

The Hadeeth of Intention

Imaam Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali rahimahullah
Jaami ul-Uloom wal-Hikam

Below are translated excerpts from the beautiful work by Imaam Ibn Rajab al-Hanbalee rahimahullaah entitled 'Jaami Al-Uloom wal Hikm' in which he has a detailed commentary on 50 ahaadeeth of the Messenger, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam. (Basically an-Nawawee's 42 ahaadeeth with 8 added on)

THE FIRST HADEETH:

Umar bin al-Khattaab relates that: 'I heard the Messenger of Allaah, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, *"Verily actions are by intentions, and for every person is what he intended. So the one whose hijra was to Allaah and His Messenger, then his hijrah was to Allaah 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."* [Related by Bukhaaree and Muslim.]

This hadeeth is singularly narrated by Yahya bin Sa'eed al-Ansaaree from Muhammad bin Ibraaheem at-Taimee from Alqama bin Abee Waqqaas from Umar bin al-Khattaab (RA) and this hadeeth has no other authentic route as stated by Ali bin al-Madinee and others.

Al-Khattabee said, 'I do not know of a difference concerning this amongst the Ahlul Hadeeth.' This despite the fact that it has been reported from the hadeeth of Abu Sa'eed and others – and it is said that it is reported via many routes – but none of them are authentic according to the Hadeeth Masters.

Then from al-Ansaaree a huge group of people reports this hadeeth. It is said that the number is more than two hundred, and it is also said that the number is more than seven hundred. From the most notable of these are: Imaam Maalik, ath-Thawree. Al-Awzaa`ee, ibn al-Mubaarak, Layth bin Sa`d, Hamaad bin Zayd, Shu`bah, ibn Uyaynah and others. The scholars have agreed to its authenticity and have unanimously accepted it.

IT IS DESIRED THAT YOU BEGIN EVERY BOOK WITH THIS HADEETH:

And Imaam Bukhaaree commences his Saheeh with this hadeeth and gives it the place of an opening lecture from him thereby indicating that every action that is done not desiring the Face of Allaah is invalid bearing no fruits in this world and in the Hereafter.

This is why Abdurrahmaan al-Mahdee said, "If I were to write a book composed of chapters, I would place in every chapter the hadeeth of Umar bin al-Khattaab 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 hadeeth to do with 'actions are by intentions.'"

This hadeeth is one of the hadeeth around which the whole religion revolves, and it is related from Imaam ash-Shaafi'ee that he said, "This hadeeth constitutes a third of all knowledge."

Imaam Ahmad said, "The foundations of Islaam are upon three ahaadeeth:

- | The hadeeth of Umar, *'Verily actions are by intention'*
- | The hadeeth of Aa`ishah, *'Whosoever introduces into this affair of ours that which is not part of it, then it is rejected.'*
- | The hadeeth of Nu`maan bin Bashir, *'The halaal is clear and the haraam is clear.'*

Ishaaq bin Raahawayah said, "the foundations of the religion are upon four hadeeth:

- | The hadeeth of Umar, *'Verily actions are by intention.'*
- | The hadeeth, *'The halaal is clear, and the haraam is clear.'*
- | The hadeeth, *'Verily the creation of one of you comes together in the stomach of his mother for 40 days.'*
- | The hadeeth, *'Whosoever invents into this affair of ours anything which is not part of it, then it is rejected.'*

Abu Ubayd said, "The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, collected all the affairs of the Hereafter in one statement, *'Whosoever introduces into this affair of ours that which is not part of it, then it is rejected.'* And all the affairs of this world in one statement, *'Verily actions are by intentions.'* Place them in every chapter."

Abu Daawood said, "I looked into the hadeeth of the Musnad (i.e. of Ahmad) and it consisted of 40 000 ahaadeeth. Then I looked again and (found that) the 40 000 ahaadeeth revolved around 4 ahaadeeth:

- | The hadeeth of Nu'maan bin Bashir, *'The halaal is clear and the haraam is clear.'*
- | The hadeeth of Umar, *'Verily actions are by intentions'*
- | The hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah, *'Verily Allaah is pure, and does not accept except that which is pure. And indeed Allaah ordered the Muslims with that which He ordered the Messengers.'*
- | The hadeeth, *'From the excellence of ones Islam is his leaving that which does not concern him.'*

And also from Abu Daawood, "It suffices man that he knows from all these ahaadeeth [the ones he collected in his Sunan] 4 ahaadeeth:

- | The first: His, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, *'Verily actions are by intention.'*
- | The second: His saying, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, *'From the excellence of a persons Islam is his leaving that which does not concern him.'*
- | The third: His, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, *'The believer will not truly believe until he wishes for his brother that which he wishes for himself.'*

- | The fourth: His, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, *'The halaal is clear and the haraam is clear.'*

And in another narration from him, "Fiqh revolves around 5 ahaadeeth:

- | (The hadeeth), *'The halaal is clear and the haraam is clear'*
- | His, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, *'Do not harm and do not reciprocate harm.'*
- | His saying, *'Verily actions are by intentions.'*
- | His saying, *'The religion is advice/sincerity'*
- | His saying, *'What I forbade you from then stay away from it, and what I ordered you with then do as much of it as you can.'*

THE INTENTION IS THE FOUNDATION OF EVERY ACTION:

His, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, *'verily (innamaa) actions are by intention'* and in a narration *'actions are by intention'* - and both of these statements dictate constraint [to the fact that all actions are in need of intention] according to the correct opinion. And it is not our goal here to direct the discussion towards this or expound in any length on it.

[Ibn Daqeeq al-Eid says in his 'Ihkaam al-Ahkaam': "2: The words 'innamaa' is used for constraint according to what is established in the Usul... and there is agreement over this. The meaning of constraint: is to affirm all that is contained in what is mentioned, and to negate all that falls outside of it...

3: Constraint sometimes dictates an unrestricted constraint (al-Hasr al-Mutlaq) and sometimes a specified/restricted constraint (Hasr Makhsoos) – which it is, can be understood from the context and secondary evidences. For example the saying of Allaah, **'innaama anta mundhir'** (indeed you are only a warner) 13:7. The literal sense of this verse confines the Messenger's, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, duties only to warning, but the Messenger is not merely confined to this rather he has many beautiful descriptions such as giving glad tidings and others. But the understanding of the (context) of the words dictates that he is constrained to giving warnings only to those who believe and negates his ability to have descend (from the heavens) the Signs that the disbelievers wish. (This then is an example of restricted constraint)

Similar to this is his, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, *'indeed I am only a man (innama ana bashr) and when you fall into a dispute and come to me...'* Its meaning: his being constrained to (normal) human qualities with respect to his inability to examine what is inside the disputants (i.e. see into their hearts and minds) not with respect to every quality for indeed the Messenger, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, has many other qualities (which are better than the normal human qualities)....

...So when the word 'innamaa' occurs then consider it, if the context and the intention of the words show that the constraint is specific to something then stick to this, and if it is not specific to something then take it to be an unrestricted constraint. With regards to this (unrestricted constraint) is his, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, *'indeed (innamaa) actions are by intentions.'* Allaah knows best."]

And they differ as to the limits of his saying, 'actions are by intention'. And many of the later

Muslims think that the limit is that the action is made correct, able to be considered and acceptable with the intention. And in this what is meant is that action which is legislated (Shar`i) needing an intention. And as for what is not requiring an intention like habitual actions such as eating, drinking, dressing and other things, or like returning the trust or guarantees then none of these is in need of an intention.

And others say, rather 'actions' here is to be understood in its generality, and nothing is exempt from it. And some of them relate this as the saying of the majority, meaning the majority of the early people. And this occurs in the words of ibn Jareer at-Tabaree and Abu Taalib al-Makki and others from the early Muslims. And it is clear from the words of Imaam Ahmad, he said in a narration, 'I like that for every action, from prayer or fast or charity or any action of righteousness that there be an intention preceding the action. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, said, "**Actions are by intentions...**", and this is taken for every matter.'

Fadl bin Ziyaad said, 'I asked Abu Abdullaah (i.e. Ahmad) about the intention in action, how should it be? He said, "one should treat his self when he intends to do an action, not desiring by it the people (i.e. showing off)."'

...And it is possible that the limits of his, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, saying, 'actions are by intention' (is that the action is made) good, or corrupt, or acceptable, or rejected, or rewarded, or not rewarded according to the intention. Therefore this statement informs us of the Islamic ruling concerning this- and that is that the correctness or incorrectness of the action is in accordance to the correctness or incorrectness of the intention, and its acceptance and rejection is according to its conclusion.

And his saying after this, 'and for everyone is what he intended' is informing that he will not gain anything from his action except what he intended. So if he intended good, he gets good. And if he intended evil then he gets evil. And this second statement (of the hadeeth) is not merely reiterating the first, for the first statement points to the fact that the goodness or corruptness of the action is according to the intention necessary for that action to exist. The second statement points to the fact that the reward of the actor for his action is in accordance to his good intention, and that the punishment for his action is in accordance to his evil intention. And if the intention is permissible (mubah), then the action is permissible (mubah), and there is not for it any reward or punishment.

Therefore the action in itself is good, or bad, or permissible according to the intention behind it necessary for that action to exist. And the reward of the person or his punishment is according to the intention upon which the action became righteous, or bad or permissible.

THE MEANING OF NIYYAH IN THE LANGUAGE AND SPEECH OF THE SCHOLARS:

Know that Niyyah (intention) in the language is a type of purpose (qasd) and desire (iraadah). And Niyyah in the speech of the scholars occurs in two meanings (or contexts):

1) To distinguish different types of worship, one from the other. Like distinguishing Dhuhr prayer from Asr prayer, or distinguishing the fast of Ramadaan from other fasts. Or distinguishing actions of worship from actions of habit, like distinguishing the bath from impurity from the baths simply to get clean. And this meaning of Niyyah you will commonly find in many of the works of the Legal Jurists.

2) To distinguish the intended object of the action - is it for Allaah only and for no other, or for Allaah and other than him? And this is the meaning of intention you will find in the works of the Gnostics (ʿaarifoona), in their discussions on sincerity and those things that it is dependant on. And this (meaning) you will often find in the statements of the Salaf.

And Abu Bakr ibn Abee Dunya wrote a book, calling it, 'Sincerity and intention', and he meant this (second meaning) of intention. And it is the meaning of intention which is repeatedly mentioned in the speech of the Prophet , sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam,, sometimes with the word niyyah, other times with the word iraadah, and sometimes with words close in meaning to the above two. And the mention of intention occurs in the Qur'aan many times, by the use of words other than niyyah but with similar meaning.

MEANING OF NIYYAH IN THE QUR`AAN AND IN THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET AND IN THE WORDS OF THE SALAF:

We have mentioned that the meaning of niyyah in the speech of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, and the Salaf of this nation was used generally in the second sense and therefore carries the meaning of Iraadah.

And in the Qur`aan often it describes intention with the word iraadah as in His saying,

"Among you are some that desire (yureed) this world and some that desire the hereafter" (3:152)

"Whosoever desires the life of this world and it's adornment" (11:15)

"And keep yourself patiently with those who call on their Lord morning and evening seeking (yureedoona) His Face, and let not your eyes overlook them, desiring the pomp and glitter of this life." (18:28)

And sometimes niyyah is described with the word ibtigaa (desire) as in His saying,

"Except only the desire (ibtigaa) to seek the Face of His Lord, the Most High" (92:20)

"And you spend not except seeking (ibtigaa) the Face of Allaah" (2:272)

And as for what occurs in the Sunnah and statements of the Salaf to do with this (second) meaning of niyyah then there is a large number, and we will mention some of them: ...

The Messenger, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, said, *"People will be gathered upon their intentions"* [Ibn Maajah, Saheeh al-Jaami no.7898] *"Mankind will be resurrected upon their intentions"* [Muslim]

"Verily those slain on the battlefield will be resurrected upon their intentions" [ibn Abee ad-Dunya]

"For the ones whose concern is this world Allaah will scatter his affair, and place poverty between his two eyes. And he will not get from the world except what is written for him. And for the one whose intention is the hereafter Allaah will gather for him his affair and place contentment in his heart, and the world will come to him willingly" [ibn Maajah,

Saheeh al-Jaami no.6386]

And Yahya bin Abu Katheer said, "Learn your intention for it is more serious than the action."

Zayd ash-Shaamee said, "verily I like that I have an intention for everything even if it be eating and drinking"

And he also said, "have intention for everything, desiring the good, even if it be leaving for the toilet"

Sufyaan ath-Thawree said, "I have not treated anything more difficult then my intention, because it keeps changing."

Yusuf bin Asbaat said, "purifying the intention from its corruption is harder upon the workers than long striving (i.e. in their work)"

Ibn al-Mubaarak said, "maybe a small action is made great by its intention, and maybe a great action is made small by its intention"

Ibn `Ijlaan said, "the action is not acceptable except by three: Taqwaa of Allaah, and good intention, and correctness (i.e. conformity to the Sunnah)"

Fudayl bin Iyaadh said, "Allaah wishes from you only your intentions and desires (iraadah)"

[I have not quoted all the verses, ahaadeeth and narrations here].

All of these were reported by ibn Abee ad-Dunyaa in his 'al-Ikhlaas wa an-Niyyah'.

And with this, the meaning of Imaam Ahmad's statement becomes known, that the foundation of the religion is upon three ahaadeeth:

"Verily actions are by intention"

"Whosoever introduces into this affair of ours that which is not part of it then it is rejected"

"The halaal is clear and the haraam is clear"

For the whole religion returns to doing the commanded actions and staying away from the forbidden actions and stopping at the doubtful matters as is contained in the hadeeth of Nu`maan bin Basheer. And all of this is perfected upon two matters:

1) That outwardly the action be done as taught by the Sunnah, and this is to be found in the hadeeth of Aa`ishah, *"Whosoever introduces into this affair of ours that which is not part of it then it is rejected."*

2) That inwardly the action be done seeking the Face of Allaah, as is contained in the hadeeth, *"Verily actions are by intention."* Fudayl bin `Iyaadh said about His saying, **'That he may test which of you is best in action'** (67:2) - "Who is sincere in it and correct in it. And the action, if it is sincere and not correct then it is not accepted. And if it is correct and not sincere then it is not accepted. It is only accepted when it is both sincere and correct. And it is sincere when it is for the sake of Allaah, and correct when it is done

according to the Sunnah."

And the proof of what Fudayl said lies in the verse,

"So whosoever hopes for the meeting with His Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of His Lord" (18:110)