

Glimpses from the Book: Riyaa : Hidden Shirk

Yasir al-Qathi / Edited By Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips

Linguistically riyaa comes from the root "ra`aa" which means to see, to behold, to view. The derived word 'riyaa' means "eyeservice, hypocrisy, dissimulation; dissemblance."

From a Sharee`ah point of view, "to perform acts which are pleasing to Allah, with the intention of pleasing other than Allah". Thus riyaa originates in the heart.

...from page. 25...

Mahmood ibn Labeed reported that the Allah's Messenger said, "The thing that I fear most for you is the minor Shirk; Riyaa" (Ahmad in his Musnad)

Aboo Sa`eed reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) came to us while we were discussing about Dajjaal and said, "Should I not inform you of that which I fear for you even more than the dangers of Dajjaal? It is the hidden Shirk; A person stands to pray, and he beautifies his prayer because he sees as the people looking at him." (Sunan Ibn Majah vol. 2, #3389)

Aboo Moosaa al-Ash`aree reported that Allah's Messenger delivered a sermon to them one day and said, "O People! Fear this Shirk (meaning riyaa), for it is more inconspicuous than the crawling of an ant." (Authenticated in Saheeh al Targheeb wat-Tarheeb, no. 33)

...from page 45.... "The causes of Riyaa"

The primary cause of riyaa is a weakness in Eemaan. When a person does not have strong faith in Allaah, he will prefer the admiration of people over the pleasure of Allah.

There are three symptoms that are indicative of riyaa, and it is essential that a believer avoid all of them.

1] The love of Praise---as mentioned in a ahaadeeth of the first three people being thrown into the hellfire; the scholar (who taught for fame), the martyr (who fought for fame), and the person who gave his money in charity (so people would say he is generous). All three of these people desired the pleasure of people over the pleasure of Allah. The person who desires the praise of people must feel some pride in himself, for he feels himself worthy of being praised. There is a danger, therefore, of him becoming arrogant and boastful.

Aboo Hurayrah quoted Allah's Messenger (s.a.w.s) as saying: "Allaah, Most Great and Glorious said: Pride is My cloak, and greatness is My robe, so whoever competes with Me, with respect to either of them, I shall cast him into Hell" (Saheeh Muslim, vol. 4 #6349, Sunan Aboo Dawood, vol. 3 #4079)

Aboo Hurayrah quoted Allah's Messenger (s.a.w.s) warning about a person's adoration of himself: "There are three destruct full things: desires that are followed, greediness that is obeyed, and a person's self-admiration and conceit; and this is the worst of the three"

Allah also warned against falling into the category of those Christians and Jews whom the Qur'ân mentions:

"Do not assume that those who rejoice in what they have done, and love to be praised for what they have not done, think not that they are absolved from punishment, (but rather) for them is a painful torment." (Al-Imran : 188)

2] Fear Of Criticism No one likes to be criticised. The dislike of criticism regarding religious practices may be divided into two categories:

a] The first category is that of a person who neglects a commandment of Allah in order to avoid the criticism of his peers. However, the true believers are described in the Qur'ân as follows: "...They do not fear the criticism of those who criticize. And this is the blessing of Allah; He gives it to whomsoever He wishes. Verily, Allaah is Self-Sufficient, all Knowing." (Al-Maa'idah : 54)

b] The second category is that of a person who obeys certain commandments of Islaam, not for the sake of Allaah, but because he fears people will look down on him and criticise him if he does not do it. For example, a man may make his formal prayers in the mosque because he does not want people to criticize him for praying at home, or to think that he is not praying at all.

3] Greed for people's possessions If a person covets what other people possess, whether it is rank, money or power, then he will wish them to envy him similarly. For example, if he is jealous of a position of a certain person in society, he will try by every possible means to attain the same position. Such desires lead people to spend their lives putting on a show for other people so that they will admire their rank, money, or power.

These three categories are implied in the following statement of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.s). Aboo Moosaa related that a person came to the Prophet (s.a.w.s) and asked: "A person fights to defend his honor (i.e. to avoid criticism), another to prove his bravery (i.e. to be praised for it), and a third to show off (i.e. so that his position can be seen); of these three, which one fights in the way of Allah? " He (s.a.w.s) answered: "Whoever fights to make the word of Allaah prevalent [i.e. to bring honor to Islaam, and to establish it in the land], he is the one who fights in the way of Allaah" (Saheeh al-Bukhari vol. 4 #65)

Some scholars advised: "Remove the causes of riyaa` from yourself by considering the opinion of people as important to you as animals and small children. Do not differentiate in your worship between the presence of people or their absence, or between their knowledge of your actions and their ignorance. Rather be conscious of the infinite knowledge of Allaah alone."

...lastly, from page. 77...(summarized)

The Ways to Avoid Riyaaa

- 1] Increasing knowledge of Islaam
- 2] Du'aa: The prophet (s.a.w.s) taught the specific Du'aa for riyaa: "Allahumma innaa na`oothu bika an-nushrika bika shay`an na`lamuhu, wa nastagfiruka limaa laa na`lamuh. [O Allaah, we seek refuge in you from committing shirk knowingly, and ask your forgiveness for (the shirk that we may commit unknowingly)]"
- 3] Reflecting upon Heaven and Hell
- 4] Hiding one's good deeds
- 5] Reflection upon one self's shortcomings
- 6] Accompanying the Pious
- 7] Knowledge of Riyaa`