



IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

**UNDERSTANDING "IKHLAS" IN OUR ACTS OF WORSHIP**

One the most startling hadiths in relation to this word "ikhlas" comes from this authentic narration:

From Abu Hurayrah, who said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah say, ' Verily, the first to be judged on the Day of Resurrection will be a man who had died as a martyr. He will be brought forward. Allah will remind him of the favours He had bestowed upon him and the man will acknowledge them. Then He will ask him: `What did you do to express gratitude for it?' The man will reply: `I fought for Your Cause till I was martyred.' Allah will say: `You have lied. You fought so that people might call you courageous; and they have done so.' Command will then be issued about him and he will be dragged on his face and thrown into Hell. Next a man who had acquired and imparted knowledge and read the Qur'an will be brought forward, Allah will remind him of the favours He had bestowed upon him and the man will acknowledge them. Then He will ask him: `What did you do to express gratitude for it?' The man will reply: `I acquired knowledge and taught it, and read the Qur'an for Your sake.' Allah will say to him: `You have lied. You acquired knowledge so that people might call you a learned (man), and you read the Qur'an so that they might call you a reciter, and they have done so.' Command will then be issued about him, and he will be dragged on his face and thrown into Hell. Next a man whom Allah had made affluent and to whom Allah had given plenty of wealth, will be brought forward, Allah will remind him of the favours He had bestowed upon him and the man will acknowledge them. He will ask him: `What did you do to express gratitude for it?' The man will reply: `I did not neglect any of the ways You liked wealth to be spend liberally for Your sake'. Allah will say to him: `You have lied. You did it so that people might call you generous, and they have done so.' Command will then be issued about him and he will be dragged on his face and thrown into Hell."

And the wording, "So these are the first of Allaah's creation the Fire will be kindled with on the Day of Resurrection"

Saheeh Muslim, 13/45/1905

This hadith clearly shows that before we engage in various acts of worship, the main requirements on how these deeds are accepted by Allah MUST be met. It is horrifying that even though in this hadeeth, the acts of worship seem to be very noble, the intention of why acts of worship are done is of utmost priority.

Another perfect example was given by one of the prominent companion - Khalid bin Walid (RA). In the time of prophet Muhammad SallAllahu alayhi wa sallam, and the first caliph, Abu Bakr (RA), Khalid bin Walid (RA) has always been a commander of the army, and with the Help of Allah, when Khalid bin Walid was leading the army of Muslims against the disbelievers, the Muslims would always be granted victory by Allah. During the reign of caliph Ummar ibn Khattab (RA), Khalid bin Walid was removed from his post as commander of the army by Caliph Umar. Rather than being offended and refusing to fight, Khalid fought even harder. When he was asked why, he said: "I fight for Allah not for Umar."

Allah, the Exalted said:

"Say: Indeed I have been commanded to worship Allah making the *Din* sincerely for Him alone." [Al-Qur'an 39:11]

And there is also the *Qudsi Hadith* reported by Muslim: "*I am so self-sufficient that I am in no need of having partners. Thus, whoever does an action for someone else's sake as well as Mine, will have that action rejected by Me to him whom he associated with Me.*" [Reported by Muslim]

## THE MEANING OF IKHLAS

Sincerity, purity or isolation. Islamically it denotes purifying our motives and intentions to seek the pleasure of Allah.

An Arabic to English dictionary tells us that the word *ikhlas* means sincerity, purity or isolation. The word *ikhlas* comes from the Arabic word *akh-la-sa* and it means to render a deed free of *riyaa* so that there is no consideration other than Allah. Bearing this in mind, an Islamic glossary will often describes the word *ikhlas* as the act of purifying motives or intentions so that actions are done primarily to seek the pleasure of Allah. When we combine these

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definitions with the English dictionary definition of sincerity - being free from pretence, deceit or hypocrisy - we begin to understand what *ikhlas* is.

*Ikhlas* is purifying one's deeds from all contamination by *shirk*, in order to worship Allah in the correct way. For a person to cultivate and maintain real *ikhlas* he must avoid anything that calls into question Allah's right to be worshipped as the One. *Surah* number 112 is called Al-Ikhlās and it explains very clearly the Oneness of Allah.

There are some other useful definitions of *ikhlas*:

1. It is the freedom of the desire for nearness to Allah from every blemish or impurity;
2. It is singling out Allah with one's intention in all acts of worship;
3. It is forgetting the sight of the creation by continual observance of the Creator; and
4. It is to hide your good deeds just like you would hide your evil deeds.

[Taken from the book *Al-Ikhlās* by Abu Muhammad ibn Sa'id al-Baylawi]

In order that a believer's deeds and actions are accepted by Allah they must be performed with *ikhlas*, they must be preceded by the right intention and they must be carried out according to the *shariah*.

"And they were commanded not but they should worship Allah and worship none but him alone, and give *zakah*, and that is the right religion." (Quran 98:5)

Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu alayhi wa sallam emphasised that, "Allah is Pure and He accepts only that which is pure" (Muslim) thus the *Sunnah* gives prominence to the fact that Allah accepts only that which is pure and done solely for His sake.

Say, "Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds." (Quran 6:162)

The acceptance of a person's deeds by Allah depends on purity and sincerity; because it is with such *ikhlas* that a person can attain a high rank in the sight of Allah. In fact with the right intention and a pure heart a person can even be rewarded for an action that they were unable to perform. Prophet Muhammad said, "Verily Allah has recorded the good deeds and the evil deeds." He then informed those around him that, "Whosoever intends to do a good deed but does not do it, Allah records it with Himself as a complete good deed..." (Bukhari, Muslim)

So, in general, the intention of one's deed is of primary importance for the acceptance of this deed by Allah. We must aim to memorise this hadith, which is always the very first hadith of every good book on hadith:

عَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَبِي حَفْصِ عُمَرَ ابْنِ الْخَطَّابِ  
رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ، سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ  
وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ وَإِنَّمَا لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ  
مَنْوَى فَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ فَهَاجَرَتْهُ إِلَى  
اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ لِدُنْيَا يُصِيبُهَا أَوْ امْرَأَةٍ  
يَنْكِحُهَا فَهَاجَرَتْهُ إِلَى مَا هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِ. رَوَاهُ إِمَامَا الْمُحَدِّثِينَ  
أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ إِسْمَاعِيلَ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ بْنِ الْمُغِيرَةَ ابْنِ  
بَرْدِزْبَةَ الْبُخَارِيُّ وَأَبُو الْحُسَيْنِ مُسْلِمُ بْنُ الْحَجَّاجِ بْنِ  
مُسْلِمِ الْقُشَيْرِيِّ النَّيْسَابُورِيِّ فِي صَحِيحَيْهِمَا اللَّذَيْنِ هُمَا  
أَصْحُ الْكُتُبِ الْمُصَنَّفَةِ.

Umar Ibn Al-Khattab relates that he heard the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, say, " Verily actions are by intentions, and for every person is what he intended. So the one whose hijrah was to Allah and His Messenger, then his hijrah was to Allah and His Messenger. And the one whose hijrah was for the world to gain from it, or a woman to marry her, then his hijrah was to what he made hijrah for."

[Agreed upon]

And Imam Al-Bukhari commences his *Sahih* with this *hadith* and gives it the place of an opening lecture from him thereby indicating that every action that is done not desiring the Face of Allah is invalid bearing no fruits in this world and in the Hereafter.

This is why Abdur-Rahman al-Mahdi said, "If I were to write a book composed of chapters, I would place in every chapter the *hadith* of 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab to do with 'actions are by intentions'."

And from him that he said, "Whosoever desires to author a book then let him start with the *hadith* to do with 'actions are by intentions'."

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This *hadith* is one of the *hadith* around which the whole religion revolves, and it is related from *Imam ash-Shafi'i* that he said, "This *hadith* constitutes a third of all knowledge."

*Imam Ahmad* said:

"The foundations of Islam are upon three *ahadith*:

1. The *hadith* of 'Umar, 'Verily actions are by intention';
2. The *hadith* of A'ishah, 'Whosoever introduces into this affair of ours that which is not part of it, then it is rejected'; and
3. The *hadith* of Nu'man ibn Bashir, 'The halal is clear and the haram is clear'."

*Ishaq ibn Rahawayah* said:

"The foundations of the religion are upon four *hadith*:

1. The *hadith* of 'Umar, 'Verily actions are by intention';
2. The *hadith*, 'The halal is clear, and the haram is clear';
3. The *hadith*, 'Verily the creation of one of you comes together in the stomach of his mother for 40 days'; and
4. The *hadith*, 'Whosoever invents into this affair of ours anything which is not part of it, then it is rejected'."

The prophet (SAWS) pointed to the importance of the intention in several ahaadeeth. In the *hadith* of Abu Hurraira, the Prophet (SAWS) said: "people will be resurrected (on the day of judgment) according to their intentions"(Ibn Majah). It was reported about some of the salaf; "whoever would like his deeds to be complete, then let him make good his intention" (with sincerity) (Jaami' Uloom wal Hikam) Ibn Aj'laan said: "A deed is not sound except by three things; taqwa, good intention, and correctness", and Abdullah Ibn al-Mubaarik said: "perhaps a small deed is magnified by the intention, and perhaps a great deed is minimized by the intention". The meaning here is that a person may do what seems on the surface to be an insignificant deed, but because of his sincere intention to please Allah, the deed is magnified in Allah's sight, and similarly, a person may do what on the surface seems to be a monumental deed, but because his intention was not sincere, that deed has little or no significance in the sight of Allah.

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Everyday life causes our levels of *ikhlas* to wax and wane and to rise and fall. There are many ways in which to obtain or increase our *ikhlas*. They include;

- Doing righteous deeds. The more deeds we do, the easier they will become, the more close we will get to Allah and our hearts will become more sincere and pure.

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- Seeking knowledge. If we understand what we are doing and why, we can perform all actions in accordance with the *shariah*. Doing so will make our hearts softer, more pure.
- Always checking our intention. Imam Ahmad said that we should ask ourselves before performing an action, "Is this for the sake of Allah?"

*Ikhlas* has been said to be the foundation on which all our deeds and actions are built. If the foundation is corrupt the structure can be easily broken.

A great scholar of Islam once said, "Indeed the hardest thing to achieve in this world is *ikhlas*. How many times have I struggled to extinguish *riyaa* (showing off) from my heart except that it only appeared again in a different colour"? (*Jaami ul-Uloom wal-Hikam* of Ibn Rajab al-Hanbalee)

It is clear from this statement that even the most educated people struggle to remain sincere and avoid *riyaa*. But indeed it is something that we must avoid. Prophet Muhammad said that it was the thing he feared most for his *Ummah*. "Indeed the thing that I fear most for you is the minor *shirk*," he said. The *sahabah* asked, "And what is minor *shirk*, Oh Messenger of Allah?" To which he replied, "It is *Riyaa*. Allah will say to the people of *riyaa* on the Day of Judgement - when the people are being re-paid for their deeds - 'Go to those who you showed off your deeds to in the *dunya*, and see if you can find reward from them!'" (Imam Ahmad)

There is also a *hadith qudsi* in which Allah says, "I am Independent of all the partners (ascribed to me). Whoever performs a deed while associating partners with Me, I will leave him and his *shirk*." (Muslim)

*Riyaa* can be defined as the performance of a deed with the intention of pleasing someone or something other than Allah. It is a form of *shirk* and something to be feared because it is easy to fall into *riyaa* without noticing.

Our good deeds and actions can be nullified by *riyaa*. Let us take the example of a man who has £100 he wants to give in charity. He begins his act of charity with a pure and sincere heart and donates £50 but then the idea of showing how rich he is occurs to him so he makes quite a performance of giving another £50. It is possible that Allah will reject the second \$50 as an act of charity because it was mixed with a desire to show off. If however the idea of showing off occurred after the total \$100 had been distributed it would not affect or invalidate the act of charity.

Having said this it is important to bear in mind that it is not showing off if a person feels happy after doing an act of worship. This is a sign of faith. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him,

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said "Whoever feels happy because of his good deeds and sad because of his bad deeds, is a believer." (Imam Ahmad, Ibn Majah)

In addition, if people praise you for a good deed it is nothing to be ashamed or afraid of, it is a portion of the glad tidings of the Hereafter. Prophet Muhammad was asked, "What do you think if a man does a good deed and the people praise him for it?" He said: "That is the portion of the glad tidings for the believer which he is given in this world." (Muslim)

There are a number of things that you might like to pay more attention to in order to ward off any *riyaa* that may be creeping into your worship.

- Try to bear in mind the concept of *ihsan*. Allah is always watching.
- Either conceal your worship or make a conscious effort not to make a display of it or yourself.
- Reflect on your shortcomings and your achievements. Remember that Allah alone is the source for our accomplishments.
- Seek Allah's help to overcome any *riyaa* in your worship.
- Reflect upon the *ayah* we say many times a day in our prayers. "You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything)" (Quran 1:5)

Another important point to bear in mind is that we should not stop doing good deeds for fear of *riyaa*. This is one of the tricks of *Shaytan*. He tries to weaken people's resolve so that they avoid doing things that Allah loves and is pleased with. If we carefully form an intention to please Allah alone this should ensure that *riyaa* does not creep into our worship.

In conclusion we must remember that sincerity in worship is important. Believers must aim to have a pure heart and the intention to please Allah in all that they do.

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Reasons on difficulties in achieving ikhlas:

1. Our ego/nafs
2. Shaytan
3. Lack of knowledge
4. Bad companions