

## **Repentance**

Two men once visited a holy man to ask his advice. "We have done wrong actions," they said, "and our consciences are troubled. Can you tell us what we must do so that we may be forgiven and feel clear of our guilt?"

"Tell me your wrong-doings, my sons," said the old man.

The first man said, "I have committed a great and grievous sin."

"What about you?" the holy man asked the second.

"Oh," he said, "I have done quite a number of wrong things, but they are all quite small and not at all important."

The holy man considered the matter for a while. "This is what you must do," he said at last. "Each of you must go and bring me a stone for each of his misdeeds."

Off the men went. Presently, the first man came back staggering with an enormous boulder, so heavy that he could hardly lift it, and with a groan he let it fall at the feet of the holy man. Then along came the second man, cheerfully carrying a bag of small pebbles. This he also laid at the feet of the saint.

"Now," said the holy man, "take all these stones and put them back where you found them." The first man shouldered his rock again, and staggered back to the place from which he had brought it. But the second man could only remember where a few of his pebbles had lain.

After some time, the second man came back and said that the task was too difficult. "You must know, my son, that sins are like these stones. If a man has committed a great sin, it lies heavy on his conscience; but if he is truly sorry, he is forgiven and the load is taken away. But if a man is constantly doing small things that are wrong, he does not feel any very great load of guilt, and so is not sorry and remains a sinner. So you see, it is as important to avoid little sins as big ones."