



إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ

ACTIONS ARE BASED ON INTENTION

**An Explanation of the Hadith of ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) by
Shaykh Muhammad ibn Sālih al-Uthaymeen (رحمه الله تعالى)**

From His explanation on Riyādh as-Sāliheen



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An Explanation of the Hadith of ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) by
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إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّةِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِأَمْرِي مَا نَوَيْ، فَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ فَهَجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ،
وَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى دُنْيَا يُصِيبُهَا أَوْ امْرَأَةٍ يَتَرَوُّجُهَا، فَهَجْرَتُهُ إِلَى مَا هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِ

Actions are based on intention and every person will have only what he intended. So whoever emigrates for the sake of Allah and His Messenger then his emigration will be considered for Allah and His Messenger. But whoever migrates for the sake of worldly gain or for the marriage of a woman then his emigration will be according to what he emigrated for.

Its authenticity is agreed upon. It was narrated by the two Imāms Abu Abdullāh, Muhammad ibn Isma’eel ibn Ibrāheem ibn al-Mugheerah ibn Bardizbah al-Ju’fi al-Bukhāri and Abu al-Husayn, Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj ibn al-Muslim al-Qushayri an-Naysaburi (رضي الله عنهما). This narration is mentioned in both of their authentic compilations which are the two most authentic books of hadith.

EXPLANATION

Given that this chapter is related to sincerity (الإخلاص), purity of intent for Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, and that every intended statement and deed must be sincerely for Allah, the author (Imām an-Nawawi) mentioned certain verses and hadith that convey its significance. So he introduced this chapter with the hadith of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb who said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) say, **“Actions are based on intention and every person will have only what he intended.”**”

The scholars differ with regard to the meaning of these two sentences. Some of them said that both of these sentences mean the same thing (a tautology) and that the second sentence is just for emphasis and stressing its meaning. This view, however, is incorrect because the general principle with regard to [tautology in] speech is that it establishes independent meaning and it is not merely brought for stress. Furthermore, when you ponder over both sentences, it becomes clear that there is a major difference between the two. The first sentence deals with motive (something that initiated action) and the second one deals with consequence.

In the first sentence, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) clarified that every action must have an intention and motive. So every sane person who performs an action of his own volition must have done it based on an intention. It is simply impossible for a sane person to do anything of his own volition in the absence of intention. So true is this that the scholars said, “If Allah tasked us to do things in the absence of intention then this would be an unbearable task.” This is correct. How is it possible that a sane person, like yourself, who is not under duress, do an action in the absence of intention?! This is just simply impossible because actions are the direct consequence of will and power and will is simply intent. So in light of this, the meaning of the first sentence is that every person that performs an action does so based on intention.

[People’s] intentions, however, differ hugely. Some people's intentions reach for the sky but others have the lowest and most debased of intention. So much so that you can view two men performing the same action. They are indistinguishable in their movements, statements and actions from beginning until end. Despite that, however, lies the distance between the heavens and the earth, and this is due to a contrast in intent.

So, the fundamental point is that there is no action in the absence of intention, but intention itself differs and contrasts [from person to person]. The result of which is **“and every person will have only what he intended”** Thus, every person will have what he intended. If he had in mind Allah and the abode of the hereafter, by doing deeds that are legally established, then he will attain what he intended. If he had in mind some worldly affair then he may or may not attain it. Allah, the Most High, states,

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ۝۱۸

Whoever should desire the immediate, We hasten for him from it what We will to whom We intend. [Al Israa 18]

Allah did not say here, **“We hasten for him what he wills”**; rather he said, **“We hasten for him from it what We will”** and not what he wills. So He restricted what is to be hastened and for whom it will be hastened. From mankind are those who are given what they aspire for in the dunya, and from them are those who are given a portion. Some, however, gain nothing of what they aspire for. As for

وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا ۝۱۹

But whoever desires the Hereafter and exerts the effort due to it while he is a believer - it is those whose effort is ever appreciated [by Allah]

[Al Israa 19]

then, certainly, he will reap the rewards of these actions which he did seeking the Face of Allah and the abode of the hereafter.

The Prophet’s (صلى الله عليه وسلم) words **“Actions are based on intention”** is a sentence that provides us the scale for weighing all actions, but it is the scale for weighing the internal state of actions. As for the Prophet’s (صلى الله عليه وسلم) statement which was collected by the two Shaykhs (Bukhari and Muslim) on the authority of ‘Aa’isha

مَنْ عَمِلَ عَمَلًا لَيْسَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْرُنَا فَهُوَ رَدٌّ

“He who does an act which we have not commanded, will have it rejected (by Allah)”

then this is the scale by which all external actions are weighed. Thus, the people of knowledge said, “These two hadith sum up the whole religion. The hadith of ‘Umar **“Actions are based on intention”** weighs the internal state of actions, and the hadith of ‘Aa’isha **“He who does an act which we have not commanded”** weighs the external state of actions.

Then the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) goes on to give us a practical example. He says, **“So whoever emigrates for the sake of Allah and His Messenger then his emigration will be considered for Allah and His Messenger. But whoever migrates for the sake of worldly gain or for the marriage of a woman then his emigration will be according to what he emigrated for.”**

The term الهجرة *al-hijra* conveys the meaning of a person migrating from the lands of the non-Muslims to the lands of Islam. For example, a person resides in America, and America is a non-Muslim country. So he accepts Islam but he is unable to realise and represent his Islam there. So he travels from America to the lands of Islam. This is an example of migration. Migration is done for different reasons:

1. There are those who migrate, bidding farewell to their country for the sake of Allah and His Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم). So this person attains good and attains his objective because **“[he] emigrates for the sake of Allah and His Messenger”**. In other words, he has realised his intention.
2. There are those who migrate for worldly gain. For example, a man has a love for acquiring wealth who hears that there are lush, green pastures abroad in the lands of the Muslims for the acquisition of wealth. So he migrates from his non-Muslim country to the lands of the Muslims for the sole purpose of acquiring wealth and not so that he can straighten out his religious affairs.
3. A man migrates from the lands of the non-Muslims to the lands of the Muslims, seeking to marry a woman. It is made known to him that her hand will not be given unless he resides in a Muslim country and that he cannot travel with her to the lands of the non-Muslims. So he migrates from his non-Muslim country to the lands of the Muslims for the sole purpose of marrying this woman.

Those in the pursuit of the dunya or marriage did not migrate for the sake of Allah and his Messenger, and this is why the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said **“then his emigration will be according to what he emigrated for”**. So he just said here **“then his emigration is according to what he emigrated for”** and not **“then his emigration is for the sake of worldly gain or for the marriage of a woman”**. Why is this? Some said that [the statement was not repeated] due to verbosity,¹ since if he had said, **“then his emigration is for the sake of worldly gain or for the marriage of a woman”** then the statement would be verbose. It was also said that the reason behind him not reiterating his statement was to show disdain for both acts (worldly gain and marriage) because both are inferior. Immigrating [to a Muslim country] is from the best of deeds, but when immigration is done for worldly gain or for marriage then it is an inferior and degraded deed because the intention has been corrupted.

THE TYPES OF HIJRAH

Hijrah can be made from actions, people and places.

The first type is hijrah (migrating) due to place. It could be that a person travels from a place plagued with disobedience and evil doing, or from a land of disbelief to a land that is free from it. The greatest hijrah is from the lands of the non-Muslims to the lands of the Muslims. The people of knowledge have mentioned that it is incumbent on a person to migrate from a non-Muslim land to a Muslim one if he unable to practice his religion openly.² As for the person who is able to practise his religion openly and he meets no resistance in establishing the symbols of Islam then hijrah is not an obligation. Rather, it is a recommendation. So based on this, travelling to the lands of the non-Muslims is a greater sin than remaining in those lands. So if a person’s homeland happens to be non-Muslim country and he is unable to practice his religion there openly, he is required to migrate from that land.

Likewise, if a person is from the people of Islam and lives in a Muslim country then it is not permissible for him to travel to the lands of the non-Muslims, due to the detrimental effects it will

¹ Containing more words than necessary.

² The Ulama have explained the clause “the ability to practice his religion openly” to mean be able to openly declare tawheed, free oneself from shirk and to implement the symbols of Islam without any fear. Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ibrāheem said, “Practising his religion openly does not only refer to praying and the subsidiaries of the religion and avoiding the forbidden things, such as usury, fornication and so on. Rather, “practicing the religion openly” means proclaiming tawheed and disassociation from whatever the polytheists are upon of shirk with Allah in worship and anything else that relates to disbelief and misguidance.” (*Fatāwā ash-Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ibrāheem* [1/77]).

have on his religion and moral character, not to mention it is also a squandering of wealth which helps to strengthen their economy. Allah has commanded us to frustrate the nonbelievers with all we can muster. Allah states,

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَتَلُوا الَّذِينَ يُلُونَكُمْ مِّنَ الْكُفَّارِ وَلَيَجِدُوا فِيكُمْ غِلْظَةً وَّاعْلَمُوا
أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ ١٢٣

123. O you who believe, fight those of the unbelievers who are near to you and let them find in you hardness; and know that Allah is with those who guard (against evil).

[At Tawbah 123]

وَلَا يَطُون مَوَاطِنًا يَغِيظُ الْكُفَّارَ وَلَا يَنَالُونَ مِنْ عَدُوِّ نَيْلًا إِلَّا كُتِبَ لَهُم بِهِ عَمَلٌ
صَالِحٌ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ١٢٠

Nor do they tread on any ground that enrages the disbelievers, nor do they inflict upon an enemy any infliction but that is registered for them as a righteous deed. Indeed, Allah does not allow to be lost the reward of the doers of good.

[at Tawbah 120]

So it makes no difference if the nonbeliever is a Christian, a Jew, an atheist or someone labelled as a Muslim; they are all enemies of Allah [due to their opposition to], His Book, His Messenger and the believers, no matter how well intended they are. They are enemies of Allah!

It is not permissible for a person to travel to the lands of the unbelievers unless he fulfils three conditions:

1. He is armed with enough knowledge to ward off any doubts and specious arguments [that come his way] because the nonbelievers are known for casting aspersions on Islam, their Book, their Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and on anything else where they can create doubt to keep a person in a state of uncertainty and indecisiveness. It goes without saying that when a person has doubts about matters that he should be certain in then he will not perform what is legally required of him. So belief in Allah, His angels His Books, His messengers,

the Last Day and predestination, its good and its bad is a belief that is based on certainty.

If a person doubts in any of the articles of faith then he is a nonbeliever.

So the nonbelievers introduce doubts into the hearts of the Muslims, so much so that some of the chief protagonists openly declare, "Do not attempt to convert Muslims to the religion of Christianity; it is enough just to make him harbour doubts about his religion. If you cause him to have doubts about his religion, you have deprived him of his religion, and this is sufficient. As for trying to make him convert to the religion of Christianity (which is founded upon misguidance and idiocy) then this is not possible because the Christians are misguided, even though the religion of Jesus Christ was the truth. However, it was the truth during his time before it was abrogated by the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه وسلم) message. Truly, guidance and truth are only a part of what the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) came with.

2. He has a level of religious commitment that can safeguard him against evil desires. When the one who lacks religious commitment travels to the lands of the non-Muslims, he becomes submerged in its worldly splendour. In these lands, you find the evil appetite for alcohol, fornication, homosexuality and every other vice found in these countries. It is feared that when a person [who is lacking religious commitment] goes off to these lands, he will fall victim to these concerns, unless he has a level of religious commitment that can safeguard him against such vices. Therefore, a person must have a level of religious commitment that can safeguard him against these evil desires.
3. There has to be a need for him to go there. For example, he is sick and only in the lands of the non-Muslims can he find treatment. Or he is in need of a certain type of knowledge that no one in the land of the Muslims specialises in, so he travels to the land of the non-Muslims to learn this knowledge. Or he is involved in some commerce that requires him to go there. So he goes there, does his business and then returns. The important thing is that there is a need that requires him to go there. And this is why I consider those who travel to non-Muslim lands to tour or sightsee as sinful, and that every penny spent by these tourists is forbidden and a waste of wealth, for which they will be held accountable on the Day of Resurrection. A day when they will not find any room to move or stroll around. A day when they will find nothing except the deeds that they did, since these people wasted their time, squandered their wealth and morally compromised their

characters. Furthermore, they might even take their families with them. It is astonishing that these people travel to the lands of the nonbelievers wherein the call to prayer cannot be heard. The only thing heard is the horns of the Jews and the bells of the Christians. So they and their families, sons and daughters, remain there which only brings about a great evil. We ask Allah for wellbeing and safety.

And this is a form of affliction that Allah blights us with. These afflictions, which sweep us away and we are currently experiencing, are all due to our sins and disobedience, just as Allah has stated,

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِّنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ ۝۳۰

And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have earned, and (yet) He pardons most (of your faults).

[Ash-Shura 30]

We are in a state of heedlessness. We think we are safe in our lands because Allah has given us respite, as if He is unawares. We act as if Allah does not impose on the wrongdoer His will until He permanently takes him.

People get pushed to their very limits during the events of life, but their hearts remain callous and hard, and refuge with Allah is sought! Allah has said about such people,

وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَاهُم بِالْعَذَابِ فَمَا اسْتَكَانُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَمَا يَتَضَرَّعُونَ ۝۷۶

And already We overtook them with chastisement, but they were not submissive to their Lord, nor do they humble themselves.

[Al Mu'minun 76]

So He overtakes them with chastisement, but in spite of this, they do not humble themselves before Allah and nor do they submit to Him through supplication. They do not fear His supreme authority because their hearts are lifeless and callous. We ask Allah for wellbeing! They are so lifeless that life-defining moments pass by their hearts with consummate ease, and we seek refuge from a lifeless and callous heart! If only the people were in a clear state of mind and their hearts were alive, then we would not find ourselves in this predicament. And even though we are considered to be battling a vicious, destructive war, most people do not bat an eye. And this is

undoubtedly wrong. There are people during these critical times going off with their families to have a good time in the lands of the non-believers, the lands of sinfulness and shamelessness, and refuge is sought with Allah!

Travelling to the lands of the non-Muslims for purposes of da'wah is permissible. If the methods of da'wah are effective and have a positive impact there then it is permissible because it is a journey that has its advantages. In the lands of the non-Muslims, much of the general population are blind to the reality of Islam. They do not know anything about Islam; rather, they have been misguided in their understanding of it. They are taught that Islam is a barbaric and cruel religion, especially when the west hears about certain atrocities that are perpetrated by those who they say are Muslims. So they say, "Where is Islam?! This is nothing but barbarity! Savage animals killing and devouring each other!" And, as a result, people flee from Islam due to the actions of the Muslims. We ask Allah to guide us all to His Straight Path.

The second type is hijrah (forsaking) due to actions. And this is when a person makes hijrah from what Allah has forbidden of sins and evil deeds, just as the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said,

الْمُسْلِمُ مَنْ سَلِمَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ مِنْ لِسَانِهِ وَيَدِهِ وَالْمُهَاجِرُ مَنْ هَجَرَ مَا نَهَى اللَّهُ عَنْهُ

“The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe, and the Muhājir is the one who forsakes what Allah has forbidden to him.”³

So you make hijrah from everything that Allah has forbidden, whether it is related to the rights of Allah or the rights of His slaves. So you make hijrah from defamation of character, cursing, killing, cheating, devouring wealth unjustly, disobeying the parents, cutting the ties and everything else that Allah has forbidden.

The third type is hijrah (boycotting) of a person. For even a person is required to be boycotted sometimes. The people of knowledge said, “Like the man who is boycotted on account of his flagrant disobedience. In such a case, boycotting this individual is approved as long there lies a benefit and a gain in boycotting him. The benefit and gain is that when he is boycotted, he takes stock of himself and returns from his disobedience. For instance, there is a man who is notorious for swindling and cheating in commerce, so the people boycott him. So due to their boycotting of him, he repents for his sins and feels remorse and reforms his ways. A second person is involved

³ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim/

in usury-based transactions, and so the people boycott him. They do not give him the salutations and nor do they speak to him. So when he learns about this, he feels ashamed and reforms his ways. A third person - and he is the worst of them – does not pray the five daily prayers, and so this one is an apostate, disbeliever and refuge with Allah is sort! This person is required to be boycotted; salutations are not to be exchanged and his invitations are not to be accepted until he realises what he has done, repents to Allah and returns to Islam.

As for when boycotting is ineffectual and there is no interest to be served by forsaking him, then this only applies to cases of sin and not cases of disbelief because boycotting due to disbelief is always done. The disbelieving apostate is boycotted under all circumstances, even if there is no interest to be served by forsaking him. However, if boycotting a sinful Muslim, who commits sins less than major disbelief, is not in his interest then boycotting him is not lawful. This is because the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said,

لَا يَحِلُّ لِرَجُلٍ أَنْ يَهْجُرَ أَحَاهُ فَوْقَ ثَلَاثِ لَيَالٍ، يَلْتَقِيَانِ فَيُعْرِضُ هَذَا وَيُعْرِضُ هَذَا، وَخَيْرُهُمَا الَّذِي يَبْدَأُ بِالسَّلَامِ

“It is not lawful for a man to desert his brother Muslim for more than three nights. [It is unlawful for them that] when they meet, one of them turns his face away from the other, and the other turns his face from the former, and the better of the two will be the one who greets the other first.”⁴

According to the People of the Sunnah, it is well known that acts of disobedience that are less than major kufr do not expel from the fold of belief.

⁴ Al-Bukhari.