Virtues of The Prayers for Forgiveness – Imam Hasan al-Basri (RA)

The act of seeking forgiveness is what gives us the opening we need after feeling overwhelmed by the burden of sin. Forgiveness means a way out, a second chance, a feeling of hope with which to turn a new page in life. It is through the seeking of forgiveness that we begin to understand that there is no reason whatsoever to despair of the mercy of Allah. Islam encourages us to not run away in fear of Allah but rather to turn toward Allah the same way a baby would run into its mother’s lap. So lovingly does Allah, Most High, address His sinful servants: “Say: O My servants—those (of you) who have committed (sins in great) excess against their own souls—never despair of the mercy of Allah! For, indeed, Allah forgives sins, one and all. Indeed, it is He who is the All-Forgiving, the Mercy-Giving. So turn in penitence to your Lord. And submit yourselves to Him.” (Al-Qur’an 39:53–54)

This collection of seventy prayers for forgiveness [istighfarat] are attributed to one of the greatest spiritual luminaries of the past, Imam Hasan al-Basri, and it has been presented to offer a way for us to navigate through the complications and pitfalls of this life. Set out in Arabic script, with adjoining translation in English. Below is the event that took place between Imam Hasan al-Basri and eight men he met in Arafat:

Imam Hasan al Basri says:

I had always wished to see a friend or dear servant of Allah, either while awake or in a dream, so that I could ask him of a need of mine, until one year, while I was standing in Arafat at noon, I suddenly noticed eight people by the Arak (trees) in the vicinity of the Valley of Numān facing the Mount of the Valley of Sakharât. I resolved that they are the ones I was seeking, so I approached them and greeted them, to which they responded most cordially. Among them was elderly man whose face Allah had illuminated and its brilliance was ascending into the horizon. I sat with them and felt little in myself when I observed the calmness and tranquillity they possessed within them. Then one of them stood up, made call for prayer, and then made the call to commence. At this the elderly man proceeded forth and led them in prayer. I Prayed with them, and I knew that there was no prayer - nor would there be any- recorded in my book of deeds with a value like this one. After the prayer, he faced in the direction of Kàba and then said: "For Allah is abundant praise" I did not hear him say anything other than that. I feared that my opportunity to be with them [and benefit from them] would pass, or that they would soon leave me, so I said to the one next to me "By Allah, the One Who has chosen you, how have you achieved this [great] status and [moral] excellence?"

His face changed, and he opened his eyes [in surprise], upon which the elderly man said to him, "Whomever Allah guides, he is truly guided. Show him the way; may Allah have mercy on you." So the one beside me said to me, "I used to recite the prayers of forgiveness that save from the Hellfire' during three nights." I asked as to exactly what these prayers were and in which nights they were recited? He said, "I recite them on the nights of the seventh, ninth, tenth of Dhū’l Hijja, and if the one reciting them really knows what he is reciting and what words he is uttering, it is incumbent upon Allah to provide him with security on the day of great grief [Judgement Day], and to distinguish him with [His] mercy and friendship." I said, "Teach me these prayers; may Allah Most High have mercy on you." So he said to me, they are....

The Narrator, Imam Hasan al-Basri, born in 21 AH and brought up in the house of Umm Salama (ra), had the opportunity to live with many of the Companions (ra). With his knowledge of the Qur’an and Hadith he excelled many of the learned men of his time. Thabit ibn Qurra says, “In his learning and piety, forbearance and restraint, frankness and large-heartedness, insight and sound judgment, he resembled a bright star.” The reason Hasan al-Basri’s words carried weight with his audience was that he was not simply a preacher, but a man with a noble disposition and soul. His speeches had a magnetism that no other mentor or scholar of Basra or Kufa could attempt to surpass. Whenever he lectured on the hereafter or described the days of the Companions (ra), the eyes of his audience would be seen brimming with tears. When he passed away on Friday 5th of Rajab 110 AH, at the age 89, the entire population of Basra attended his funeral, so that for the first time in the history of Basra the Jami Masjid of the city remained empty at the hour of the Asr prayer.
Prayers for Forgiveness By Imam Hassan Al-Basri

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that my body, empowered by the good health that You had granted, was able to commit; every sin that came within the reaches of my power only due to the grace of Your bounties; every sin to which my hand, nourished by Your ample sustenance, extended. And while sinning, I hid myself behind Your veil from the people; and when fearing You, while engrossed in my sin, I relied on Your assurance of safety and forgiveness; and I took refuge in You, with Your clemency, not to smite me, and I depended on You, with Your noble countenance and pardon, to forgive me.

So send blessings and peace, O my Lord, upon our Master Muhammad, and upon the family of our Master Muhammad, and forgive my sin, O Best of those who forgive!

Note: This ending prayer follows each one of the seventy prayers in the actual litany but has only been mentioned once in this translated edition.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that invites me to Your anger, or draws me near Your displeasure, or makes me inclined to that which You have prohibited, or distances me from [the bliss and success] to which You have invited me.

Note: This ending prayer follows each one of the seventy prayers in the actual litany but has only been mentioned once in this translated edition.
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin into which I, in my deviance, lured one of Your creation, or which I, with my cunning, deceived him into doing—hence teaching him such wicked deeds that he was previously unaware of, and making attractive to him those that he was aware of. Now I am to meet You tomorrow, with my burden of sins along with the burdens of others’ sins.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that calls to deviance; for every sin that leads from the path of guidance; for every sin that diminishes abundant wealth; for every sin that obliterates long-possessed property and inherited family wealth; for every sin that deprives me of honorable repute; and for every sin that drives away my friends and family.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin in which I exhausted my limbs, by day and by night—all the while keeping myself hidden, out of shame from Your servants, with Your covering over me; and indeed, there is nothing to cover my sins but what You cover me with.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin with which my enemies intended to disgrace me, but You turned their plotting away from me and did not assist them in disgracing me, as though I were Your obedient servant; and You sustained me until it seemed as though I were Your friend. Until when, O my Lord, will I disobey You and You continue giving me respite? Long indeed have I disobeyed You and You have not punished me; and long indeed have I, with all my evil deeds, beseeched You and You have granted me my requests. What meager thanks of mine can measure up, in Your sight, to even one of Your many blessings upon me?
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin for which I presented my repentance before You; and regarding which I stood before You swearing an oath in Your name and called Your friends from among Your servants to be my witnesses—that I would never return to disobeying You. But when Satan with his cunning tempted me to return to it; and Your forsaking me [due to Your anger over my impiety] caused me to [despairingly] waver toward it; and my lower self-invited me to disobey You once more; I hid myself in shame from Your servants, but openly and daringly committed sins before You, though I knew full well that no covering nor any closed door could conceal me from You and no veil could hide me from Your sight. I still defied You by disobediently doing what You had prohibited to me; but [despite my iniquity], You did not remove Your covering from me, but treated me equal to Your pious servants, as though I had always been an obedient servant and swift to fulfill Your every command and fearful of Your warnings. I remained obscure in front of Your servants, and none beside You knew my secret. You did not single me out from Your servants with a mark of disgrace, but showered upon me blessings like theirs; and with this You distinguished me over them as though I were, in Your sight, of a status like theirs. All this was owing only of Your forbearance and abundant blessings—generous grace from You to me. For You then, O my Lord, belongs all praise. I ask from You, O Allah, just as You have covered my evil deeds in this world, that You not humiliate me with them on the Day of judgment. [Forgive my sins,] O Most Merciful of the merciful!
(8) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin for which I spent the night in sleeplessness, savoring the pleasure of soon committing it and waiting in eager anticipation of its realization and fulfillment—until when morning came, I presented myself before You in the guise of the pious, while concealing in my heart what was against Your pleasure. [Forgive me,] O Lord of the Worlds!

(9) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin by which I wronged one of Your friends and assisted one of Your enemies; or of which I spoke favorably against Your liking, or upon which I rode away from Your obedience; or to which I advanced in open defiance of Your command.

(10) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that breeds rancor, for every sin that causes calamity to strike, for every sin that makes my enemies to rejoice at my misfortune, for every sin that removes the coverings [from my faults and the faults of others], and for every sin that withholds rain from the heavens.

(11) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that diverted me from the way to which You had guided me; or from doing what You had commanded me and avoiding what You had forbidden me; or from doing anything to which You had directed me, in which there
would have been for me prosperity and attainment of Your pleasure, Your love, and Your nearness.

(12) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I forgot but You recorded; that I made little of but You noted; that I openly committed but You quietly concealed—and if I were to repent to You for it, You would surely forgive it.

(13) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin for which, even before its completion, I anticipated Your swift punishment, but You granted me respite and draped over me a covering, yet I spared no effort in trying to tear it away from myself.

(14) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that You prohibited to me but I opposed You by committing; and every sin that You forewarned me of but I remained firm in committing; and every sin that You deemed abominable but my lower self-made attractive to me.

(15) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that turns away from me Your mercy or causes Your vengeance to befall me, or deprives me of Your generosity, or takes away from me Your blessings.
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I reproached or condemned one of Your creation for committing, but then myself plunged into and brazenly committed before You.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin for which I repented to You and then embarked on committing again; but then I felt ashamed before You and fearful of You while engrossed in it, so I invoked Your forgiveness for it once more, but [in my weakness] returned to it yet again.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that overtook me and became unavoidable for me when I took a covenant with You, or made a promise to You, or took an oath by You in regard to a responsibility to one of Your creation, and then I broke it without any excuse; it was in fact my arrogance that made me step down from fulfilling it and my insolence that made me reject observing it.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that overcame me [when I abused] a bounty You had bestowed upon me, using it to embolden myself in disobeying You, opposing Your command, and insolently advancing toward sin despite Your warnings [of punishment].
(20) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin in which I gave preference to my base desire over Your obedience and my passion over Your command—thus I contented myself with Your wrath and subjected myself to Your displeasure, though You had forbidden me, presented Your admonition to me, and established the proof of it to me through Your warnings [of punishment in Your revelations]. I seek Your forgiveness, O Allah, and repent to You.

(21) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I knew myself to have committed, then forgot about or remembered, or that I had committed intentionally or unintentionally; and I have no doubt that it is a sin about which You will question me and for which my soul is held captive to You, even if I have become forgetful and heedless of it.

(22) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I committed in front of You knowing full well that You were watching me. I intended to turn to You in repentance for it, but I was made to forget to invoke Your forgiveness—it was Satan that made me forget.

(23) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I committed despite knowing that I would be asked about it, and I was aware of it, even if I was unaware of it when I committed it. I seek Your forgiveness.
(23) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin upon which I embarked, thinking well of You—that You would forgive me for it and not punish me. I thus audaciously continued in committing it while relying, with my knowledge of Your generosity on You not to disgrace me after having concealed it for me.

(24) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin by which I deserved rejection of my prayers, and refusal of their acceptance, and failure in my hopes being fulfilled, and severance of hope in Your mercy.

(25) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that brings about illnesses and emaciating diseases, and warrants punishments and misery and will be a cause of grief and remorse on judgment Day.

(26) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that leaves grief on its heel, that causes remorse, that holds back sustenance, and that prevents acceptance of [my] prayers.

(27) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I praised with my tongue, or that I resolved upon in my heart, or that my soul took pleasure in, or that my tongue endorsed, or that I effected with my actions, or that I wrote with my hand, or that I committed in any way or caused one of Your servants to commit.
(28) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I committed in solitude during my night and my day yet You lowered over me a covering so that none besides You—O All Compelling One—could see me engaged in it. My soul thus fell into confusion, and I wavered between abandoning it out of fear of You and committing it out of good hopes in Your mercy; but my lower self-adorned it for me such that I boldly committed it, though being aware that, in doing so, I was disobeying You.

(29) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I took to be petty but You took to be grave, that I deemed to be small but You deemed to be great, and in which my own ignorance embroiled me.

(30) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin by which I misguided one of Your creation, or through which I mistreated one of them, or which my lower self-made seemingly attractive to me, or which I pointed out to another person, or to which I steered someone besides myself or in which I intentionally persisted, or to which I remained stubbornly attached out of my foolishness.
(31) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin by which I betrayed my trust [of obedience], or whose perpetration my lower self-commended to me, or by which I violated the rights of my own body, or in doing which I gave precedence to my base desires over obedience to You, or from which I gained excessive delight, or which I strove to do for the sake of another, or to which I lured my followers, or on which I remained stubborn against one who tried to prevent me, or in committing which I overcame one who tried to obstruct me or subdued him through my cunning, or into which my evil tendencies caused me to slip.

(32) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin for which I employed such cunning that invokes Your wrath, or in committing which I overcame those in Your obedience, or by which I lured—or intended to lure—one of Your creation into disobeying You. And though I made it seem to Your servants that through my endeavors I seek You [and Your pleasure], my true aim was to disobey You, and as such my desire was turned away from Your obedience.

(33) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that You recorded against me because of my conceit, or ostentation, or desire to be heard, or malicious intentions, or malice, or rancor, or treachery, or pride, or exultancy, or intemperate mirth, or obstinacy or envy or insolence, or ungratefulness, or fervor for other than Your sake, or bigotry, or acquiescence to sin, or blind hope, or extreme avarice, or generous spending for sin, or oppression, or unwarranted cunning, or theft, or
lying, or backbiting, or idle amusement, or fruitless talk, or calumny, or useless play, or any such activity that by doing sins are reaped and in pursuing is destruction and grief.

(34) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin in doing which I feared someone besides You, and opposed Your friends, and befriended Your enemies, and forsook those beloved to You, and placed myself in the path of Your anger.

(35) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness, through the power You possess over me and over everything, for every sin that I was destined, in Your eternal knowledge, to commit.

(36) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin for which I repented to You, but which I then returned to, breaking the covenant between me and You, out of my insolence and my knowledge of Your abundant forgiveness.

(37) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that has drawn me near to Your punishment, or has distanced me from Your reward, or has hidden from me Your mercy, or has sullied for me Your blessings.
(38) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin by which I—while acquiring some good You had promised—permitted what You had forbidden or forbade what You had permitted. For extreme greed had entered into my heart, and because of it I was deprived of some good that I could have deserved, or by it I deprived another soul of some good that it deserved.

(39) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I committed with the good health You granted me, or gained the ability to do because of Your endless blessings, or became more bold in doing due to Your keeping away Your vengeance from me, or toward which I extended my hands by means of Your plentiful sustenance; or any sin that I committed, initially doing some good action seeking therewith Your noble Countenance, but into which my soul’s covetousness mixed what invoked Your displeasure.

(40) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin to which my search for excuses and my craving [for the world] invited me, and thus I sought to commit it and so made lawful for myself what You had decreed unlawful.

(41) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I committed while thinking that [I was]-serving in the case that I committed, or [I was] already thinking and I committed a sin, or was in a situation I committed a sin.
(41) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that remained hidden from Your creation but did not escape You—for which I repented to You and You forgave me. But I then returned to it, yet You still kept it concealed for me.

(42) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin toward which I walked with my legs, or toward which I extended my hands, or which I closely observed with my eyes, or which I carefully listened to with my ears, or which I squandered of the sustenance You had provided me. Then, despite my disobedience, I asked You for more sustenance, and You provided it to me. Then again, I used Your sustenance in disobeying You, but You kept Your covering over me. Yet again I asked You for more, and You still did not deprive me. Then after Your increase, I openly transgressed against You, but You did not humiliate me. I have thus constantly persisted in disobeying You, and You have constantly remained clement and benevolent with me—O Most Benevolent of the benevolent!

(43) O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin, the minor of which warrants Your painful punishment, the major of which causes Your severe punishment to descend, and the committing of which hastens Your vengeance, and the persisting in which brings an end to Your bounty.
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that nobody knew of but You, and that nobody was aware of but You – it is among those grave sins from which nothing but Your pardon can save me, and which nothing but Your forgiveness and forbearance can encompass.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that removes blessings, and causes punishments to descend, and violates the sacred, and prolongs illness, and hastens anguish, and leaves behind it remorse.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that obliterates good deeds, and multiplies evil deeds, and causes punishments to descend, and angers You, O Lord of the Heavens!

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that You are most worthy to forgive, for You were the One most noble in keeping it concealed. Indeed, You are all-worthy of reverent fear and all-worthy of granting forgiveness.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin by which I wronged one of Your friends while assisting Your enemies and siding with those in Your disobedience against those in Your obedience.
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin in which my deep engrossment cloaked me with humiliation and made me despair of the existence of Your mercy; or it was despair that prevented me from returning to obeying You, as I realized the severity of my crime and mired hopelessly in my low opinion of myself.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that would have brought my destruction had it not been for Your forbearance and mercy; and would have entered me into the Abode of Perdition [Hell] had it not been for Your favor; and would have taken me down the path of deviance had it not been for Your guidance.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin whose perpetration brings loss of hope, and rejection of prayer, and consecutive calamities, and successive anxieties, and multiplied sorrows.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that turns my prayer away from You, and prolongs my suffering of Your displeasure, and shortens my hope in You.
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that kills the heart, and incites anxiety and preoccupies the mind, and pleases Satan, and angers the All-Merciful.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that leaves on its heel despair of Your mercy and despondency of Your forgiveness, and deprivation of Your vast treasures.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin for which I despised myself out of reverence for You. I expressed my repentance to You and You accepted it. I invoked Your pardon and You granted it. Then my base desires returned me to my old habits, as I only longed for Your abundant mercy and generous forgiveness, and forgot Your threats [of punishment], and entertained hopes of Your gracious promises [of reward].

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that will blacken my face on the day when the faces of Your friends will be whitened and the faces of Your enemies will be blackened—when Your enemies will turn, one against another, in reproach, and You will say, “Dispute not with each other in My presence, for I have already sent to you advanced warning” [Quran 50:28].
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that I understood to be a sin and, out of shame before You, remained silent when remembering it; and every sin that I concealed in my heart but You knew of in me, for You know what is secret and what is still more hidden.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that makes me detestable to Your servants, and repels from me Your friends; or that estranges me to those in Your obedience, due to the disquietude of my disobedience, my mounting grief and my perpetration of sins.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that calls to unbelief and prolongs indecisiveness in thought, and leads to poverty and brings on hardship, and prevents prosperity and rends the covering from over my sins, and prevents ease.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that draws nearer [to people] their appointed times of death, and severs hopes [in Your mercy], and spoils good deeds.
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that pollutes what You have made pure, and exposes of me what You have covered [of my wrongdoings], or makes repulsive what You have beautified in me.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin because of which Your promise cannot be obtained, and in the presence of which safety from Your wrath cannot be felt, Your mercy cannot descend, and Your permanent favors cannot be attained.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin in doing which I concealed myself from Your servants in the light of day but openly and daringly opposed You by committing in the darkness of night. This I did while knowing that secrets are open to You, and that the hidden is exposed to You, and that nothing can protect me from Your punishment, nor can anything—neither my wealth nor my children—avail me before You, except that I come to You with a sound heart.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that causes forgetfulness of Your remembrance; or that brings on its heel heedlessness of Your warning and drives me to senselessly feel safe from Your devising; or that causes me to despair of the good reward You possess.
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that overtook me because I disrespectfully complained and objected to You for withholding Your subsistence from me, and because I turned away from You and inclined instead toward Your [powerless] servants in submissiveness and earnest petition; whereas You had let me hear Your clear statement in Your Book, “But they humbled not themselves to their Lord, nor did they submissively entreat [Him]” [Quran 23:76].

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that remained with me because, when anxiety struck, I sought aid, succor, and support from someone besides You.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin to which fear of someone besides You drove me, and it [the fear] called me to earnestly entreat one of Your creation or inclined me to yearn for what others besides You possessed—so I preferred to obey them and disobey You in order to lay hand on what they had, though I was aware that I am in need of You and that I am never free and independent of Your support.
O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin that my soul made seem to me trivial and small, and continued to make seem insignificant, until it finally entangled me in it.

O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for every sin of mine, I ask You to forgive me all the injustices against Your servants that You have enumerated against me; for Your servants have against me many claims of violated rights and injustices to which I am held captive. O Allah, even if these evil deeds of mine are many in number, they are a paltry few in sight of Your forgiveness. O Allah, any male or female servant of Yours who has against me a claim of injustice, that I forcibly seized from him something of his land or wealth or honour or body—whether he was absent or present, or whether he or his representatives demanded from me compensation for it but neither was I able to return it to him nor did I seek to be pardoned for it—I ask that You, with Your benevolence, generosity and abundant treasures, satisfy them on my behalf; and do not give them over me power to take away and decrease
my good deeds. For indeed, You possess what can satisfy them on my behalf and I do not. And do not make a way for their bad deeds to overcome my good deeds on the Day of judgment.

[CONCLUDING PRAYERS]

I seek forgiveness from Allah—besides Whom there is nothing worthy of worship—the Living, the Self-Subsisting Sustainer of all creation, And I turn to Him seeking forgiveness that increases one hundred million times with every blink of the eye and with every breath, that remains as long as Allah remains and lasts as long as Allah lasts; for His Dominion will never—for all of eternity—come to an end, cease, or die away. O Allah, accept this prayer.

O Allah, make mine a prayer that meets with Your acceptance and a request that meets with Your blessing. Indeed You have power over all things.

O Allah, send blessings on our Master Muhammad, and upon the family of our Master Muhammad, and upon his Companions; and grant them abundant peace. Grant them abundant blessings and peace that remain as long as You remain and last as long as You last, that have bounds only You can know—blessings that please You and him, and by which You are pleased with us, O Lord of the worlds! And for this, all praise is due to Allah.

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of All-Eminence, [who is far above] what they claim. And peace be upon all the Messengers. And all Praise is due to Allah, the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds.