



In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Riyah (Pretending Virtuosity)

What is *riyah*?

Riyah' means to falsely make oneself appear to be virtuous, good natured or a true believer before people for the sake of earning their respect and admiration, or for the purpose of gaining a good reputation among them. It differs from hypocrisy (*nifaq*) in that a hypocrite feigns integrity, uprightness, virtue, honesty and piety without sincere intention of acquiring these traits for the sake of God, while a person with *riyah* acquires these good traits for the sake of pleasing God, however, he later performs good actions for the sake of gaining respect and good reputation among people.

The stages of *riyah*

The first stage: A person makes a display of his religious beliefs, and shows off his knowledge of religious teachings in order to project himself as an honest person in the eyes of people in order to gain their confidence and respect. For example, he tries to make a display of his trust in God and His Power, saying that he does not believe in any being except Him. When trust in God or submission to His Will is discussed, he wags his head in affirmation with a sigh, and thus deceives people giving an impression that he is a true believer. This stage of *riya'* is also seen in a person who eradicates false beliefs from his heart and, through such purification, wants to attain power and respect among people by making an overt or covert display of his purity. For instance, when *nifaq* (hypocrisy) is mentioned, his utterances or gestures will be of a person who is purified of it.

The second stage: The individual demonstrates his piety and virtuous deeds and he then behaves in such a manner as if he is free from all vices. The aim behind such actions is to win the confidence of others. For example, a person may give charity or claim great spirituality in order to win respect and praise.

The third stage: It is marked by an individual's overt performance of the prescribed forms of acts of worships and good deeds in front of other people on purely rational grounds and with

the intention of posing himself as a person who strictly adheres to the religious commands or abstains from evil deeds. He thus wishes to win the hearts of people and attract their attention towards himself in the name of religion. For example, a person may observe obligatory prayers strictly on time or pray night prayers in order to be known as virtuous and God fearing by his circle of friends or common people.

The devastating effects of *riyah*.....

A person suffering from *riyah* fails to realize that even if he earns worldly fame among people, scholars or the elite, he will be disgraced in the eyes of the King of Kings, and his actions will lead him to *Sijjin* (the lowest level of hell).

A person with *riyah* usually likes to humiliate others, and injures the feelings of brothers and sisters-in-faith. He is often rude to a pious person and behaves proudly with him in order to project himself to be more virtuous.

If the tree of *riyah* grows for a long time in a person's heart, it leads him to become a hypocrite. Each one of the vices mentioned above is enough to land a person in hell.

It is stated in the traditions that the person used to *riyah* i.e. the person who displays his devotion, high religious status, knowledge, preaching, leading of prayers, fasts and other pious deeds for the sake of gaining respect in the hearts of people instead of truly seeking reward from God is a polytheist (*mushrik*). His idolatry(*shirk*) is confirmed by the Qur'an and the traditions narrated through the Holy Household of the Prophet (saw) and therefore his sin is unpardonable.

Advice to combat *riyah*

A person suffering from this grave disease is usually not aware that it has penetrated his personality and thus made his deeds worthless. The lures of the devil and the self are so subtle and the path of humanity is so delicate that unless he is very self-vigilant, he cannot understand this inherent evil. He imagines that his actions are for pleasing God, but in reality they are serving his own interests.

If you are acquiring knowledge, falling prey to *riyah* will make you desire to gain an important position in the eyes of scholars or men of honour by solving an important problem or presenting a topic in a unique way and to make you the focus of their attention in order to receive applause from them and the praise of the public at a gathering. Ask yourself: If a friend of mine or some

one else had done the same feat in front of others or done it in a better way, would I have felt the same way? Was this action of mine only for God?

Take a firm step to get rid of *riyah* for it is leading you to hell. Eradicate the desire of getting praised by creatures for the actions that are done for the sake of God. Do all your acts as a duty to God. Fight your inclination of performing virtuousness and worship in public or where there is a chance of getting praised, until this inclination is totally eliminated from your heart. Pray frequently to God Almighty to purify your heart of the stains of polytheism and hypocrisy and to clean it of the rust of the love of the world, which is the source of all vices.

There are many hadith that explains *riyah* as the hidden shirk...*riyah* destroys things as fire destroys wood.

To summarize a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah in **Sahih Muslim, Hadith no. 884**;

On the Day of Qiyamah (Judgment Day)

- Allah (swt) will call up a **Shaheed (Martyr)** and ask him:

"I gave you good health, wealth, strength and other favours...What did you do with it?"

He will reply: "I spent my life in your cause and was Martyred in your cause."

"You have told lie, you went so that people would think of you as brave warrior. People have already called you brave so now there is no reward from me."

Then he will be dragged with his face downward and cast into Jahannam (Hell Fire).

- Then Allah (swt) will call up an **Alim (Scholar)** and ask him:

"I gave you 'ilm and other favours. What did you do for me?"

"I spent my entire life, learning and teaching people this knowledge, for you."

"You are a liar!, you did this so that people would call you a big scholar. People have spoken about you as such, therefore there is no reward from me this day."

By Allah (swt) decree – he will be dragged with his face downward and cast into Jahannam (Hell Fire) as well.

- Then Allah (swt) will call up the **rich people** and say:

"I endowed you with wealth, property and many other blessings. What did you do for me?"

He will reply: "Every avenue for me to contribute to your way, I did so."

"You are lying! - You did it to be called generous fellow... people have said you are generous so there is nothing for you to get from me." Allah's decree will be that this person is for the Hellfire also.

This is how riyah destroys a person's deeds. Today, this riyah has entered in to all aspects of our life and this is destroying our good deeds.

Allah subhan wata'ala knows best.

Whatever written of Truth and benefit is only due to Allah's Assistance and Guidance, and whatever of error is of me alone. Allah Alone Knows Best and He is the Only Source of Strength.