

Sincerity in Worship: Ikhlas vs. Riyaa (part 2 of 2)

Description: A discussion about how *riyaa* can creep into our worship and rob it of all sincerity.

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Objectives

- To understand the concept of *riyaa* and how to defend ourselves from letting it ruin our worship and relationship with Allah.

Arabic Terms

- *Aayaat* - (singular "ayah) the word *aayaat* can have many meanings. It is almost always used when talking about proofs from Allah. These include evidences, verses, lessons, signs, and revelations.
- *Dunya* - this world, as opposed to the world of the Hereafter.
- *Hadith* - (plural "ahadith) is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
- *Hadith Qudsi* - Allah's message to humankind transmitted in the words of Prophet Muhammad, usually dealing with spiritual or ethical subjects.
- *Ihsan* - perfection or excellence. Islamically, it is to worship Allah as if you are seeing Him. While one does not see Allah, he or she is aware that Allah see all.
- *Ikhlas* - sincerity, purity or isolation. Islamically it denotes purifying our motives and intentions to seek the pleasure of Allah. It is also the name of the 112th chapter of Quran.
- *Riyaa* " It comes from the word ra'aa meaning to see, to behold, to view. Thus the word *riyaa* means showing off, hypocrisy, and dissimulation. Islamically *riyaa* means to perform acts which are pleasing to Allah with the intention of pleasing other than Allah.
- *Sahabah* - the plural form of "Sahabi," which translates to Companions. A *sahabi*, as the word is commonly used today, is someone who saw Prophet Muhammad, believed in him and died as a Muslim.
- *Shariah* - Islamic Law.
- *Shaytan* - sometimes spelled *Shaitan* or *Shaytaan*. It is the word used in Islam and

the Arabic language to denote the devil or Satan, the personification of evil.

- *Shirk* " a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.
- *Surah* " chapter of the Quran.
- *Ummah* - Refers to the whole Muslim community, irrespective of color, race, language or nationality.

Ikhlas means that one's heart is pure and that he or she worships Allah solely to please Him. In lesson 1 we established that in order for a believer's deeds to be accepted by Allah they must be performed with *ikhlas*, they must be preceded by the correct intention and they must be carried out according to the *Shariah*. We will continue our lesson by discussing things that can contradict or corrupt our *ikhlas*; *i-e*, *riyaa*. *Riyaa* is in fact minor *shirk*, it makes us focus on gaining the admiration and appreciation of people rather than seeking to please Allah.



A great scholar of Islam once said, "Indeed the hardest thing to achieve in this world is *ikhlas*. How many times have I struggled to extinguish *riyaa* (showing off) from my heart except that it only appeared again in a different colour?"^[1] It is clear from this statement that even the most educated people struggle to remain sincere and avoid *riyaa*. But indeed it is something that we must avoid. Prophet Muhammad said that it was the thing he feared most for his *Ummah*. "Indeed the thing that I fear most for you is the minor *shirk*," he said. The *sahabah* asked, "And what is minor *shirk*, Oh Messenger of Allah?" To which he replied, "It is *Riyaa*. Allah will say to the people of *riyaa* on the Day of Judgement " when the people are being re-paid for their deeds " 'Go to those who you showed off your deeds to in the *dunya*, and see if you can find reward from them!"^[2]

There is also a *hadith qudsi* in which Allah says, "I am Independent of all the partners (ascribed to me). Whoever performs a deed while associating partners with Me, I will leave him and his *shirk*."^[3] *Riyaa* can be defined as the performance of a deed with the intention of pleasing someone or something other than Allah. It is a form of *shirk* and something to be feared because it is easy to fall into *riyaa* without noticing.

Our good deeds and actions can be nullified by *riyaa*. Let us take the example of a man who has \$100 he wants to give in charity. He begins his act of charity with a pure and sincere heart and donates \$50 but then the idea of showing how rich he is occurs to him so he makes quite a performance of giving another \$50. It is possible that Allah will reject the second \$50 as an act of charity because it was mixed with a desire to show off. If however the idea of showing off occurred after the total \$100 had been distributed it would not affect or invalidate the act of charity.

Having said this it is important to bear in mind that it is not showing off if a person feels happy after doing an act of worship. This is a sign of faith. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said "Whoever feels happy because of his good deeds and sad because of his bad deeds, is a believer."^[4] In addition, if people praise you for a good deed it is nothing to be ashamed or afraid of, it is a portion of the glad tidings of the Hereafter. Prophet Muhammad was asked, "What do you think if a man does a good deed and the people praise him for it?" He said: "That is the portion of the glad tidings for the believer which he is given in this world."^[5]

There are a number of things that you might like to pay more attention to in order to ward off any *riyaa* that may be creeping into your worship.

- Try to bear in mind the concept of *ihسان*. Allah is always watching.
- Either conceal your worship or make a conscious effort not to make a display of it or yourself.
- Reflect on your shortcomings and your achievements. Remember that Allah alone is the source for our accomplishments.
- Seek Allah's help to overcome any *riyaa* in your worship.
- Reflect upon the *ayah* we say many times a day in our prayers. **"You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything)" (Quran 1:5)**

Another important point to bear in mind is that we should not stop doing good deeds for fear of *riyaa*. This is one of the tricks of *Shaytan*. He tries to weaken people's resolve so that they avoid doing things that Allah loves and is pleased with. If we carefully form an intention to please Allah alone this should ensure that *riyaa* does not creep into our worship.

In conclusion we must remember that sincerity in worship is important. Believers must aim to have a pure heart and the intention to please Allah in all that they do.

Endnotes:

^[1] *Jaami ul-Uloom wal-Hikam* of Ibn Rajab al-Hanbalee

^[2] *Imam Ahmad*

^[3] *Saheeh Muslim*

^[4] *Imam Ahmad, Ibn Majah.*

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