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# On Intention - Part II\*

Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani

## Abstract



In this part, two salient questions as to intention will be addressed: what are the effects of different intentions on the nature of actions and are human beings capable of forming intentions voluntarily? In view of the fact that various acts can be classified into three main categories, i.e. acts of disobedience, acts of obedience, and permissible ones, although additional bad intentions may lower the position of acts of disobedience even more, good intentions cannot change the nature of acts of disobedience into that of acts of obedience. In order for acts of obedience to be initially correct, one ought to intend to perform them for the sake of God, and nevertheless if one wants to multiply the merits of his actions, one can form extra lawful good intentions for them. In response to the second question, it will be stated that intention is not completely under human control. People need to attain some appropriate cognitive attitudes such as strong beliefs in God or divine rewards and refrain from some inappropriate conative or affective attitudes like fear so as to be able to have good intentions. This is because, being the essence of actions, intention follows man's other attitudes. However, the most valuable intention is to perform an act of obedience to glorify God, because He is worthy of obedience and worship.

## Keywords

good intentions, role of intention in multiplying excellences, human control and intention.

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## **Part 4: Explaining Actions Related to Intention**

Know that even though actions may be divided into many categories, such as physical activity, speech, movement, stagnation, attaining benefits, repelling harms, thought, recollection, and similar other countless and innumerable things, they can be classified into three general types: acts of disobedience, acts of obedience, and those that are permitted.

Intention does not change the subjects of the first type, i.e. the acts of disobedience. This<sup>1</sup> ought not to be derived by an unaware person from the generality of the Prophet's (s) saying "Deeds are measured by intentions," and he should not suspect that the act of disobedience would turn into an act of obedience just because of its intention, like someone who backbites another person in order to seek favor with a third, or someone who gives the poor some food using the money of others, or someone who builds a school, a mosque, or a guest house using unlawful wealth while their intentions are good. These all stem from ignorance. Intention has no effect in the exclusion of these acts from unlawfulness, injustice, aggression, and disobedience. To intend good by doing bad, against what divine law requires, is itself another bad thing. If one knew this, then he would be opposing divine law, and if he did not, then he would be disobedient on account of his ignorance, because it is obligatory for every Muslim to search for knowledge. It is divine law that introduces good things so that they may be known. So how is it possible that the bad turns into the good? How preposterous! What may encourage this is a person's hidden lust in the heart and inward whim. If the heart desired to seek a high worldly position, win people's affections, and take delight in the illicit pleasures of the soul, then Satan would invoke them to deceive the ignorant. That is why Sahl said, God, the Exalted, has not been disobeyed with a sin greater

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1. I.e., the idea that intention can change the nature of the acts of disobedience.

than ignorance. He was asked, “O Aba Muhammad! Do you know something worse than ignorance?” He replied, “Yes, being ignorant of one’s ignorance.” This statement is true, since one’s being ignorant of his ignorance would completely block the way to learning. If one thinks of himself as being knowledgeable, why will he want to learn? In the same manner, the best thing by which God has been obeyed is knowledge. The root of one’s knowledge is his knowing that he knows, just as the root of one’s ignorance is his being ignorant of his ignorance, because if one were not able to distinguish useful knowledge from harmful knowledge, he would be preoccupied with ornamented sorts of knowledge, which people greedily pursue as a means of gaining worldly things. This is a fundamental constituent of ignorance and a source of corrupting the world.

Therefore, one who intends good by means of disobeying God due to his ignorance is not excused except if he has recently converted to Islam and has not found time to learn. God, the Exalted, says, “Ask the People of the Reminder if you do not know” (Quran, 16:43). The Prophet (s) has said, “The ignorant is not excused for his ignorance, and the ignorant is not permitted to be silent upon his ignorance, and one who knows is not permitted to be silent upon his knowledge” (Makki, 1417 AH, 2:257).

Rulers who try to get close [to God] by building mosques and schools using illegal wealth are similar to unprincipled scholars who try to get close [to God] by teaching the foolish and wicked people that are known for their iniquities. These people usually aim to dispute with scholars, contest against the unwise, win the hearts of popular figures, and gather the wealth of this world and that of the rulers, needy people, and orphans, since if they were taught, they would become the bandits upon God’s path, and they are all the representatives of the Dajjal [the Antichrist]. They greedily fight for this world, follow their whims, distance themselves from God-wariness, and encourage those who see them to disobey God. Furthermore, their knowledge may spread to other people

like them, and this group may then also use the same piece of knowledge as a means of doing evil and following their whims. This custom will successively continue, its evil consequences will go back to the first teacher who accepted to teach while he already knew that the student had a corrupted intention and saw that the student had committed different sorts of sins in his speech, behavior, food, dress, and interactions.

This scholar will pass away, but the destructive effects of his actions will remain, say, for one or two thousand years in the world. Blessed be the one whose sins will perish when he passes away! Even more surprising is the ignorance of one who says, “Deeds are measured by intentions, and I intended to spread teachings of the religion by instructing this student. If he employed the teachings in bringing about corruption, he would be sinful, not me; my only aim was to help him employ them in doing good.” Loving leadership, seeking followers, and boasting about one’s knowledge [on the teacher’s side] may all make it seem good to teach such a person; appealing to the teacher’s love for leadership, Satan has deceived him. I wish I knew what this teacher would think of one who gave a bandit a sword and provided him with a horse and instruments to help him reach his goal saying, “[By doing these actions]I only intended to be beneficent and generous and to assume the character traits of God; I just wanted the bandit to fight with this sword and horse in God’s path, for it is one of the most meritorious things to provide and equip border guards and soldiers with horses and weapons, but if they used them to rob travelers, they would be sinful.” Nevertheless, jurists have reached a consensus on the prohibition of this act in spite of the fact that generosity is one of the most desirable traits in the eyes of God, the Exalted; as the Prophet (s) has said, “God has three hundred attributes. If one gets close to Him by means of just one of them, he would enter Paradise, and generosity is what God loves the most” (Tajlil Tabrizi, 1417 AH, 10:12).

I wish I knew why this sort of generosity was prohibited and why it has become obligatory upon the giver to look into the conditions of this wrongdoer so that if it becomes clear for him that this man will employ these weapons for evil purposes, he will have to attempt to take them away from him and not support him with other ones. Similarly, knowledge is a weapon by which Satan and the enemies of God are fought, and sometimes it reinforces them, for these enemies are the base whims of man. A man who prefers this world over his religion and his whim over the Hereafter is powerless against them due to his lack of virtue. How can it be allowed to support him with a kind of knowledge that will enable him to satisfy his lust? Scholars of the past would constantly check out the state of those who frequently came to them. If they saw that one of them had shortcomings in performing supererogatory prayers or other recommended acts, they would reprimand him and stop honoring him, and if they saw him commit an act of disobedience or debauchery, they would distance themselves from him, prevent him from participating in their gatherings and classes and refrain from talking to him, let alone teach him, since they knew that a person who learns religious matters without acting on them and then teaches it to others is seeking nothing else but a means for doing evil. All our previous scholars asserted that they sought God's protection from a vicious man who knows the Islamic tradition and never from a vicious man who does not.

Such a matter and its likes are things about which the unwise and the followers of Satan are confused, even though possessing mantles and loose sleeves and being verbose and erudite—a kind of erudition that does not admonish and restrain them from pursuing this world or encourage and invite them to the next one, but rather a sort of knowledge that has to do with people, and they employ it to gather wealth, attract adherents, and gain the upper hand over their opponents.

Hence, from amongst the three types of acts, the tradition of the

Prophet (s) “Deeds are measured by intentions” is only concerned with the acts of obedience and permissible acts, not those of disobedience, for an act of obedience can turn into an act of disobedience by intention and can be an act of obedience by intention, and a permissible act can turn into an act of obedience or an act of disobedience by means of intention, but an act of disobedience can never turn into an act of obedience by intention. However, intention is involved in the act such that if evil intentions were added to it, the encumbrances would multiply and the harmful consequences would become far greater ....

The second type is related to the acts of obedience. They depend on intentions for their initial correctness and doubled excellences. On its initial correctness, it is necessary that one only intends to obey God alone in performing the act of obedience. So, if it were performed out of hypocrisy, his act of obedience would turn into an act of disobedience. It is the multiplicity of good intentions that causes an act to have more excellences. One may form multiple good intentions in performing one single act of obedience so that he may gain a reward for every one of them. Since every one of them is a good deed, every intention may bring about a reward ten times its like, as it is suggested by a tradition. Sitting in a mosque is, for instance, an act of obedience, and one may form many intentions in performing it so that his sitting there may be considered among the virtuous acts of the pious and enable him to reach the degrees of the faithful: First, one may hold the conviction that the mosque is God’s house and one who enters it is His visitor, so he may intend to visit his Lord by sitting in the mosque hoping to achieve what the Prophet (s) has promised where he said, “One who enters a mosque visits God, the Exalted, and it is upon the visited to honor his visitor” (Makki, 1417 AH, 2:259). Second, one may wait for the next prayer after he has prayed so that by doing so he will be counted among those who await prayer. This is the meaning of God’s saying, “[C]lose [your] ranks” (Quran 3:200). Third, one may lead a monastic life by

restraining his eyes, ears, and other body parts from movement and activity, as spiritual retreat (*i'tikaf*) is restraining the soul and it is implied by fasting (*sawm*), because fasting is a kind of retreat. For this reason, the Prophet (s) is reported to have said, "The monasticism of my nation is to sit in mosques" (Makki, 1417 AH, 259). Fourth, being in the mosque in seclusion, one should focus all his attention on God, make his heart constantly think of the next world, and push away occupations which distract him from God. Fifth, in the mosque, one may prepare to remember God, listen to His remembrance, or remind people of Him as it has been narrated, "If a person went to the mosque at dawn to remember God or to remind others of Him, he would be like those who wage jihad in the way of God" (Makki, 1417 AH, 259). Sixth, one may intend to inform others about knowledge concerning God by enjoining what is right or forbidding what is wrong, because the mosque is [normally] not empty of those who pray incorrectly or commit what they are not permitted to do; thus, he bids them to do what is right and guides them towards the religion; consequently, he shares with them in the good things they have learned from him. Hence, his good works are increased. Seventh, one may benefit from a brother in the way of God, which would be a gift and treasure for the Hereafter; as the mosque is a place in which religious people who love God and love others in the way of God seek refuge. Eighth, one may desist from sins by virtue of feeling ashamed [of committing sins] in the sight of God, or he may feel ashamed to breach the sanctity of the mosque. Al- Hasan ibn 'Ali (a) said, "One who goes to the mosque frequently will be provided by God with one of seven things: a brother from whom he can benefit in the way of God, His mercy which will be sent down to him, new knowledge, an allusion which shows him the way to guidance or keeps him away from destruction, or he will desist from sins due to fear or shame" (Makki, 1417 AH, 259).

I add that this tradition, which we quoted above, was also

transmitted through the Shiite path from the Commander of the Faithful (a), “One who goes to the mosque frequently will obtain one of eight things: a brother from whom he can benefit in the way of God, new knowledge, or a definite sign, or he will hear a remark which shows him the way to guidance or a remark which keeps him away from destruction, or God’s mercy that he expected, or he will desist from a sin due to fear or shame” (Ibn Tawus, 1406 AH, 90-91).

Abu Hamid [Ghazali] says, so this is how intentions can be increased. You can draw an analogy between this and other acts of obedience and what is permitted, since every act of obedience is capable of holding many intentions; these may be present in the faithful servant’s heart to the extent that he makes serious attempts to seek goodness, prepares himself to have it, and reflects on it. In doing so, his actions are purified and his good deeds are multiplied.

The third type of act is related to what is permitted. Every permitted act is capable of holding one or more intentions by means of which it can turn into the most meritorious supererogatory act, and enable the agent to attain the highest of positions. Therefore, how great the loss suffered by one who is ignorant of this fact is, who deals with intentions, because of his inadvertency and ignorance, in the same manner as stray cattle do! The servant is required not to undervalue any of his thoughts and moments, for he will be questioned about them all on the Day of Resurrection; he will be questioned why he performed an act which was completely permitted and free from the taint of reprehensibility, and what he intended by performing it. For this reason, the Prophet (s) has said: “There will be reckoning in having done what it is permitted in this world and there will be punishment for having done what is forbidden” (Makki, 1417 AH, 479). There is also a narration that states, “One who wears perfume for the sake of God will appear on the Day of Resurrection while his scent will be more fragrant than musk, and one who wears perfume



for the sake of someone other than God will appear on the Day of Resurrection while his scent will be more putrid than a corpse” (Makki, 1417 AH, 274). Using perfume, in and of itself, is a permitted act but in doing so one has to have a [godly] intention.

If it is asked, “What can one possibly intend to do by wearing perfume? It is one of those things that the human soul enjoys, and how does one wear perfume for the sake of God?” In answer to this, you should know that one who uses perfume, say, on a Friday or at other times, for example, may be imagined as intending to enjoy the pleasures of this world or intending to boast about having immense wealth in order for his companions to envy him or intending to show off to people so that he would have a high standing in their hearts or would be known for having a pleasant smell or would be held in great affection by unfamiliar women when he has prepared himself to look at them and so forth, and all of these render using perfume an act of disobedience; this is why his scent will be more putrid than a corpse on the Day of Resurrection. However, the first intention, i.e. pleasure and enjoyment, is not an act of disobedience [by itself], but one will be questioned concerning it: “One whose deeds are carefully reckoned is like being tormented.” (Majlisi, 1403 AH, 33:505). In addition, one who is given something desirable in this world which is permitted will not be punished in the next world; yet his blessings in the Hereafter will decrease proportionately. How great a loss it is to hasten to have what perishes and to lose the abundance of blessings that remain forever!

In using perfume with good intentions, one may intend to conform to the Prophet’s (s) tradition on a Friday or intend to venerate the mosque and show reverence for God’s house—as he does not see it right that one who sets out to visit God enters His house except when he smells nice—or intend to give ease and comfort to his fellows in the mosque with his pleasant smell or intend to get rid of his bad odor that may annoy those who

associate with him or intend to terminate the subject of backbiting, since those who backbite him for his bad odor disobey God. This is because if a person exposes himself to backbiting and is able to refrain from it, he will be a partner in that sin ....

God said, "Do not abuse those whom they invoke besides Allah, lest they should abuse Allah out of hostility, without any knowledge" (Quran, 6:108). By saying this, God indicates that to cause something which results in an evil is itself an evil. By using perfume, one may intend to make his brain activity better so as to increase his astuteness and intelligence and thus make it easier for him to understand the important matters of his religion upon reflection, for it is said that one whose smell is pleasant becomes more rational.

A learned man would not be incapable of such intentions if his heart were occupied with the attaining of the Hereafter and the quest for goodness; however, if his heart were more occupied with the luxuries of this world, this type of intentions would not come into his mind; even if he were reminded of them, he would have no incentive to move towards them. This is only a kind of talk or conversation with oneself and may not be regarded as an intention to act. There are numerous kinds of permissible acts, and it is not possible to count all possible intentions, so you can compare with this type of instances other [permissible] acts. For that reason, one predecessor has said, "I would indeed like to form intentions for every act even for eating, drinking, sleeping, and going to the bathroom; all of these can be intended for the sake of God, because everything which maintains one's body and causes one's heart to be unconcerned with bodily problems supports religion." If one's intention in eating were to get strong in order to worship God, and his intention in having sexual intercourse was to reinforce religion, to please his wife, and to produce a child that would worship God and thus increase the Prophet's (s) community, if these all were his real intentions, then

he would obey God in his eating and marriage. The dominant pleasures of the soul are eating and having sexual intercourse; nevertheless, if the concern for the Hereafter dominates one's heart, it will not be impossible for him to form good intentions. Similarly, when he loses some money, he should make his intention good and say that it was spent in the way of God or when he is notified that someone has backbitten him, he should feel at ease as his bad deeds will be transferred to his backbiter, while his backbiter's good deeds will be given to him, and it is that which he should intend in his declining to reply.

A narration states, "A servant will be brought for reckoning while his deeds will be rendered void by what blighted them, so he will deserve to go into hellfire. Afterwards, his good deeds will be disclosed to him, so he will deserve to go to Paradise. He will be astonished by that and say, "O my Lord! I did not perform these deeds!" It will be said to him that they are the good deeds done by those who have backbitten, annoyed, and wronged you. Another narration states, "A servant with good deeds as great as mountains will enter the Day of Resurrection; if his deeds remained unchanged, he would surely enter Paradise; nonetheless, he will be informed that he has wronged this person, insulted that person, and hit another individual; therefore, his good deeds will be taken away in return for these acts till there remains nothing good for him. Then the angles will say, "He has run out of good deeds while there are still creditors whom he owes." Then God will say, "Place upon him the burdens of their wrong deeds, beat him, and throw him into hellfire."

In short, pay extremely careful attention to all of your acts and movements and do not take them lightly, insofar as you may not beware of their deception and vices now and will have no excuse and answer for them on the Day of Reckoning and Questioning; for surely God is indeed aware of, and witness to, what you do: "[H]e says no word but that there is a ready observer beside him"

(Quran, 50:18). If you possess prudence and reason, and are not among those who are deceived, meditate on yourself at this moment, carefully examine your soul before it will be examined thoroughly, contemplate your states; neither rest nor move as long as you have not reflected on why you move, what you intend, what you will achieve in this world, what you will lose in the next world, and why you prefer this world to the next.

When you recognize that what motivates you is nothing but your religion, strengthen your resolve and carry out what you have in mind; but if this is not the case, then refrain from it. Afterwards, carefully contemplate the states of your heart with regard to refrainment and restraint, for not acting is itself an act and it also requires a correct intention. You should not be motivated by a hidden whim of which you are not aware.

Do not be deceived by the external appearances of things and commonly accepted good deeds; look deeply into the complexities and secrets of affairs so as to keep away from the group of those who have been deceived [by the apparent nature of things].

It has been narrated that once Zechariah (a) was hired to build a mud wall. His hirers paid him two pieces of flatbread. He was accustomed to eating only what he had earned by his labor. One day a group of people came to visit him while he was eating, but he did not offer to share the food with them. After he finished eating, they were surprised by his conduct, because they knew that Zechariah (a) was a generous and ascetic person and they thought that offering the food was required by his benevolent character. Zechariah then said to them, “I am hired to work for some people on a certain wage; they offered me these two pieces of flatbread in order for me to maintain my strength to do the job. If I had shared the food with you, the food would not have been sufficient for either you or me and I would not have had the strength to do their work.”

Zechariah was truly insightful. He was able to take into

consideration the internal aspects of things through God's light in this manner; for his failing to do their work as a result of physiological weakness was a shortcoming in what was obligatory, while refraining from sharing the food with them was a shortcoming in what was supererogatory, and a supererogatory act does not take precedence over a relevant obligation. It is in this way that a servant must inspect his intentions in the performance of other acts. He ought to ensure that he has a correct intention before doing or refraining from it, and if no intention comes to his mind, he should cease to act, since intention is not under human control.

### **Part 5: Explaining the Fact that Intention is not under Human Control**

Know that the ignorant would hear the advice we cited on improving and multiplying intentions together with the saying of the Prophet (s) "Actions are measured by intentions"; thereafter, he may say to himself that I intend to teach for the sake of God, to trade for the sake of God, or to eat for the sake of God, and so on, and when he sets out to do them, he supposes that this is a true intention. How far it is! This is merely a kind of talk or conversation with oneself, words uttered, a thought, or transition from one passing thought to another, whereas a true intention is far from this. Indeed, a true intention is the inclination, attention, and desire of the soul towards an action which appears to the person as fulfilling his purpose either now or in the future. If there was essentially no desire or inclination, it would be impossible to create or acquire it through merely willing; as it is like a satiated person saying, "I have intended to have an appetite and a desire for food" or like one who is not in love saying, "I have intended to like so-and-so, to fall in love with her, and to adore her with all my heart." This is impossible, and there is no way to make one's

heart desire, be inclined to, and attend to something except by first acquiring its means, which may be possible at times and not at others, since the human soul is motivated to act in a certain way only by something that promotes a pleasant and agreeable objective. As long as a man does not believe that achieving his purpose is contingent on a particular action, his attention will not be directed to it; however, he is not always able to form this type of beliefs. If he believed it, then he would be able to give his heart's attention to it if his heart were unoccupied and not concerned with a more attractive purpose. However, this is not possible at all times, because incentives and disincentives are caused to come together by a variety of things. These vary according to individuals, conditions, and acts.

Therefore, if a person were to be overwhelmed by the lust for sexual intercourse and did not have an appropriate worldly or religious belief and purpose for conceiving a child, it would be impossible for him to engage in sexual intercourse with the intention of having a child, but it would only be possible for him to do so with the intention of satisfying his lust, since intention consists in responding to the motive, and here there is no motive other than lust; so how can he intend to conceive a child? Similarly, if he were not positively affected by the thought that it would be a great virtue to establish the institution of marriage so as to follow the Prophet's (s) tradition, it would be impossible for him to intend to follow such a tradition. In any case, he can utter the words with his tongue or [think about them in his] heart, but this is only a kind of conversation with oneself, and does not constitute intention.

Certainly, the way to acquire this intention is, for example, to strengthen one's faith firstly in the divine law and secondly in the great reward for those who wish and make efforts to increase the number of the Prophet's (s) nation, and then thirdly to repel all kinds of ill-thoughts about having children, such as increase in living expenses, constant tiredness, and so forth. If a person

managed to do this, then his heart may be inclined to have children for the reward, he may be moved by that inclination, and his body parts may move to conduct a marriage contract. If the moving force made his tongue accept the contract for this dominant motive in the heart, he would gain the correct intention; however, if this were not the case, what he evaluated and weighed up in his mind concerning the conception of a child would be obsessional and absurd. For this reason, a number of our predecessors would refrain from carrying out certain acts of obedience when they did not possess proper intentions. They would claim that they did not have the proper intention, like Ibn Sirin, who did not partake in the funeral prayer of al-Hasan al-Basri, on the context that he did not have the [godly] intention to do so.

I add: In offering an excuse, Ibn Sirin did not pray for him probably, because he considered him to be a hypocrite.

Abu Hamid (Ghazali) said: If any of the predecessors were asked to do a righteous or virtuous act, they would say, "If God provides us with its intention, we will do it." One of them is reported to have once said, "I have for a month asked [God] for an intention to visit a sick person, but I have not gained it yet." 'Isa ibn Kathir also said, "I was walking with Maymun ibn Mahran. When we reached his front door, I decided to return. His son then asked him, 'Do you not wish to offer him dinner?' He replied, 'It is not something I have been able to intend.'"

I say that al-Barqi has narrated, with his chain of transmission, from Imam al-Sadiq (a): "One of the Imam's companions came to him, greeted him, and sat down with the Imam. When the Imam (a) then decided to leave and return home, the companion also came back with him. When the Imam (a) arrived at his home, he came in and bid his companion farewell. On entering, the Imam's son Isma'il asked him, "O father! Why did you not offer him to come in?" He (a) replied, "It would not have befitted me to do so." His son then said, "He would not have come in." He (a) replied,

“O my son! I would surely hate for God to count me amongst those who offer hospitality [without really meaning it].”

Abu Hamid (Ghazali) says: This is because intentions follow one’s attitudes. Therefore, if someone’s attitude were to change, then his intention would change as well. Thus, the scholars of the past did not hold it correct to act except with an intention, since they knew that intention is the essence of acts and that any action done without a genuine intention would be a pretended one. In addition, such an act would take one away from God rather than make him earn proximity to Him. They knew that it is not an intention to just say, “I have intended” with the tongue, but rather a true intention is the stimulation of the heart by means of the mercy unfolded by God. It is at times available (and at others not) to form an intention. In fact, it would often be available to one whose heart is primarily concerned with religious matters to intend to do good to other individuals as his heart essentially leans towards the good and therefore is frequently motivated to perform such acts. However, such an intention would not be available to a person whose heart leans towards the world and is more concerned with material matters. Moreover, it would not be available for him to perform obligatory acts except through his strenuous efforts. His ultimate accomplishment would be to remember hellfire and to warn himself to beware of its punishments [that await him] or to recall Paradise and to encourage himself to attain its blessings; by doing so, he may be capable of forming a weak motivation, but his reward will be proportional to his inclination and intention.

Holding that God is worthy of worship and obedience, one would not be able to form a correct intention to glorify Him by performing an act of obedience if he were to desire this world, because it [performing an act of obedience to glorify God because He is worthy of obedience] is the most honorable and highest kind of intention; honored is the one who is able to realize its value, let alone the one



who is capable of forming it in carrying out the acts of obedience.

There are a variety of intentions that people have for obeying God: some people act out of fear, for they want to stay away from hellfire; and some act out of hope, for they wish to attain Paradise. Although these intentions are inferior to the one with which a person obeys God in order to exalt and venerate Him for His sake alone and not for the sake of anything other than Him, they are considered to be among valid intentions, because they are inclinations towards things that are promised in the Hereafter even though they are from amongst the familiar pleasures of this world. And the majority of motives are those which pertain to the stomach and the private parts and the place where they are satisfied is Paradise. So, the agent who acts in order to achieve Paradise does so for the sake of his own stomach and private parts, like a vicious hireling. His level will be that of the simpleminded and he will reach this level through his awareness, because most of the inhabitants of Paradise are the simpleminded.

Those who possess intellect in their obedience do not disregard the remembrance of God and reflecting upon Him in admiration of His beauty and majesty, while their other acts are a confirmation and fulfillment of this. Their status is too high to pay heed to the houris and foods of Paradise. These are not the contents of their intentions, and this verse is true of them: “[T]hose who supplicate their Lord morning and evening [exclusively] desiring His face” (Quran, 6:52). The rewards of people will be proportional to [the value of] their intentions. Thus, those possessing intellect are undoubtedly endowed with observing the Face of their Lord. They may ridicule those who pay attention to the faces of the wide-eyed houris, just as those who enjoy gazing at the wide-eyed houris may ridicule those who enjoy gazing at the faces of women made of clay, but the ridicule of the former is far greater, since the difference between the beauty of the divine majesty and that of wide-eyed houris is much greater

and vaster than the difference between the beauty of the houris and the beauty of women made of clay.

The fact that concupiscent animal souls highly value sexual intercourse with good-looking people to satisfy their urges and desires, and disregard the observance of the divine majesty and beauty resembles the fact that the beetle highly values its companion and its own affection for it, and disregards observing the beauty of good-looking women. Just as most hearts are blind to the beauty and majesty of God, the beetle is blind to the beauty of women. It does not perceive it at all and does not pay attention to it. If it had possessed intellect and had been reminded of women, it would have disparaged the intellect of those who give attention to women, “but they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy—and that is why He created them” (Quran, 11: 118-9) and “each faction boasting about what it possessed” (Quran, 30:32).

To summarize, intentions are of varying degrees. If one of them were to dominate over a person’s heart, he would probably find it difficult to switch to another. The recognition of these facts may make one perform certain acts denounced as reprehensible by some shallow-sighted jurists. So, we contend that if an intention to carry out a permissible act appeared to someone, in contrast to a recommended and virtuous act, then performing the permissible act would take precedence over the virtuous act. In this case, the permissible act will become meritorious, while the recommended act will become imperfect in that respect, because deeds are measured by intentions. This is similar to the case of forgiveness, as forgiving after being oppressed is better than taking revenge. However, if only the intention for revenge, and not to forgive, were formed in one’s heart, then it would be more suitable to take revenge. Correspondingly, one may have an intention to drink, eat, and sleep in order to relax his soul and to gain strength for worshipping God in the future, while at present

he has no intention to observe [any recommended] fast or perform any [supererogatory] prayer, in this case the former is better for him. Furthermore, if, as a result of continuous worship, he began to get bored of it, failed to feel the joy, and his attraction towards it started to wane, it would be worthier for him to partake in socializing and other recreational activities, especially when he knows that by doing so, even for a small period of time, his enthusiasm and energy for worship will be rekindled. Abu Darda' said, "I relax and comfort myself with recreation so that it will help me to do the right thing." 'Ali (a) is also reported to have said, "Refresh your hearts, for when they are compelled [into doing something], they become blind."

These are fine points that are grasped only by scholars who are meticulous [in their research], not by shallow minded scholars. A competent physician may sometimes prescribe meat, which is naturally hot, to a patient who has a naturally hot temperament in order to cure him, whereas this type of cure may be considered to be unlikely and ineffective by an incompetent physician. He was unable to understand that the first physician initially wants to make the patient regain his strength so that he will be able to undergo and bear the treatment with the opposite temperament. Similarly, a skillful chess player may intentionally lose his castle or knight in exchange for nothing so as to defeat his opponent, while a short-sighted novice player may laugh and feel surprised [at what he does]. Likewise, a man experienced in fighting may at times consider it to be in his best interests to run away and turn his back on his enemy so as to place him in a predicament where he can mount an attack on him.

In the same manner, the entirety of the spiritual journey towards God is a battle with Satan and constant refinement of the heart. A clear-sighted person, who is given success by God, manages to recognize certain subtle realities that are seen to be worthless and unlikely by an undiscerning man. Hence, a disciple

ought not to simply deny, in his mind, what he may come to see from his spiritual guide nor should a learner raise objections to his teacher; but he should rather limit his judgment to the extent of his own insight and submit to his teacher's states and remarks even though he is unable to understand them, until a time when he reaches and arrives at their position and station, for only then will their secrets be unveiled for him.

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