# **The Four Great Deeds Which Take Willpower**

[*Güçlü İrade İsteyen Dört Büyük Amel*](http://www.ozgurherkul.org/kirik-testi/kirik-testi-guclu-irade-isteyen-dort-buyuk-amel/)

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**Question:**The following is related in *Al-Munabbihat* (The Counsel) with reference to Ali ibn Abi Talib, may God be pleased with him:

**إِنَّ أَصْعَبَ الْأَعْمَالِ أَرْبَعُ خِصَالٍ اَلْعَفْوُ عِنْدَ الْغَضَبِ، وَالْجُودُ فِي الْعُسْرَةِ، وَالْعِفَّةُ فِي الْخَلْوَةِ، وَقَوْلُ الْحَقِّ لِمَنْ يَخَافُهُ أَوْ يَرْجُوهُ**

“The following four virtues are the most difficult of deeds: Being able to forgive while enraged, showing generosity during hardship, remaining chaste in the face of temptation while in private, always speaking up for truth in the face of another whom one fears or from whom one expects a benefit.” Could you expound on the deeds mentioned in this statement, and the Divine rewards to be granted in return?

**Answer:**When you consider other statements that are ascribed to noble Ali, his words included in *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence) and his style and use of language, and then also consider the fact that the Muslims had newly emerged from the Era of Ignorance so notions and concepts about different fields of knowledge had not fully flourished, and works about language and eloquence had not yet fully appeared, then these words, which require a certain literary background, do not appear so likely to be his. Therefore, one cannot help but imagine that perhaps the people of the third and fourth centuries, when different scholarly fields had been developed, ascribed the words they said to noble Ali, may God be pleased with him. However, when we consider his unique qualities such as being open to spirituality, having dynamic inspirations and his position as the father of a chain of saintly people, then it is highly possible for him to have said these words as a result of inspiration. On the other hand, the previously mentioned possibility should not be dismissed. In addition, it is also possible for those people from a later period to have rephrased his original statements by enriching them with the meanings and concepts of their own period. As it is not easy to have a decisive view on this, let us say “God knows its truth” and discuss the subject of the four deeds that are mentioned.

Our master Ali firstly expresses that the most difficult deeds number four. Actually, every deed has a difficult aspect of its own. Making ablutions five times a day, observing the Prayers, Fasting throughout the day particularly on long, hot days, donating from lawful gains, observing the duty of Hajj, observing the rights of parents without any complaint near them… When such acts of worship and responsibilities are viewed, it will be seen that each of them has certain difficulties of its own. I imagine that nobody views these deeds and worship as easy. However, he particularly draws attention to four issues that he sees as the most difficult among deeds.

1. **Forgiveness while Enraged**

The first difficult deed is being able to forgive others while in a state of rage. Actually, swallowing one’s rage and showing forgiveness at the moment when a one’s rage overflows like magma is a deed the Qur’an praises and encourages people to do. For example: “*They spend (out of what God has provided for them) both in ease and hardship, ever-restraining their rage (even when provoked and able to retaliate), and pardoning people (their offenses)*…” (Al Imran 3:134). With this Divine verse, God states that swallowing one’s rage and pardoning others is a quality of God-revering and pious ones (those with *taqwa*). He brings to our attention that swallowing one’s rage is as difficult a task as swallowing a thorny cactus. Surely, the reward for a person who accomplishes such a deed will be greater accordingly.

Forgiving is easy for a person who is not disturbed by anyone, who is in a good mood, who is shown appreciation and love by others. What really matters is a person’s giving his willpower its due at a time when he is bothered and troubled by others, and is in a rage because of that—to not respond in the same way and show forgiveness.

In fact, a human being is not a creature that has to react in the same way when some others touch him with their horns. God Almighty, may His glory be exalted, left no gap in human abilities. He endowed humanity with the way to perfection and created them as perfect beings. He granted them such a willpower that, when a person is able to harness its full potential, he can carry out the most difficult deeds and subjugate his feelings of anger and rage by taking them under control.

As you know the original word for forgiveness is *afw*, and it means “erasing something.” That is to say, you deliberately ignore some of the attitudes and behaviors displayed by others which disturb and enrage you, and virtually white them out in your mind. You do not even allow all of these negativities to take a place in your mind or leave a trace in your neurons. Even if they pressurize you to the degree of affecting your health, you erase them from your cortex.  This truly is a difficult deed to fulfill. However, once a person is able to accomplish that, namely, build a character predisposed for forgetting others’ evils, then the rewards in the afterlife will be very different. It is likely that in response to this forgiving attitude, the Divine punishment due for certain wrongs and sins committed by that person will be erased and he will be blessed with Divine forgiveness in return for having forgiven others.

1. **Showing Generosity in Times of Hardship**

Secondly, our master Ali, may God be pleased with him, emphasized the importance of acting magnanimously when seized by hardship. It is easy for a person with a substantial fortune to be generous because it will not seriously diminish by giving some of it away. What will a person who has a thousand dollars lose if he gives away one dollar of it? What really matters is being able to give for God’s sake during hardship. As forgiveness during rage is an invitation for Divine forgiveness, generosity during times of hardship is an invitation for Divine generosity.

In a way, he drew attention to the altruistic virtue of *ithar*, preferring others over oneself; *ithar* is a person’s giving his food to another while he himself is hungry and thirsty. God Almighty states the following in relation to this issue: “…*and in their hearts do not begrudge what they (other believers) have been given, and (indeed) they prefer them over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot*” (al-Hashr 59:9).

During the Battle of Yarmuk, a Companion with dried-up lips, on the verge of death, was about to drink the water they brought for him. On hearing another dying Companion asking for water, he beckoned for the water to be taken to him instead. When the second Companion received the water, he heard the same moan from a third and beckoned for the water to be taken to him instead. This repeated until the water was taken to seven different people. In the end, all of them were martyred and none of those altruistic souls was able to drink the water. It is one of the most striking and beautiful examples of the virtue of *ithar*, preferring others over oneself, as an outward reflection of living for the sake of others in the true sense and remaining loyal to real human values.

1. **Being Able to Remain Chaste in the Face of Temptation When in Private**

The third difficult but good deed mentioned by our master Ali is remaining chaste in spite of being in a situation that allows one to sin in private..

In a saying, the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, referred to the seven categories of people who will be provided with shade by the Divine Throne on the Day of Judgment when no other shade exists. He revealed that one of these is someone who rejects the indecent invitation of a woman of status and beauty by responding to her by saying, “I fear God.”[[1]](https://www.herkul.org/weekly-sermons/the-four-great-deeds-which-take-willpower/#_edn1)

In a way, it is easy to appear decent in others’ sight. It is not easy for people to commit sin while others’ eyes are on them. However, when someone finds himself in the vortex of such a tempting opportunity, when someone immoral is attempting to seduce him, it is very difficult for him to master his willpower and become an example of chastity; refusing temptation by exclaiming as Prophet Joseph, peace be upon him, did: “*God forbid*!” (Yusuf 12:23), and thus taking a clear stance against that temptation. In such situations where one is pushed toward negative things, it truly takes a willpower of steel to stand perfectly upright with the soundness of a mountain without being shaken at all. Undoubtedly, the reward for a person who withstands such temptation will be as great in the same degree.

During the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, may God be pleased with him, a seductive woman laid her eyes on a handsome young man and set a trap for him. One day, she somehow managed to make him take one step in through her door. However, the young man found himself reciting the verse with the following meaning: “*Those who keep from disobedience to God in reverence for Him and piety: when a suggestion from Satan touches them*—*they are alert and remember God, and then they have clear discernment*” (al-A’raf 7:201). Upon this, the young man’s heart stopped and he passed away right there. The Companions did not wish to inform the caliph about it; they took the body, which was found in front of that immoral woman’s house, and buried him quietly. On realizing the absence of this devout youth, who would normally take his place in the first rank of the Prayers, Umar ibn al-Khattab asked where he was. The Companions told him about the situation. After this, the caliph ran to the grave of the young man and recited the verse meaning, “*But for him who lives in awe of his Lord and of the standing before his Lord (in the Hereafter), there will be two Gardens*…” in address to him. Then a voice from the grave replied with the following words: “O leader of the believers! I have been granted twice more than that.”

This event also indicates that it is so hard, so valuable, and very important for a person to remain chaste in case of immediate temptation while in private. Unfortunately, as the recent few centuries have taken away so many values from us, it also destroyed our idea of chastity. We Muslims have become so miserable and corrupt in this regard. Under the banner of “freedom” some have laid all indecent means of immorality before us and thus made our atmosphere vulnerable to all kinds of immorality. But in spite of everything, we hold the belief that as far as those who protect their decency and chastity in our time are concerned, God Almighty will treat them with His Divine favors, honor them with two Paradises, and crown them with His good pleasure, absolute acceptance, and seeing Him.

1. **Speaking Up for Truth When This Is Difficult**

He explained the final good deed he thought to be difficult as “speaking out against another whom one fears or from whom one expects some benefit.” In situations where one fears someone or is promised some benefits by them, if a person cannot be morally upright and speak up for truth but instead agrees to engage in a deal, then the holders of power virtually shackle him and bring him under total control. They then make him do everything they want. As it can be seen in different circles in our time, fear is a factor that restrains, paralyzes and totally disables a person while running on the righteous path. Likewise, cherishing expectations of certain benefits puts a person in the position of a mute devil who cannot speak out against oppressive rulers. It causes that person to knowingly distort realities, speak wrongly and commit wrongs. As we witness its very bitter examples, so many people today are saying just the opposite of what they said yesterday because of certain opportunities laid before them, some expectation they cherish, or due to being paralyzed by fear and anxiety. Like a chameleon, they change from one hue to another with the changing conditions and thus—may God protect—they commit successive wrongs in a way that will ruin their life in both worlds. By means of different engagements of benefits, they virtually live like slaves and cannot manage to break free. So it is true heroism to speak up for truth during a time when fear and benefits prevail. Such a heroic act will surely be rewarded accordingly in the next world.

In short, rewards for deeds will differ according to the time and conditions in which they were realized. However, one point should not be missed here. Receiving a much greater reward for having fulfilled a difficult deed depends on keeping the sincerity of intention and not making any overt or covert complaints. In other words, in order to gain a greater reward in accordance with the difficulty of a certain deed, one must not complain about the difficulties. One should show patience against all odds, not dare to criticize Divine destiny and fulfill that deed in a willing and voluntary fashion.

[[1]](https://www.herkul.org/weekly-sermons/the-four-great-deeds-which-take-willpower/#_ednref1) *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Zakah, 16; *Sahih Muslim*, Zakah, 91.

*This text is the translation of “**[Güçlü İrade İsteyen Dört Büyük Amel](http://www.ozgurherkul.org/kirik-testi/kirik-testi-guclu-irade-isteyen-dort-buyuk-amel/).”*