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## The meaning of ‘actions are only judged by intentions’

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

### Explanation of the hadeeth: ‘Actions are only judged by intentions’<sup>1</sup>

Shaykh al-Albaanee (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ)<sup>2</sup>:

“This hadeeth means that righteous actions are only (sound/accepted/rewarded) by sincere intentions, not that actions opposing the Legislation turn into righteous legislated actions due to coupling them with righteous intentions. No one will say that except someone ignorant or pursuing his own interests!

Many people know this hadeeth in wording but don’t understand its meaning. Why? Because oftentimes we turn (to some people) and say: ‘Yaa akhi, this action that you are doing, or this statement that you are uttering, is not a righteous action.’ What is the answer? ‘Yaa akhi, the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم)<sup>3</sup> said: ‘**Actions are only judged by intentions**’ and my intention is good! My intention is righteous!’

So what is the meaning of the hadeeth? Does the hadeeth mean that evil actions are only (sound/accepted/rewarded) by righteous intentions? Or does it mean that righteous actions are only (sound/accepted/rewarded) by righteous intentions? This latter statement is the meaning. As for if one’s actions are not righteous but intention is righteous – this is not enough. Likewise it is also not enough if it is vice versa: i.e. if one’s actions are righteous but intention is not righteous. So the hadeeth gives us two opposites: just like it is a condition for righteous action that there be righteous intention, it is likewise a condition for righteous intention that there be righteous action. So either one is not enough without the other.

You hear many people nowadays swearing by their fathers for example, saying: ‘Yaa akhi, by Allaah, my intention is good.’ Sometimes you may find a person coming to a grave and praying there – a grave of a prophet or righteous person or the like – then when they are prohibited from that, he tells you: ‘My intention is not to worship him, my intention is to seek nearness to Allaah (tawassul) through him.’ Ok, your coming to this grave – granted that the intention is righteous – is an action, so is this a righteous action? The answer is no, because the Messenger (عليه السلام)<sup>4</sup> used to say: ‘**Don’t sit on the graves nor pray toward them.**’ And du’aa is part of prayer, in fact du’aa is worship as he (عليه السلام) said. Hence turning to the grave with du’aa is like turning to it with prayer: it is an action that is

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<sup>1</sup> Saheeh al-Bukhaaree no.1

<sup>2</sup> (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) (rahimahullaah) May Allaah the Most High have mercy on him

<sup>3</sup> (صلى الله عليه وسلم) (sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him

<sup>4</sup> (عليه السلام) (alaihis-salaam) Peace be upon him

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not righteous, and this unrighteous action is not justified by the intention being righteous, if we grant that the intention is righteous.

Thus, for our actions to be righteous, they must be in agreement with the Legislation. This is what our Lord (عزوجل)<sup>5</sup> pointed to with His Statement in the Noble Qur’aan: **[whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous work and not associate any partner in the worship of his Lord]**<sup>6</sup>.”

sources: silsilat ul-hudaa wan noor, 340/8 & nudhum al-fawaaid, 21

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<sup>5</sup> (عزوجل) (Azza wa Jaal) Mighty and Majestic is He

<sup>6</sup> سورة الكهف – Soorah al-Kahf [18:110]