

a lover of Allah, who is so absorbed in contemplation of the next world that there remains in his heart no place for the love of this world. Such a person must be devout and pure in all his actions, even in eating, drinking and answering the calls of nature. With rare exceptions, anyone who is not like this will find the door of devotion closed in his face.

The everyday actions of a person who is overwhelmed by his or her love for Allah and the *akhira* are characterised by this love and they are, in fact, pure devotion. In the same way, anyone whose soul is overwhelmed by love for and preoccupation with this world, or status and authority, will be so overwhelmed by these things that no act of worship, be it prayer or fasting, will be acceptable, except in very rare cases.

The remedy for love of this world is to break the worldly desires of the self, ending its greed for this world and purifying it in preparation for the next world. This will then become the state of the heart and sincere devotion will become easier to attain. There are a great many actions where a man acts, thinking they are purely intended for Allah's pleasure, but he is deluded, for he fails to see the defects in them.

It has been related that a man was used to praying in the first row in the mosque. One day he was late for the prayer, so he prayed in the second row. Feeling embarrassment when people saw him in the second row, he realised that the pleasure and satisfaction of the heart that he used to gain from praying in the first row were due to his seeing people seeing him there and admiring him for it. This is a subtle and intangible condition and actions are rarely safe from it. Apart from those whom Allah has assisted, few are aware of such delicate matters. Those who do not real-

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ise it only come to see their good deeds appearing as bad ones on the Day of Resurrection; they are the ones referred to in Allah's words:

◀ And something will come to them from Allah which they had never anticipated, for the evil of their deeds will become apparent to them. (39:47-48) ▶

And also:

◀ Say: Shall We tell you who will lose most in respect of their deeds? Those whose efforts were astray in the life of this world, while they thought that they were doing good works. (18:103-104) ▶

Yaqub said: "A devout person is someone who conceals things that are good, in the same way that he conceals things that are bad."

As-Sousi said: "True devotion is to lose the faculty of being conscious of your devotion; for someone who identifies devotion in his devotion is a person whose devotion is in need of devotion." To contemplate devotion is to admire it, and admiration is an affliction; and that which is pure is whatever is free of all afflictions. This means that one's deeds should be purified from any self-admiration concerning the actions they entail.

Ayyub said: "It is much harder for the people of action to purify their intentions than it is to execute any of their actions."

Some people have said: "To be devout for a short while is to survive for ever, but devotion is rare."

Suhail was asked: "What is the most difficult thing for the self?" He said: "Devotion, when the self does not have the good fortune of being endowed with it."

Al-Fudayl said: "Forsaking action for the sake of other

people is to seek their admiration. To act for the sake of their admiration is to associate others with Allah. Devotion is when Allah frees you from both of these states.”

## *Notes*

1. *Sahih*, an-Nisa'i, *Kitab al-Jihad*, 6/25; al-Hafidh ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Qadir*, 6/28.
2. *Sahih*, Ibn Ma'jah; also Ibn Hibban, *Mawarid adh-Dham'an*, p. 47, on the authority of Zaid ibn Thabit.

## TWO

### THE NATURE OF INTENTION

The intention of a person is not his utterance of the words, "I intend to do so and so." It is an overflowing from the heart which runs like conquests inspired by Allah. At times it is made easy, at other times, difficult. A person whose heart is overwhelmingly righteous finds it easy to summon good intentions at most times. Such a person has a heart generally inclined to the roots of goodness which, most of the time, blossom into the manifestation of good actions. As for those whose hearts incline towards and are overwhelmed by worldly matters, they find this difficult to accomplish and even obligatory acts of worship may become difficult and tiresome.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Actions are only by intention, and every man shall only have what he intended. Thus he whose *hijra* was for Allah and His Messenger, his *hijra* was for Allah and His Messenger, and he whose *hijra* was to achieve some worldly benefit or to take some woman in marriage, his *hijra* was for that for which he made *hijra*." <sup>1</sup>

*Imam ash-Shaf'i* said: "This *hadith* is a third of all knowledge." The words, "actions are only by intention", mean that deeds which are performed in accordance with the *sunnah* are only acceptable and rewarded if the intentions behind them were sincere. It is like the saying of the the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, "Actions depend upon their outcome." <sup>2</sup>

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Likewise, the words, "every man shall only have what he intended", mean that the reward for an action depends upon the intention behind it. After stating this principle, the Prophet ﷺ gave examples of it by saying, "Thus he whose *hijra* was for Allah and His Messenger, his *hijra* was for Allah and His Messenger, and he whose *hijra* was to achieve some worldly benefit or to take some woman in marriage, his *hijra* was for that for which he made *hijra*." So deeds which are apparently identical may differ, because the intentions behind them are different in degrees of goodness and badness, from one person to another.

Good intentions do not change the nature of forbidden actions. The ignorant should not misconstrue the meaning of the *hadith* and think that good intentions could turn forbidden actions into acceptable ones. The above saying of the Prophet ﷺ specifically relates to acts of worship and permissible actions, not to forbidden ones. Worship and permissible actions can be turned into forbidden ones because of the intentions behind them, and permissible actions can become either good or bad deeds by intention; but wrong actions cannot become acts of worship, even with good intentions.<sup>3</sup> When bad intentions are accompanied by flaws in the actions themselves, then their gravity and punishment are multiplied.

Any praiseworthy act must be rooted in sound intentions; only then should it be deemed worthy of reward. The fundamental principle should be that the act is intended for the worship of Allah alone. If our intention is to show off, then these same acts of worship will in fact become acts of disobedience. As for permissible deeds, they all involve intentions – which can potentially turn them into excellent acts which bring a man nearer to Allah and confer on him the gift of closeness to Him.

### *The Excellence of Intention*

Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "The best acts are doing what Allah has commanded, staying far away from what Allah has forbidden, and having sincere intentions towards whatever Allah has required of us." <sup>4</sup>

Some of our predecessors said: "Many small actions are made great by the intentions behind them. Many great actions, on the other hand, are made small because the intentions behind them are lacking."

Yahya Ibn Abu Kathir said: "Learn about intentions, for their importance is greater than the importance of actions."

Ibn Umar once heard a man who was putting on his *ihram* say: "O Allah! I intend to do the *Hajj* and *Umrah*." So he said to him: "Is it not in fact the people whom you are informing of your intentions? Does not Allah already know what is in your heart?" <sup>5</sup> It is because good intentions are exclusively the concern of the heart, that they should not be voiced during worship.

### *The Excellence of Knowledge and Teaching*

There are many proofs in the Qur'an concerning the excellence of knowledge and its transmission. Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, says:

◀ Allah will raise up to high ranks those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge. (58:11) ▶

And also:

◀ Are those who know equal to those who do not know? (39:9) ▶

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Also, in the *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ says, "When Allah desires good for someone, He gives him understanding of the *deen*."<sup>6</sup> He ﷺ also said, "Allah makes the way to the Garden easy for whoever treads a path in search of knowledge."<sup>7</sup>

Travelling on the path to knowledge refers both to walking along an actual pathway, such as going on foot to the assemblies of the *ulama'*, as well as to following a metaphysical road, such as studying and memorising.

The above saying of the Prophet ﷺ probably means that Allah makes learning the useful knowledge that is sought after easier for the seeker, clearing the way for him and smoothing his journey. Some of our predecessors used to say: "Is there anyone seeking knowledge, so that we can assist him in finding it?"

This *hadith* also alludes to the road leading to the Garden on the Day of Judgement, which is the straight path – and to what precedes it and what comes after it.

Knowledge is also the shortest path to Allah. Whoever travels the road of knowledge reaches Allah and the Garden by the shortest route. Knowledge also clears the way out of darkness, ignorance, doubt and scepticism. It is why Allah called His Book, "Light".

Al-Bukhari and Muslim have reported on the authority of Abdullah ibn Umar that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Truly, Allah will not take away knowledge by snatching it away from people, but by taking away the lives of the people of knowledge one by one until none of them survive. Then the people will adopt ignorant ones as their leaders. They will be asked to deliver judgements and they will give them without knowledge, with the result that they will go astray and lead others astray."

When 'Ubadah ibn as-Samit was asked about this *hadith* he said: "If you want, I will tell you what the highest knowledge is, which raises people in rank: it is humility."

He said this because there are two types of knowledge. The first produces its fruit in the heart. It is knowledge of Allah, the Exalted – His Names, His Attributes, and His Acts – which commands fear, respect, exaltation, love, supplication and reliance on Him. This is the beneficial type of knowledge. As ibn Mas'ud said: "They will recite the Qur'an, but it will not go beyond their throats. The Qur'an is only beneficial when it reaches the heart and is firmly planted in it."

Al-Hasan said: "There are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the tongue, which can be a case against the son of Adam, as is mentioned in the *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ: 'The Qur'an is either a case for you or a case against you'<sup>8</sup>; and knowledge of the heart, which is beneficial knowledge. The second kind is the beneficial kind which raises people in rank; it is the inner knowledge which is absorbed by the heart and puts it right. The knowledge that is on the tongue is taken lightly by people: neither those who possess it, nor anyone else, act upon it, and then it vanishes when its owners vanish on the Day of Judgment, when creation will be brought to account."

## Notes

1. Al-Bukhari and Muslim.
2. Al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Qadar*, 11/499.
3. This is illustrated in a *hadith* recorded by Imam Muslim in his *Sahih*, in which it is related on the authority of Abu



Dharr that the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "You will receive the reward for *sadaqa* even when you have sexual intercourse with your wives." The *sahaba* said, "Will we really be rewarded for satisfying our physical desires?" He replied, "If you have *haram* intercourse, you will be committing a sin; similarly, if you have *halal* intercourse, you will be rewarded." *Imam* an-Nawawi said, "This *hadith* clearly shows that permissible actions become acts of obedience if there is a good intention behind them; sexual intercourse becomes an act of worship if it is accompanied by any one of the following good intentions: keeping company with your wife in kindness, as Allah ta'Ala has commanded; hoping to have, as a result of the intercourse, good and righteous offspring; guarding your chastity and that of your wife; helping to prevent *haram* lustful glances or thoughts, or *haram* intercourse; and any other good intention."

4. *Tahdhib al-'Asma' li-Nawawi*, 1/173. Abu Ishaq ash-Shirazi once entered the mosque to have something to eat, as was his custom, and then realised that he had dropped a *dinar*. He retraced his steps and found it lying on the ground, but then left it where it was, saying, "Perhaps it is not mine; perhaps it belongs to somebody else."

5. *Sahih, Ja'mi 'l-'Ulum wa'l-Hikam*, p.19.

6. Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

7. Muslim, 21/17.

8. Muslim, *Kitab at-Tahara*, 3/99.

## THREE

### TYPES OF HEART

Just as the heart may be described in terms of being alive or dead, it may also be regarded as belonging to one of three types; these are the healthy heart, the dead heart, and the sick heart.

#### *The Healthy Heart*

On the Day of Resurrection, only those who come to Allah with a healthy heart will be saved. Allah says:

◀ The day on which neither wealth nor sons will be of any use, except for whoever brings to Allah a sound heart. (26:88-89) ▶

In defining the healthy heart, the following has been said: "It is a heart cleansed from any passion that challenges what Allah commands, or disputes what He forbids. It is free from any impulses which contradict His good. As a result, it is safeguarded against the worship of anything other than Him, and seeks the judgement of no other except that of His Messenger ﷺ. Its services are exclusively reserved for Allah, willingly and lovingly, with total reliance, relating all matters to Him, in fear, hope and sincere dedication. When it loves, its love is in the way of Allah. If it detests, it detests in the light of what He detests. When it gives, it gives for Allah. If it withholds, it withholds for Allah. Nevertheless, all this will not suffice for its