

95095 - Forgetting Intention

the question

I forget to form the intention when doing most deeds.

What should I do?

Detailed answer

Intention (niyyah) is an important matter, as it is the spirit of deeds through which deeds become valid, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Actions are but by intentions and each person will have but that which he intended.” Narrated by al-Bukhari (1) and Muslim (1907).

The intention turns permissible deeds into acts of worship, hence we should pay attention to it and make it for the sake of Allah, free from any element of showing off.

It should be noted that intentions are of two types:

1 – Obligatory intention, without which an act of worship is not valid, such as the intention in doing wudu, praying, paying zakah (obligatory alms), fasting and doing Hajj (Pilgrimage). This intention is something that no one can do without. If a person does wudu to pray, touch the Mushaf (written copy of Quran) or in order to be (ritually) pure (tahir), he has formed the intention. Intending to pray or intending to remove impurity is forming the intention when doing wudu.

When a man stands to pray, knowing that this is Zuhr (afternoon) prayer, for example, and he intends to offer the prayer and gets up to do it, then he has formed the intention. It is not essential – and in fact it is not prescribed – to say out loud, “I intend to pray Zuhr prayer” etc., as some people do. This was not narrated from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the place for the intention is in the heart.

Similarly, if a person decides at night that he will fast on the following day, then he has formed the intention of fasting. In fact, his eating sahoor (pre-dawn meal) shows that he is intending to fast.

It is difficult for a person to forget to form the intention in such cases.

2 – The second type of intention is that which is mustahabb (preferable) in order to attain reward. This is what some people forget, which is to keep the intention in mind when doing permissible things, so that they will be acts of worship, such as eating, drinking and sleeping with the intention of strengthening oneself to do acts of worship, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “You will never spend anything that you spend for the sake of Allah, but you will be rewarded for it, even the morsel of food that you put in your wife’s mouth.” Narrated by al-Bukhari (56).

Mu’adh (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I sleep and I get up (to pray at night), and I seek reward for my sleep as I seek reward for my getting up. Narrated by al-Bukhari (4088).

He (may Allah be pleased with him) sought reward for his sleep just as he sought reward for his getting up to pray at night, because he intended by sleeping to gain strength to do acts of worship.

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar said in al-Fath: What this means is that he sought reward by resting just as he sought reward by striving, because if the intention in resting is to enable one to do acts of worship, one attains reward. End quote.

What helps to keep this intention in mind is deliberating, thinking and not being hasty. So you should think about what you are intending to do, take stock of yourself before acting, think about whether it is halal or haram (permissible or impermissible), then look at your intention: what do you want from this? Every time you take stock of yourself and think before acting, this will remind you about forming the intention, until it becomes second nature and a habit that you adopt, so that you will not enter or exit, eat or drink, give or withhold, without having an intention in doing so; thus most of your time will become times of worship.

We ask Allah to help us and you to do this.

And Allah knows best.