

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

I remember when we went to *maktab* as children, our Ustad taught us some hadiths to learn by heart. The first one that was taught was *innamal aamaalo binniyyate*. Its translation as we were told was “actions are judged according to intentions”. Later on, when we started reading religious books, I came to know that these words were part of a longer hadith from Sahih Bukhari which is considered by Islamic scholars to be the most truthful book after the Book of Allah, namely the Holy Quran. The full hadith is narrated by Hazrat Umar bin Al Khattab (ra) and he said:

“I heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) saying, "The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So, whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for." In Islam intention is very important and the purer it is the better it is. Under all circumstances, we should be aware that our intention is known by us and by Allah. If we try to delude someone, we will be deluding but ourselves because although others might not know about our real intention, Allah is well aware of it and He will take us to account for it.

That is why behind our *Salaat*, our Fasting and Hajj there is a need for the intention. My personal experience and that of many other people that I have read about is that when we make the intention to do something good, we are easily able to do it. For example, if one makes the intention to wake up for *Tahajjud* or *Fajr* prayer, one easily wakes up for that purpose. Whereas if we leave it to chance and not make the intention, quite often it so happens that one may miss the *Tahajjud* prayer and pray *Fajr* late. I am sure many of among us may have had similar experiences where the importance of intention might have been highlighted. I can cite several quotations where people of the world also have shown the importance of “intention” in achieving worldly success. But that is something else. Let us stick to the religious aspect and understand that it is our personal responsibility, under all circumstances to cultivate good intentions in our dealings with one another and we should not try to mask our intention in order to cause harm to others or to do things to our advantage while harming others.

My aim in this brief introduction is only to provoke reflection over why we do what we do. Sometimes we know it. Very often we do not know. But it is our duty to understand why we do what we do. Hazrat Masih Maood (as) came to revive faith in Allah. As his followers, it is our duty to succeed in this task by purifying our intention of everything that is not related to God and see to it that we try to do everything for the sake of Allah

alone. There is one hadith which can help us to see the need to check ourselves constantly so that we might not get involved in things that we might consider to be light but which are quite heavy in the sight of Allah.

There is a well-known hadith which points out to us the importance of having pure intention in doing good deeds and what that intention should be. I first read about this hadith in a book by Al Ghazzali around 1975. Every time I read this hadith, I get very concerned. Twice I have read it in my sermons here. But I think that it is still relevant to us all as a good reminder. It is reported that:

“Ibn Al-Mubarak related, with a chain of authorities going back to a certain man, that this man said to Mu'adh, 'O Mu'adh, tell me a Tradition you heard from the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him).' The man continued : 'Mu'adh wept until I thought he would never cease, but at length he ceased; then he said: 'I heard the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) saying to me: 'I am going to tell you a Tradition (or tell you of a happening), Mu'adh; if you remember it, it will benefit you before God, but if you forget it and do not remember it, your plea of defense before God on the day of resurrection will be removed. O Mu'adh, God (may He be blessed and exalted) before creating the heavens and the earth created seven angels, and to each of the heavens He appointed one of these seven angels as keeper.

Now the guardian angels are ascending with man's work from morning to evening; and the work has a light like the light of the sun. When they bring it up to the lowest heaven, they increase and multiply it, and the angel at the gate says to the guardians. 'With this work strike the face of the doer of it; I am in charge of backbiting; my Lord has commanded me not to allow the work of anyone guilty of backbiting to pass beyond me."

He continued: 'Then the guardians bring one of man's good works and increase and multiply it, until they reach the second heaven with it. The angel responsible for it says, 'Stand and with this work strike the face of the worker of it, for in his work he sought worldly honour ; my Lord has commanded me not to allow his work to pass beyond me; he boasted in men's society of his superiority; I am the angel dealing with boastfulness."

He continued: 'The guardians ascend with a man's work, so bright with light from alms and Worship and fasting that the guardians were astonished. They passed with it to the third heaven, and there the angel in charge says to them, 'Stand and with this work strike the face of the worker of it; I am the angel dealing. with arrogance; my Lord has commanded me not to let his work pass beyond me for he has treated people arrogantly in society."

He continued: 'The guardians ascend with a man's work shining brightly like a star and ringing from the acts of adoration and Worship, from fasting and from the greater and lesser pilgrimages, and they pass with it to the fourth heaven. Then the angel responsible for that says to them, 'Stand and with this work strike the face and back and front of the doer of this work; I am in charge of pride ; my Lord has commanded me not to let this act pass beyond me ; whenever this man performed any work pride entered into it."

He continued: 'The guardians ascend with a man's work and pass with it to the fifth heaven; it is like a bride being conducted to her husband. The angel responsible for it says to the guardians, 'Stand and with this work strike the face of the doer of it, and carry him away and place him on his shoulder; I am the angel dealing with envy; this man used to envy whoever studied and performed a work like his and all who were superior to men in some way; he used to envy them and slander them; my Lord has commanded me not to allow his work to pass beyond me."

He continued: 'The guardians ascend with a man's work, radiant as the moon from Worship and almsgiving and the greater and lesser pilgrimages and the holy war and fasting, and they pass with it to the sixth heaven, where the angel responsible for that says to them, 'Stand and with this work strike the face of the doer of it; he never had mercy on any of God's servants who had met with misfortune or sickness, but he rejoiced at that; I am the angel of mercy; my Lord commanded me not to allow his work to pass beyond me."

He continued: 'The guardians ascend with a man's work consisting of Worship and fasting and the spending of money (in good causes, or otherwise as alms) and the holy war and continence; it had a sound like that of bees and a radiance like that of the sun; along with it were three thousand angels and they passed with it to the seventh heaven. The angel responsible for that said to them, 'Stand and with that work strike the face of the doer of it and with it strike his limbs and lock up his heart; I veil from my Lord every work that is not done for the sake of my Lord; this work was done for the sake of something other than God most high; he did it for the sake of honour among the religious scholars (*ulama*) and fame among the intellectuals and renown among the cities; my Lord commanded me not to allow his work to pass beyond me; every work not done purely for God is hypocrisy, and God does not receive the work of the hypocrite."

He continued: 'The guardians ascend with a man's work consisting of Worship, almsgiving, fasting, the greater and lesser pilgrimages, a good character, observance of silence and recollection of God most high. It is accompanied by the angels of the seven heavens until they have passed through all the veils to the presence of God most high. Then they stand before Him and bear witness to Him of the good work, performed solely

for the sake of God most high; and God most high says, "You are the guardians over the work of My servant, but I am the Watcher over his heart; this act was not done for My sake, but for the sake of something else; so My curse is upon him."

Then the angels all say, "Thy curse and our curse be upon him"; and the seven heavens and those in them curse him." At that Mu'adh wept, and then continued: "I said: 'O Messenger of God. you are the Messenger of God, and I am Mu'adh; how shall I have purity of intention and salvation'? Muhammad said: 'Imitate me, even if you fall short somewhat in what you do. O Mu'adh, guard your tongue from slandering your brothers who know the Qur'an by heart; attribute your sins to yourself and not to them; do not justify yourself and blame them; do not exalt yourself above them; do not mingle the work of this world with the work of the world to come; do not act arrogantly in society so that men avoid you because of your bad character; do not whisper to one man while another is also present; do not magnify your importance above other men so that you lose the good things of both this world and the world to come; do not tear to pieces people's characters so that on the day of Resurrection the dogs of Hell tear you to pieces in Hell. God most high says (Q. 79, 2); "By those who draw forth"; do you know what these are, O Mu'adh?' I said: 'What are they, O Messenger of God (may you be ransomed by my father and mother)?' He said: 'The dogs in Hell drawing the flesh from the bones'. I said: 'O Messenger of God (may you be ransomed by my father and mother) who is able to acquire these good qualities, and who will escape from these dogs?' He said: 'O Mu'adh, it is indeed easy for him for whom God makes it easy.' " Khalid b. Mi'dan said: 'I never saw anyone more assiduous in reading the noble Qur'an than Mu'adh on account of this noble Tradition" (Faith & Practice of Ghazali (p. 145-151)

May Allah help each one among us to understand and to do good deeds for His sake exclusively so that He might be pleased with us in this world and in the next. Ameen.