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Khutbah

Title: [The Value of Intention](#)

DVD title: Develop a Mentality around the Value of Good Intentions
with Motivations Based in Responsibility

(Opening du'ās). In the Holy Qur'an Allah Swt reveals to us in *Sūratu-l-Baqarah*,

Do not make the name of Allah the subject of your oath, lest it becomes a barrier to virtue and piety, and reconciliation between people. And Allah is the hearing and the knowing.

Allah will not reprove you for that which you utter without thought, but he will reprove you for what you have taken on in your hearts. And Allah is ever forgiving and forbearing. (2:224-225)

And in *Sūratu Tawbah*,

For those who choose a place of prostration in the Masjid out of opposition and disbelief, and in order to cause dissent among the believers as an outpost for those who have warred against Allah and his Messenger in the past, they will surely swear, “we only wanted the good.” And Allah bears witness that they are certainly liars. (9:107)

The underlying subject for today in this quotation is a word that is not used in either of these 'āyāt: *niyyat*, or the intention of the individual. Allah tells us through many means—the Qur'an, the Hadith, the teachings of our great predecessors—that it has been

disclosed to worshipers that all humankind will find themselves in a state of disarray or ruination, except those who truly appreciate and worship. Even among those who worship, they find themselves often lost, except for those who understand what they are worshipping and why. Among those who understand, are those who have to implement what they understand, and manifest it. Even among those, there are some who become confused and lost, except for those who are sincere. The sincere people are in great danger because of the environment, the reaction and response one gets from their own sincerity. Obviously without sincerity, everything before that is abrogated and lost. Sincerity and truthfulness do not exist except in the intention, in the consciousness of the individual.

How can a person who doesn't know to keep their intention find their way to contentment, happiness, and peace in this world? First we have to learn and believe by our experience that there is a great benefit and virtue in good intention, because the spirit of all actions lies in the intentions of Prophet Mohammed. The judgment of those intentions belongs only to Allah, Who looks at the act from the perspective of intention. (We all understand my perspective on what I mean by "how Allah looks".) The Messenger said, "***Allah most High does not look at your outward appearance and qualities. He looks at your heart and your deeds.***" This looking at the heart is because the heart is, first of all, the center of intention. The Prophet (sal) said,

Acts are according to intention. Every person receives from his act of worship that which his intention is for that worship. Whoever emigrates to fight in defense of Islam or to perform the greater pilgrimage for the sake of Allah, his emigration is for the Sake of Allah most high. Whoever does this in order to attain some wealth or marry some woman, his emigration is not for the Sake of Allah. It is for the sake of what he seeks.

Most of the martyrs of my people die on beds and pillows. Many are killed between two ranks whose intention Allah most High knows better. A servant of Allah does many good deeds, and the angels carry those deeds to Allah most high. Allah most High says, "Remove that from his record, because he did not do it for me. But write down such and such of his deeds." And they say, "O Allah, he has not done that." And Allah says, "But he formed the intention to do that."

The Messenger (sal) said:

There are four kinds of people. One has wealth and spends it wisely. Another says, "If I had it, I would do the same." The reward for both is the same. Another has wealth and does not use it according to the rule of good spending, and another says to himself, "If I had it, I would do the same." Both of them are also equal in offending and being misguided. That intention by itself is just like doing it as well.

Anas said:

One day during the Tabuk expedition, the Messenger (sal) came out and said, "In Medina, there are many people who are our partners in the rewards and hardships of travel and hunger that we endure." We said, "Why, when they are not with us?" He said, "They have stayed back, excused; but the intention of theirs was the same as ours."

During a drought, one of the children of the Banii Israel came upon a mountain of sand and said, "If this had been all wheat, I would have given it all to the poor who are starving." And a revelation came to the Prophet (sal) that he should say

to that person, "Allah Swt has accepted your charity and has given you as much spiritual reward as if you had all that wheat and had given it away in charity."

Hence, this is the depth and power of *niyyat*. Countless times, Prophet Mohammed (sal) reveals this over and over. He said,

There is always poverty before the two eyes of him whose intention and ambition are the world, and he leaves this world as a lover of the world. Allah most High keeps the heart of him whose intention and ambition are for the Hereafter, rich. And he leaves this world and he is an ascetic in it.

Again, Prophet Mohammed (sal) said,

When the Muslims stand in ranks against the unbelievers, angels begin to write on scrolls, "So and so fights zealously. So and so fights with ardor." When you say so and so was killed in the way of Allah Most High, whoever fights so the creed of unity will prevail is on the path of Allah, the Most High.

And he said, ***"Whoever marries without intention of paying the dowry is an adulterer. And whoever borrows money without the intention of repaying it is a thief."***

Obviously, we have to think over what our intentions are, and think over what is the use of the blessings we get when our desires are fulfilled. The teaching is to first learn the intention of the act, and then perform the action. Someone once said, *"Teach me an act that I may be engaged in day and night, so I am not devoid of good at any time."* They said, *"If you cannot perform a good deed, then continually form good intentions, so the spiritual reward of the unperformed deed will be obtained."* Abu Hurayra (ra) said, *"Mankind will be assembled on the Day of Resurrection according to their intentions."* Hasan al Basri (ra) said, *"Eternal paradise without end is not with acts of these few days*

of our life on earth. Rather, it is with good intentions, because there is no end to good intentions.”

The lesson for us today is not just the intention to such and such a thing, or the intention to avoid something that is bad or evil or destruction or sinful. It is an encouragement for a mentality. The good intentions underlie the thoughts, the actions, the tone of voice, the words, the hopes, the aspirations, the admonitions, the prohibitions, and the prescriptions of a good person. You may perform twenty good actions today, but have 2000 or even uncountable good intentions during the day, because they are part of your character and personality. Whatever you do, even if it is not completed; and whatever you desire, even though it may not be fulfilled; whatever action you hope to do is first formed internally from what? Is it just “I see something. I want it, so I make a good intention for it”? No, the Qur’anic verses I quoted to you [explain why]. A lot of people can put their heads down on the ground and pray like a Muslim, but their intentions are to deceive. In the same way, we can deceive ourselves by formulating what we want in the context of something spiritual. On the other hand, the exact same thing can be counted as a good action, even though it is not fulfilled, when it comes from a sincere heart.

The human being usually doesn’t act so long as he doesn’t have three things: knowledge, will, and power; or knowledge, *desire*, and power, if you want to say it that way. If one doesn’t see food; one doesn’t eat. If one sees it but has no desire for the food, one also doesn’t eat. One who is not motivated by the will to eat also doesn’t eat, even though the food is there. These three things precede all action, but action is subservient to the power, and the willpower is subservient to the desire or motivation. Will power compels one to act. We have to have at least these three elements. Our desire is not subservient to our knowledge. One may know about many things and not desire them. Without knowledge, there is no desire because you don’t know about it, so you can’t desire it. Desire prompts

our action and willpower and sets it into motion. We call that motivation, or our purpose and intention. They are all the same.

When a person's intention or motivation is pure or sincere, good; and in their heart it is for the sake of harmony and resonance and balance, for the sake of good – that is, consonant with the system Allah Swt has created – then the action is attempted. As for the motivation, usually our motivation is combined with a series of circumstances. It's rarely that we have one motivation and then we act. We see the connections between things. We see that people are hungry and there is food over there, and I have money in my pocket. Things come together. You have to combine what's available. An example is given by Imam al Ghazāli. He says,

If a poor relative requests a dirham, one gives it to him because of both the kinship and poverty. The donor knows from his heart that if his relative was not poor, he would have given it anyway because of his relationship. And if the requester was poor, but not a relative, he would have given it of the poverty.

These are two intentions mixed together. We see a need, and we might be motivated because this is a need of a member of the community. There are many people [in the greater society] who have not enough money to pay their bills, but this is a community member. If you see that, and they are part of your family, you give it. And you give it because of the need also. If it was not a member of the family, and there was no one in the family who needed it, you would give it because of the poverty, or the need.

The lesson for us is, there are many complexities, not just simplicity, in intention. We have to also have standards by which we can form those intentions, not just for emotional reasons. The intention or the motivation can be weak, and not really impel us to act in any

way. But the cause is so demanding that we overcome our weakness. We may not identify with someone halfway across the world who is in need, but we see the relationship and the cause. This person is in need because of genocide. This person is in need because of really horrific circumstances that shake us, and give us the impetus to act. All of these are dimensions of human character, which are reflective of what we have been speaking about in the names of Allah Swt. Each one of these requires a different level or kind of motivation for us.

What Allah Swt is telling us, when we go back to Qur'an; and what Prophet Mohammed (sal) is showing us when we go back to Hadith is that the motivations are not for spiritual reward. The motivations are because we have grasped at some level the teachings of Islam. We have grasped at some level the dimension of responsibility we have. Our personal selfishness or desire for reward doesn't stand in the way of our good action. We are not being motivated by a worldly interpretation of even an other-worldly reward. In Qur'an, Allah assures us the reward in the Hereafter is there, under all these circumstances. Don't work for that, or concern yourself about that. It's all described in Qur'an and Hadith, and you don't have to work for that. The only way to know your intention is pure is to do it *fī sabīl Allah*, or for the sake of Allah's Creation, or because your heart tells you this is what is good and right, and your heart is filled with the love of Rasulallah (sal) and Allah. Don't concern yourself with these other things; they are all taken care of. To the degree, He tells us, that if the act is not performed, the intention is sufficient for the reward.

What is the reward, then? The reward can be described as a beautiful place in Jannah or good companionship, and it is described in many other ways. Underneath that, the reward is that you will be in the right place at the right time for eternity. Or to say it in another way, you will find the perfect fit for yourself in creation and beyond creation.

The reward is contentment. The reward is peacefulness, happiness, a state of love and beauty and understanding, which is described in many worldly terms. Rivers and beautiful people and trees with fruits of all kinds, agelessness: all these things human beings can identify with. Many khatibs go on and on about them, as if they were a bribery. But it is not bribery. The reward for goodness is endless goodness. If we can be somehow content with that, and understand that human machinations for power and influence and selfishness all come to an end. There is a dynamic, interactive peacefulness and contentment. What adds to that are our good intentions.

Prophet Mohammed (sal) reinforces what Allah Swt reveals on this when he said, “***The intention fo the believer is better than the deed.***” How can that be true? Sometimes we can have a very pure idea, but by the time it is manifested, it has to be adjusted and changed in some way. We can get caught up in the action of it. The purity of the intention is what Allah Swt looks for. [He looks for] what is in the realm of subtleties, the realm of non-material action. Everything is formed in the mind, then it is worked out in the physical world. A good example of that might be Nikola Tesla. He did all his mathematics and discoveries and tested them all out in the laboratory of his brain. Then there was a big, long process of manifesting those things that were successful and not successful, and moderately successful, and certainly not understood. People tried to grab power from it and control it, and tried to misuse it—even to this day. If you were judging the action and the result of the intention, you would find all kinds of flaws in it. Not because the idea was flawed, but in the realm of human interactions, the manifestation (not the idea) became flawed. In the same way, we work these things out in our hearts and minds, and through our love. But sometimes, by the time it is expressed, it just doesn’t come out quite right.

How many of us have felt great love in our heart and opened our mouths, and something

came out that was misinterpreted by the hearer? Or you heard yourself saying, “That’s not what I meant.” Allah will judge the *niyyat*, not those words. Again: don’t concern yourself with those outer manifestations. Don’t concern yourself with negotiating the rewards. Don’t concern yourself so much with how it is taken. Concern yourself with the purity of your *niyyat*, because the hearer may not be at the level of receiving that the intender is in giving. Then the lesson is among sincere believers there is a consistency. You will find at a certain level—not among the common folk or necessarily among just the good believers, but at some level—people who understand. At that level, there will be a consistency in understanding, a heart to heart understanding. Just below that, all judgmentalness drops off. Ego falls away. Preferences fall away, because you are meeting on a level of harmony and resonance. We can imagine this, but sometimes not really grasp it.

The means, Imam al Ghazāli tells us, is the aim of all acts: to turn to the heart. So the aim of *salat* or prostration is not that the forehead moves from up here to the carpet, but rather that the heart turns from the desires, arrogance, and distractions to humility. The purpose of uttering the Name of Allah is greater, not because the tongue moves and goes “Allah, Allah,” and flicks around in your mouth, but because the heart turns from glorifying its desires, the worldly things and the ego/*nafs ammāra* to the glorification of Allah Swt. The purpose of casting stones at Mina during the Hajj is not to increase the number of stones at the spot to show how many people hate Shaytan. It is certainly not to get arm exercise so you can throw a baseball back in the US after you make Hajj. It is that the heart stands firm upon the platform of being an ‘*Abd* of Allah, dependent upon Allah, saying, here at this point that I’m going to abandon my lower nature and desires to pursue something higher, more obedient, more loving. Example after example can be given in the same way. We can make up our own examples.

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Realize that our heart is created with the inclination or desires that appear in it; but we have the opportunity to overcome those desires. In the core of the heart is the desire for harmony and balance/*mizān*. These are dependent on the intentions, and the actions that follow will be a testimony to the sincerity of our own heart. *Insh'allah* we will remember that today as we finish our day, and in days to come to try sincerely to contemplate the intentions that are coming behind our thoughts and actions, and our hopes and our desires, *insh'allah. Du'ās.*

SECOND KHUTBAH. *Du'ās.*