

Twelfth Rule

INTENTION AND SINCERITY IN **ACTIONS**

In Rauzat al-Waezeen it is narrated that Imam al-Sadiq (AS) reports that God The Almighty said,

I am the best partner. I do not accept any act in which you take partners besides Me. I only accept deeds, which are sincerely done for Me.

Ikhlas in Persian means *vizheh kardan* (to make exclusive), that is, to purge a thing of everything else that has mingled with it. That which is meant here is that all of one's speech and action should be for the sake of seeking nearness to God, The Exalted, and exclusively for His sake, without being adulterated with any worldly or otherworldly purpose.

According to the guideline given by The Prophet (S) to Abu Dhar,

O' Abu Dhar! You should have pure intention in all your deeds, even in (lawful) eating and drinking.

The Shaykh Rajab Ali (AR) would frequently assert to his disciples,

All your tasks must be for God's sake, even your eating and sleeping. Once you drink this cup of tea while remembering God, your heart will be radiated with Divine Light. Nevertheless, if you drink it for the sake of satiating your desire, it will turn to what you had wanted (other than God)!

The Aimmah (AS) have informed us that,

Allah (SWT) nullified Shaytan's good deeds and extensive efforts because of vanity on just one occasion, even though he had worshipped Allah (SWT) for 6000 years.

Most certainly, sincere intentions are actions themselves and all deeds depend on our intentions. Imam al-Baqir (AS) once exclaimed that the preservation of a righteous deed is more difficult than performing that deed in the first place. When he was asked as to what constituted the 'preservation of a deed', he replied,

Let us suppose that someone makes a gift of charity in order to earn God's pleasure and to have it recorded in his register of deeds as an act of charity unknown to men. Then he tells someone about what he has done. The reward for hidden charity is annulled for his act will have become public. He then tells someone else of what he has done, and this time the sincerity with which he had performed the act will be completely annulled, and the register of his deeds will record that his act was hypocritical.

However, it should be made clear that the effect of a virtuous deed disappears and the reward for it becomes annulled only when the reason for making it public is hypocritical and self-display, not a motive of higher order such as encouraging emulation by others.

Imam Ali (AS) once said,

Verily, the granting of Prayer is according to the measure of the intention...

The suggestion is, therefore, to be sincere and not a hypocrite who acts for other than Allah (SWT), or even one who says one thing and does another. Allah (SWT) has to say the following regarding hypocrisy and the hypocrites,

In addition, of the people (are some) who say, 'We believe in Allah (SWT) and in The Last Day', (while in fact) they are not believers. They (intend to) deceive Allah (SWT) and those who believe, when in reality they deceive not but themselves. They just cannot perceive it. In their heart is a disease and Allah (SWT) increases their disease. For them is a painful chastisement because they would be liars. Moreover, when it is said unto them, 'Do not make mischief on earth', they reply, 'Verily, we are among those who do well.' Beware! Verily, they are the mischief-mongers but they perceive it not.

When it is said unto them (the hypocrites), 'Believe (in Allah (SWT)) as others before you did', they say, 'Shall we believe what fool believed?' Beware! Verily, they (the hypocrites) are the fools but they are unaware of it.

And when they meet with those who believe, they say, 'We believe!', but when they return to their mischief, they say, 'Verily, we are with you (i.e. mischief and Shaytan) and we had just mocked! Allah (SWT) mocks at them and He only allows them to continue bewildered (because of consistent disobedience) in their rebellion. These are then who purchase error for guidance. Hence, their transaction does not profit them, neither are they guided aright. The likeness of them is like unto one who kindles a fire, and when it lights all around him, Allah (SWT) takes away the light and leaves them in darkness and they are unable to see. (Indeed, they are) deaf, dumb and blind. Hence, there shall be no return from their darkness.

Or like a rainstorm from heaven fraught with darkness, thunder and lightening, they place their fingers in their ears against the thunderclaps for fear of death! And verily, Allah (SWT) encompasses the disbelievers. The lightening well nigh snatched away their sight (from them), as often as it gleams for them. They walk therein and when it gets dark for them, they halt! If Allah (SWT) willed, He could take away their hearing and their sight. Verily, Allah (SWT) has power over all things.

(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 8 – 20)

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) reports The Prophet (S) as having said,

Indeed when The Angel of Allah (SWT) joyously takes to the higher Heaven the good deeds of a man, as he carries the good deeds Heavenward, Allah (SWT) Almighty orders him (The Angel) to place those deeds in 'Sijjin', since they were not performed for him alone.

al-Khumeini (AR) says,

You and I cannot imagine what 'Sijjin' is, and which kinds of demons are appointed there; and you cannot contemplate the horrors inflicted upon the sinners there. And once we have been made to face it, it will not be possible for us to get rid of it, as all the means of repentance shall be cut off.

Wake up my friend! And cast away your negligence and carelessness, and weigh your actions in the balance of your reason before they are weighed and measured in the other world. And cleanse the mirror of your heart of the rust of polytheism, hypocrisy, and two-facedness. Do not allow the rust of impurity of polytheism and infidelity to gather in such a way that it cannot be cleansed with the fire of the other world. Do not allow the light of your nature to be turned into the gloom of apostasy.

Imam Ali (AS) reports The Prophet (S) as having remarked the following,

One who does some act liked by Allah (SWT) in order to show off to people, and in secret manifests such qualities such as are abominations to Allah (SWT), he shall encounter God's anger and wrath (on The Day of Resurrection).

As He, The Almighty puts it,

There is no clearer sign in the earth and in the heavens of the elegance of The Beloved than the heart of a true believer.
(Hadith al-Qudsi)

It is well known that the believer's heart is in the occupation of Allah (SWT), and not at the disposal of the self. The heart of the true believer is not self-willed, nor is it vagrant. It is said of it,

The heart of the true believer lies between two fingers of Allah (SWT), that He may turn it whatever way He pleases.

We should remind ourselves that we are not here to worship The Devil or ourselves. And that ignorance is the cause of all this evil that prevents The Hand of Allah (SWT) from handling our hearts and soul.

Stages

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) summarizes several stages of Unity in Worship and its importance to any spiritual traveler. We need to

worship Allah (SWT) keeping worship purely for Him. Never be motivated by self-interest while you worship Allah (SWT). This may not only be considered as a deviation from the path of devotion to Allah (SWT), being a self-seeker may also reflect you as that person not fully acquainted with monotheism, The Unity of Allah (SWT) in His actions and attributes. But worship Him because He deserves to be worshipped. He is fit and worthy of being worshipped because of His attributes. In other words, He is to be worshipped because He is Allah (SWT).

Imam Ali (AS) used to constantly exclaim,

My Lord! I do not worship You because I am afraid of Your Hell, nor because I want Your Paradise. I worship You because I have found You fit for being worshipped. You Yourself have guided me to You and have called me to You. Had You not been I would not have known what You are.

The Stage of 'Burning' – Each and everything for Allah ONLY

Ba Yazid Bistami has have said,

First I renounced the world. Next day I renounced The Hereafter. The third day I renounced everything other than Allah (SWT). The fourth day I was asked what I wanted. I said, 'I want that I do not want!'

One day, Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) asked his teacher and spiritual adviser, Mirza Ali Agha Qazi (AR) about this question and a solution to the above problem. He said that it could be resolved by adopting the method of 'Burning.' The spiritual traveler should realize that

Allah (SWT) has created him in such a way that he must always have some desires and ambitions. That is a part of his inborn nature. Howsoever he may try, he cannot eliminate all desires. Therefore he should realize his powerlessness and give up all efforts to that effect. In that case he will entrust his case to Allah (SWT). The feeling of powerlessness will not only purify him, but will also burn the roots of all desire. Anyhow, it must be kept in mind that only theoretical knowledge of this point is not enough. The spiritual traveler must develop a real taste for it. If such a taste is developed, it can be more pleasure giving than anything else in the world.

This method is called 'Burning' for it burns out the very existence of will and intention and uproots them completely. One instance in The Qur'an is the use of the Divine expression,

When gathered with calamity, they say, 'We belong to Allah (SWT) and to Him shall we return?'

(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 156)

Worship, Part of Our Living – A Brief Note on Riya and Ujb

Let it be known that we can most certainly translate all our actions into worship be it in school or at a playground. With sincere intention one can be continuously rewarded for his or her deeds. However, this needs courage and devotion for we need to have Allah (SWT) in our mind at all times. All actions should be for His sake and in this way we would not welcome evil acts. Truly, how can one commit a sin for pleasing his Lord?

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) in his book al-Mizan, quotes a tradition saying that,

If intentions were pure then even the mountains would move if they were ordered to.

We need to also constantly remind ourselves that it is easier to perform a good and obedient act but extremely difficult to preserve that action. One can always spoil his worship by telling others, or by advertising his actions. Of course, one is permitted to disclose the information when the other party is considered a learner so that he performs the acts too.

Sincerity should always form the main part of our worship. Pleasing Allah (SWT) and Him only should be our goal. It is reported by our respected Aimmah (AS) that on The Day of Judgment three groups of people (martyrs, scholars, and the rich) will be brought forward for reckoning. These people will have performed many good and obedient acts in their life. For example, to acquire martyrdom is considered one of the highest goals in Islam. Similarly, scholars are highly respected in the Islamic world. However, these very people will have to encounter a tough reckoning on that Day and for many, their actions will have been rejected simply because they performed the actions to show others, and please others besides Allah (SWT).

According to al-Khumeini (AR),

Riya means to falsely make oneself appear to be virtuous, good natured or a true believer in God before the people for the sake of earning their respect and admiration, or with the purpose of gaining good reputation among them. The hypocrite feigns integrity, uprightness, virtue, honesty and piety without an authentic intention of acquiring these traits for the sake of God. It has several grades and degrees.

At the first step, an individual makes a display of his religious beliefs, and shows off his knowledge of the religious teachings in order to project himself as an honest person in the eyes of people to gain their confidence and respect.

The second step on the path of Riya is represented by those who eradicate false belief from their hearts and, through such purification, want to attain power and respect among people.

The third stage of Riya, which is considered overt by The Fuqaha, also consists of two steps:

1. The first step is marked by an individual's performance of the prescribed forms of piety, prayers and good deeds in front of other people with the intention of demonstrating his good qualities and praiseworthy habits, or by his posture as a person who strictly adheres to the religious commands on purely rational grounds, and thus wishing to win the hearts of people and attracting their attention towards himself. Such acts, whether performed in total or in part, with the motive of Riya, to please the others, are discussed in the books of fiqh.

2. At the second step, one abstains from evil deeds for the purpose of Riya only.

Riya should be avoided in all circumstances and The Aimmah (AS) have cautioned us significantly on this matter. There are three distinguishing features of one accustomed to such a disease of the soul – Riya,

- 1) He expresses joy and cheerfulness when he is greeted by people.
- 2) He becomes cheerless and sullen when alone.
- 3) He wishes to be praised for everything he does.
(Imam Ali (AS))

We, as Spiritual travelers, should be at all times single-minded and well intentioned. Our objective should be to please Allah (SWT) and Him only. He alone deserves to be worshipped.

Riya (to falsely make oneself appear virtuous and good natured before the people for the sake of earning their respect and attention) in any of its forms amounts to polytheism. Indeed, one who works for the people, his reward lies with them, and one who works for Allah (SWT), his reward lies with Allah (SWT).
(Imam al-Sadiq (AS))

Further, this disease and sin makes a person abstain from evil deeds for the purpose of Riya only. In this way he makes others partners to Allah (SWT) and has given permission to The Devil to occupy his heart as if it does not belong to Allah (SWT). Imam al-Sadiq (AS) quotes Allah (SWT) as having said,

I am the best of friends. One who makes others My partners in any matter; his deeds are not acceptable to Me. I accept only those acts that are purely done for My sake.

Yazid ibn Khalifah reports from al-Imam al-Sadiq (A) that,

Riya in any of its form amounts to shirk, (polytheism); verily, one who works for the people, his reward lies with them, and one who works for God his reward lies with God.

Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 402

al-Khumeini (AR) writes,

Anyhow, if you see that Riya is stealing into your heart, you should realize that your heart has not really surrendered itself to reason and faith has yet to illuminate your heart. For you consider others to be your Allah (SWT) and see them as efficient agents in the world, and you do not trust Him, the only Allah (SWT). Even though Shaytan may struggle strenuously to pollute your good acts with Riya by injecting into your mind evil thoughts and ideas, you really do not have to think for a second of bargaining divine blessings, those infinite favors and benevolence with popularity among people, which is neither effective nor long lasting.

It is related in authentic sources that Allah (SWT) will command certain persons to be put into Hell, and then He will say to The Master of Hell, 'Order the Fire not to burn their feet, for they used to walk towards mosques; nor their hands, for they used to raise them towards Me in prayer; nor their tongues, for they frequently used to recite The Qur'an; nor their faces, for they used to perform the ablutions completely and without deficiency?.' Therefore, The Master of Hell will say, 'O' you miserable ones! What used to be your plight?' Moreover, they (the people) will reply, 'We used to act according to the commands of being other than Allah.' The people will then be told, 'Take your reward from him for whom you acted!'

Ujb is another obstacle in this step, besides Riya. Abul-Hasan (AS) has this to say about the Ujb (self-conceit, vanity) that vitiates the quality of human deeds.

There are several levels of Ujb, one of them is when one's bad qualities appear to him as good; he reckons them as good ones and congratulates himself imagining that he is performing virtues. Another level of Ujb is represented by a person who believes in God and thinks that he has done a favor to God; whereas God Almighty has conferred a favor on him (by endowing him with faith).

(Usul al-Kafi, vol. II, p. 313)

Scholars have defined Ujb as the magnification of one's virtues and good deeds, their overestimation, and satisfaction with them accompanied with a feeling of superiority on their account, while one exonerates and exculpates himself from all failings and faults. Nevertheless, to feel pleasure and delight on performing virtuous deeds accompanied with a sense of humility and modesty before God and gratitude to God for His favors, and to ask Him to increase them, is not Ujb, but is a praiseworthy trait.

Allamah al-Majlisi (AR) quotes the great scholar and thinker al-Shaykh Baha al-Din al-Amili (AR) as having said,

There is no doubt that when anyone performs good deeds, like fasting, night vigils, etc., he feels some kind of joy and pleasure within him. This pleasure and joy, if it is on account of the feeling that God Almighty has conferred on him favor and grace, which caused him to perform such acts of piety, while he is afraid of their loss and is anxious about their disappearance, and asks God Almighty for their continuity and abundance-this kind of exultation and gladness is not Ujb. But if the exultation and pride is felt on account of the belief that he is the doer of such deeds and that it is he who possesses all such good qualities, and if he glorifies his own deeds with confidence in his goodness, considering himself to be free from all faults and vices, it reaches such a point that one believes that he is conferring some favor upon God in performing these deeds. This feeling of exultation and pride is Ujb.

Allah (SWT) Almighty once commanded Prophet Daud (AS) to convey glad tidings to the sinners and to terrify the pious. Prophet Daud (AS) asked Allah (SWT) as to why he should convey glad tidings to the sinner and frighten the pious. Replied Allah (SWT) Almighty,

O' Daud (AS)! Give good news to the sinners that I accept their repentance, and warn the righteous that they should not have Ujb (self-admiration) for their acts, for there is no servant who does not stand doomed when I take an account of his deeds (and deserve chastisement, since, according to the requirements of justice, a man with all his worship cannot thank Allah (SWT) properly even for one of His favors).

In his al-Khisal, Sheikh Saduq (AR) reports from Imam al-Sadiq (AS) that he said,

The Devil says,

If I subdue the son of Adam (AS) in three things I do not care for whatever he may do, as his good deeds will not be accepted:

- 1) When he overestimates his good deeds.
- 2) When he is forgetful of his sins.
- 3) When Ujb permeates him.

It is reported in al-Kafi that Imam Ali (AS) was once asked about Ujb (self-conceit and/or vanity) and he replied the following,

There are several levels of Ujb. One of them is when one's bad qualities appear to him as good; he reckons them as good ones and congratulates himself in imagining that he is performing virtues. Another level of Ujb is represented by a person who believes in Allah (SWT) and thinks that he has done a favor to Allah (SWT), whereas Allah (SWT) Almighty has conferred a favor on him (by endowing him with faith).

We should at least try to have an iota of sincerity in all our actions compared to The Prince of Believers, Imam Ali (AS). We should not be boastful of our deeds and proud of ourselves. Let us ask our hearts whether it is in search of Allah (SWT) or it is in love with itself. Indeed, the one into whose heart Ujb permeates is destined to be destroyed. *No loneliness can be compared in dreadfulness to the one, which is the result of Ujb.* (Imam Ali (AS))

Prophet Musa (AS) asked Shaytan to inform him about the sin by means of which he infiltrates into the hearts of the progeny of Prophet Adam (AS). Shaytan replied ***it is the time when they feel Ujb about themselves, overestimate their good deeds and the gravity of their sins becomes diminutive in their eyes.***

A Brief Note on The Sincerity of Ali (AS)

al-Khumeini (AR) writes the following confirming Imam Ali's Sincerity in every second of his life, that even one strike of his sword on The Day of Khaybar was, is and continues to be weightier in The Eyes of Allah than the worship of the entire creation, including the Non-Living, The Angels and The Jinn.

I swear by the station of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) that even if all the Archangels (AS), and all The Prophets of Allah (SWT) (AS), except The Seal of Prophets (S), who is The Lord of Ali (AS) and all others; if they try to utter a single Takbir (i.e. Allah-u-Akbar - Allah (SWT) is Great) of Ali's, they will not be able to do it!

al-Baqir (AS) said,

O' Abu Hamza, do not place Ali (A.S.) below the level to which Allah has raised him, and do not elevate him above the level where Allah has kept him. It is enough (excellence) for Ali that he is the one who fought the apostates and he is the one who will pair off the inmates of Paradise.