

## Unveiling the Forgotten Aspect of Good Deeds: A Comparative Study of Muslims Thoughts

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### Abstract

This article analyses the dual dimensions of good deeds (i.e. inner and outer or physical and spiritual) according to several renowned Muslim scholars. The inner or spiritual dimension of good deeds has been forgotten both in literature and practical life of Muslims. Therefore, this article is important because it highlights Muslim scholars who made earnest efforts in their own ways to rediscover the inner dimension of religious observance. This is to bring about a return in Muslim societies to a more profound reflection upon the inner dimension of the spiritual life. This article aims to highlight the insights of selected Muslim scholars on the dual dimensions of good deeds, which is the inner and outer. This article is library research which employs descriptive and analytical study. First, it describes general relevant issues before analysing specific area of the selected or main literature such as *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Qut al-Qulub* and other literature. The focus of the article is rather on examining spiritual insight of selected Muslim scholars towards dual dimensions of good deeds. The article finds that these Muslim scholars affirms the existence of inner dimension of good deeds. They promulgated that only through the balanced observance of outer and inner dimensions can good deeds achieve their goals and be conducive to spiritual growth. It is suggested that further research is carried out on analysing particular spiritual preconditions of good deeds according to these renowned scholars.

**Keywords:** Islam, Good Deeds, Inner and Outer Dimensions, Spirituality.

### Introduction

“Good deed” or “good work” is a general term which has a variety of meaning, scope, and context. In an Islamic context, however, good deeds refer to those deeds that are commanded, encouraged, or praised by the Shari’ah. It is a good, beautiful, virtuous, or righteous deed which is done for the sake of Allah, namely, for His content and pleasure, and done according to the Shari’ah (Rosmizi, 2014). The scope of good deed is wide and comprehensive and therefore covers all aspects of activity, such as those related to religious

rites and rituals (*'ibadah*), social activities (*mu'amalah*), and ethics (*akhlaq*). It also covers physical action, speech, thought and even spiritual dimension.

Although practically all religious traditions address both the exterior and interior components, or the outer and the inner dimensions of good deeds, most devotees (particularly lay believers) focus on the former, emphasising the outward observance of religious observance and rituals, as well as moral conduct. As a result, the strict observance of their exterior preconditions tends to take precedence, often at the expense of their spiritual component. This approach leads to simply dogmatic, ritualist, and legalist interpretations of good deeds to some extent.

The Islamic literature is replete with discussions and literature on good works, particularly devotional acts (*'ibadah*). Because good acts fall under the category of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), it is usually written by Muslim jurists. In fact, distinct experts of each *madhhab* have published numerous books of *fiqh*. These works, however, tend to focus on the outer dimensions of the subjects being covered. For succeeding generations, most of their conversations are relatively dry and solely focus on their outer dimension, emphasising outward observance of religious ceremonies and rituals (*ahkam al-a'mal*), as well as moral behaviours. Perhaps one of the reasons is that the issue of *fiqh* was considered more important than it was then. Therefore, there is often a tendency to focus on meticulously adhering to external preconditions at the expense of the spiritual dimension. Due to the lack of spirituality at the time since the second century, this practice contributed to some extent to the dogmatic, ritualist, and legalist views of good deeds among later generation.

In the second century of Islam, the relationship between good deeds and spiritual dimension of Islam was either overlooked or underdeveloped. The rise in intellectual dispute between Sufis and orthodox scholars was one of the factors. Al-Ghazali was one of the first great thinkers to clearly identify the problem and offer solutions in depth, not only in theory but also in practise (Rosmizi, 2014). Some other Muslim scholars—mostly those who learnt Sufism—also highlight the dual nature of good deeds and they all together in their own ways advice Muslims to observe both the inner and outer dimensions of good deeds accordingly. In other words, they argue that each good deed has two dimensions, namely, the outer and inner dimension. Both of these dimensions need to be integrated and observed accordingly.

Al-Ghazali, for example, is unsatisfied with merely performing good deeds on the surface since he does not consider them as effective. He considers a good conduct committed without inward observance to be a lifeless body, performed as nothing more than a regular activity devoid of spiritual aspect, and so as failing to accomplish its goal (Quasem, 1974).

Within Muslim communities, al-Ghazali was aware of a lack of spirituality and awareness of the inner dimension of good deeds. He bemoaned the fact that most adherents were only concerned with their outer self, ignoring the need to provide spirituality to the inner self (the soul). Similarly, good deeds were regarded as merely a religious command or an outward observance. Al-Ghazali was also concerned about different interpretations and practises concerning good deeds.

Al-Ghazali's view above is also supported by other prominent Muslim scholars, both in classical and contemporary time such as al-Muhasibi, al-Isfahani, Abu Talib al-Makki, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Said Nursi Badiuzzaman, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Yusuf al-Qaradawi. This article, however, analyses the dual dimensions of good deeds according to renowned classical Muslim scholars. Their views on inner dimension are the focus of this article. The selected scholars are al-Muhasibi, al-Isfahani, Abu Talib al-Makki, Imam al-Ghazali, and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah.

This spiritual dimension of good deeds has been forgotten both in literature and practical life of Muslims. These Muslim scholars made earnest efforts in their own ways to rediscover the inner dimension of religious observance. This is to bring about a return in Muslim societies to a more profound reflection upon the inner dimension of the spiritual life. This article aims to highlight the insights of selected Muslim scholars on the dual aspects of good deeds (the inner and outer).

### **Methodology of the Study**

This article falls within the domain of the history of religious thought which is mostly theoretical in nature, and it involves bibliographic/library research. Thus, this article applies qualitative approach. It uses descriptive and analytical methods. First, it describes general relevant issues before analysing specific area of the selected or main literature such as *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Qut al-Qulub* and other literature. The focus of the article is rather on examining spiritual insight of selected Muslim scholars towards dual dimensions of good deeds.

These discussion of good deeds forms the main source of this article in analysing Muslim scholars' primary views of the inner dimension of good deeds. By disclosing the inner dimension, these Muslim scholars' breath spirituality into almost all kinds of good deed that they address, attending both to the heart and mind. Their profound spiritual insights of good deeds, especially the inner meaning and inner action, are still relevant to contemporary Muslim society, and therefore, their main elements can be constructed as a spiritual model that can be applied to a Muslim daily life.

### **Good Deeds From Islamic and Western Perspectives**

The Arabic term which denotes deed is *'amala* ([pl. *a'mal*] deed, work, action), derives from the root word *'aml* (doing, acting, action, activity, labour, practice, achievement, etc.). Other related forms include for instance *'amila* (to do, act, operate, be active, work), *'amali* (work, working), and *'amaliyah* (work, job, action, activity, making, manufacture, fabrication, etc.) (Wehr, 1976, 1994; Al-Nadwi, 2005; Ibn Manzur, n.d.; 'Abd al-Baqi, 1990). The term *'aml* appears in the Qur'an in several different forms and contexts (Kassis, 1983). The term *'amal salih* is normally used in conjunction with the term *iman* (faith), especially in perfect active form, when referring to a good deed (*amanu* [pl.]).

"Good deeds" is a general term with broad scope, there is no specific and unanimous upon definition. However, in an Islamic context, good deeds refer to those deeds that the Shari'ah commands, encourages, or praises. It is a good, beautiful, virtuous, or righteous deed which is done for the sake of Allah, that is, for His content and pleasure, and in accordance with the Shari'ah. Its scope is broad and comprehensive, therefore it encompasses all aspects of activity, including religious rites and rituals (*'ibadah*), social activities (*mu'amalah*), and ethics

(*akhlaq*). To achieve the fundamental purpose or the core aims of Islamic law (*maqasid al-Shari'ah*), which are intended to preserve justice, balance, and harmony, among other virtues, good deeds are required (Rosmizi, 2014).

Among the Arabic terms which denote good deeds are '*amal salih* (pl. *a'mal salihat*), *birr*, *khayr* (pl. *khayrat*), etc (al-Baqarah 2: 148, Imran 3: 114, Al-Maidah 5: 48, Al-Tawbah 9: 88, Al-Anbiya' 21: 73,90, Al-Mu'minun 23: 56,61, Fatir 35: 32, Al-Rahman 55: 70; Izutsu, 2002). The last two terms (*birr* and *khayrat*) are also used in a broad sense to refer to all that is good, or to all good things, while the first term (*'amal salih*) is more specific in that it refers to meritorious or righteous deeds, performed in accordance with the Shari'ah.

Good deeds (*a'mal salihat*) are intimately linked to faith (*iman*) in Islam. The essence of faith, Tawhid (the oneness, unity or unicity of God, or also known as Absolute Monotheism), is also very significant in the context of performing good deeds in Islam. All good deeds should be done truly in the name of God, and good deeds should move man closer to Tawhid. The Qur'an frequently associates its messages of faith with good deeds. Thus, whenever the Qur'an states things related to faith, it will always include the connection to good deeds. The Qur'an, for example, asserts that "[w]ho believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer..." (al-Baqarah 2: 3,62), and on another occasion it asserts "...any who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord..." (al-Baqarah 2: 3,62) and many others. All of these verses indicate that the principles of Islamic faith (*iman*) have their fixed foundation in the Qur'an, and that doing good deeds is one of the qualities of true faith (Rosmizi, 2014). Consequently, good deeds in Islam encompass both horizontal relationship (i.e., relationship between man and other creatures) and vertical relationship (i.e., relationship between man and God).

The term *iman* has been applied to a variety of context, making it "all the more comprehensive" (Singh & Agwan, 2000). It is sometimes used in the Qur'an to refer the content of faith, to allude to the act of faith, and to indicate both at the same time. This means that, just like a general concept of faith, *iman* has two dimensions: theoretical and practical. Therefore, *iman* encompasses more than "belief", counting or declaring true" (*tasdiq*), or intellectual assent in the sense of simply accepting something as true without knowing it as such. It is, indeed, a firm belief founded on certitude, compliance, conviction, and commitment (Oniah, 2007). *Iman* should be accompanied by God consciousness or piety (*taqwa*), and action (*'amal*), or rather good deeds. Good actions are not only a reflection of one's faith, but it is also regarded as one component of faith. The internal conviction, the verbal expression, [and] the performance of the prescribed works is the three principal elements of an act of faith (Al-Ash'ari, 2003; Schacht, Lewis & Pellat, 1970; Wensick, 2007; Watt, 1994). Accordingly, *iman* involves complete submission or obedience on the part of Islamic believers, followed by the accomplishment of good deeds.

Iman, according to the majority of Muslim scholars, is more than just faith or belief; it is comprehensive and dynamic (Rosmizi, 2014). Iman encompasses all three human dimensions, namely, the physical, spiritual, and intellectual, because it demands confirmation and action by speech, heart, and physical limbs. Iman is dynamic in the sense that it is not a passive concept. Instead, it necessitates active engagement, particularly in the performance of good deeds. This confirms that *iman* has "a doctrinal, epistemic, moral, behavioural and

sociological value.” (Singh & Agwan, 2000). Consequently, the vast majority of prominent Muslim exegetes believe that good deeds are an essential component of *iman*.

The importance of doing good deeds is emphasised throughout the Qur’an. Man is commanded by the Qur’an to enjoin what is good and forbid what is bad (Imran 3: 104,110,114). The-Qur’an (99: 6-8) further states that all man’s deeds, no matter how insignificant, are accountable. This concept of man’s deeds being accountable implies judgement, i.e., rewards and punishment (al-Qari’ah 101: 6-11). The Qur’an positive attitude toward good deeds transcends gender, races, or place. For example, (Al-Nisa’ 4: 124; al-Tawbah 9: 71; al-Nahl 16: 97; al-Hadid 57: 18) encourages them in both men and women, and states that all good deeds will be rewarded, and none will be ignored. Another interesting verse is al-Baqarah 2: 62 which states that the rewards for good deeds are not only for Muslims, but also for Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans who have corrected faith and perform good deeds.

The Qur’an and Prophetic traditions emphasise the other aspect of these injunctions, namely, admonishing those who doubt or disbelieve, and instructing man to avoid bad or evil deeds, in addition to urging man to have faith and enjoining him to do good deeds. As in the case of good deeds, the Qur’an states that bad deeds are accountable, and that man will suffer and receive his due punishments based on his bad deeds (Rosmizi, 2014).

Indeed, the Qur’an and the Prophetic traditions contain numerous passages emphasising the necessity and importance of good deeds for this life and in the Hereafter (al-Inshiqaq 84: 7-12, Ali ‘Imran 3: 114, al-Anbiya’ 21: 90, al-Mu’minun 23: 61; *Sahih al-Bukhari*, esp. book *Iman* (faith), *al-Adab* (good manner), etc.). Those who believed and accomplish good deeds will also be rewarded in many ways. Among them are that they will be given (different kinds of) Gardens or Paradise (al-Baqarah 2: 25,82, al-Kahf 18: 21,107, Maryam 19: 60-61, Taha 20: 76, al-Hajj 22: 14, 23, 56, Luqman 31: 8, Ghafir 40: 40, al-Shuraa 42: 22, Muhammad 47: 12, al-Hadid 57: 12, al-Talaq 65: 11, al-Buruj 85: 11, al-Bayyinah 98: 8) that they will be granted in the land, inheritance (of power) and security and peace in life; (al-Nur 24: 55) that they will be changed into good; (al-Furqan 25: 70) that they will be granted forgiveness and a sustenance most generous; (al-Hajj 22: 50, Saba 34: 4) that God will increase His bounty on them; (al-Shuraa 42: 26) that they are regarded as the best creatures; (al-Bayyinah 98: 7) that they will be bestowed love (Maryam 19: 96) will be granted ranks exalted (Taha 20: 75) will be forgiven again and again (Taha 20: 82) will have no fear of harm nor of any curtailment (Taha 20: 112) that their endeavours will not be rejected and God shall record it in his favour; (al-Anbiya’ 21: 94) that they will have hopes to be among those who achieve salvation; (al-Qasas 28: 67) that their evil will be blotted out; (al-Ankabut 29: 7) that they shall be admitted to the company of the Righteous (al-Ankabut 29: 9); promised with a multiplied reward and the dwelling on high; (Saba 34: 37) that their good will be increased; (Al-Qur’an. Ash-Shuraa 42: 233) that their rewards shall not perish or fail (al-Kahf 18: 30, Fussilat 41: 8, al-Inshiqaq 84: 25) and many other rewards.

On the other hand, in Western world, discussion on the spiritual dimension of good deeds does not receive much attention. One of the reasons is because the focus in the Wests, people attach much emphasizes on physical and material world, instead of spiritual development. For instance, in a psychological perspective, doing good deeds is mostly related to horizontal

elements, such as doing good deeds to human beings and other creations. This approach can produce human beings who develop emotionally and humane in their attitudes and behaviors but do not emphasize on spiritual development because it does not talk about man's relationship with God, and the afterlife's relationship with worldly life. Consequently, it neglects the spiritual or internal aspects of good deeds relate to the aspects of vertical belief, such as belief in God, angels, prophets, the day of judgment, focusing only on the relationship between human beings and on the 'here and now' in human life.

In the field of Western Psychology, there are various terms that describe good deeds such as prosocial, altruistic actions. Prosocial behavior is an action that is considered by most people in society or in a social group to be beneficial to others (Steele et al., 2008). The main feature of prosocial behavior is the desire to perform altruistically motivated behaviors. Altruistic carries the meaning of any moral action intended to benefit another, performed voluntarily, and not expecting any appreciation from others (Bar-Tal et al., 1980). Being a volunteer, helping those in need, giving donations are among the good deeds needed by the community and benefit its members in the long run.

According to psychology, there are some factors why human beings do good deeds such as because of self-interest, extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, and sense of obligation. Good deeds are motivated by self-interest especially when individuals derive social or material benefits from their actions (Berman et al., 2015; Lin-Healy & Small, 2013). These include gaining personal status, being recognized, getting material rewards, and praise from those around them.

Besides, extrinsic motivation drive individuals in doing good deeds because they want rewards such as praise or a return from the good deeds done. In the Western perspective, extrinsic motivation relies so much on the material gain, and it does not focus on the spiritual gain such as God's blessing, and rewards in the Hereafter (al-Jannah). Besides that, intrinsic motivation plays an important role in doing good deeds. It refers to an individual performing the behavior or act because he or she feels happy doing it, or because of curiosity or interest. An intrinsically motivated person is more likely to have better mental health and general well-being than an extrinsically motivated person (Baqtayan et al., 2018).

Furthermore, sense of obligation is one of the factors contributed to good deeds in western perspective. Humans often do things out of a sense of duty. Failure to meet obligations causes the individual to feel guilty (also demanding and coercion). The first philosopher to discuss obligation from a psychological point of view is David Hume (1751/1957). If the obligation is not met, the individual feels guilty (Tomasello, 2020). Obligations are also driven by typical social structure which is tied to agreements or promises between individuals, and social structures. It can even happen that outsiders judge that an individual is obligated to do something even if the individual does not consider it so. Violations of obligations often provoke protests from the parties involved. While the perpetrator felt the need to apologize and provide justification for the act.

### Inner Dimension of Good Deeds from Muslim Perspectives

#### ***The Views of Four Schools of Islamic Law on Good Deeds: The Hanafites, the Malikites, the Shafiites, the Hanbalites***

Islam emphasizes and balances between faith and good deeds, and both have a close relationship to each other. In Islam, faith is the most fundamental key for good deeds to be accepted by God. Good deeds alike have great influence on one's faith. In fact, good deeds are an integral part of faith. This relationship has been discussed by Muslim jurists.

With the exception of the Hanafites, the majority of Sunnite scholars agree that faith increases and decreases according to deeds or acts. As a result, a widely accepted definition of faith in Islam is a confession with the tongue, a verification and conviction with the heart, and performance with the limbs. It increases by acts of obedience and decreases by acts of disobedience (Rosmizi & Yucel, 2016).

Good deeds are regarded as one of the essential aspects of faith in these three schools of thought. They affirm that faith encompasses the three major parts of act, the tongue or speech, the heart or mind, and the limbs. Hadith that states this view of faith is when the Prophet stated, "Faith (*iman*) is a confession with the tongue, a verification with the heart, and an act with the members" (Glasse, 2002).

Abu Hanifah's perspective on faith is singular and identical, unmistakable, indelible and invariable, distinct from works but dynamic through its three (or two) aspects, despite excluding works or actions from faith, Abu Hanifah maintains that faith requires a firm commitment and strictly encourages good deeds while sternly forbidding bad deeds (Rosmizi & Yucel, 2016).

Therefore, the Malikites, the Shafi'ites, and the Hanbalites all agree that faith increases by acts of obedience, and decreases by acts of disobedience. The concept of faith and good deeds encompasses all dimensions of human beings, including physical, spiritual, and intellectual elements. Nevertheless, Imam Abu Hanifah asserts that faith and good deeds are two different things, and that faith neither increases nor decrease (Rosmizi & Yucel, 2016).

#### **Good Deeds according to al-Muhasibi**

Al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi (243/857) is a representative of early ascetic Sufism. Al-Ghazali (505/1111) was profoundly influenced by Al-Muhasibi. Al-Muhasibi was born in Basra and died in Baghdad. Apart from his works, which include the Book of the Observance of the Rights of God (*Kitab al-Ri'ayah li-huquq Allah*), little is known about him (Mohamed, 2006).

Morality is emphasised heavily by Al-Muhasibi. In his *Sharh al-Ma'rifah wa Badhl al-Nasihah*, for example, he develops the principles of Sufi morality, a valuable work that still exists in manuscript form. Sufi morality is based on the following principles:

- Doing good deeds and religious duties in addition to gnosis (knowledge of spiritual mysteries)
- Do not lie.
- Do not promise to anyone and avoid from swearing to strengthen the promise.
- Do not judge anyone and do not cause any disturbance.

- Do not cast any sort of curse upon anyone.
- Do not accuse anyone of infidelity or equate Allah with any divinity.
- Do not commit any sins in public or in private.
- Do not ask anyone for anything and keep one's concerns and troubles hidden from others.
- Do not desire of other people's property or possessions.
- Maintaining humility and continuing to do good deeds that improves one's rank both with God and people (*Sharh al-Ma'rifah wa Badhl al-Nasihah*) (Al-Muhasibi, 1993; Filiz, 2006)

Al-Muhasibi affirms the existence of dual nature of good deeds, and he believes that both need to be observed accordingly. Al-Muhasibi points out in his *Sharh al-Ma'rifah wa Badhl al-Nasihah* that prayer or good deeds without *al-Ma'rifah* (essential knowledge/gnosis) leads to a separation from God and hardening of the heart. *Al-Ma'rifah* is split into three categories in his book: knowledge of God, of His enemy, Satan, and of the *nafs*, which commands evil. Al-Muhasibi believes that good deeds should be performed for the sake of God, and he offers ten pieces of advice that are reminiscent of the Ten Commandments in the Bible (Al-Muhasibi, 1993; Filiz, 2006).

Al-Muhasibi goes on to discuss the mystery of human action in greater detail. He claims that every human organ, specifically the heart, has deeds and actions extraordinary to it. In his opinion, God looks at the heart and its deeds rather than the physical organs and their deeds, because the deeds of the heart are more essential and valuable (Al-Muhasibi, 1993; Filiz, 2006).

The art of living a moral life, according to Al-Muhasibi, is a never-ending process of self-discipline and learning. The goal of the art of living a moral life is to merge and harmonize human behaviour with the existing human nature, thereby elevating oneself to the level of a perfect human being. Al-Muhasibi states that the pursuit of self-perfection is a life-long process of education, stating that avoiding oneself through self-questioning can lead to the corruption of the heart, ruining the human being's achievement at the same time. In this context, He establishes an immediate connection between the decline of one's religious life and the corruption of the heart. This connection is based on the Hadith of the Prophet SAW: "Lo, there is a piece of flesh in the body: as long as it is wholesome and healthy, the whole body is healthy; and when it becomes corrupted, the whole body is corrupted as well. Lo, that [piece of flesh] is the heart" (Al-Muhasibi, 1993; Filiz, 2006).

Al-Muhasibi also explains issues surrounding one of the most important aspects of Islamic faith and practice, which is prayer (*al-salat*), in another book titled *Kitab Fahm al-Salat* (The Book concerning comprehending prayer). In this sense, al-Muhasibi addresses some of the most fundamental issues such as ablution (*al-wudu'*), a ritual bath (*al-ghusl*), the prerequisite of prayer (*shurut al-salat*), the actions, and what is read in prayer (*af'al wa aqwal al-salat*), as well as what is prohibited in prayer and other issues that can be found in any classical juristic text. This book, however, is not typical *fiqh* *msnusi*; instead, as one would expect from a philosopher and Sufi like al-Muhasibi, he incorporates the spiritual elements of prayer and relates them directly to the juristic issues he discusses. Consequently, he presents a complete



and perfect example of how to perform prayer in Islam in this book, which not only states the requirements of Islamic Law but also provides rewards for the soul (Picken, 2011).

All of these show that al-Muhasibi emphasizes both aspects of good deeds. He does not merely offer the normal discussion of good deeds like average *fiqh* books which mostly concern with outer dimension, but he dives deep into spiritual dimension of good deeds, establishing close relationship between outer and inner dimensions, and between man and God.

### Good Deeds according to al-Isfahani

Abul Qasim al-Husayn ibn Muhammad ibn al-Mufaddal al-Raghib al- Isfahani (1108) is a Muslim ethical scholar who belonged to the Syafi'ites school of thought. Al-Raghib al-Isfahani lived during the first half of the eleventh century, which is corresponding to the latter half of the Buyid dynasty, and around this time is the Golden age of Islam, or known as the renaissance of Islam (Mohamed, 2006). Al-Raghib is known in the Muslim world mainly through his Quranic lexicon, *Mufradat Alfaz al-Quran* (Mohamed, 1995).

Al-Isfahani states that good deeds consist of two types, namely voluntary deeds by enslaving oneself and the second is the worship that has been determined that has been ordered by Allah SWT (al-Isfahani, 1961). In the matter of relationship between faith and good deeds, al-Isfahani agrees with Ash'arites, which maintains that faith increases and decreases based on good deeds (al-Isfahani, 1987; Mohamed, 1995). According to al-Isfahani, faith consists of both word and action, and complete faith cannot exist if the person is an adulterer or a thief. That is means, actions will determine the level of faith of the person. While al-Isfahani identifies the effect of an action on one's faith, he leaves the judgement of one's faith solely on God, since faith is confined in the heart, that is only God can judge what is in it (Mohamed, 1995).

Based on the following hadith; "Modesty is part of faith (Iman)", "Greed and faith can never be combined in the human heart", "Whoever gather these three things, gathers faith: to spend from poverty, to be a believer from the sincerity of one's soul, and to offer greetings of peace", and "The believers with the most complete faith are those with the most excellent character and who are most kind to their families", Al-Isfahani combines faith and ethics (Quoted in al-Dhari'ah, (Mohamed, 2006). Likewise, he believes that faith and ethics are linked; while faith is a matter of the heart, its perfection is dependent by good deeds (Mohamed, 2006). As a result, in order to perfect one's religion, one must integrate good deeds in their worship.

In his discussion, al-Isfahani (1987) supports a *hadith* that there are seventy-two categories of *iman*, the highest being the *shahadah* and the lowest being clearing an obstacle on the road. Iman consists of two dimensions: belief (*i'tiqad*) and action. Al-Isfahani contends that there are three ranks of belief. First, there is the level of assurance (*yaqin*) where there is no doubt as God states "Indeed, the believers are those who have believed in Allah and His apostle; they were not in doubt" (Al-Hujurat 49: 15). Second, there is the rank of conjecture (*zanni*), which is founded on a strong indication (*amarah*), as God states "Who believes (*yazunnuna*) that they shall meet their Lord" (al-Ma'idah 5: 46). Thirdly, there is the rank of

imitation (*taqlid*), which is to believe in the view of those with spiritual insight (*ahl basa'ir*), as God states "But had they referred it to the Apostle or the people in authority among them, those of them who investigate it would comprehend it" (Al-Nisa 4: 86). Al-Isfahani further argues that there are three ranks of action, namely, building civilization (*'imarah*), worship (*ibadah*), and vicegerency (*khilafah*). As regards belief and action, al-Isfahani states that there are six grades of belief and action, and for each grade, one seeks it with desire, awe, or sincerity through supererogatory devotions and shaking the lower soul (*nafs*). This is supported with Quranic verses such as "Such people are sincere in their obedience to Allah (Al-Nisa 4: 146). Thus, there are twelve ranks, for each individual occupies either the beginning, the middle, or the end (Al-Isfahani, 1987).

In conclusion, Al-Isfahani also highlights the importance of incorporating good deeds into one's worship to perfect one's religion, since he believed that faith and ethics are connected to each other. He maintains the dual nature of good deeds and urges Muslims to observe both of them accordingly.

### **Good Deeds according to Abu Talib al-Makki**

Al-Makki (996) is one of the prominent Muslim scholars born in Persian province of Jibal. His *Qut al-Qulub* (Nourishment of the Heart) was one of the instrumental works in early Islam to explicate the significance of the inner dimension towards the balance of life with the outer aspects of Islam. Besides that, Abu Talib al-Makki remained influential to some scholars such as al-Ghazali (d.1111) that al-Makki's work on *Qut al-Qulub* was inspirational to his *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences). For instance, Atif (2012) mentions that "the *Ihya'* resembles the *Qut* in structure, content and motive".

*Qut al-Qulub* deals extensively with the systematic formation of Sufism and the knowledge of hearts. According to al-Makki, *ma'rifah* (essential knowledge/gnosis) reflects the most reliable form of knowledge. It is attainable through the inner and outer devotion to Allah SWT. Like many other books of Islam that concentrate on the principle of Islam and *iman*, al-Makki focuses on the spiritual aspects of *qalb* (heart), the inspirations (*khawatir*) and the role of purification (*tazkiyatun al-nafs*). Moreover, some scholars acknowledged that Al-Makki was the first Sufi scholar who demonstrated the relationship between Sufism and the Islamic Law (Shariah) and that al-Ghazali venerated his book as a source of inspiration.

In his *Qut al-Qulub*, Abu Talib al-Makki valued wisdom and knowledge and he attempted to differentiate between them. By referring to the Prophet Musa seeking guidance from the Prophet Khidir, he acknowledged that wisdom is superior and can lead to truth. Al-Makki also makes a distinction between *ilm al-zahir* and *ilm al-batin*. Therefore, *ma'rifah* possesses the highest level of knowledge. The gnosis refers to the *muqinin* as the most sincere and devout (Al-Makki, 1997; Azam, 1991).

According to the hadith of the Prophet SAW, intention plays an essential role in Islam. Al-Makki clarifies that a single *niyyah* can yield multiple reward. It comprises a variety of actions, such as observing the sunnah, entering the mosque, being kind to others and many more. Al-Makki states that "Visiting brothers for the sake of Allah is among the virtuous deeds of the believers" (Al-Makki, 1997; Azam, 1991). Certain types of praiseworthy and blameworthy

intentions might have an impact that can affect someone's deeds. Therefore, it is incumbent for Muslims to observe one's *niyyah* and strive to purify it.

Al-Makki describes a length on sincerity that is of five types: *ikhlas al-millah*, *ikhlas al-din*, *ikhlas al-amal*, *ikhlas fi sadaqah* and *ikhlas al-akhlaq*. It has clearly illustrated the link between belief and righteous deeds, as well as the fact that all good deeds are for the sake of invoking Allah (Al-Makki, 1997; Azam, 1991).

Al-Makki establishes a close relationship between good deeds and the stations (*maqamat*) as well as the states (*ahwal*) in *Qut al-Qulub*. He also emphasises the spiritual value of repentance (*taubah*), patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*syukur*), hope (*raja'*), fear (*khawf*), asceticism (*zuhd*), surrender (*tawakkal*), contentment (*redha*) and love (*mahabbah*) (Al-Makki, 1997; Azam, 1991). Each of these stages is of great virtues that it elevates man's spiritual consciousness. For example, in his elaboration on repentance, he elaborates the word *nasuha* in Arabic denotes "the intensified amount of *nush* i.e. sincerity" (Azam, 1991). It also means *istiqamah* that one is in constant obedience to Allah SWT.

Another example is *Raja'* or hope which is a strong desire to invoke God all forms of help, protection, forgiveness and mercy. It also demonstrates man's reliance on God (al-Makki, 1997). A Muslim must return to God that has control of whatever befalls him. Al-Makki further stated that one should think good about Allah (*husnus zan*) that He will not test his servant beyond his ability in any situation. Simultaneously, He hears and answers all prayers. Tawhid (Islamic faith), according to al-Makki, teaches humans to contemplate a better life. Al-Makki detailed the next *maqam* of *khawf* (fearing Allah). This level corresponds to the *maqam raja'* (hope) that humans will always be positive in the hope of Allah's mercy and fear of His punishment. Furthermore, al-Makki reminds the Muslims that the feeling of *khawf* should not reach the level where fear becomes overpowering, leading to hopelessness. It is because despair with God is sinful and forbidden in Islam.

In conclusion, like other scholars discussed above, al-Makki affirms the existence of dual nature of good deeds, namely the outer and inner or the physical and spiritual dimensions. He urges Muslims to learn and observe both of them accordingly. It is only through a balanced observance of both dimensions of good deeds that one can feel the sweetness of performing good deeds.

### **Good Deeds according to Imam al-Ghazali**

Imam al-Ghazali [Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali al-Tusi (1058-1111 CE / 450-505 AH)], one of Islamic history's most prominent and influential scholars, has a positive and unique perspective on good deeds. As has been alluded above, the relationship between good deeds and the spiritual dimension of Islam was either overlooked or underdeveloped in the second century of Islam. One of the factors was the rise in intellectual conflict between Sufis and orthodox scholars. Al-Ghazali was one of the first great thinkers to identify the problem and offer comprehensive solutions, in theory and practice (Rosmizi, 2014).

According to al-Ghazali, creation has two main aspects: the physical and the spiritual, the outer and inner, or the visible and invisible (Al-Ghazali, 1981). He considers man to be made up of the physical body (*zahir*) and the heart or soul, which is inner (*batin*) and spiritual. The

former belongs to *'alam mulk* or *'alam al-shahadah* (the visible, physical, material or phenomenal world), whereas the latter belongs to *'alam al-malakut* (the spiritual world or the realm of the divine world) (Al-Ghazali, 1986; Al-Ghazali, 1967; Al-Ghazali, 1953; Al-Ghazali, 2010; Al-Ghazali, 2003; Al-Ghazali, 2001; Whittingham, 2011). Consequently, al-Ghazali argues that good deeds have two dimensions, namely, outer and inner. The essence of good deeds is the inner dimension of good deeds (Quasem, 1974). Thus, he places a strong focus on the importance of balancing the outer and inner dimensions of good deeds. According to al-Ghazali, every act has an effect on the soul, which is largely dependent on how the act is executed. Thus, good deeds can only have their desired effects on the soul and achieve their purpose by maintaining a balance between their outer and inner dimensions (Quasem, 1978).

Al-Ghazali maintains that understanding the inner dimension of good deeds and noticing their inner preconditions is very important. He describes this the "kernel" of good deeds, because without it, the good deeds would merely appear as outward actions that are empty of real value. Therefore, good deeds performed without regard for an inner dimension may be considered imperfect or even invalid. In fact, there is a risk that good deeds performed not according to their correct preconditions (for example, with pride or to show off) would eventually be regarded as bad deeds or sins, which are harmful especially to the soul. Therefore, al-Ghazali emphasized the inner dimension of good deeds without ignoring their outer dimensions and elucidating their primary inner preconditions. He believes that good deeds must be consistently performed at all stages of life and by all classes of believers (Quasem, 1974). He may have been one among the first Muslim scholars to systematize it in such thoughtful ways.

Good deeds, according to al-Ghazali, are one of the ways towards journeying to Allah (God). They are one of the most important *provisions* for a wayfarer or traveller in the path of Allah, since it might help him avoid worldly greed, and lead to spiritual attainment and eternal happiness. Because good works are a reflection of one's understanding, fear, and love of Allah, they should be able to enhance the bond between man and Allah (Rosmizi, 2019).

Al-Ghazali strongly recommends all Muslims to learn both the inner and outer dimensions of good works. As good works have outer meanings or knowledge, they also have inner meanings (*al-ma'ani al-batinah*) or inner knowledge (*'ilm batin*). Similarly, as good works have outer preconditions (*al-a'mal al-batinah*), they also have inner preconditions. These two dimensions of good works need to be combined and observed accordingly (Rosmizi, 2019).

Accordingly, throughout his writings, al-Ghazali reminds his readers not to be satisfied with their ordinary outward practises of good works, or with simply fulfilling the basic outward preconditions, because these kinds of good works are still at risk, and are not free of various defects, whether they realise it or not. He contends that good works done in the right way can have a positive effect on the soul. As a result, he insists that devotional acts lacking an inward spiritual dimension will not have the desired effect on the soul. Indeed, such observance will only lead to pure ritualism and legalism, which serve as a barrier to spiritual experience. Therefore, al-Ghazali encourages his readers to acquire and comprehend the inward knowledge of good works and other devotional acts, as well as to observe some of their inward preconditions (*al-shurut al-batinah*). Hence, he advises readers to ponder the true inward knowledge (*'ilm al-batin*) of things beyond the teachings of common jurists and

the general perception of Muslim society. Understanding these elements and maintaining a balance between the outward and inward dimensions will allow one to realise some wisdom, reality, and secrets or mysteries of certain devotional acts, which will have a positive impact on one's soul.

For this reason, al-Ghazali examines the inner knowledge (*al-shurut al-batinah*) of good deeds and encourages his readers to acquire, comprehend, and observe them. He revises *al-shurut al-batinah* for ordinary Muslims as well as spiritual elites. Understanding these elements will allow one to realise certain wisdom, reality, and secrets as well as mysteries of some kind of good deeds, and as a result, they will have a positive effect on him (Rosmizi et al., 2016). These *al-shurut al-batinah*, according to al-Ghazali, are necessary for achieving the sweetness of faith. He contends that in order to achieve a deeper understanding, some inner conditions must be applied in addition to *fiqh* rules. For a spiritual traveller at various levels, the details of these conditions are explained in *Ihya'*, stage by stage (Rosmizi, 2019).

Recognizing the importance of the inner or spiritual dimensions of good deeds, al-Ghazali regards a mere outward observance of good deeds as ineffective, describing it as a lifeless body performing a routine action devoid of spiritual element (Quasem, 1974; Rosmizi, 2014). Therefore, he places a strong emphasis on the importance of balancing the outer and inner dimensions of good deeds. He reminds readers to not satisfy with observing simply the outer dimensions of good deeds because this does not satisfy the requirement for eternal happiness. If one wants to achieve a higher level of eternal happiness, one should go above and beyond what is required. Some of these requirements can be found in al-Ghazali's formulation of inner knowledge, which includes the need for a better understanding of the true or inner meaning, real purposes, as well as the importance of good deeds (Rosmizi & Mihlar, 2017).

In conclusion, al-Ghazali provides traditional Islam with a unique consideration of the theoretical and practical aspects of the inner or spiritual dimension of good deeds. He firmly affirms the existence of dual nature of good deeds. He introduces spirituality not only into a potentially dry body of theology, but also into the practice of jurisprudence, formal religious observance, and some other fields of knowledge. As a result, he not only rediscovers deep spirituality that most Muslims have forgotten, especially after the second century of Islam, but he also bridges the gap between different classes of people, fills the spiritual void, unites the heart (spirituality) and the mind (reason), harmonizes and combines Sufism and formal religious observance, and thus balances the unequal observance of the outer and inner dimensions.

#### **Ibn al-Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah and the concept of *Al-Iftiqār ila Allah* (الإفتقار إلى الله)**

Al-Jawziyyah (1292-1350), one of Syria's Middle Ages Muslim scholars, has introduced the concept of *al-Iftiqar ila Allah* – (The feeling of not deserving to be with Allah) as a precondition for 'ibadah and good deeds. He states that the constant feeling of not being with Allah (*al-Iftiqar ila Allah*) indicates that man is not for himself and has nothing from him; he and everyone is for Allah. The complete feeling of not being with Allah (*al-Iftiqar ila Allah*) is one of the most distinctive characteristics of 'Ibadah in Islam, as it is "the fact and essence of worship to Allah". He adds, "A real experience of not being with Allah is the continual awareness of not being with Allah in every situation", in addition that the slave of Allah notices

a comprehensive feeling of not being with Allah in every outward and inward deed (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1996). This is based on the following verse from the Qur'an:

"O people, it is you who stand in need of Allah; as for Allah, He is Self-Sufficient, Immensely Praiseworthy" (Fatir 35: 15).

Allah's servant strips his heart of all fortunes and desires and dedicates his heart to Allah's love and obedience, falling down to Him and surrendering to His commands and prohibitions. The Muslim's awareness of being without Allah manifested in his utter surrender to his Lord, the Mighty and Sublime, humiliated in front of Him, surrendering to His orders and prohibitions, and clinging to His heart with His love (*mahabbah*) and obedience (*al-ta'ah*). Allah states: "

"Surely my Prayer, all my acts of worship, and my living and my dying are for Allah alone, the Lord of the whole universe. He has no associate. Thus, have I been bidden, and I am the foremost of those who submit themselves (to Allah)" (al-An'am 6: 162-163).

Furthermore, Ibn al-Qayyim stated that anyone who considers various forms of genuine and practical worship will find that the absence of Allah is the all-encompassing trait of all of them. In *salat*, humbled and humiliated, his head bent, looking at the location of his prostration, he opens it by uttering the *takbir*, a clear indicator of renunciation of all other situations and positions in favor of Allah.

Muslim's humiliation and need reach their peak when he bows his head and his forehead smeared in dust, he is pleading with God for help and turning to Him.

He went on stated that *al-Iftiqar ila Allah* is a great position that the heart attains, and it is the key to its life and the foundation of its acceptance of Allah. According to Ibn al-Qayyim, this is accomplished by two interconnected processes

First, to recognize the Creator's majesty and tyranny: The greater the servant's understanding of Allah, His qualities, His names, In His Hands, he is the greatest lack of Him and humiliation.

Second, to acknowledge the creature's frailty and inability: whoever recognizes his own worth and sees that no matter how high he rises in rank, power, and riches, he is helpless, weak, and lacking in both purity and justice. His pride has vanished, his limbs have been humiliated, and now has an overwhelming yearning for his master, recourse to him, and obedience in his hands (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1996).

In conclusion, it is very clear that Ibn Qayyim emphasizes on both inner and outer dimensions of good deeds. For instance, his concept of concept of *Al-Iftiqār ila Allah* as a precondition for *'ibadah* and good deeds make it clear that he emphasizes the importance of observing the spiritual or inner dimension of good deeds. His emphasis on heart also proves that one must eliminate his heart from all of desires and fortune and surrendering to Allah solely, applying it into the various forms of practical worship, by being humbled and humiliated in *salat* for instance. To sum up, Ibn Qayyim attaches great emphasis on both inner and outer dimensions of good deeds that has been proved in his concept of *al-Iftiqar ila Allah*.

### Conclusion

This article has unveiled the forgotten aspect of good deeds, namely the inner or spiritual dimension, according to renowned Muslims scholars. This spiritual dimension of good deeds has been forgotten both in Muslims literature and practise. The selected Muslim scholars are among those who, in their own ways, have made earnest efforts to rediscover the inner dimension of religious observance. This will result in a return to a more profound reflection on their inner dimension of the spiritual life in Muslim societies.

The spiritual dimension of good deeds receives little attention in the Western world. Doing good deeds is mostly associated with horizontal elements, such as doing good deeds to human beings and other creations. On the other hand, in Islam, good deeds encompass both horizontal relationships (i.e., relationship between human and other creatures) and vertical relationship (i.e., relationship between men and God). *Tawhid* is the foundation of good deeds, and good deeds are an essential component of faith.

As regard the dual dimension of good deeds, this article finds that the selected prominent Muslim scholars affirm the existence of outer and inner dimension of good deeds. Employing their own approaches, they propagated that each good deed has two dimensions, namely, the outer and inner or the physical and the spiritual dimensions. Both of these dimensions need to be integrated and observed accordingly. They promulgated that only through the balanced observance of outer and inner dimensions can good deeds achieve their goals and be conducive to spiritual growth.

They have strong support from the Qur'an and the Prophetic *Sunnah* as well as the practice of earlier *Salafu al-Salih*, earlier righteous Muslims. They agree that if the inner dimension of good deeds is not observed accordingly, then those good deeds will not be able to bring their fruits, and even some of them agree that those kinds of good deeds are like lifeless body or even useless or worst.

This fact prove that the dual dimension of good deeds was emphasize by the Quran and practiced by earlier Muslims, however, it has been gradually forgotten in this modern era. Therefore, by analysing the views of these great Muslim scholas, we have unveiled the forgotten part of good deeds, which is the inner or the outer or also called as the spiritual dimension.

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