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# THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF INTENTION IN WORSHIP

The intention is the essence of worship. Every act of worship has an outer element and an inner element. The outer element is the physical and visible part of the action. This may be recitation of the Quran, offering the prescribed daily devotion, giving charity, fasting, performing the pilgrimage or any other act of worship. There is also the inner element, this is what the heart feels and determines, and this is where the intention lies.

To explain the significance of this, the Messenger Muhammad said, “Indeed, all actions are judged by their intention, and everyone shall receive what they intended.” Thus, every action requires an intention in order for it to be correct and valid. This intention has a dual purpose, the first is to ensure it is done exclusively as a devotion for God’s sake. This is called purity of intention. All acts of worship should only be directed and intended exclusively for God, or else it falls into associating partners with God, the greatest sin.

The Messenger Muhammad continued in the above teaching and said, “Whoever therefore migrates to please God and His Messenger, will have it recorded as such, and whoever migrates for a worldly purpose or marriage, then it too will be recorded as such.” This refers to his disciples who were migrating from Mecca to Medina. Although they were making the same journey, so outwardly they look the same. However, their intention and motive is very different.

There is another element to this in worship, and that is the aspect of reward. A person's reward can be greatly increased due to their intention. The Messenger Muhammad informed us that a person may be granted Paradise because of a word they said that was only uttered to please God. In another statement, the Messenger Muhammad told us of a man who travelled to another town to visit his Muslim brother. God sent to him an angel in human form to ask him the reason for his journey, was it for business purposes, marriage or some other worldly reason? When the man replied that it was only for God's sake that he was visiting his friend, the angel informed him that God had forgiven him.

This shows how important the intention is. Acts of worship can only be intended for God. Just as intention can uplift good deeds and increase reward, bad intentions can turn acts of worship into sin that deserve punishment. The Messenger Muhammad informed us that of the categories of people who will be punished on the Day of Judgement are the scholars of Islam or Quran reciters who only taught or read to show off and impress others, the charitable who only spent to show off, and the warrior who only fought to be called brave and courageous. Each one of the above examples is outwardly doing a good deed and seems to be pious, but they will all be punished, as their worship was not for God's reward but to impress people and garner their praise.

The second purpose of the intention is to identify the act of worship, especially where similar acts of worship can be offered. For example, charity, is the money being given the obligatory annual charity due, or is it a voluntary charity being offered, or perhaps paying an expiation for an error committed? The action of giving money is one and the same. It is the intention that separates and identifies this.

This also helps when differentiating between people performing the same act of worship but for different reasons. For example, someone missed their noon daily ritual devotion as they are travelling. They come into the mosque as the afternoon daily ritual devotion is being offered. Both the noon and afternoon daily ritual devotions are performed exactly the same way. The only thing that would differentiate between a person who is offering one or the other is their intention.

It is for this reason that Muslim scholars stress the importance of intention before every good deed and act of worship. This is to ensure that the worship is being intended to please God alone. It is also so that the correct act of worship is being intended before being embarked upon.

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