228454 - Ruling on doing righteous deeds with the aim of worldly gain

the question

Is it permissible for a person to do righteous deeds and acts of worship with the aim of obtaining worldly benefits?

Summary of answer

Conclusion:

Whoever does
acts of worship and righteous deeds with the sole aim of worldly gain will have no share of reward with Allah (such as one who gives charity only so that he might be healed, or who recites Soorat al-Baqarah only so that she might get married, or who fasts only for the purpose of dieting, or who joins the Muslim army only for the sake of booty, or who goes for Hajj only for the purpose of trade.

But if someone
intends to seek the pleasure of Allah and the hereafter, and makes worldly gain a secondary factor, not the main focus, there is no blame on him.

And Allah knows
best.

Detailed answer

The basic principle is that the Muslim should intend, by doing acts of worship and righteous deeds, to seek the pleasure of Allah, and his intention should be purely for that purpose.

Whoever does righteous deeds or acts of worship with the aim of attaining some worldly gain, comes under one of two headings:

1. Worldly gain is all that he is seeking

Thus he fasts for the purpose of health or diet; he performs pilgrimage on behalf of someone else for the money only; he goes out to fight in jihad for the sake of the booty; he gives charity for the sake of healing or earning people's praise, and so on.

Such a person has no share in the hereafter.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Whoever desires the life of this world and its adornments - We fully repay them for their deeds therein, and they therein will not be deprived"

[Hood 11:15].

Ibn Jareer at-Tabari said: Whoever does a righteous deed seeking worldly gain, whether it is fasting, praying, or tahajjud at night, doing it only for the sake of worldly gain, Allah says: I shall give him what he is seeking in this world of reward, but his deeds that he did for worldly gain will be rendered invalid, and in the hereafter he will be among the losers.

End quote from Jaami' al-Bayaan (12/347).

Abu'l-'Abbaas al-Qurtubi said: If his motive was otherwise, such as worldly gain, then it is no longer an act of worship; rather it is a sin that may doom the doer, for it is either disbelief, which is major shirk, or it is showing off, which is minor shirk…. This applies if the motive for the act of worship was worldly gain only, in the sense that if that aim was not attainable, he would not do that deed.

End quote from al-Mufhim lima ashkala min Talkhees Kitaab Muslim (12/50)

2. By doing this deed he is seeking the pleasure of Allah, but he also hopes to attain some worldly gains or benefits that may result from this deed,

such as one who fasts for the sake of Allah, but in addition to that he is seeking to look after his health; or he does Hajj for the sake of Allah, but at the same time he intends to do some business;

or he strives in jihad for the sake of Allah, and also aims to acquire some of the booty; or he gives zakaah on his wealth for the sake of Allah, but also seeks blessing and growth for his wealth; or he gives charity for the sake of Allah, and at the same time intends to seek healing from disease; or he upholds ties of kinship, seeking reward, long life and abundant provision.

In such cases the ruling differs, according to which is the stronger motive for doing the action in question.

i. If the stronger motive is seeking the pleasure of Allah and hoping for reward from Him, then there is nothing wrong with that.

At-Taahir ibn ‘Ashoor said: If one hopes for some immediate benefit and reward (in this world), and that comes about as a result of this particular act of worship, but it is not the main aim, then it may be overlooked, especially since this is something that no one can avoid; or especially if it is something that may motivate one to do more acts of worship.

End quote from at-Tahreer wa’t-Tanweer (23/318)

Shaykh ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan as-Sa‘di said: The hope of the one who strives for some worldly gains from his righteous deeds should not harm him, if his main aim is to attain the pleasure of Allah and seek the hereafter.

In His wisdom and mercy, Allah has ordained that there should be immediate reward and deferred reward (for righteous deeds), and He has promised that reward to those who strive, because hope of reward and investing effort for that purpose energises people to strive and prompts them to do good, just as warnings of punishment for offences and mentioning types of punishment is something by means of which Allah instills fear in people’s hearts and motivates them to give up sins and offenses.

The sincere believer is sincere to Allah in all that he does or refrains from, and is motivated in his efforts to attain the sublime goal by the various rewards that he may earn.

End quote from Bahjat Quloob al-Abraar, p. 273

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen said:

If his motive is mostly to show devotion to Allah, then he will miss out on the perfect reward, but that will not harm him, because Allah, may He be exalted, says concerning the pilgrims (interpretation of the meaning):

“There is no blame upon you for seeking bounty from your Lord [during hajj]”

[al-Baqarah 2:198].

End quote.

ii. But if worldly gain is the stronger motive, then there will be no reward for him

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen said, carrying on from the words quoted above:

If his motive is mostly something other than showing devotion to Allah, then he will have no reward in the hereafter; rather his reward will be what he gains in this world, and I fear that he may be sinning thereby, because he has taken an act of worship, which is the means of attaining the most sublime aims, and has turned it into a means of attaining insignificant worldly gain. Thus he is like those of whom Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And among them are some who criticize you concerning the [distribution of] charities. If they are given from them, they approve; but if they are not given from them, at once they become angry”

[at-Tawbah 9:58].

In as-Saheehayn, it is narrated from ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever migrated for some worldly gain or in order to marry some woman, then his migration was for the purpose for which he migrated.”

iii. If both aims are equal, and neither out weighs the other, then the matter is subject to further discussion. The more correct scholarly view is that there is no reward for him; he is like one

who does an act of worship seeking the pleasure of Allah and of someone else.

End quote from Majmoo‘ Fataawa wa Rasaa’il ash-Shaykh (1/99)

in His wisdom, Allah, may He be exalted, has ordained reward in this world for acts of obedience, as part of the blessing of those acts of obedience, and He has mentioned some of them in order to encourage his slaves to do them: “Whoever desires the reward of this world - then with Allah is the reward of this world and the Hereafter” [an-Nisa’ 4:134].

Mention of these worldly benefits of righteous deeds make one long to do such deeds and want to them. By His generosity, Allah, may He be exalted, gives to those who strive – if they seek His pleasure – reward in both realms: “So Allah gave them the reward of this world and the good reward of the Hereafter” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:148].

There is no blame on the one who does something for the sake of Allah, with the reward of the hereafter as his main aim, and whatever reward he attains in this world is a secondary matter for him. Rather blame is due on the one who does not seek anything but worldly gain by doing good, or that is his main aim and intention from the outset. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And when you have completed your rites, remember Allah like your [previous] remembrance of your fathers or with [much] greater remembrance. And among the people is he who says, ‘Our Lord, give us in this world,’ and he will have in the Hereafter no share.

But among them is he who says, ‘Our Lord, give us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter [that which is] good and protect us from the punishment of the Fire’”

[al-Baqarah 2:200-201].

Some religious texts offer encouragement by referring to worldly benefits, such as the following verses (interpretation of the meaning):

“And said, 'Ask forgiveness of your Lord. Indeed, He is ever a Perpetual Forgiver’

He will send [rain from] the sky upon you in [continuing] showers,

And give you increase in wealth and children and provide for you gardens and provide for you rivers”

[Nooh 71:10-12]

“Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life”

[an-Nahl 16:97]

“And if only the people of the cities had believed and feared Allah , We would have opened upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth”

[al-A‘raaf 7:96].

And the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Follow one Hajj or ‘umrah with another, for they eradicate poverty and sins as the bellows eliminate the dross of iron, gold and silver; and an accepted Hajj brings no less a reward than Paradise.” Narrated by Ahmad; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani.

And he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The siwaak is cleansing for the mouth and pleasing to the Lord.” Narrated by Ahmad (33683); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani.

There are many verses and hadiths that speak of the benefits of various righteous deeds.

Further examples:

· Repeatedly performing Hajj and ‘umrah with the intention of being saved from poverty

· Seeking forgiveness with the intention of attaining wealth and sons

· Saying some adhkaar so that Allah will protect one from harm

· Praying Fajr in congregation so that one will be under the care and protection of Allah

· Being easy-going when claiming debt from one who is in financial difficulty, so that Allah will make things easy for one in this world

· Sending blessings upon the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) so as to be saved from worry

· Giving zakaah so that one's wealth will increase and grow

· Doing a lot of acts of worship so that Allah will take care of one's offspring after one dies

· Praying for forgiveness so that one might be healed from disease.

The apparent meaning of the texts indicates that a person may do a righteous deed, hoping to attain some worldly benefit that results from doing that deed, because the only reason Allah mentioned these worldly benefits is to encourage people to do these deeds, on condition that seeking Allah's pleasure is the main motive in doing the act of obedience, and the hope of attaining these worldly benefits is secondary to that. Based on the above, we may understand some statements of the early generations:

Sa'eed ibn Jubayr said: I make my prayer lengthier for the sake of this son of mine. Hishaam said: (That is,) in the hope that Allah would take care of his son because of that.

End quote from Hilyat al-Awliyaa' (4/279).

Whatever the case, the fact is that doing an act of worship with the sole aim of attaining the reward of Allah is better and more proper, and brings a greater reward, then hoping for worldly gain thereby, even if that is a secondary factor.