PURIFICATION OF INTENTIONS AND ACTIONS

A compass for our journey back home

We are all on our journey back home. The journey is not possible without movement and action. So we all have to act. But how do we know which direction to go in and how to act. So, here is a criterion and compass that would help us assess our actions and then act accordingly.

Our actions have to be pure internally as well as externally. Internal purification is acquired through Ikhlas (which will be explained shortly) and the external purification of the actions is acquired through itiba (which will also be explained shortly inshaAllah). Both of these aspects are required to be there in our actions for them to be accepted.

Ikhlas

It is from the root ‘khalasa’ which means to get rid of everything. When we talk about it from the Islamic perspective with regards to our hearts, it means to rid our hearts of love of everything else and made our hearts available solely to the love of Allah swt.

Ikhlas accordingly is a state of Qalb.

Levels of Ikhlas

Now, this purity can have three levels:

- One: Our hearts are filled only with the love of Allah swt and all that we do is in his love
- Two: Our hearts do love Allah swt but there are impurities in our hearts.
- Three: Our hearts are void of the knowledge and love of our Creator Allah swt

The condition one is where we said to be in the state of Ikhlas. Allah swt says in the Quran:

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َلَّا يَمَحى الْحَبَّ السَّمَّاءِ
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Is it not to Allah that sincere devotion is due? (Quran 39:3)
Consider the example of the gold coin. It will only be pure if it is 100% gold. If it has got impurities and it is 18 karat or 12 karats or 6 karats, its value will be lower as it would contain impurities in it. Same is the case with ikhlas – either it is pure or impure. The motivation for our actions could either be uncontaminated or contaminated depending on our ikhlas.

If I stand in salah and I come to it only for the pleasure of Allah swt, only to come close to Him and attain His pleasure, this action would be with ikhlas. However, if other intentions merge with this, then it is not the pure ikhlas. If I come there to be entertained by some friends or if I think walking is good for me so let’s walk to the masjid for that then it is not pure ikhlas. Though there is no harm in what we are trying to achieve, it is not pure ikhlas. This is the mild form of deviation from ikhlas. There can be much bigger deviations too.

Similarly, if I fast in order to control my nafs and do that for the pleasure of Allah swt only, then it is Ikhlas. However, if my objective is losing weight or I do it as a practice in the society or the community we belong to, then it is not pure ikhlas.

The degree of ikhlas depends on the degree of contamination.

**The opposite of Ikhlas: Ishraq**

The opposite of Ikhlas is ishraq. This is from the root ‘sharaqa’ which means to make partners. It is the same root as the word ‘shirk’ (associating partners with Allah swt). Ishraq also has various levels – major as well as minor. The state of contaminated intention is what is known as the state of Ishraq.

**What does contaminate the motivation**

There are a number of things that can impact the level of our ikhlas. Anything which is not the pure burst of the love and longing for Allah swt is the contaminant. Whatever we don’t do out of love or fear of Allah swt is considered to contain impurities of various levels.

Such contaminations could be:

- Love for worldly gains
- Love for leadership
- Love for control over situations
- Love for being respected by people for one’s action
- Love for the praise of people
- And so on.

**Levels of Ishraq**

If what motivates me for my good actions and religious practices is purely other than Allah, then it is shirk al-jali (clear and open shirk). In this context, we are not talking about the things from which we do not expect a reward in the aakhirah. We are talking about religious practices. If their intention is
purely other than Allah, then we have fallen into the shirk. That was the condition of the pure hypocrites. Actions done in such state are no actions.

On the other hand, if the motivation is Allah swt but other motivations have come in too as contamination, then it is not the state of full ikhlas.

There are certain characteristics, that demonstrate ishraq. One of such characteristics is Ar-Riya or showing off which we will shortly cover inshaAllah.

**Is partial Ikhlas accepted?**

There are two opinions among the scholars regarding whether partial Ikhlas is accepted or not.

- According to one group of scholars, anything that has shirk or ishraq in that are rejected. All such good deeds are not considered good deeds and are invalid. One would be asked to seek the reward of such deeds from the people that they did them for. Ubay ibn Ka’b reported: The Prophet, peace, and blessings be upon him, said, “Give glad tidings to this nation of honor, victory, and stability. Yet, whoever does a deed of the Hereafter for the sake of the world, then he will have no portion of it in the Hereafter.” [Musnad Ahmad 20717]. Similarly, it has been narrated that: Abu Sa’d reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “When Allah gathers the people on the Day of Resurrection, a day of which there is no doubt, an announcement will be made: To those who shared with anyone in deeds done for Allah, then let him seek his reward from those besides Allah. Verily, Allah is free of any partners.” [Sunan al-Tirmidhi 3154]

- According to another group of scholars, the reward of deeds depends on the level of ishraq. If our ishraq exceeds our ikhlas, then we are liable for punishment. We learn about this from the hadith of the martyr, the scholar, and the charitable person who would be the first ones to be thrown in hell for their lack of sincerity in actions. On the other hand, if the ikhlas exceeds the ishraq in our intention, then the deeds will be rewarded, however, their value would depend on the level of ikhlas we had.

**Riya as a contaminant:**

It is the less obvious form of shirk. The Prophet ﷺ called it the minor shirk. It leaves our action as no action – totally or partially.

Ar-Riya is defined as a person’s wish to be seen and appreciated by others.

**Levels of Riya:**

We should understand these levels very well and try to avoid them as much as possible. In a hadith, the Prophet ﷺ said it’s so dangerous that it’s like the black ant on the black rock in the night with no moon. It can sneak up on you like this. So we should better guard ourselves against it.
- An action that is purely for other than Allah is a major shirk i.e. you do it solely for people to see it and appreciate and there is no love for Allah swt. Such an action is a rejected action.

- The second level of Riya is that when the original motivation for our acts of worship is Allah swt, but when people see us, it energizes us and we start doing it in a much better way. In seclusion, our state is different. It would certainly lead to less reward, if not punishment.

- The third level is when people see me, it doesn’t change how I am performing the action, however, I feel good and happy about it. It is another level of Riya.

- The fourth and most hidden level is when a person performs an action for Allah, and it doesn’t matter if anyone sees him or not; he does not feel any energy from people looking at him. However, the person, in his heart, believes, that he should be respected more for his piety and if people don’t give him enough respect, he gets angry (even if he doesn’t show his anger to others).

**Should I abandon doing an action in which there are chances of Raya (showing off)**

Rather than stopping our selves from doing good actions which may come with chances of falling in Raya, we should pause before doing them, clean our intentions and then do them for the sake of Allah alone.

**Is the intention / niyyah good enough for acceptance of deeds?**

Consider the example of a person who is overspeeding the vehicle. A police officer comes and stops the car. How would he feel about the person if he says that my intention was very good and I intended no harm to anyone? I was just overspeeding because it brings in a good gush of air in the car and I have not seen my family for 3 hours today; so I wanted to drive fast.

Is this intention good enough? No. The action has to be in accordance with the law too. What is the law for us to follow for our lives? The way of Rasool Allah ﷺ. If we follow him and love him, it is loving Allah. Loving him is a sign of Ikhlas as Allah swt says:

قَلْ إِنِّي نَذَّرُ مَعَكُمْ وَطَرَّمُنا بَيْنَ أَكْثَرِكُمْ نَذَّرِي وَأَنَا لِلَّهِ فَلَا شَخْصٌ يُنْتَهَى إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ رَحِيمٌ

Say [O Prophet]: "If you love God, follow me [and] God will love you and forgive you your sins; for God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace." (Quran 3:31)

**Itiba:**

Doing the acts of worship and goodness in conformity with the shariah and the way of the Prophet ﷺ is called itiba. It is following the command with love.

The deen has been completed for us and we must follow that without division.

How do we move away from Sunnah:

اللَّهُ أَحْكَمَ لَكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَأَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقُرْآنَ بِحَيْثُ تُرَيُّنَيْنَ لَكُمُ الْإِسلامُ وَيَتِمَّ نَفْسُكُمُ الْإِسلامَ وَيَتِمَّ الْإِسلامُ نَفْسَكُمُ
Today I have perfected your faith for you, completed My favor upon you, and chosen Islam as your way. (Quran 5:3)

**What do we say in Khutbah:**

At the beginning of most of his speeches, the Prophet ﷺ used to remind us that all newly invented matters in the religion are bid’ah and all acts of bid’ah lead to misguidance. And all misguidance leads to hell-fire. When we sit in the khutbah next time and hear these words again, we should ponder over them and reorientate our intentions towards Allah swt alone.

**Claims of those who do bid’ah:**

It is to be noted that neither we can create anything new in the religion nor blindly follow the practices of people who have changed the religion. The following two ahadith provide guidance about both of these situations:

> من أحدث ﰲ أمر़نا هذا ما ليس منه فهمُ رَبُّكَ

> “Whoever innovates something in this command of ours that is not of it, it will be rejected”

> ومن عملًا ﻦَعْلَمَ ﻹنَا لَيْسَ عَلَيْهِ أَنزَلَهُ رَبُّكَ

> “Whoever does an action not based on our commands, it will be rejected”

**Can you improve the ‘perfect’ things**

What if I bring over a masterpiece painting and put on the wall and ask you to further enhance its beauty? What if you are not a painter yourself and the one whose painting I have put in front of you is the master in his field and is known to produce the best of works? If you add a brush here or there or if you remove some of what the painter drew, will you be beautifying the picture or taking away its beauty? The answer is, of course, the second one. You cannot ‘perfect’ what has already been perfected.

Similarly, if you see that the bottle cover gives a lot of benefits. It protects the water from insects, dust and so on; and you decide to make it bigger what is required for the bottle. Would the bigger bottle cover be as effective as the right-sized one? What if you decide to save some plastic and make it smaller than what fits on the bottle? Would it add to the effectiveness or reduce it? The answer is, of course, the second one.

Then why do we not realize that what Allah swt has given us is the best of guidance; it is a perfect religion. We can neither take away anything from it nor should we try to add anything to it. If we do such innovation or bidah with our religion, we will take away its beauty. It has to be kept pure and original.
“And verily, this is My Straight Path, so follow it. And follow not [other] paths, for they separate you away from this path. This He has ordained for you that you may become pious.” (Surah al-Anaam:153)

CONTEMPLATION TASK FOR LESSON 21

Question your intentions. Do you find any other motives for your good deeds than the love of Allah swt and His Messenger ﷺ? If you do, then repent and purify your intentions. Also think of how you can purify your actions by doing the iteba of our beloved Prophet ﷺ and protecting yourself from Ibtida.