



## Core Curriculum

### 3 Foundations of Islam - Obligatory Acts

#### 3.12 **Niyya: Religious Intention as the Foundation of Islamic Practice**

##### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel!

The essence of Islamic law is something called niyya, which literally means intention, as in the intention behind our actions. In this lesson, inshā’Allāh, we will look at the meaning of niyya in Islam as well as its different kinds. We will then conclude with some of the common misconceptions that people have when it comes to niyya.

##### BODY OF TEXT

The Messenger of Allah (s) once said:

“...And when they stand up for As-Salat (the prayer), they stand with laziness and to be seen of men, and they do not remember Allah but little...” (Chapter 4, verse 142 of the Holy Qur’an)

The pivot which centers the purpose of all of our actions and beliefs in Islam is something called niyya. Niyya is the intention we have behind any religious act that we do as Muslims. What we would call a “good” niyya would be a something we do for Allah’s sake alone and not for someone or something else. In other words, as the Prophet Muhammad

(s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as) have taught us, a good niyya is a means for Qurbatan illa-Allāh.

Qurbatan illa-Allāh means “to seek closeness to Allah.” So when you do an action, your niyya may be considered good if your sole intention is to be closer to God. If you’re performing a religious act for the sake of something or someone other than Allah, then you’re in trouble!

So it’s pretty simple to see that the intentions we have behind the things we do really determines whether or not we’ve actually sinned, or if we’ve done something that will help our salvation and the salvation of the Muslim ummah.

Let’s stop talking in abstract terms and get more specific with examples. Say that you want to pray your wājib salāt in a group. You see members of the Islamic community coming into the room your praying in. At first you were alone and praying for God’s sake alone, but you were praying fast. Once people came in, you started praying more slowly, maybe shedding a few tears in order to get people to think your all religious and pious.

In the first instance, your niyya may have been good as you were praying for God’s sake and no one else. But then when people entered, your niyya actually changed and you started praying for the sake of impressing others and not God! So this would be an example of a niyya gone wrong, or a bad niyya.

There is a beautiful hadith from the Prophet Muhammad (s) which describes the reality of niyya in Islam:

“Actions are but by intention and every man shall have but that which he intended. Thus he whose migration was for Allah and His messenger, his migration was for Allah and His messenger, and he whose migration was to achieve some worldly benefit or to take some woman in marriage, his migration was for that for which he migrated.”

If you do something for God’s sake, you will get your rewards. If you

don't, you won't get them. But there is more. Sometimes we make honest mistakes, like accidentally eating pork. If our intention or niyya was not to sin, then Allah will not take us to task for that sin. So what does this tell us? Niyya isn't something that you just say before you do something, niyya is a state of the heart, it is your heart and soul's intention.

So that's what niyya is really about, its about gaining closeness to God. That's the real journey. When you go to Hajj for example, the pilgrimage only has value when you only do it for the sake of getting closer to God.

However, there is more to this story. We often fall pray to the "good" niyya of others. In other words, they may have intended something good, but something bad happened. If we really want to have "good" niyya, that is, the kind of niyya that is pleasing to Allah, there are a few things we need to do:

1. The foundation of good niyya is to please Allah and to seek closeness to Him. One cannot do this if one doesn't know what Allah actually wants or what pleases him. So the first step is to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of Islam. This is one way of preventing the evil of "good intentions." It is no wonder that the Prophet (s) said that "seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim."
2. The second point of good niyya is to make sure that there is no selfishness involved. Sometimes we think what we're doing is for the sake of Allah, but deep down inside it is for other reasons, like personal gain. So critical self-reflection is crucial for good niyya.
3. Sometimes with good niyya we may fail at something or end up unintentionally hurting someone. A marker of good niyya is to be able to go out of one's way to rectify the situation and make up for any damage or pain that one caused.
4. Effort: getting good niyya is a struggle or jihād. One must adopt the mandatory skills, patience in order to meaningfully discharge the results of one's niyya. Sitting and thinking that "good intentions" are enough is not sufficient for it to be worthy of Allah's pleasure. This is what we may call "lazy niyya" thinking that as long as intentions are good, one can do the bare minimum. That is totally incorrect. Wanting to please Allah

means that one must put in one's maximum effort in trying to attain success in what one is doing.

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh