

December 12, 2009

Saturday



Title: Only Actions with Good Intentions Have Merit

DVD title: An In-Depth Look at the Hadith of Umar:  
Deeds are Judged by Intention

Dinner blessing: *Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm*. O Allah, we are thin tonight. Fatten us. Many people are traveling. We are grateful that you brought Arifa and Raheel safely to Muscat. We are happy to know that Isa has the perseverance to sit with a bowl in his hand throughout a long prayer. Thank you, Allah, for the blessings You continue to shower upon us and the places You send us, and the work You give us to do. We are grateful that You brought Musa safely back from California, the land of Ostia West. We are glad we have sincere people here to share the meal with. We ask You for safe travel for everyone who is traveling this weekend, for Abul Hasan and Nadia and others. We ask You also for blessings upon our loved ones. Help us to make all of this *dhikr*. Amin.

Suhbat: *Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm*. Hazrat Umar al-Khattab (ra) related that the Prophet (sal) said, “**Deeds are only of intentions. An individual is rewarded according to what he intends.**” Usually, we say this in shortspeak as actions follow intentions. But it’s good to hear it properly. Deeds are a result only of intention. Deeds are only of intentions. An individual is rewarded only according to that which he or she intends; therefore, the rewards only come from what you intend. We don’t intend everything, do we? You know the rest of the quote: “**Therefore, he whose immigration was for Allah and His Messenger, or who has immigrated for the sake of worldly gain or for a woman whom he**

***desires to marry, then his immigration is for the sake of that which moved him to immigrate.”***

This *hadith* has a lot to do with what we have been talking about in terms of practices and how one approaches them. It has a lot to do with a lot of things, but especially I want to draw your attention in that direction. The other thing is, this was the very first *hadith* that Imam al Bukhari recorded in his Sahih Hadith book. He recorded it because it serves the purpose of the *khutbah*, of the introduction. He points out that all deeds that are devoid of proper intention are *batil/vain*. Abdur Rahman al Mahdi was reported to have said, “*Were I to compose a book made up of many chapters, I would place this hadith of Umar regarding deeds and intention in each chapter.*” This is not only a Sahih Hadith, but it is a *hadith* that sit on the axis of Islam. Imam al Shaafi (ra) said, “*This hadith comprises one-third of religious knowledge.*”

Imam al Hanbal said, “*The principle axis of Islam in terms of hadith are three: The Hadith of Umar, that deeds are judged only by intentions. The Hadith of Aisha, where she reported that the Prophet said, whoever introduces into our affairs that which does not belong is rejected. And the Hadith of al-Basheer, where he reports that the Prophet (sal) said, ‘The licit is clear and the illicit is clear.’*” Others also use this *hadith*. Abu Dawud, the compiler of the Sunnah, was reported to have said of the 4800 *hadith* in his book, it is sufficient that a person knows only four of them. “*The Hadith of Umar. The hadith that says, ‘Part of a person’s virtue in Islam is to ignore that which is of no concern to him.’ The hadith that the Prophet is reported to have said, ‘The believer is not a believer unless he desire for his brother what he desires for himself.’ And the fourth one is ‘The licit is clear and the illicit is clear.’*”

The first thing we have to understand about this *hadith* we are talking about is whether or not it refers to all actions; or only those actions, for them to be valid, the intention has to precede it. If it refers only to this, it wouldn't apply to the normal things of human life like eating, drinking, clothing, etc. He gives the example of returning misappropriated property. The other opinion is this *hadith* refers to all actions. All actions have to be preceded by intention. I think it's pretty well agreed upon that the concept that all actions should be preceded by good intention is the one the Sahaba operated under, and is what the Prophet (sal) taught.

When you look at these words, there is an assumption that a lot more of what we do could be done voluntarily and consciously. Isn't that the inherent assumption in this? We do a lot of things unconsciously, assumptively. Then when we get used to doing them, historically we continue to do them habitually. We could make a certain assumption that the voluntary actions of a person are a consequence only of that individual's purpose to perform a certain act or bring that certain act into being. Think about that: if it was everything, that one is striving to be totally conscious of everything they are doing; even the things they would do, in a sense, involuntarily; like eating or drinking water or going to sleep. There are *du'ā* for all of these things.

When you look at the second sentence, this is a statement of spiritual judgment of the act that you are going to perform; it has to have a spiritual context. If the intention motivating the act is good, we call that spiritually proper. Then the actual performance of the act is good, and a person receives recognition or reward for that action. All you have to do is have a good intention to perform something that is a good act. You cannot have a good intention to perform something that is a bad act. An action that is distorted or corrupted can only come about if the intention motivating it is also corrupt and selfish, destructive. If the intention that

motivates an act is something that is permissible, then the acts in themselves bring out the goodness and the fullness, the purity and the love—the goodness.

Acts in themselves, their goodness or their evil or their neutral state, from the perspective of Islam and of a Sufi, can only be judged according to the intention of the one who is performing the action that brought into existence that action in the first place. [When doing something mundane,] like when I fill up my car with gasoline. Chances are, one would normally not sit there and say, “It is now my intention, O Lord, to fill up my car with fuel.” (Although Mustafa does it all the time, most people are not like this!) The question is do we understand that goodness is not necessarily, and often not, inherent in the action? It’s inherent in the intention. We are, in a sense, imbuing even the most mundane action with Divine Presence. Of course, Allah is present everywhere.

We can utilize the most mundane action like going to fill up the gas tank [to become aware of] that Divine Presence. In that sense, we are creating that *An*, that moment. Of course, Allah is present everywhere. To direct that attention, that *bāraka*/blessing, or to uplift one’s soul by being in that nearness to Allah can only happen when the individual makes the intention for it to happen. We tend to think that certain acts themselves are just inherently good acts, like giving to charity. That’s an inherently good act; anyone can do it. It’s a good action. But when it is preceded by niyyat, it is a transforming action. It has the capability, the *madad* of Allah (swt).

You see this is one of the nuances of choice that human beings have. The angels just go about their work. The animals, the birds, they just go about their work. But the human being can make choices. We understand that the success of any endeavor will begin back with its intention. It’s not the endeavor that is invariably good. Even if you are going to build a hospital, the intention behind building that

hospital will determine how much spiritual good will happen there. From the perspective of Islam, we have to understand that all these actions that we are taking every day, that would occur without intention – even less than a second of attention– are somewhat in vain. It doesn't matter what it looks like the outcome is. It's the transformative effect for the Sufi that is important, not just the external outcome.

If you go out and raise money for charity because you want to help poor Muslims in the poorhouse (there are a lot of people with subprime mortgages who are poor in their house), if you are going to focus on that, then you have to realize that one has to be clear about their state and their intention. Otherwise, even if some worldly success follows, something will follow it either to take it away, or make us not appreciate it, or feel dissatisfied with it, or have to compromise values, etc. in order to work with certain people to make the salary we are making because that's our reward for our good work. We don't realize that if we had practiced submission and trust, and an understanding of this work and intention paradigm, we would be so much ahead at this point in our spiritual life.

We are almost, some of us, at the place where we feel like we want to give up and turn our attention to ask Allah to send a lightning bolt down, right? “Well, I've been at this 25 years. I don't see the progress. I'll keep it up because maybe Allah will notice that I'm really good and He'll zap me with one of his laser phasers and bring me to the highest state of consciousness just based on my past record.” Fortunately and unfortunately, that's true to some extent.

This *niyyat* is used in two separate ways, especially historically by the Muslim scholars. One is to be able to distinguish acts of worship from acts that are not worship. The intention for *salatu-l-dhuhr* is different from the intention for *salatu-l-asr*. You make a different intention every time you pray to empower and

distinguish, to change the *adab* to *ibāda*, to change the mundane every day matters into intention to worship. Allah gives us five opportunities to do this. If I gave a message, and everyone had to hear it out of the tongue of a authorized teacher, they'd hear it once and that's it. No one would remember it. But if the lessons you are getting come through *niyyat* that have to do with things you do in every day life and work—it could be cooking, cleaning, or being a trapeze artist—if you take that approach, progress can be made very quickly. That's a gift of Allah.

You decide where you will start with your efforts. You start there, and everything unfolds from there. Some of the ladies do yoga from a yoga video. If they, the first day, took the hardest level of the yoga lessons and tried to do it, do you think they would be doing yoga today? No. They wouldn't be doing it. But if you start step by step, and you stretch yourself step by step, because you made the intention to go step by step, then you will get something out of the yoga other than a wrenched back or a twisted knee or whatever. Intention is everything.

The second way is to distinguish an action performed for the sake of Allah, from an action done for the sake of Allah and other people, from an action done just for the sake of other than Allah. As long as we are doing things (as we do every day) for other people, this is a more advance stage. The most advanced stage is to have all your capability and potentiality, and Allah calls upon you. Then you have to have the courage to shift direction or attention, or to trust for an extra bit of time, another two weeks, month, or year. One trusts one another. With that trust, you develop sincerity and deepen love; without trust, it's very hard to regain.

This *niyyat* also has a kind of *bāraka* or power in itself. When one makes a sincere *niyyat*, there is a vision of the fruit of that *niyyat* when you make it. “It is now my intention to get in the car and drive to Lynchburg.” You have an image in your mind of where you are going. A *niyyat* is not just some kind of a magic,

mumbo-jumbo formula; it is a way of constructing spiritual success. It has a role in the fulfillment of the action. “I made my *niyyat* to be successful in our work in the Gulf.” There is no such thing as one *niyyat* for all. The *niyyat* should be that the success of our work in the Gulf (and I’ll use this example because the ladies are in the Gulf) has to be because the *niyyat* is to remember to make *niyyat*. Do you understand? Now, I’ll bring it back to what we have been talking about.

Most of the ancient scholars talked about *niyyat* in their discussions as part of *ikhlas*/sincerity. Where does sincerity come from? Loyalty. What is this *niyyat*, then? How does it have to do with loyalty? Loyalty to whom? Loyalty to Allah, of course. But to what? To have sincere intention to do good things, to do good work, and to abjure and stay away from things that are not good, to be a loyal *murīd*, a loyal Muslim, a loyal Sufī. This is the same meaning that was intended by the true *salaf*/ancestors, when they used the term *niyyat*. In the Qur’an, in the speech of the Prophet (sal), *niyyat* is synonymous with the term *irāda*/will. When a person makes a sincere *niyyat*, you put your will behind it. This is the aspect that Allah has given us of being the creator. Who is the Creator? Al-Khalaq.

We have an aspect of the Creator in us, just like we have an aspect of the Compassionate in us. We have an aspect of the Truth in us, and of the Patient in us. When you make a *niyyat*, you are participating in the completion of that *niyyat* as an action that is a successful action. But a *niyyat* can only act if it is a *niyyat* for good. Of course you can make *niyyat* to do something evil and follow through, but no good can come out of it. Allah says that whoever desires the bounty or harvest of dunya will have that. Whoever desires the gratification of dunya, Allah says **“I will hasten it to you. We wished it to whom we desire.” “Do not expel those who call out to their Lord in the early morn and the evening who are seekers of his face. And do not let your eyes wander from them out of desire for the frivolities of this world.”** (18:28)

Take one step toward Allah, and Allah comes running toward you, yes? Every step you take with *niyyat* will bring you into that fold of people who are aware of, living in, participating with, that Divine Presence. As for the rest of the people, Allah says, and I'm paraphrasing, "I'll help you enjoy the toys you wanted." You get the feeling that Allah wants to get those people out of the way; give them what they want. The Prophet (sal), "***Whosoever takes part in a military campaign in the cause of Allah but sought only booty, shall gain only what he intended.***" They will get nothing else out of it. But then he says, "***Most of the martyrs in my community will die in their beds.***" We should put that up on billboards around the country. "***And many a man killed in battle whose intention is known only to Allah. Indeed, you shall never spend of your property of an amount whereby you are desirous of pleasing Allah save you shall be rewarded for it, even if the morsel of food you place in your wife or children's mouth.***"

Similarly, it is reported that Umar said, "*One who has no intention has no meritorious deeds.*" It's not just the action, it's what you are going to put in that action. It's the shell. It's not just making the *niyyat*, but it is having the faith and trust and sincerity that comes from your loyalty to the path that will make that *niyyat* come true. People say, "I made my intention but it didn't happen." That's because you thought it was about the container called intention, not about the content of what you were putting in it.

I wanted to talk about this tonight because we have to understand that we use this [phrase] all the time: actions follow intentions. We see in our own lives things work out or are difficult, we get a pain here or there. "I tried very hard not to get the flu, but I got it anyway." "Well, it must have been Allah's will." It's possible, obviously, because everything is Allah's will in the greater sense. But you have to have the confidence, the sincerity, the loyalty to make the intention very clear and

very right. Hazrat Umar said, *“One who has no intention has no meritorious deeds.”* In other words, to get the *thawab* (the blessing, the reward)—though you are not intending to get that, just to do what is right—is to do what is right and what is good with good intention. I’m sorry if it sounds too simplistic. As good as it sounds, and as clear as it is, and as easy as it seems, the fact is, it is one of the most difficult things to achieve: to have good intention all the time. It is very difficult.

Sufyan al-Thawri (ra) said, *“Nothing is more difficult for me to treat than my intention, for indeed it turns on me.”* Yusef Asbat (ra) said, *“Purifying one’s intention from corruption is more difficult for persons than lengthy ijihad (exertion).”* So many things interrupt it: attitudes, character attitudes, habitual patterns, tribal customs, tribal mentalities, nationalistic customs, personal desires, love of kith and kin. So many things interrupt the pure *niyyat*. Then, of course, there is the idea that people do it just for show. Like the hypocrites will say one thing and do something else, because their intention is for something else. But they know intellectually, “I’ll say this, but I’ll really do that.” How can there be a reward for that? *“The hypocrite is a person who takes their time to come to the masjid for prayer so everyone can see them when they enter.”* They make an entrance. A person who just sort of strolls in. that is much more gross than what we see everyday.

We see things everyday that are much more destructive: the way our ego works, the way we bring harm to ourselves, the way we try to get attention. There are so many ways. People are gregarious and get attention. People are sullen and get attention. Those actions lack *niyyat*. The example is when the Prophet (sal) was asked, ***“What is your opinion of one who fights in the way of Allah, seeking fame in the world and reward from Allah? And the Prophet (sal) replied, ‘He receives nothing by the way of reward from Allah.’ And he repeated it three***

***times. Then he said, Allah accepts no deeds other than those performed solely for His sake and by which His Face is sought.***”

It is not that you have to stand and say, “I’m going to brush my teeth now *fi sabīli-Llāh*. Oh, and I’m going to floss my teeth after that for the sake of Allah.” But when you have in your heart and soul that your life and your work and your existence and your purpose is for the sake of justice and compassion, mercy and love and understanding and friendship and companionship, etc. etc., even the brushing of your teeth is covered by that *niyyat*. Morning breath. You are thinking of the other person: “No, don’t kiss me! I haven’t brushed my teeth yet.” Even at that level, you are thinking of the other person because your love covers that. It’s a silly example. But it’s the truth. You are not so selfish, so wrapped up in your own self. “Even though you had garlic butter tonight, give me a kiss!” Even that’s covered because it’s in the *niyyat* of love.

Try to understand that actions follow intentions, and the good actions, the good deeds, come from a sincere heart. A sincere person is a person of deep loyalty and understanding. A person who has the love of Allah and understands that all things are encompassed by Allah. The Prophet (sal) said, “***Soldiers in the path of Allah attain 2/3 of their reward immediately when they obtain the booty from their enemy; whereas, they receive the reward in its entirety when they obtain nothing from their enemy.***” Why? Because they were only fighting in the way of Allah, and not for any other purpose. And I mean, not for *any* other purpose. To understand that to act for Allah is to act for understanding, compassion, mercy, love, tolerance, and patience. That can be done in any situation. Yes, there are nuances: I’m not naïve.

Did you see on the news where a crazy man tried to break into a woman’s house? some man high on drugs was trying to break into her house. He kept yelling, “I

have a gun, I have a gun.” She told him, “If you get into this house, I will kill you.” She’s on the line with 911. She’s very serious: “I will kill that man if he comes into my house.” It was in Oklahoma where they are allowed to do that, seriously. You don’t have to be in active retreat like you have to be in this state. So you hear the 911 thing, and you hear her shoot the man. Then she’s, “Oh my God, forgive me, forgive me, Oh my God, I had to shoot him!” You could hear her sincere repentance. She sounded very tough before she shot; then when she shot, she was totally distraught. The 911 operator was, “It’s okay, you had to do it, it’s okay” and she was, “I think I killed him!” And she did, she killed him. But immediately she was repentant.

When you heard the first part of the conversation, you thought it was some redneck waiting for someone to break into their house so they could kill them. But it wasn’t the case at all. She was immediately repentant. What was her *niyyat*? Is it possible she could get a reward for killing a human being? Big question. “Why didn’t she shoot for his legs?” Maybe she did and she was a bad shot. Maybe she was nervous. She thought for sure she was going to be harmed. That’s *jihad*. An immediate repentance and pleading with Allah: “Please forgive me. O my God, what did I do?”

Those crazy suicide bombers aren’t saying that. Just like the soldiers who are out there killing the “jihadis” or whatever they call them; they aren’t saying “Oh my God, what did I do?” They are working for a much lower cause. There is no benefit from that. That’s not the example of *niyyat*. The world we live in today is very serious. I’ll end with a quotation from [one Sufi] who said that Mutarraf Ibn Abdullah would repeat the following every day: “*O Allah! I seek your forgiveness for that which I sought your repentance, but to which I subsequently returned. I seek Your Forgiveness for that which I rendered to You from myself, but that I was not able to maintain faithfully. And I seek Your Forgiveness for that which I*

*claimed I desired Your Face, but my heart became corrupted with that which I did.*  
This is a little about *niyyat*. *Asalaam Aleikum..*

If your intention is to punish yourself, Allah will help you punish yourself. If your intention is to liberate yourself, Allah will help you liberate yourself from yourself. **EDIT 52:01- 53:15** You know I don't like to talk like that: saying Allah does this or that. When you have the will and the intention and the capacity to act as if Allah is not present, then Allah helps you do that in the sense that the system itself helps you do that. Look at what's happening in the environment: it's getting more and more corrupted. The poor polar bears are sitting on smaller and smaller pieces of ice. So there is a destructive side of the process of the system that is also Allah, in the sense that we call Allah the avenger or the destroyer. Human beings have to learn that unless they make decisions that are consistent with the higher intentions and their goals, they will be assisted in making the lower ones to learn from. You see that in nature also: every winter the plants are destroyed, and every summer they come back and grow again. Somehow they revive, if they are perennials. From this perspective, it looks like they died, but there is life in them. If you dig them up and throw them away, I guess they might grow in the compost heap.

There is a destructive side, also. But if your *niyyat* is to do what is good and right, then Allah assists you with that. You are in that rhythm of the system. Then you will become more conscious and aware of what makes things good, constructive, and developed. (Question, can't hear). You are making it for your own self, so Allah assists you in that. That will bring you to understand the folly of that, or you won't. If you say, "I'm a spiritual person, I really want to do the right thing," but you still do these selfish things, you have these two sides to your personality. You are doing this thing that is destructive or self-serving, but part of you is watching it. So you are assisted in doing that so you learn from it faster. The

person who can never make any actions fi sabiil Allah, who is totally committed to their own selfish nature, they won't see it. They can't be guided. But most of us are of two minds. We want to do good things, but we make decisions that are not good for us, for the community, for the ummah, or for humanity. So as a result of that, we see it. Because we have two minds. We are observers of it. Oh my God, what did I do? Then immediately you are forgiven.

It's within the system of what is allowable. Not just because it's allowable by law, but by natural law. Human law follows natural law: if someone comes to kill you, you can kill them. You don't want to. She was very tough on the phone. "if he breaks in I tell you, I'm going to shoot him," in a very gravelly voice. But as soon as she shot him, it's "Oh, oh, oh! My God what did I do? I'm sorry God, Please forgive me, God." She was a pious woman. Otherwise, she wouldn't have said that. She would have said, 'I shot the SOB!' And they showed pictures of her house. She had a chain link fence around it and signs that say beware of the dog, real redneck kind of thing. And still she was pious.