

Core Curriculum

3 Foundations of Islam - Obligatory Acts

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

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.

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.

