



**The Necessity of Ikhlas
(Sincerity) in Deeds)**

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All praises and thanks are due to Allâh, Lord of all that exists. I bear witness that none except Him has the right to be worshipped, Alone with sincerity in the religion. I bear witness that Muhammad is Allâh's slave and Messenger and His truthful and trustworthy Messenger. May Allâh's peace and blessings be on Muhammad, his progeny, his Companions and all those who followed them perfectly until the Day of Resurrection.

O Muslims! Fear Allâh the Exalted and hold to *Ikhlas* (sincerity) for Allâh's Face in your actions and statements. Al-Bukhâri and Muslim narrated that 'Umar رضى الله عنه said, "I heard the Messenger of Allâh ﷺ say:

«إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَّا نَوَىٰ» .

“Verily, the reward of deeds depends upon the *Niyyah* (intentions) and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended.”

Therefore, every action that was not performed for Allâh's Sake only, is annulled and fruitless in this life and the Hereafter.

There are two implications for the word *Niyyah* according to the scholars. One of them pertains to distinguishing acts of worship from acts of habit. For instance, there is a difference between taking a bath to remove impurity and taking a bath to cool off or to clean the body. Further, there is a different *Niyyah* for *Zhur* prayer than *Asr* prayer and fasting during Ramadhân in contrast to fasting in other months.

The second meaning for *Niyyah* pertains to distinguishing between the intention behind the act, if it is directed to Allâh Alone or to Allâh and others. This meaning carries with it happiness or misery and reward or punishment. Two different persons might perform the same act, paying equal effort to it. Yet, one of them earns a reward while the other earns no reward, or even punishment, because the intentions were different in each case. Allâh the Exalted said:

﴿مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصَلُّهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا ۝ وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا﴾

“Whoever desires the quick-passing (transitory enjoyment of this world), We readily grant him what We will for whom We like. Then, afterwards, We have appointed for him Hell; he will burn therein disgraced and rejected (far away from Allāh’s Mercy). And whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it, with the necessary effort due for it (i.e. does righteous deeds of Allāh’s obedience) while he is a believer (in the Oneness of Allāh — Islāmīc Monotheism) — then such are the ones whose striving shall be appreciated, (thanked and rewarded by Allāh).” (17:18,19)

Some scholars said that this is why people vary in grades; it is in accordance to the intentions behind their actions, not because of merely fasting and praying. For instance, *Hijrah* (migration) from the area of *Kufr* (disbelief) to the area of Islam is one of the best righteous deeds there are. But it will truly be a *Hijrah* by having the intention in the heart to do so (in Allāh’s Cause), not just because one departs from one area to another for worldly purpose or for no particular reason. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

«فَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ فَهِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ لِدُنْيَا يُصِيبُهَا أَوْ امْرَأَةٍ يَنْكِحُهَا، فَهِجْرَتُهُ إِلَىٰ مَا هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِ».

“So whoever emigrated to Allāh and His Messenger, then his migration was to Allāh and His Messenger. And whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his migration was for what he emigrated for.”

In this *Hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ states that *Hijrah* depends on the intention and *Niyah* behind it. Therefore, whoever emigrated to the land of Islam on account of his love for Allāh and His Messenger ﷺ, to

learn Islam and be able to practice it in public, since he was unable to do so in the land of *Shirk*, then he truthfully emigrated to Allâh and His Messenger ﷺ. Allâh has promised great rewards from Him for this righteous act.

As for he who emigrates from the land of *Shirk* to the land of Islam seeking worldly benefits or for the purpose of marrying a certain woman, then he did not emigrate for Allâh and His Messenger. Rather, he is a merchant or seeker of marriage. When the Prophet ﷺ was asked about the different intentions behind fighting, such as showing off and being courageous to defend one's tribe, and so forth, he gave this answer:

قَالَ ﷺ: «مَنْ قَاتَلَ لِتُكُونَ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ هِيَ الْعُلْيَا فَهُوَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ».

“He who fights so that Allâh's Word is the highest, then he is fighting in the Cause of Allâh.”

Further, *An-Nasai*'î narrated from Abu Umamah رضى الله عنهما that a man came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked him, “What about a man who joined *Jihâd* to earn reward, as well as fame? What will he earn?” The Messenger of Allâh said, “Nothing.” He (ﷺ) then said:

«إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَقْبَلُ إِلَّا مَا كَانَ خَالِصًا وَابْتِغَىٰ بِهِ وَجْهَهُ».

“Verily, Allâh only accepts what was performed in sincerity to Him seeking His Face.”

There is no doubt that dying as a martyr in Allâh's Cause, learning beneficial knowledge and teaching it and spending money in Allâh's Cause are some of the best righteous deeds there are and the hardest to perform. When one's intention behind performing any of these acts is corrupt, he will earn the Fire! Muslim narrated that Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه said that he heard the Prophet ﷺ say:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ يَقُولُ: «إِنَّ أَوَّلَ النَّاسِ يُقْضَىٰ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَلَيْهِ رَجُلٌ اسْتُشْهِدَ فَأُتِيَ بِهِ فَعَرَفَهُ نَعْمَهُ فَعَرَفَهَا. فَقَالَ: مَا عَمِلْتَ فِيهَا؟ قَالَ: قَاتَلْتُ فِيكَ حَتَّى اسْتُشْهِدْتُ، قَالَ: كَذَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّكَ

قَاتَلَتْ لِأَنْ يُقَالَ: جَرِيءٌ، فَقَدْ قِيلَ. ثُمَّ أُمِرَ بِهِ فَسُجِبَ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ حَتَّى
 أُلْقِيَ فِي النَّارِ. وَرَجُلٌ تَعَلَّمَ الْعِلْمَ وَعَلَّمَهُ وَقَرَأَ الْقُرْآنَ فَأَتَى بِهِ فَعَرَفَهُ نِعْمَةً
 فَعَرَفَهَا. فَقَالَ: مَا عَمِلْتَ فِيهَا؟ قَالَ: تَعَلَّمْتُ الْعِلْمَ وَعَدَّمْتُهُ وَقَرَأْتُ الْقُرْآنَ
 فِيكَ، قَالَ: كَذَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّكَ تَعَلَّمْتَ الْعِلْمَ لِيُقَالَ: عَالِمٌ وَقَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ
 لِيُقَالَ: قَارِءٌ فَقَدْ قِيلَ. ثُمَّ أُمِرَ بِهِ فَسُجِبَ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ حَتَّى أُلْقِيَ فِي النَّارِ.
 وَرَجُلٌ وَسَّعَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَأَعْطَاهُ مِنْ أَصْنَافِ الْمَالِ فَأَتَى بِهِ فَعَرَفَهُ نِعْمَةً فَعَرَفَهَا.
 فَقَالَ: مَا عَمِلْتَ فِيهَا؟ فَقَالَ: مَا تَرَكْتُ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ تُحِبُّهُ أَنْ يُنْفَقَ فِيهِ إِلَّا
 أَنْفَقْتُ فِيهَا لَكَ، قَالَ: كَذَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّكَ فَعَلْتَ لِيُقَالَ: هُوَ جَوَادٌ فَقَدْ قِيلَ. ثُمَّ
 أُمِرَ بِهِ فَسُجِبَ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ حَتَّى أُلْقِيَ فِي النَّارِ».

“The first person who a sentence passed against him will be found guilty on the Day of Resurrection, is a man who died as a *Shahid* (martyr). He will be summoned, and Allâh will remind him of His bounties on him, and he will attest to them. Allâh will ask him, ‘What have you done in return?’ The man will say, ‘I fought for Your Sake, until I died as a *Shahid*.’ Allâh will say, ‘You have said a lie! You only fought so that it will be said, ‘He is brave,’ and it was said (meaning, you have received your payment)!’ Then, he will be sentenced to be dragged on his face until he is thrown in the Fire. Also, a man who learned knowledge and taught it, and who also read the Qur’ân, will be summoned, and Allâh will remind him of His bounties on him, and he will attest to them. Allâh will ask him, ‘What have you done as regards them?’ He will say, ‘I have learned knowledge and taught it, and I also read the Qur’ân for Your sake.’ Allâh will reply, ‘You have said a lie! You only learned (the knowledge) so that it will be said, ‘*Aalim* (a scholar),’ and you have read the Qur’ân so that it will be said, ‘*Qarii* (a reader of the Qur’ân).’ And it was said!’ He will be sentenced to be dragged on his face until he is thrown in the Fire. And a man whom Allâh has given abundance (in wealth and provisions) and

different types of possessions will be summoned and Allâh will remind him of His bounties on him and he will attest to them. Allâh will ask him, ‘What have you done as regards them?’ He will reply, ‘I left no path that You like spending on, but I spent on it for Your sake.’ Allâh will reply, ‘You have said a lie! You only spent so it will be said, ‘He is generous,’ and it was said.’ Then he will dragged on his face until he is thrown in the Fire.”

When Mu‘awiyah bin Abu Sufyan, رضى الله عنه, heard this *Hadith*, he cried and said, “Allâh and His Messenger ﷺ have said the truth.”

﴿ مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا نُوَفِّ إِلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فِيهَا وَهُمْ فِيهَا لَا يُبْخَسُونَ
○ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا النَّارُ ﴾

“Whosoever desires the life of the world and its glitter, to them We shall pay in full (the wages of) their deeds therein, and they will have no diminution therein. They are those for whom there is nothing in the Hereafter but Fire.” (11:15,16)

Imam Ibn Rajab said:

“Know that performing deeds for other than Allâh is of different types. Sometimes, this action might be to show off in its entirety, and thus, one seeks to be seen by the creation for a worldly gain. For example, this is the state that the hypocrites pray in.”

Just as Allâh described them:

﴿ وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا كَسَالَىٰ يُرَاءُونَ النَّاسَ ﴾

“And when they stand up for *As-Salât* (the prayer), they stand with laziness and to be seen of men.” (4:142)

Further, Allâh described the acts of the disbelievers as being all for showing off, when He said:

﴿ وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بَطَرًا وَرِئَاءَ النَّاسِ ﴾

“And be not like those who come out of their homes boastfully and to be seen of men.” (8:47)

The boasting and showing off described here rarely appears in the prayer and fasting performed by a believer. Yet, showing off might appear in their acts of charity and *Hajj*, because these latter acts are carried out in public and bring benefit to people, making it hard to observe perfect sincerity while performing them. However, if showing off appears in these acts, it will annul them and earn one Allâh's anger and torment, as is known to Muslims. Sometimes, the act might be for Allâh and is mixed with showing off. In this case, there are authentic texts asserting that if the intention of showing off was present at the time one intended to perform a righteous act, the act itself will be annulled and fruitless. But when the act was started to gain Allâh's reward alone, but changed later on to include an intention to partially show off, then it will not annul the act, provided one repels such thoughts.

Therefore, O slaves of Allâh! Worship Allâh Alone in sincerity and stay away from *Riyâ'* (showing off) and evil intentions. Allâh does not look at your shapes and wealth, but rather at your hearts and actions.

Know that the slave will be helped towards *Ikhlas* (sincerity) when he performs a righteous deed in confidence between him and his Lord. This way, the act will be easily steered away from *Riyâ'* (showing off). The Prophet ﷺ said in an authentic *Hadith*, that among the seven whom Allâh shades under His Shade, on a Day when there will be only His Shade:

«رَجُلٌ تَصَلَّى بِصَدَقَةٍ فَأَخْفَاهَا حَتَّى لَا تَعْلَمَ شِمَالُهُ مَا تُنْفِقُ يَمِينُهُ» .

“...A man who gives charitable gifts so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given (i.e., nobody knows how much he has given in charity).”

In addition, Allâh said:

﴿إِنْ بُدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ وَإِنْ تُخْفَوْهَا وَتُوْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَيَكْفُرْ عَنْكُمْ مِّنْ سَعَاتِكُمْ﴾

“If you disclose your *Sadaqât* (almsgiving), it is well; but if you conceal them and give them to the poor, that is better for you.

(Allâh) will expiate you some of your sins.” (2:271)

When a believer gives away charity for a good cause, he should not agree that his name be announced to the public, such as in newspapers, unless the purpose is to encourage others to pay for this and other charitable causes, or if his name is announced without his knowledge. Further, when some people build a mosque, they have a statement written on its door declaring that so-and-so ‘generous person’ built this mosque from his money. This is not proper conduct and might spoil one’s good deed, especially if he or she sought to preserve the memory of his or her generosity!

So, fear Allâh, O Allâh’s slaves, and perform all good deeds for His Sake alone:

﴿ قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاحِدٌ فَنَ كَانِ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ ۚ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا ﴾

“Say (O Muhammad ﷺ): “I am only a man like you. It has been revealed to me that your *Ilâh* (God) is One *Ilâh* (Allâh). So whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of his Lord.” (18:110)

May Allâh direct us and you to the blessings of the Glorious Qur’ân and benefit us and you with whatever is in it of the *Āyat* and Wise *Dhikr*. I say this and ask Allâh the Great, Most Honored for forgiveness for me, you and all Muslims for every sin. Invoke Him for forgiveness, for He is the Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.”¹

¹ *Al-Khutabul-Minbariyah*, by Shaikh Salih Al-Fozan, vol. 2, p. 273