supports this process (Scull, 2015). A study explored what aspects of religiosity/spirituality (R/S) were important to forgiveness, as a better understanding of the role of R/S was needed. R/S connections provided guidance and compassionate support that was essential to forgiveness of a major transgression (Heacock, 2017).

Concept of forgiveness in Islam

In Islam, forgiveness is central to spiritual beliefs and practices. Muslims seek strength and solace through forgiveness from God, pardoning others, and embracing Allah's blessings. Key Arabic terms for forgiveness include *tawbah* (repentance), *ghafara* (absolution), *afw* (pardon), *safhu* (ignoring the wrong), and *samah* (generosity) (Ibn Manzur, 2003, as cited in Abu-Nimer & Nasser, 2013; Wehr, 1976, as cited in Abu-Nimer & Nasser, 2013). *Istighfaar* (seeking forgiveness) and *tawbah* (repentance) are often used interchangeably but have distinct meanings when combined. *Istighfaar* seeks protection from past actions, while *tawbah* involves turning back to Allah and seeking refuge from future consequences (Al-Munajjid, 1998).

One's life is shaped by relationships on three levels: with Allah, with others, and with oneself. The relationship with Allah is fundamental, offering guidance, strength, and shaping one's moral compass and sense of purpose. This connection influences how one navigates life's challenges and perceives the world. Relationships with others—familial, friendly, or professional—provide support, companionship, and contribute to one's sense of belonging, values, and behavior. Lastly, the relationship with oneself, encompassing self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-care, is crucial for resilience, authenticity, and inner harmony. Thus, "The Forgiveness Triad," as established by the Human Development Study Group (Enright, 1996), identifies three key



components: forgiving others, receiving forgiveness, and self-forgiveness. These will be discussed below in the light of Islam.

Seeking forgiveness from Allah

Divine forgiveness is linked to psychological well-being, enhancing subjective well-being and reducing anxiety (Fincham, 2022; Fincham & May, 2019; Krause & Hill, 2018). High levels of divine forgiveness are associated with better psychosocial health and improved psychological functioning (Long et al., 2020a; Krause & Ellison, 2003). It mediates the relationship between daily spiritual experiences and life engagement (Lyons et al., 2011). Conversely, doubts about receiving divine forgiveness can lead to psychological distress. Escher (2013) found that faith in God's capacity to forgive fosters forgiveness towards others and oneself.

A Muslim's faith can weaken during challenges and temptations, leading to spiritual struggles and susceptibility to Satan's temptations (6:43). Such struggles may involve neglecting Allah's commandments, committing forbidden actions, or rejecting Tawheed (Ibn Taymīyah, 2001). These moments often lead believers to seek Allah's guidance and forgiveness, though sometimes they may turn away. The awareness of Allah's watchful gaze varies, with some being mindful and others becoming heedless. Satan exploits the psychology of sin by preying on human imperfection, encouraging sins to create a barrier between individuals and Allah. This can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair, making one believe perfection is unattainable. Unlike angels, who are sinless, humans are not created perfect and are prone to sin. Muslims are advised against giving up or succumbing to despair, as they are inherently imperfect (Quran 2:30). They should remember Allah's Mercy and resist Satan's tactics (Quran 24:21), avoiding feelings of abandonment or hopelessness.

Islam acknowledges human fallibility and the inevitability of mistakes, emphasizing that humans are inherently imperfect and reflect Allah's Names and Attributes. This acceptance of imperfection does not condone sin or justify sinful behavior but encourages hope through repentance and seeking Allah's forgiveness. The Prophet said, "By the One in Whose Hand my soul is! If you do not commit sins, Allah would replace you with a people who would



commit sins and seek forgiveness from Allah; and Allah will certainly forgive them."¹ Allah does not love sin but values those who repent sincerely. Adam (as) sinned in *Jannah* (Paradise) but distinguished himself by turning to Allah for forgiveness immediately (Quran 7:23). His act of repentance reflects humility and a genuine desire to correct his mistake.

In moments of weakness, individuals are reminded of Allah's encompassing mercy (Quran 5:39). Allah assures that He accepts repentance and forgives all sins (Quran 39:53). This verse offers hope to sinners, encouraging them not to despair of Allah's mercy. The Prophet highlighted that Allah's mercy surpasses His Wrath.² Despairing of Allah's mercy, seen as a major sin (Al-Munajjid, 2016) equating to disbelief (Quran 12:87) and going astray (Quran 15:56), reflecting a denial of His forgiveness and omnipotence. Allah encourages forgiveness in many places in the Quran (11:2-3, 24:31, 40:55, 46:2, 47:19, 66:8). The mercy of Allah has been bestowed upon His servants and they have been encompassed with His kindness. He is Forbearing and does not punish or destroy immediately; rather, He grants respite and encourages seeking of forgiveness (Quran 39:53, 5:74, 20:82, 3:135, 4:110). Except for one chapter, every Quranic chapter highlights Allah's attributes of Ar-Rahmaan (the Gracious) and Ar-Raheem (the Most-Merciful). This underscores Islam's focus on compassion and benevolence. Allah is consistently depicted as merciful and forgiving, not wrathful. Names related to His Mercy include *Al-Ghaffaar* (the Forgiver), *Al-Karim* (the Generous), *Al-Ghafoor* (the All-Forgiving), *Al-Halim* (the Forbearing), *Al-Afuww* (the Supreme Pardoner), and *Ar-Ra'oof* (the Compassionate). Muslims are reminded of Allah's Mercy when encouraged to seek forgiveness (Quran 9:104). A Hadith³ reveals that Allah rejoices at the repentance of believers, highlighting His grace and compassion. This divine quality reassures believers of Allah's acceptance and joy in their repentance, reinforcing the importance of seeking forgiveness. It instills hope and encourages spiritual growth, reflecting the compassionate nature of Islam.

¹ *Riyad as-Salihin* 1871, In-book reference: Book 19, *Hadith* 3, <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:1871>

² *Riyad as-Salihin* 419, In-book reference: Introduction, *Hadith* 419, <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:419>

³ *Riyad as-Salihin* 15, In-book reference: Introduction, *Hadith* 15, <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:15>



The Quran also offers numerous examples of various Prophets who sought Allah's forgiveness. For instance, it mentions Adam (as) seeking forgiveness in 7:23, Musa (as) in 7:151, and Yunus (as) in 21:87. These instances serve as powerful reminders for believers to seek forgiveness and guidance from Allah. Moreover, the Prophet himself serves as a role model for Muslims, as they are encouraged to emulate his actions. It is known that he would engage in repentance a hundred times a day,⁴ illustrating his unwavering commitment to seeking forgiveness and spiritual improvement. Additionally, the Quran instructs the Prophet that upon achieving victory, he should praise Allah and seek His forgiveness (Quran 110:1-3). This guidance emphasizes the importance of expressing gratitude and seeking forgiveness, even in moments of triumph and success. The gateway of repentance is accessible to the believers, until the sun rises from the west.⁵ and until one reaches the pangs of death.⁶ When individuals sincerely repent and turn to Allah, they are assured in the Quran that their sins will be expiated, offering them the opportunity to attain salvation (Quran 66:8). This divine promise provides solace and hope to those who seek forgiveness, reassuring them of the mercy and compassion of Allah. The Quran's affirmation of the expiation of sins and the admittance into Jannah serves as a source of encouragement for believers, inspiring them to seek repentance and strive for spiritual growth. The Prophet said: "Every son of Adam commits sin, and the best of those who commit sin are those who repent."⁷ Through His mercy towards humanity, Allah has opened the gate of repentance, commanding individuals to turn to Him each time they are overwhelmed by sin. Without this mercy, people would endure significant hardship and lack the motivation to draw closer to their Lord, losing all hope of His forgiveness and pardon. Repentance becomes essential as a result of human shortcomings and failings.

Forgiving others

Human beings are not infallible and may fall short in their dealings with others. As individuals hope for forgiveness for their own wrongdoings, they are encouraged to pardon others and overlook their transgressions to avoid seeking restitution on the Day of Resurrection, when good

⁴ Muslim 4/2076, *Hisn al-Muslim* 249, <https://sunnah.com/hisn:249>

⁵ *Mishkat al-Masabih* 2329 In-book reference: Book 9, *Hadith* 103, <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:2329>

⁶ *Sunan Ibn Majah* 4253 In-book reference: Book 37, *Hadith* 154, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4253>

⁷ *Sunan Ibn Majah* 4251, In-book reference: Book 37, *Hadith* 152, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4251>



deeds will be most crucial. Allah encourages forgiving others in several places in the Quran (3:134, 4:149, 16:126, 42:43, 57:21 and 64:14). The Islamic philosophy of *Tasaamuh*, rooted in 'turning the other cheek,' emphasizes forgiveness and understanding even in adversity. It encourages empathy, compassion, and letting go of resentment, promoting a culture of mutual respect and harmony. *Tasaamuh* fosters peaceful coexistence and strengthens social bonds, leading to a more inclusive and understanding society.

The Quran, Hadith, and Seerah emphasize the importance of forgiveness, inspiring Muslims to practice this virtue. Allah promises a lofty status for those who forgive others (Quran 42:40). The Ahadith also inform that Allah increases the honour⁸ and status of the one who forgives and forgives their sins.⁹ The Prophet ﷺ said: 'Someone who does not show mercy will not be shown mercy.'¹⁰ The Prophet ﷺ exemplified the virtue of forgiveness by never seeking personal revenge and always responding to adversity with dignity and restraint. Despite enduring mockery, abuse, and persecution from the Quraysh, he consistently chose forbearance over retaliation. A study indicated that R/S role models provided participants with an example they could follow on their path forward to a forgiveness disposition. Stories of how the Prophet Mohammed ﷺ had forgiven guided participants as he inspired them to forgiveness, in addition to helping them shape their identity as a person who gives and receives forgiveness (Heacock, 2017). Some examples of forgiveness from the Quran, the Hadith, and the Seerah are listed below:

Incident of Taif: During the Makkan period of Islam, the Prophet ﷺ journeyed to Taif to propagate the message of Islam. His message was met with hostility, and he was pelted with stones and expelled from the city. The angel of the mountain was dispatched by Allah to potentially punish the people of Taif. However, the Prophet ﷺ interceded, requesting their forgiveness despite the ill-treatment he endured (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002) and showed remarkable resilience in the face of adversity. This act of intercession by the Prophet ﷺ serves as a profound

⁸ *Sahih Muslim* 2588, In-book reference: Book 45, *Hadith* 90, USC-MSA web (English) reference: Book 32, *Hadith* 6264, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2588>

⁹ *Sunan Ibn Majah* 2693 In-book reference: Book 21, *Hadith* 79, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:2693>

¹⁰ *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* 95 In-book reference: Book 5, *Hadith* 12, <https://sunnah.com/adab:95>



example of mercy and forgiveness, illustrating his unwavering commitment to the principles of Islam.

Conquest of Makkah: Another powerful example of the Prophet's forgiving nature is his forgiveness towards many enemies who had persecuted him and his followers. Despite having the authority for revenge, he chose compassion and mercy. This included Hind and Wahshi, who were responsible for killing his beloved uncle Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib (ra) at the Battle of Uhud (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002). Additionally, the Prophet forgave his archenemy Abu Sufyan, granting amnesty and safety to those who sought refuge in his house, and also forgave 'Ikrimah bin Abu Jahl. This remarkable forgiveness not only demonstrated the Prophet's exceptional mercy but also set a powerful example for his followers (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002). His forgiving nature was crucial in the acceptance and spread of Islam.

Story of Yusuf (as): The Quran promotes forgiveness towards others and within one's own family. This emphasis is exemplified in the story of Yusuf (as), where the magnitude of injustice and wrongdoing committed by his own kin is vividly portrayed. Despite the conspiracy to harm him, Yusuf (as) refrains from blaming his brothers, even when he gains authority, opting instead to attribute the wrongdoing to Satan (12:100). This narrative serves as a powerful reminder of the virtue of forgiveness, especially within the family unit, and underscores the Quran's teachings on compassion and understanding.

Incident of Aisha (ra) and the slander: When Mistah ibn Uthathah engaged in gossip during the slander incident (*al-ifk*), and Allah revealed confirming the innocence of 'Aishah (ra), Abu Bakr, who had been supporting Mistah due to their familial relationship and his financial need, declared that he would no longer provide any support to Mistah after his remarks about 'Aishah (ra). Allah revealed verse 22 from Surah Noor, encouraging Abu Bakr (ra) to pardon and overlook so Allah could forgive in return.¹¹ Abu Bakr (ra) responded by continuing to provide Mistah with the expenditure which he used to give him before, as he sought Allah's forgiveness.

¹¹ *Sahih al-Bukhari* 4757 In-book reference: Book 65, *Hadith* 279, USC-MSA web (English) reference: Vol. 6, Book 60, *Hadith* 281, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4757>



The numerous examples of forgiveness in the Quran, Hadith, and Seerah offer profound lessons for believers, highlighting the power of pardoning others. These teachings emphasize the importance of forgiveness in fostering compassion, understanding, and reconciliation within the Muslim community. Forgiveness is a means of healing and moving forward, rather than endorsing wrongdoing. It helps release the burden of pain and prevents emotional pain and bitterness that can impact well-being and peace of mind. Forgiveness benefits both the victim and the forgiver, addressing persistent resentment that can lead to depression and anxiety (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000).

Self-forgiveness

Self-forgiveness can be defined as “a process acknowledging and working through one’s responsibility for one’s perceived transgression, but then releasing self-condemnation with its associated emotional, cognitive, and behavioural consequences” (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2020). Self-forgiveness was strongly correlated with enhanced psychosocial well-being (Davis, et. al., 2015; Cornish, Woodyatt, Morris, Conroy and Townsdin, 2018; Long, Chen, Potts, Hanson & VanderWeele, 2020b). There are three components of the self-forgiveness process: (1) accepting the right amount of responsibility, (2) repentance and making apologies/amends, and (3) releasing unhelpful negative thoughts and emotions (Exline, Wilt, Stauner, Harriott, & Saritoprak, 2017). These three concepts all pertain to the notion of forgiveness in Islam.

A conscience is a blessing from Allah, prompting remorse and acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoing, which is the first step in self-forgiveness. While humans are prone to mistakes, forgiving oneself is often more challenging than forgiving others. In such instances, Muslims are reminded not to despair of Allah’s Mercy (Quran 39:53-55) and emphasizes that the best sinners are those who repent often.¹² Repentance offers a clean slate and is essential for self-forgiveness. Succumbing to self-blame and despair can lead to negativity and hinder growth, playing into Satan's hands. Recognizing human fallibility and seeking forgiveness helps open doors to self-

¹² Related by *At-Tirmidhi* and *Ibn Majah* with a strong chain of narrators. Book 16, *Hadith* 41, English translation: Book 16, *Hadith* 1520, <https://sunnah.com/bulugh/16/41>



improvement and inner peace. The Quran emphasizes self-compassion and understanding that everyone errs, which aids in alleviating guilt and promotes healing and spiritual renewal.

Harboring doubts about Allah's mercy and feeling abandoned can harm well-being and lead to poorer mental health (Pargament et al., 1998; Manning-Walsh, 2005). Negative religious coping predicts lower life satisfaction (Hebert et al., 2009). Embracing repentance strengthens one's connection with Allah, fostering humility and gratitude. The Quran and Hadith emphasize that redemption is always possible, with the Prophet stating, "He who repents of a sin is like him who has committed no sin."¹³ Thus, self-forgiveness reflects resilience and aligns with Quranic and Sunnah teachings.

The Process of Asking for Forgiveness

Seeking forgiveness is a very simple process in Islam. It emphasizes the importance of acknowledging one's mistakes and seeking reconciliation with both the divine and fellow human beings. The act of seeking forgiveness, known as *istighfar*, involves expressing remorse for wrongdoing and actively striving to avoid repeating the same transgressions. This process is deeply rooted in the belief in the mercy and compassion of Allah, and it serves as a means of spiritual purification and growth. Furthermore, seeking forgiveness is not only a personal endeavour but also a communal one, as it fosters a sense of accountability and empathy within the Muslim community. The criteria for sincere repentance are as follows:

1. **Feeling remorse for past actions:** The feeling of emptiness when sinning is seen as a blessing, representing the innate realization and the need to return to Allah. It makes mankind realize that nothing satisfies the heart except Allah. The sense of guilt guides them back to Allah. Seeking forgiveness must be preceded by regret. Regret is considered repentance.¹⁴ If this regret is genuine, the individual will renounce the wrongdoing and make a firm resolution not to repeat it. In this way, their repentance will be thorough and will meet all the required criteria mentioned below. Regret can be experienced upon real-

¹³ *Mishkat al-Masabih* 2363, In-book reference: Book 9, *Hadith* 136, <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:2363>

¹⁴ *Sunan Ibn Majah* 4252, In-book reference: Book 37, *Hadith* 153, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4252>



izing one's ignorance about Allah (Quran 4:17-18), remembering Allah after heedlessness (Quran 3:133-136), Fear of Allah's plan after having felt secure from it (Quran 23:55-61), hoping for Allah's mercy after despairing (Quran 39:53-55) (Al-Munajjid, 2023).

2. **Renouncing the sin and committing to not repeat the offense:** Making a firm resolution to abandon the sin or wrongdoing and committing to never repeating it again is a significant step towards self-improvement and personal growth. This decision reflects a strong determination to rectify past mistakes and move forward with integrity. It requires introspection and self-discipline to recognize the harmful behaviour and take proactive steps to eliminate it from one's life. By consciously acknowledging the wrongdoing and pledging to steer clear of it in the future, one demonstrates a genuine desire for positive change and moral development.
3. **Seeking forgiveness from the one who was wronged:** Seeking forgiveness from the individual who was harmed, or restoring their rights (Al-Munajjid, 2023), is essential.

Acknowledging and taking responsibility for our actions is crucial. If direct reparation isn't possible, alternative forms of restitution can be considered. For example, publicly expressing remorse or making charitable donations on behalf of the harmed individual can demonstrate a commitment to amends and contribute positively. The goal is to ensure that harm is acknowledged and offset with meaningful acts of kindness and restitution.

4. **Turning to Allah and verbally seeking forgiveness:** Muslims are reminded to abstain from sin and refrain from committing them. However, when a sin is committed, it is crucial to seek repentance. Islam provides many avenues for seeking forgiveness and repentance. Allah also allows a respite of six hours after a bad deed is committed.¹⁵ If the individual sincerely regrets and seeks Allah's forgiveness, then the angel does not record the bad deed; otherwise, it is documented as a transgression.

¹⁵ *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabir* 7765. Grade: *Hasan* (fair) according to Al-Albani



Additionally, there are various acts of kindness also result in forgiveness from Allah. This is exemplified in the Hadith of the prostitute who offered water to a thirsty dog and was subsequently forgiven¹⁶, as well as in the case of the man who forgave the debts of the poor in the hope of Allah's forgiveness, and Allah forgave him.¹⁷ After every obligatory salah, which a Muslim is expected to perform five times a day, they are encouraged to seek Allah's forgiveness as taught by the Prophet who would seek forgiveness from Allah thrice after each prayer.¹⁸ There are many duas of the Prophets seeking forgiveness in the Quran (Quran 7:23, 7:151, and 21:87). Furthermore, the Prophet taught a number of duas for seeking forgiveness including the Dua which is known as *Sayyidul istighfar* (superior way of asking for forgiveness from Allah).¹⁹ Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah outlined ten ways in which punishment for a sin is lifted: repentance, praying for forgiveness, performing good deeds, supplications of other Muslims for a Muslim (such as during a funeral prayer), acts of charity done on behalf of the deceased, the intercession of the Prophet on the Day of Resurrection, expiation of sins through calamities, the torment, squeezing, and terror that occurs in the grave, the horrors, distress, and hardship of the Day of Resurrection, and the mercy and forgiveness of Allah.²⁰

Ramadan is a significant month for Muslims, focusing on introspection, prayer, and deepening faith. It encourages acts of kindness, self-discipline, and empathy. Fasting during Ramadan offers physical and spiritual purification, helping individuals reflect on their actions and seek forgiveness. A Hadith reports that anyone who fasts during Ramadan with sincere faith and in anticipation of Allah's reward will have their previous sins forgiven.²¹ Muslims are also encouraged to recite a particular dua seeking Allah's forgiveness in the last ten days of

¹⁶ *Sahih al-Bukhari* 3321, In-book reference: Book 59, *Hadith* 127, USC-MSA web (English) reference: Vol. 4, Book 54, *Hadith* 538, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3321>

¹⁷ *Sahih al-Bukhari* 3480, In-book reference: Book 60, *Hadith* 147 USC-MSA web (English) reference: Vol. 4, Book 55, *Hadith* 687, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3480>

¹⁸ *Riyad as-Salihin* 1415, In-book reference: Book 15, *Hadith* 8, <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:1415>

¹⁹ *Sahih al-Bukhari* 6306, In-book reference: Book 80, *Hadith* 3, USC-MSA web (English) reference: Vol. 8, Book 75, *Hadith* 318, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6306>

²⁰ *Majmoo' Fataawa Ibn Taymiyah*, vol. 7, p. 487-501.

²¹ *Sahih al-Bukhari* 38, In-book reference: Book 2, *Hadith* 31 USC-MSA web (English) reference: Vol. 1, Book 2, *Hadith* 38, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:38>



Ramadan.²² Whoever prays *Qiyamul Layl* (night prayer) during Ramadan with faith and hoping for reward, will also be forgiven his past sins.²³

5. **Following up the evil deeds with good ones:** The Quran states that Allah will turn sins into good deeds for those who repent, believe, and act righteously (25:70). This reflects redemption and the transformative power of sincere remorse and virtuous behavior, offering hope and encouragement for forgiveness and a righteous life. It highlights Allah's mercy and the importance of spiritual transformation, guiding the faithful in their spiritual and moral growth.
6. **Repenting before death approaches a person (Quran 4:17-18):** Repenting before death is a profound, personal experience involving reflection, introspection, and reconciliation. It allows individuals to confront their actions, seek forgiveness, and make amends, leading to peace and closure. This process, whether seeking forgiveness from others or finding inner peace, is significant in the final stages of life.

Reciprocating the Wrongdoing

The reciprocation of the wrong that has been perpetrated may be carried out in any of the following ways:

1. Harboring resentment and retaliating with further harm is not conducive to resolution and is thus impermissible. This approach risks shifting from being the wronged party to becoming the wrongdoer, perpetuating a cycle of negativity and conflict.
2. The second option, under *Qisas* (2:178) or seeking revenge (Quran 42:41), is permissible but forgiveness is preferred (Quran 42:40). It involves retaliating with equivalent harm, reflecting Islamic principles of proportional retribution. While it acknowledges varying levels of faith and tolerance, this approach is discouraged due to the risk of escalating harm beyond the original injury.
3. The third option is to forgive and move on without actively mending the situation. This may be necessary when significant harm has been inflicted, and there is concern about

²² *Riyad as-Salihin* 1195, In-book reference: Book 8, *Hadith* 205, <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:1195>

²³ *Sunan an-Nasa'i* 1602, In-book reference: Book 20, *Hadith* 5, <https://sunnah.com/nasai:1602>



recurrence. Islam emphasizes kindness, forgiveness, and faith in people's inherent goodness as key aspects of commendable character. However, it is crucial to note that being overly trusting and allowing oneself to be exploited is not advisable as advised by the Prophet in a Hadith.²⁴

4. The fourth and highly encouraged option is to forgive and forget, mending the relationship completely. The Quran advises repelling evil with good (Quran 41:34) and promises rewards for those who forgive and reconcile (Quran 42:40). Reconciliation reflects Ishaan, the Islamic concept of striving for excellence in good deeds. The Prophet exemplified this forgiveness, as did Abu Bakr (ra) with Mistah, following Allah's guidance to forgive in order to be forgiven.
5. Shariah promotes forgiveness but recognizes that some offenses may be too severe for human forgiveness, especially when significant harm is done. While forgiveness is encouraged, it is not compulsory for the oppressed, highlighting the importance of accountability and justice. Belief in ultimate justice on the Day of Judgment is central to Islamic ethics, where all actions will be evaluated. For offenses beyond human forgiveness, Allah's wisdom and justice will prevail. This belief deters heinous acts and reassures the wronged that their grievances will be addressed, shaping the moral fabric of Islam.

Psychological and Physical Benefits of forgiveness

Forgiveness, as advocated by religious beliefs, is not only morally commendable but also beneficial for overall well-being. Research links forgiveness to improvements in mental and physical health (Lutjen, Sifton & Flannelly, 2012; Toussaint, Worthington & Williams, 2015). Studies show that forgiveness, including its phases of admission, apology, and acceptance, positively impacts mental and physical health (Kulcsár, 2006; Akhtar & Barlow, 2018). It reduces depression, anxiety, stress, and anger, while enhancing life satisfaction, happiness, and psychological well-being (López et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2024). Forgiveness, along with

²⁴ *Sahih al-Bukhari* 6133, In-book reference: Book 78, *Hadith* 160, USC-MSA web (English) reference: Vol. 8, Book 73, *Hadith* 154, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6133>



religiosity, predicts life satisfaction and hope (Ayten & Karagöz, 2021; Amini et al., 2020). Research on religious individual's shows that forgiveness enhances positive emotions and improves relationships with wrongdoers (Kidwell, Wade & Blaedel, 2011). Studies show that forgiveness benefits health, improving psychological well-being, reducing negative emotions, and enhancing both mental and physical health (Rasmussen et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2019; Worthington & VanderWeele, 2019; Worthington & Sandage, 2016; Worthington, Griffin, & Provencher, 2018). An unwillingness to forgive can worsen physical and psychological issues (Jones Ross et al., 2017). Research links forgiveness to lower blood pressure and better cardiovascular recovery (Friedberg et al., 2007) and shows that increased forgiveness correlates with reduced stress and improved mental health (Toussaint et al., 2016). fMRI studies also associate forgiveness with positive emotional states (Ricciardi et al., 2013).

Benefits of forgiveness from an Islamic perspective

Repentance offers profound benefits for both this life and the Hereafter (Quran 66:8). It purifies the heart, promises forgiveness for past mistakes, and enhances good deeds. In this world, repentance provides inner peace, spiritual cleansing, and a renewed sense of purpose. It also demonstrates sincerity and commitment to self-improvement. In the Hereafter, repentance leads to divine mercy and spiritual elevation, absolving past misdeeds and amplifying positive actions. Overall, repentance facilitates spiritual growth and a more purposeful existence. Repentance rewards individuals with a fulfilling life marked by faith, contentment, peace of mind (Quran 11:3), and increased sustenance (Quran 11:52). Seeking Allah's forgiveness relieves distress, alleviates anxiety, and provides unexpected blessings.²⁵ Forgiveness helps avoid sin by steering clear of tempting environments²⁶ and influences.²⁷ It also supports engaging in righteous deeds and adhering to obedience (Quran 20:82), deepening faith and realigning with Islamic teachings. Ultimately, repentance purifies the soul and seeks divine mercy, emphasizing humility and accountability in spiritual growth. Transgression is seen as a means of purification and is rewarded by Allah. Believers benefit from both good and adversity, remaining grateful and

²⁵ *Riyad as-Salihin* 1873, In-book reference: Book 19, *Hadith* 5, <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:1873>

²⁶ *Sunan Ibn Majah* 3984, In-book reference: Book 36, *Hadith* 59, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:3984>

²⁷ *Jami' at-Tirmidhi* 2395, In-book reference: Book 36, *Hadith* 93, <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:2395>



patient.²⁸ Forgiveness and reconciliation are linked to *Taqwa* (Quran 2:237), which encompasses righteousness, piety, and God-consciousness. Forgiving others and seeking reconciliation reflect deep moral and spiritual awareness, aligning with *Taqwa* and nurturing a virtuous life. Such forgiveness and purity of heart are traits of the people of Paradise.²⁹

Conclusion

The study explored forgiveness as a form of positive religious coping in clinical settings. Islamic teachings offer effective means to reduce distress, providing pathways for seeking and granting forgiveness, which fosters spiritual and emotional relief. Key advantages of Islamic forgiveness include letting go of resentment, improving relationships, resolving conflicts, reducing stress, and enhancing psychological resilience. Forgiveness in Islam also aligns with spiritual goals, deepening purpose and fulfilment. It provides moral and ethical guidelines beneficial in counselling, helping individuals develop self-awareness and empathy. Incorporating these principles into therapeutic practices can offer a holistic approach to mental and emotional well-being.

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²⁸ *Sahih Muslim* 2999, In-book reference: Book 55, *Hadith* 82 USC-MSA web (English) reference: Book 42, *Hadith* 7138, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2999>

²⁹ *Musnad Ahmad* 12697. Source: *Sahih* (authentic) according to Al-Arna'ut.



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