

Chapter Two

Analysis of Selected Hadiths about Intention (Niyyah)

Introduction

Intention is one of the key concepts and a broad term in Islamic thought. It is related to many cases and rulings in different Islamic disciplines ranging from jurisprudence to theology. Before starting to analyze the hadiths about intention it is good to give some insight about this term so the readers have some background information about it.

Intention is a resolve in a person's heart to do something.⁷⁷ Intention simply signifies a course of action that one proposes to follow. It is an act or instance of determining mentally upon some action or result. It is also purpose or attitude toward the effect of one's actions or conduct. As a legal term it is resolve in the heart to do obligatory or other actions.⁷⁸ There is another term '*qasd*' (purpose) which is close in meaning with intention (*niyyah*); however, there are some differences between them. *Qasd* (purpose) may be connected to the action of the doer himself/herself or the action of others, whereas *niyyah* (intention) is connected only to one's own actions. Another point is that *qasd* (purpose) can only refer to an action that a person is able to do, whereas *niyyah* (intention) may refer to things which are beyond the capacity of liable person. Sometimes a person may intent to do good or evil things but not capable of doing it. So, intention is related to the things that are in the capacity of liable person as well as the things which are beyond his/her capacity.

Intention is a state of mind and a commitment about an aim and a purpose. To have a clear intention means realizing clearly what one desires and which path to follow, attaining the appropriate state of mind, and then seeking the means to achieve the envisaged purpose.⁷⁹ Intention is basis of all kind of actions and it brings responsibility upon liable people for it is the ground of will power.

Before having an intention about anything everything comes to the mind as an idea first. If a person is determined in his/her intention the idea becomes a reality. If ideas do not turn into intention human beings cannot achieve any success. However, intention is not enough for such success because determination and resolve are also necessary.

The values of deeds are determined with the nature of intention and its quality. It plays pivotal role for the validity or otherwise of the deeds. Sometimes a small act may produce a tremendous result because of intention. If a Muslim intends to please God with his insignificant deeds they may be accepted as important. One insignificant deed may be a reason for a person's salvation with good intention and of course the opposite is also true. If doing good deeds or abstaining from evil ones is undertaking with the intention to please God they will bring rewards and increase to a higher spiritual level.

⁷⁷ Mahmud 'Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Mun'im, *Mu'jam al-Mustalahāt wa-al-Alfāz al-Fiqhiyah*, Dar al-Fadilah, Cairo 1999, vol.3, p. 96.

⁷⁸ Abu Zakariya Muhyiddin Yahya Ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *al-Majmu' Sharh al-Muhadhdhab*, Dar al-Turath Al-Arabi, Cairo 1929, vol.1, p. 310.

⁷⁹ Fethullah Gulen, *Questions and Answers about Islam*, New Jersey: The Light, Inc. 2006, vol.1, p. 205.

Permissible acts (mubah) are accepted without intention, such as marriage, divorce and business. However, if they are done with the intention to please God a person will be rewarded for them. For example, working to take care of one's family is permissible act. If a person does this to earn halal (lawful) money and provide halal provision for his family for the sake of God this permissible act can be considered as worship with this intention and the person will be rewarded for it. However, if an act is good but intention for it is not the person will not be rewarded. For example, martyrdom is very rewarding deed in Islam yet if a person fights for his own whim not for God's sake he is not considered martyr, and so do not receive any reward. On the other side, if a person sincerely asks martyrdom to please God but dies in the bed he is considered martyr with his intention and he can hope for the reward of martyrdom in Judgment Day.

Intention is a magical key that opens the door of eternal life. Eternal happiness or punishment lies in one's intention therefore it should be used well. With limited life and limited means the eternal happiness cannot be achieved. But with the sincere intention a believer may attain Paradise. If we were rewarded according to the amounts and the times of our good deeds we would not stay in Paradise forever. An intention to live faithfully and righteously forever will result in eternal happiness, just as an intention to live in denial, rejection, and corruption forever will result in eternal misfortune.⁸⁰ Once the Prophet stated that the believers' intentions are more benevolent than their deeds.⁸¹ So, people are rewarded or punished according to their intention.

⁸⁰ Gulen, Questions and Answers about Islam, vol.1, p. 207.

⁸¹ Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawa'id*, vol.1, p. 69.

The Hadiths on Intention and Its Significance

First hadith

وَعَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَبِي حَفْصِ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ
إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا نَوَى، فَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ فَهِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ، وَمَنْ كَانَتْ
هِجْرَتُهُ لِدُنْيَا يُصِيبُهَا، أَوْ امْرَأَةٍ يَنْكِحُهَا فَهِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى مَا هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِ

‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb reports: I heard the Messenger of God (pbuh) stating, “The deeds are considered by the intentions, and a person will get the reward according to his intention. So, whoever emigrated for Allah and His Messenger, his emigration will be for Allah and His Messenger; and whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration would be for what he emigrated for.”⁸²

‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb

The transmitter of the hadith is ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb, the second Caliph of Islam. He was from Banī Adiy tribe, a subcategory of the Quraysh. ‘Umar was 10 years junior of the Prophet (pbuh). ‘Umar was a strong and resilient man of Makka and made life intolerable for Muslims. He had a rough character, brave and was not scared of anyone and therefore the Muslims were joyous for he empowered them. When he embraced Islam, he went to Ka’ba and prayed there. With his Islam, the Muslims performed their prayer at Ka’ba for the first time.

He openly announced his emigration to Medina while the others secretly left Makka. He was considered as one of the two viziers the Prophet along with Abū Bakr. He often visited the Prophet (pbuh) to learn from him and also help him. He joined all the military expeditions that the Prophet joined and provided great benefit for the Muslims. His daughter Hafsa got married with the Prophet and ‘Umar achieved the honor of being father-in-law to the Prophet. He loved the Prophet so immensely that when the Prophet passed away he could not accept his death. He even threatened people with his sword if they said that the Prophet died.

‘Umar was trustworthy. He was gifted with the prophetic logic. He asked the Prophet to supplicate God to receive verses on specific topics and then the revelation came as he wished. Sometimes he explained his own opinions on certain matters and then God confirmed him with revelation. The similarity between Umar’s views on certain matters with the Qur’anic revelation is named as ‘Muwafaqaat al-Umariyya’ (‘Umar’s similar opinions with the Qur’an).

⁸² Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Bad-ul Wahy, 1; Muslim, *Sahīh*, Imara, 155.

After being chosen as the second Caliph after the death of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar conquered many lands such as Iran, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. His most distinguishable characteristic is his meticulous understanding of justice for he represented the best examples in this regard. He allocated salary for all the needy from the treasury and treated them fairly. He contributed to Muslim community by introducing new ideas and also establishing new institutions in the fields of governmental, judicial, economic and military. He put great effort to spread the Qur’ān all over and sent the teachers everywhere for this purpose.

Although ‘Umar had a tough character he was very humble. He wore patchy clothing, carried water on his back to the houses of widows, slept on the ground and took care of camels by himself. He often roamed the streets to listen to complains of people and to solve their problems. He was very eloquent and was uttering wisdom. He tolerated people’s critics with mercy and compassion. In several occasions some people criticized his own views while he was delivering Friday sermon but he never scolded them nor was upset with them. He was martyred by a Persian slave in the year 24 *hijrī* and was buried at the feet of the Prophet (pbuh). May God be well pleased with him.

Analysis of the hadith

This is an authentic hadith. Bukhari and Muslim agree on its authenticity and report it in their *saḥīḥ* hadith books. Bukhari starts his famous book with this hadith to give the meaning that every act becomes void if God’s content and pleasure is not intended in them. He advised the authors to start with this hadith to their books. Some scholars such as Ahmad bin Hanbal, Abū Dāwud and Tirmidhi hold that this hadith explains one-third of the religion. Imam Shāfi’i maintains that it is related to seventy topics in Islam and therefore it should be considered as half of the religion.⁸³

The statement ‘the deeds are considered by the intentions’ in the hadith can be understood in various ways. The actions which are subject to the intentions of their doers get their value with the nature of their intentions. If the intention is right and the act is righteous the doer will get reward for it. However, if the intention is bad the act is also considered bad and it brings sin upon the doer. Labeling the actions as good or bad, valid or invalid, sound or void is related to the intentions. So, the hadith informs the Muslims to be careful in their intentions. God commanded the Muslims to be sincere in their intentions;

“But they were not enjoined anything other than that they should worship God, sincere in faith in Him and practicing the Religion purely for His sake, as people of pure faith, and establish the Prayer in accordance with its conditions, and pay the Prescribed Purifying Alms; and that is the upright, ever-true Religion.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Zaylaī, *Nasb al-Raya*, vol.1, p. 301.

⁸⁴ Qur’ān 98: 5

“It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah, but it is piety (good intention) from you that reaches Him”⁸⁵

Intention is doing an act for God’s sake and having sincere purpose for it. The place for intention is heart. The actions start as intention in the minds of the doers first and then actualized by the limbs. Thus, intention is the basis for deeds and it has great significance. Removing an obstacle from the road to prevent harm from people is a good deed and also an act of worship. Similarly, abstaining from forbidden business or unlawful means due to fear of God is worship and the person gains reward with this intention.

Good thoughts get value when they are associated with good intentions. If the heart does not mean what the tongue says the intention is not valid. Intention is one of the conditions of prayer and if it is not valid the prayer is not valid either. For example, if a person expresses his/her intention by tongue but thinks something else in his/her mind in that moment intention is not valid and therefore his/her prayer is not valid.

Intention has two aspects; one is related to determining an act. For example, Noon prayer is separated from others and Ramadan fasting is separated from optional ones with specific intention. This aspect is elaborated in fiqh books. The other aspect in intention is related to subject which an act is done for. Intention reveals that if the purpose in act is God’s pleasure and content alone or there is anything else. This aspect is related to sincerity in intention and mostly explained by pious scholars.

A person will get the reward according to his intention. The result for the actions will be determined according to the intentions. For example, apparently a good deed or an act of worship may achieve people’s appreciation but God only accepts the deeds that are done for Him alone. If a person aims to gain people’s appreciation with his/her good deeds he/she won’t receive any benefit from God for it. Even if a person aims to achieve God’s pleasure together with peoples’ appreciation there is no reward for this type of acts.

Seeking God’s pleasure and content makes the deeds valuable at the side of God. Giving zakat or praying to be appreciated by people is a hidden shirk (associating partner to God). However, without intending to show off it is permissible to encourage people by practicing the rituals publicly. The Prophet stated that good deeds will not benefit to the doers if they are not done for the sake of God;

“The first of men (whose case) will be decided on the Day of Judgment will be a man who died as a martyr. He shall be brought (before God). God will make him recount His blessings ‘and he will recount them. (Then) God says: ‘What did you do?’ He answers: ‘I fought for You until I died as a martyr’. God will say: ‘You have told a lie, you fought that you might be called a ‘brave warrior’ and you were called so’. The judgment will be given against him and he will be dragged with his face downward and cast into Hell. Then a man, who acquired knowledge and recited the Qur’ān, will be brought. God will ask His blessings upon him and he will admit them. Then God asks: ‘What did you do?’ He will say: ‘I acquired knowledge

⁸⁵ Qur’ān 22: 37.

and disseminated it and recited the Qur'ān seeking Your pleasure.' God (rejects this answer) says: 'You have told a lie, you acquired knowledge so that you might be called 'a scholar' and you recited the Qur'ān so you might be called 'a reciter' (expert in Qur'ān) and such has been said. Then judgment will be given against him and he shall be dragged with his face downward and cast into the Fire. Then a man whom God made very rich and granted every kind of wealth will be brought. God will ask His blessings and he will admit them. God will (then) ask: 'What have you done'? He will answer: 'I spent my wealth in the way which You commanded that it should be spent. God (rejects this answer) says: 'You are lying, you did (so) that it might be said that he is a generous fellow and so it was said.' Then will God give judgment against him and he will be dragged with his face downward and thrown into Hell.'⁸⁶

The expression 'so whoever emigrated for Allah and His Messenger, his emigration will be for Allah and His Messenger' is an explanatory example for the ruling of intention. Real migration is abandoning what God forbade.⁸⁷ *Hijra* (emigration) as an Islamic term, refers to the Prophet and his Companions' emigration from Makka to Medina. In order to practice Islam freely they left their homeland and all the beloved ones behind for the sake of God. Although *hijra* is a very difficult act it brings great reward when it is done for the sake of God.

The emigration is a social phenomenon. All prophets emigrated to find a suitable place to convey their message. Every human being is subject to the journey from their birth until their final destination in the afterlife. Sincere believers should emigrate to different places in the world to enlighten the other people with their knowledge, culture and belief. They should devote themselves to promote peace; human values, justice and social order. In order to contribute to the civilization of their time Muslims should utilize this the prophetic action. Indeed, there have been individuals who continue to immigrate in the way of their ideas, thoughts and belief.

God usually mentions faith, hijrah and jihad (inner struggle to achieve utmost human perfection) all together and this order signifies its importance. First is belief, then hijra and then struggling in the way of belief and informing other people about their own values. Reaching out to everyone, offering hope to the weak, showing the good side of life to the pessimistic ones, introducing the universal human values to the barbarians and helping all people is the purpose of life and the meaning of hijrah in Islam.

Unbelievers and none-Muslims may see believers as threat for themselves and their way of life. Thus, they may apply all kinds of persecutions against Muslims to deter them from their belief. All prophets experienced this type of difficulties when they offered their messages to their nations. Consequently, they left their homes to seek suitable place to teach the words of God. It seems that the hijrah is an inescapable common destiny of all prophets. They always searched alternative ways to guide people to the straight path when the opposing people closed all the doors and prevented them from reaching out to others. However, when they

⁸⁶ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, Imara, 152.

⁸⁷ Nawawī, *Riyāḍ al-Sālihīn*, 1569.

migrated to new places, God bestowed the immigrants His blessings and abundant means for their services.

The notion of hijra develops on the strong basement of faith for the immigrants denounce all their worldly pleasures for the sake of their belief. Hijra is living for others and depriving oneself from their own pleasures. Hijrah is giving spirit and reviving spiritually dead ones, it is not enjoying the life in its full content. There are two steps for this sacred mission; first, the individuals gain good character, become full of faith and get over all the negative sides of their carnal desires. They become loyal servants of God at the end of this struggle. According to Islam this inner struggling is the biggest and most important jihad. At the second stage, these loyal servants want to share their enlightenment with others and help them to see the truth. At this stage, hijrah becomes obligatory for them.

If the immigrants are successful in their own *hijrah* in terms of becoming good servants of God by abandoning all sinful acts and carrying out all the religious duties, they can be successful in regards to helping others. The real hijrah happens in one's spiritual realm first and then in the physical dimension. The Prophet Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others escaped from the things which God did not like first and then left their homes. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) educated his followers with Islam and embellished them with the best human values for thirteen years before hijrah. Once they were ready for the hijrah in spirit, the Prophet allowed them to immigrate to Medina.

The holy *Hijrah* of the Prophet (pbuh) is a turning point in the Islamic History; it finished the period of Makka which lasted for thirteen years and started the new stage of Islam in Medina. The *Hijrah* affected all human history because Islam found a firm ground in Medina and spread out quickly all over the world. Since hijra, the teachings of the Prophet have been learned by the people from different races, languages, nations and cultures all over the world. All of humanity have benefited from the richness of Islam and guidance of the Prophet. Although there is no *hijra* in its literal meaning (emigration from Makka to Medina) after the conquest of Makka, it will continue elsewhere along with *jihad* until the Last Day. Believers continue to emigrate to preach Islam and its universal values.⁸⁸

The scholars mention an event which caused this hadith to be stated; a person sent a proposal of marriage to a woman named Umm Qays. However, she turned down the offer and told him that he should have to immigrate to Medina in order to accept his marriage proposal. Accordingly, he immigrated to Medina with this intention and they got married there. On account of this event, the man came to be known among the Companions as the immigrant of Umm Qays.

In short, the deeds are determined with intention. Good intention increases one's reward, and transforms every action into a kind of worship. A person achieves the eternal happiness by his/her good intention in this short worldly life.

⁸⁸ Gulen, *Messenger of God*, p. 103.