

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Sincere Intentions give Protection and Security

Allah Swt says in Surah al-Imrān:

**Our Lord, truly we have heard the voice of one calling us to faith and belief in your Lord, so we have believed. Our Lord, forgive us our faults and cover our evil deeds, and make us die among the righteous.**

Also in Surah an-Nisaa:

**Save for those who turn back to Allah and correct themselves, hold fast to Allah, and are sincere in their *dīn* for Allah. Such are the secure believers, and in time, Allah shall show the believers an immense reward.**

There are two very complementary words in Arabic: *niyyat* and *ikhlas*. We usually translate them as intention and sincerity, although another meaning of *niyyat* is sincerity; and also another meaning is protection. We understand that when Allah tells us we will be judged by our deeds and intentions, and that intentions lead to actions, there is a protection and security in good intentions. You can use both its meanings. You can say a sincere intention gives you protection. The Prophet (sal) said,

***Actions are but intentions, and every person shall have that which he intended. So he whose migration was for Allah and His messenger, his migration was for Allah and His messenger. For him whose migration was to achieve some worldly benefit, or to take some woman / man in marriage, his migration was for that which he migrated.***

I think there is another implication here, which is if your intention is right, you are protected in whatever your actions are. Intention is prior to action; therefore, don't decide on an action and then try to cover it with intention afterwards. Don't fall in love, decide on marriage, and then try to spiritualize it, instead of it coming from the spiritual intention. I think this is very, very important. It takes a lot of honesty and a lot of courage, because implied in all this is trust. When you take responsibility for another person – this is why the metaphor of marriage is used – there is trust, like *amanat*. When you imply trust, then you are implying something that is protection, but also is done with sincerity. If it is a spiritual trust, like the *amanat*, then Allah protects you and gives you the way to fulfill that trust, for the environment, for life in this world, for religion.

Then there is the question of time. He uses the word migration. From an English point of view, you have seasonal migrations and forced migrations. There are migrations that come as part of the creation, like it is Allah's intention that some birds or fish should migrate. Some migrate once in their lifetime, like salmon, and others migrate seasonally, like birds. They go from one place to another and return. They are harbingers of a cycle. Forced migrations, human migrations, like from war, genocide, pestilence, famine, obviate what is the norm of a situation and force people to change themselves. There is a factor of time here. For self-preservation, people migrate away from danger. Birds or fish migrate in order to fulfill the will of Allah. This is the slight difference between *dahr* / time and *zaman*. *Dahr* is Allah's time in creation. *Zaman* is the manifestation of Allah's time in creation. The will to create time is *dahr*. Then there is *waqt*, the moment to moment.

Intention as we know it is very important in Islam, especially among those of us of *tariqah*. For this reason, it is sometimes more important than deeds or actions. The Prophet (sal) said, ***"The intention of a person is better than his deeds."*** How can this be? It can be that we have a very good intention, but not the means to perform the deed of the

moment. The intentions themselves, however, bring a great reward. Again, we go back to the reading and see that Allah protects the sincerity of an individual and gives meaning to it. Allah Swt looks into our hearts, we are told. The intention of a Muslim in all of his or her life's activities should be directed to the satisfaction and the Will of Allah, and to the benefit of those around them. If you intend to go to school and get a college degree, is it for yourself, is it fulfilling the will of Allah, or will it also bring benefit to those around you? If you take a job, are you taking the job just to earn money, to get name and fame, like a politician, or are you really serving other human beings?

The response to that is if it isn't *fī sabīli-Llāh*, then what motives us? Debt could motivate you, or curiosity. But if it is *fī sabīli-Llāh*, then we are protected; we are safe. Even difficulties may come, but our soul is protected. Our intention is protected; otherwise, our intentions could bring catastrophe or danger to us or others, or turmoil or crisis or loss or disturbances. We all know this from our own experiences, before we were righteous, high-valued, protected, and Divinely inspired as we all are today. Except for one or two people whose names I won't mention. Truly, I think we have all experienced this on some rare occasions in our lives. Our deeds, if not predicated with good intentions, may lead us into a state of comparison; and a state of comparison leads us into shirk, a state of hypocrisy, a state of ego, a state of being ostentatious, a state of disbelief, a state of disobedience for certain.

Once or twice in our lives, I'm sure some of us have experienced one of these states. All of these will lead us in the Hereafter to either Paradise or to hell. In fact, if we don't get it right, it leads us to hell in this life. You can take it literally or metaphorically, but it also means that step by step, we create our hell for ourselves, or we create our Paradise. Step by step, we guarantee a place where there is serenity and eternal peace within ourselves; and what is within us determines where it is we will be in the future after this world. We have been advised again and again by *Rasūlu-Llāh* that our intention in our day to day lives should be to do good, and to do it in the best way possible—to speak truth, to live a

valuable live, to speak kindly, and to do it in the best way possible; to withhold that which is hurtful, and do it in the best way possible; and to give generously, in the best way possible.

‘The best way possible’ as you can tell is operant in this *dars*, because sometimes you can be truthful, not in the best way possible. You can give, not in the best way possible, etc. Again in a *hadith* of the Messenger (sal), he was asked about a person who was fighting courageously with the fanatics (thank God, there are no more fanatics in the world!), people who were boasting (thank God, no one boasts anymore), people who wanted control of other people in the world (thank God, there are no more people who are in that state anymore). Which one was in the way of Allah? The Messenger (sal) said, **“Anyone who fights so that the Word of Allah is to be the highest, that is in the way of Allah.”** Struggles, *jihad*—let’s keep it in the right context—struggles with their *nafs*, with the truth, with the needs of others, with their hopes.

You and I know there are different interpretations of what is the Word of Allah, even though the words are written down. So we cannot just say that someone says the Word of Allah is the highest, and therefore, what they say is right. In fact, I think people who say that should eat some oleander leaves. They make you mute. Then there are people who say, “Your God and my God are different.” That seems to be rising again as the political scene takes us toward another election cycle, and we fight the culture and religious wars all around us again. We know that Muslims don’t worship exactly in the same way. We know, and I think, we can assume that if you take the idea of who the God of the Christians is from the way they speak, that you could make a case that it is not the same God as the Muslims. Because the God of the Christians has a son, and the God of the Muslims has no son. So it can’t be the same person/being/Reality.

Aside from those useless theological questions, what’s more important is the sincerity. If a person loves Allah Swt, God, Jesus, *Rasūlu-Llāh* (sal) in their heart, for the good of

humanity, and out of obedience and love, and is submitted, and wishes to be guided by that force, there is not going to be very much that differentiates between those people except the means. Where are those people? There is one hiding under this shelf. There is one hiding under a rock out there. Actually, maybe there are many but we don't see them. The one we always see and hear is always the bad kid in school. It takes us to a point [of wanting to know] how to know what is the Word of Allah Swt, and if we are interpreting it correctly. I think I can tell you how you know. You will know because it will be the best for people. The word will do good. The actions will do good. The intention will do good. It will take your mind away from yourself, your wants, your desires, as the focus of your life, and you will want to do good.

You will know, because you don't intentionally do any harm; and if you happen to unintentionally do it, you immediately want to apologize. You will know, because your words are intended in your heart to be good. And you will know, because you do not have an agenda other than goodness. You will know, because your actions that those intentions reflect will not only be praising Allah, but will praise of Allah because they are good actions. Not in praise of Allah because you are praising Allah. We know that too many people have gone into war praising Allah, and they kill people. And I don't mean just Muslims. There were the wonderful dark ages of Europe, the purges in the Soviet times, the pogroms before that. There was the cultural revolution in China. Pick a country; pick a century. From the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, there were 7 centuries of useless and relentless murder taking place.

What does it mean? If something looks like, smells right, tastes right and acts right, it might be right. Good actions. Sometimes, like some people have to do today, people have to go to a doctor and have something diagnosed or painfully done. It doesn't feel right, but it is right to do. In the end, it's right. Why? Because the intention is right. Even if the outcomes seem to be unfair or not easily understandable. I went into Kinko's the other day to print some handouts for my talk in Washington on Monday night. I put my

credit card into the machine, my thumb drive into the printer, and printed out 12 copies. I started to walk away and realized I hadn't taken my credit card out, so I went back and got it. I walked out and got back to the apartment parking lot and reached into my pocket for the key to the garage, and found the lid of my thumb drive, but no thumb drive.

I went back to Kinko's and walked in the door. I didn't have a lot of information on it, but some. A person said, "Can I help you?" And I asked, "Did anyone turn in a thumb drive." He said, "No." I said, "Do you mind asking the other people?" He asked one or two, and they both said no. I'm getting upset. I'm thinking not nice thoughts. Why would anyone take someone else's thumb drive? It's 16 GB but okay. One man there was this Afghan man. He was looking around for [the thumb drive for] me. I said something that wasn't nice, but it wasn't a swear word... and as soon as I said it, I felt bad. A man said, "Are you looking for a thumb drive?" "Yes." There was one turned in, and he handed it to me. I turned to the Afghan man and said, "*Astaghfirh -Llāh*, may that person be in Paradise." He smiled and said, "*Alhamdulillah-Llāh*."

We are all tainted. We are all tempted. We are all a creature of our emotions. We are creatures of our assumptions, all of us. But you can't be afraid to say you are sorry and to repent. You can't be afraid to take something back, because you are left with the last intention. I don't want that intention to be out there. *Alhamdulillah-Llāh*, maybe that person will get to Paradise. Whether we are talking about patience and perseverance, or *muraqabah*, or *wudu*, or *salat*, *namaz*, we have to try and try again, and fail and try again, to do things *fi sabīli-Llāh*. Just take a moment. We all need to learn how to breathe again. Someone said to me recently, "I'm hearing a difference in the way you are talking recently." What's that? It seems like you are pausing more, like Hazrat used to do. It's true; I'm trying to think things through more.

We have to accept that we constantly need to try and be satisfied. We have to keep training ourselves to believe. Am I doing this for myself, for name or fame? Am I doing

this for wealth or power? Am I doing this out of desire? Am I doing this *fī sabīli-Llāh*? It does not mean you have no desire. It doesn't mean that you have no wants or personal needs—of course not. But somewhere in the back of our mind, there has to be a good reason for what we are saying and doing. If there isn't, we have to turn back from that. If we expect the person next to us to accept that repentance in the moment, forget it. They also would have to do that, too. But Allah Swt tells us that sincere repentance is accepted. In the Kinko's story, feeling bad was a form of *dhikr*. I didn't beat myself up over it. We need to be brought up and change our attitudes, so we are brought up with something to do for the sake of Allah and others, and it shouldn't have much to do with whether or not it is perceived to be nice or not nice.

It would be nice if everything we did was nice, but it is not always perceived to be nice. When you discipline a child, it is not perceived by the child to be nice, but you know it will make a better character in the individual. That is what is happening with Allah. If we walk in this world, we all get dust on us. It is Allah who asks us to be compassionate, who admonishes us to do things for others for His sake, and 'for His sake' means for the sake of others. I fully believe that. I don't believe you do something for the sake of someone who is invisible. You do something for the sake of those He has created as the object of that goodness. That is worshiping Allah, too. We understand what that means from the *Asmā' al Husna*. We have been given the opportunity to have tests and trials and overcome them, and to show our perseverance and patience with our intentions and actions and sincerity. Allah gives us the mercy to be forgiving.

It is Allah who will be satisfied with our answers and actions for His sake. Not to think that, if someone asks us, "Why are you doing this," we say, "I'm doing this *fī sabīli-Llāh*," so they can say, "Oh, how wonderful! Another religious zealot! Another crazy person who doesn't do something good just for the sake of doing it, but for some distant God." No. Allah Swt is not distant. To that person you can say, "I'm doing this for poor people (*fī sabīli-Llāh*). I'm doing this to help people (*fī sabīli-Llāh*). I'm doing this so

help humanity save itself from its own craziness and insanity and greed (*fi sabīli-LLāh*). Until you change, until I change, everything is for that. I'm glad we eventually got a President who didn't believe he was doing everything for God, using it as an excuse to make war. I'm glad that we can appreciate a little humor in our lives, because when you look at the past 10 – 12 years, and how many people died at the hands of other people, and how many Muslims died at the hands of Muslims, and how many Christians at the hands of Christians, you have to start to believe there is some power that has saved humanity. It's like lighting a backfire that got out of control, like they did in Colorado. All you have to do is strike a match and widen the conflagration. Our intentions are really, really important.

The last thing I want to say is we have to remember what we repeat every day. There is nothing second to Allah: **Qul hu Allahu Ahad. Allahu Samad.** There is only Allah. The difference between ourselves and the animals is not only the size of our brain and our consciousness and ability to choose, it's that we have to protect them. We have a role to play in the life of every living thing on this planet. The rabbit doesn't have to protect the fox. It has to get the heck away from the fox. We have to protect the rabbit and the fox, and not make any judgment about who's right and who's wrong. The difference between Muslims and non-Muslims, Christians and Jews, Buddhists and Hindus, may be a difference in culture or form; but on the essential level of *fitrah*, everybody is born with goodness. Our intention should be directed wholly, fully, totally, solely toward Allah Swt Who created all of this. [We should] be sincere in our good intentions, because that is what is required of us to make our intentions come about.

[It is what] makes the deeds come about, whether it is the intention to make Hajj, to fast, to make *muraqabah*. Maybe that's all you can do because of your job, or because you think that's all you can do, or it is all you can muster the energy to do. Maybe it's one of those things. But if you do it with intention and the right sincerity, Allah Swt will build the rest of the *masjid*, so to speak. If that's all you can build, Allah Swt will finish it. But

as soon as you can do more, you should do it. Allah will give you the strength to do it. If all you can do is get here for *khutbah* – if that’s really all you can do, and it’s not falling backwards, or laziness, or indolence, it’s not any low-level kind of emotion or greed or self-created delusion that keeps you away – then Allah will give you strength to make more. But if it’s all you can do, because that’s all you want to do, then your path is somewhere else. You will never understand fully what is happening to you, or to those around you. You will never get faith out of challenges. *Asalaamu aleykum*