

## What Are the Main Criteria for Knowing Good and Evil in Everyday Decisions?

### How Can We Become Proficient at Knowing Good and Evil?

The issue of good and evil has long been one of the most fundamental topics in human thought. From the earliest years of life, each of us has been, in some way, confronted with the issue of knowing good and evil. This occurs whether in family, among friends, or within society. The process of discerning these two concepts not only gives meaning to a person's moral development and personality structure, shaping their conscience and future choices, but also serves as a prerequisite for a healthy birth into the hereafter. Over time, these experiences make us more sensitive to the concepts of good and evil, leading us to make decisions with greater care and awareness in new situations.

Knowing good and evil is not merely a philosophical or abstract concern, but a reality that we face every day in the form of small and large decisions, from the simplest individual behaviors to the most complex social issues. The importance of this issue is felt even more when we see how environmental conditions, social pressures, and differences in beliefs and cultures can make the boundaries between good and evil unclear and sometimes difficult. In such circumstances, finding clear criteria for knowing good and evil plays a fundamental role in a person's health as well as worldly and eternal elevation. Moreover, in the age of technology and social networks, discerning these two concepts has become more complicated due to the speed of information exchange and the possibility of concealment or the rapid spread of fake news. Addressing the question of how to distinguish between good

and bad, light and darkness, right and wrong, or good and evil, helps us make more informed and responsible choices. This article attempts to pave the way for better decisions and a more ethical life by examining the importance, dimensions, and criteria for knowing good and evil.

### **How Is Knowing Good and Evil Possible in Real Life?**

Knowing the difference between good and evil and making the right decisions requires clear and reliable criteria. Although the concepts of good and evil sometimes seem complex and ambiguous due to circumstances, perspectives, or situations, but there are principles and criteria that can guide us in knowing good and evil. In this section, we will try to explain these criteria in a tangible and understandable way.

### **Intention and Motivation: What Drives Us to Act?**

One of the most important criteria for knowing good and evil is the intention and motivation behind our deeds. Deeds that stem from pure intention and love for others often lean toward good. In contrast, deeds that stem from selfishness or intentions that are far from kindness and love are usually a sign of evil. Suppose you have given financial help to a needy person. If your motivation is merely to show off or gain fame, this act cannot be considered an example of goodness because your intention was based on personal gain. But if you do this help out of compassion, love, and a sense of duty toward others, this act is an example of pure goodness.

However, intention has other dimensions and cannot be limited to primary motivation alone. Therefore, in knowing good and evil, one cannot simply rely on the correctness or purity of intention. In other words, good intention is a necessary condition for a deed to be good, but it is not sufficient. Thus, in every choice and decision, simultaneous attention to intention and other factors can lead us to a more accurate distinction between good and evil.

### **Consequences: What Will Be the Result of Our Deeds?**

In addition to intention, consequences also play a fundamental role in knowing good and evil. A deed that leads to growth and bliss in this world and the hereafter is a sign of goodness. In contrast, deeds that result in harm, damage, or the weakening of human values are considered evil. Of course, it is also necessary to consider the long-term consequences, as some deeds may seem beneficial at first, but may be destructive in the long run. For example, the decision to publish or delete a piece of news on social media can have widespread positive or negative effects on society.

To better understand this, let us consider another example. You may decide to hide a truth from your manager in order to get a promotion. This secrecy may benefit you in the short term, but in the long term, after the truth is revealed, the manager's trust in you will be lost and this choice will negatively affect your credibility. Therefore, such a deed is an example of evil, even if it is perceived as beneficial at the moment. In other words, one must also be sensitive to the possible consequences of the deed. But are deed and intention alone enough?

## Conscience: What Does Your Inner Feeling Say to You?

Conscience is a good guide to distinguish between good and evil. Although human conscience may sometimes be hesitant, it is still one of the most reliable guides in knowing good and evil. Conscience acts internally and evokes a sense of peace or discomfort within us when we make a choice. When a deed is in harmony with your conscience, it is probably good because it is consistent with the criteria of spiritual health and bliss, namely love, happiness, and peace. But if it troubles your conscience or brings about a sense of guilt, it is usually a sign of evil.

Suppose you find an expensive phone at a bus station on your way home. If you decide to keep it and use it, you may feel lucky at first, but after a while, you will probably feel guilty and lose your peace of mind. On the other hand, if you try to find the owner of the phone, although you will not gain anything materially, the inner satisfaction and peace of your conscience will be a more valuable reward.

## The Superiority of Ethical and Human Principles in Knowing Good and Evil

General ethical principles, such as honesty, justice, compassion, loyalty, respect for others, etc., provide fixed and universal criteria for knowing good and evil. A deed that aligns with human and divine values is definitely on the path of goodness. Although in some cases there may be a conflict between these principles, but by relying on religious principles, one can choose the best decision, which is goodness.

Imagine a friend asks you to lie on their behalf to cover up a mistake of violating someone's right. While loyalty to a friend is an ethical value in Islam, when two values conflict, the more significant value takes precedence. Therefore, lying for

their benefit, even with the intention of loyalty, is not permissible in Islam and is regarded as an immoral act. In some specific cases and by observing religious limits, covering up a flaw (without lying) can be justified. However, honesty and the prohibition of lying are general principles in Islamic ethics and must not be violated under the pretext of friendship or loyalty.

### **Good Is Compatible with *Fitrah*, and Evil Is in Conflict with It**

The criterion for knowing good and evil can be sought in its compatibility or incompatibility with human *fitrah* (pure primordial nature). In Islam, good is what aligns with *fitrah* and God's will, leading a person toward perfection, growth, and nearness to God. Evil, on the other hand, means straying from *fitrah*, neglecting the purposes of creation, and falling into paths that lead to the destruction of the individual and society. In other words, whatever leads a person to spiritual and moral growth, healthy social relationships, and nearness to God is good, and whatever distances a person from these is evil [1].

In the Islamic view, good is not only that which is in harmony with innate needs and human *fitrah*, but also is based on the path of nearness to God and living in accordance with ethical principles. Therefore, any departure from this divine *fitrah* leads to the emergence of evil and alienation of human being.

Each of these criteria, from intention and consequence to conscience, ethical principles, and *fitrah*, together guide us in making everyday ethical decisions. If we briefly state the role of each criterion: Intention shapes our inner motivation. Consequences show the results and effects of our decisions. Conscience, as an inner voice, leads us to evaluate right and wrong. Ethical principles provide a clear and

general framework; *fitrah* helps us know human values. The synergy of these criteria enables us to successfully discern good and evil and achieve bliss in this world and the hereafter.

## References

[1]. Quran, 30:30