

Sincerity (Ikhlas)

The quality of sincerity is one that every Muslim should aim to possess. Acting with sincerity means to act according to the prescriptions of Allah purely for His sake, neither in expectation of personal gain nor the return of the deed. It is the pure intention behind any action that determines the worth of an action in the eyes of Allah. To seek God's pleasure through the best actions is one of the primary reasons for our creation, to which Allah refers when He states,

'He who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct.'
(*Qur'an, 67:2*)

A person cannot obtain the blessing of sincerity unless it is bestowed upon him by Allah Himself and is accompanied by continuous seeking and perseverance. Allah advises us to strive for sincerity in every action when He states,

'And remember Our servants Ibrahim and Ishaq and Yaqub, men of strength and deep insight. We purified their sincerity through sincere remembrance of the [final] abode. And indeed with Us, they are surely of the elect, the very best.' (*Qur'an, 38:45-47*)

As every action requires its own intention, the quality of each action can be assessed by the level of conviction and sincerity with which it is accompanied. Imam Ali (A) has explained his method of achieving the characteristic of sincerity, stating, 'I do not perform an action for the reward of Allah, lest I become a businessman with Allah; I do not perform an action out of the fear of Allah's punishment, lest I become a slave with Allah. I perform the action because I find Allah worthy of servitude.'

Our goal should be to improve each action until it is fully adorned with the perfect intention of being entirely for the pleasure of Allah.

[Story 1](#)

Shaykh Abd al-Adhim al-Bahrani narrates:

‘On the 12th day of Jamadi al–Thani, 1413, I was listening to a lecture on Imam Husayn (A) in the holy city of Mashad and the topic of the lecture was sincerity. The speaker recounted the following story:

“Once, a lot of scholars were present before the grand Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Burujerdi and each scholar was presenting his scholastic achievements and social contributions before him. Ayatullah Burujerdi noticed that all did so except one scholar who didn’t say anything. Ayatullah Burujerdi asked the scholar, ‘Why don’t you mention what you have done, like the others?’ This scholar stood and replied with great respect, saying, ‘O my master, I would like you to permit me to read just one narration from your grandfather, Ali, the Commander of the Faithful.’

“Ayatullah Burujerdi gave his permission and so the scholar narrated, ‘Ali (A) is reported to have said, “Be sincere in your actions. Surely the Watcher [Allah] is All–seeing, All–seeing!”¹ As soon as the scholar finished speaking, Ayatullah Burujerdi appeared shocked and began to cry. Then addressing this scholar, Ayatullah Burujerdi said, ‘Thank you for reminding us of the matter of sincerity.’

“This incident affected Ayatullah Burujerdi so much so that on every occasion, be it with scholars and students or those around him, he would recount this narration.”²

Story 2

Ayatullah Sayyid Abul Qasim al–Khoei was once sitting with his students when he mentioned, ‘Indeed it is so easy for a man to see the action of another which he does not like and yet forget it so quickly that he performs the very same action or one that is even worse.’

He then related the following story:

‘One day I entered the shrine of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (A), and saw a man praying opposite the door, blocking the path of many visitors and inconveniencing them when they tried to pass him. In my mind, I said to myself, “How ignorant this man is!”

‘The days passed and one day I found myself, without even realising it, praying in the same place! I too was placing the visitors in difficulty and people were even pushing each other because of me. I did not feel guilty as I had not realised my mistake and due to my forgetfulness and negligence, when a person tried to pass in front of me, I even asked myself, “Why did he not take another path around me?”

‘A person tends not to see his own mistakes so that he is not obliged to blame himself for them. We tend to open our eyes very widely to observe others and the defects they have whilst perhaps we might have greater defects ourselves. Thus I demand of you – whenever you see me committing a mistake, inform and remind me of what I have done!’³

Story 3

Shaykh Abdul Aziz al-Habib recounts:

‘Once a shaykh was invited to give a lecture in Nadwat al-Imam Ali (A), in the presence of the Grand Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Ridha Shirazi. He introduced himself to Ayatullah Shirazi and began to list his many accomplishments. He mentioned that he was a graduate of a certain college, a member of the board of [such and such] a committee, the Imam of [such and such a masjid] and an important figure in several European centres. Unaware that he was speaking to Ayatullah Shirazi, he turned to Sayyid Shirazi after this long introduction, and asked, “And who are you, so I may get to know you?”

‘Ayatullah Shirazi replied, “I am Ridha.”

Story 4

At a time when the ideology of Communism had penetrated many spheres of Iraqi society such as politics, academia and Islamic seminary studies, many of the youth were attracted by its social philosophy and wanted clarification regarding Islam’s view towards Communist theories.

For these reasons, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim told his son, Sayyid Mahdi, that he felt there was a need for a book comparing Communism and Islam. He asked if Ayatullah Shahid Baqir al-Sadr could write this book.

After the widespread success of the book, *Our Philosophy*,⁴ Shahid al-Sadr recounts:

‘When I published this book, I did not know that it would attain such a great reputation in the world and impact the social spheres of the people, the result of which was that it brought great fame and renown to the author. Now I sometimes think, if I knew how much this book would give its author such a status amongst people, would I have been prepared to publish it under the name of a ‘group of scholars’ and not in my own name? I was prepared to do this prior to the book’s publication, but would I do so now? I cry in fear that I may not have the strength to publish it under a name other than my own.⁵’

Story 5

Allamah Majlisi had a close scholarly companion and each made a commitment to the other that, Allah willing, if he died before the other, he would enter into the dream of his friend to describe and explain what death and the hereafter was like.

It so happened that Allamah Majlisi was the first to die. One night, after many weeks had passed, Allamah Majlisi entered the dream of his friend. His friend asked, ‘So much time has passed; why has it taken so long to enter into my dream?’ The Allamah replied, ‘During the entire time that has passed, I

was being questioned by the Angels!’ His companion asked, ‘How is it there? What happened to you?’ The Allamah replied, ‘It was very difficult but it is wonderful and blissful now that my questioning has been completed. Whilst I was being questioned, the Angel asked me, “What do you have to offer Allah? What have you done in His way?” I replied to the Angel that I had written and compiled the work, *Bihar al-Anwar*, which consists of more than 100 volumes of verses, narrations and comments on the Ahlul Bayt. The Angel replied, “Not this. What else do you have to present to Allah?” I was shocked as this was such an extensive and thorough work! I thought for a moment and this time said to the Angel that I had *Mir’at al-Uqul* to present but again the Angel rejected this offering before Allah. Again I was shocked as this compilation also included so many volumes. And so I continued to offer different books and accomplishments one after the other and each time the Angel rejected them.

‘So I began to think long and hard and then I remembered an incident in my life and presented this to the Angel. One night, as I was studying and writing, I noticed a fly was buzzing and circling around the room. He was circling all around and eventually landed near my pen and ink. I could have waved him away from my writing tools but I thought to myself, “Maybe the fly is thirsty or tired so I should not wave him away but rather I should let him take rest where he is sitting.” Anyhow, shortly afterwards, the creature flew around and away and I thought nothing more of this incident.

‘The Angel responded to my account, saying, “This pure moment of mercy in your life was the most accepted action before Allah.” And so, after presenting this incident to Allah, my questioning was completed.’

Story 6

Sayyid Jawad Gulpaygani narrates the following story that he had heard:

‘One day, a scholar requested a verdict from Ayatullah Burujerdi on an issue. The question was, “Which jurist do you want us to follow after you?” Ayatullah Burujerdi wrote the name of my father, Ayatullah Sayyid Ridha Gulpaygani. The scholar wanted to photocopy the reply of Ayatullah Burujerdi in order to distribute it to the people and make them aware of this great matter but Ayatullah Gulpaygani called him, took the letter, put it in a box and locked the box.

‘Surprised, the scholar said, “My master! I need that; it’s my paper. I would like it back.” Ayatullah Gulpaygani replied, “Yes, it is your paper but it concerns me! If you distribute this, you may close the door to people performing *taqlid* [following a *mujtahid* in matters of jurisprudence] of somebody else. Leave people to choose which *marja*’ they want to follow for *taqlid* is a matter of freedom in the school of the Ahlul Bayt!”’

Story 7

The author had a discussion with Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Modarressi about his book of *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), *Min Huda al-Qur'an*. In the discussion, other authors, their works and their methodologies were deliberated upon and the work, *al-Tamhid fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, by Ayatullah Hadi Ma'rifah, was mentioned.

Ayatullah al-Modarressi asked the author, 'What do you think about this work?' to which he replied, 'I find it to be an outstanding work on Qur'anic sciences and Ayatullah Ma'rifah demonstrates his being a leading scholar in the field of Qur'anic commentary.' Ayatullah al-Modarressi responded, 'Let me tell you a story about him.'

'One day, after I had published my book of *tafsir*, I was in Qom and whilst walking, I happened to cross paths with Ayatullah Ma'rifah. After exchanging greetings, I saluted his work and conveyed my view that he has made a significant impact on the study of the sciences of the Qur'an. Ayatullah Ma'rifah then responded and said that of all the contemporary books of Qur'anic *tafsir* written, mine was the most outstanding because it addressed the social issues of the day in a way that offers practical solutions to the challenges faced by societies.'

Ayatullah al-Modarressi continued, 'Why I am I telling you this? Am I telling you this to boost my ego or because I want you to know that he praised me? Not at all! Let me ask you a question: What do *you* think about my *tafsir*?' The author replied by praising the work too.

Ayatullah al-Modarressi responded, 'No, I don't want you to praise the work to me; I want you to critique my work for me; I want you to tell me its flaws and where I can improve it. I wrote

the book to offer solutions to the problems of society and in my view, because society constantly changes and develops itself, its culture, its needs and so on, my book only offers a solution as long as it truly offers advice to reflect the circumstances. It might be that 10 years from now, the challenges of society have changed and therefore my words, in full or in part, have become redundant! In my view, in every decade there must be an updated socially informative book of *tafsir* to aid the society to fulfil its needs. This is why I told you this story.'

1. قال علي (ع): أخلص العمل فان الناقد بصير.

2. This incident reminds us of the warnings in the Qur'an not to perform actions to receive praise and respect from others. (Qur'an, 4: 142, 2:264)

3. This statement is the manifestation of the noble narration of Imam al-Sadiq (A), 'My most beloved brother is he who makes me aware of my faults.' (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, p. 282)

4. <https://www.al-islam.org/our-philosophy-falsafatuna-sayyid-muhammad-baqi...> [1]

5. This action is a manifestation of the noble verses,

By the soul and Him Who fashioned it and inspired it [with discernment between] its virtues and vices; one who purifies it, is felicitous.' (Qur'an, 91:7-9)

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Links

[1] <https://www.al-islam.org/our-philosophy-falsafatuna-sayyid-muhammad-baqir-al-sadr>