

RIYĀ

"Nearly every single Muslim has to struggle with this shirk."

Beautiful lesson by the noble shaykh Ahmad Mūsā Jibrīl حفظه الله

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The Prophet ﷺ said *the thing I fear most for you is the lesser of the shirk.*

ان أخوف ما أخاف عليكم الشرك الأصغر

The Sahābah asked *what is the shirk al asghar?*

ومن الشرك الأصغر، يا رسول الله؟

The Prophet ﷺ said: *ar-riyā.*

الرياء.

So this hadīth ['] basically what the author did was summarized it. The full hadīth would be *the thing I fear most for you is the lesser of the shirk* or the small shirk. Then the Sahābah asked *Oh Prophet of Allāh what is the small shirk?* Then the Prophet ﷺ said *ar-riyā*, which is showing off good deeds.

What's the definition of riyā?

The definition of riyā is to make your worship, your ibādah better so that people can see it and you get closer to them with that. You try to get closer to them with that either by them praising you or by them thinking better of you and it's really the matter that you're doing is supposed to be for Allāh. Basically what it is to do some matter of worship so that people can praise you.

The lessons of the hadīth

1. This shows you the mercy of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ upon us because the Prophet ﷺ feared for us. He feared that something may happen to us, whether it may be that we be thrown in Hell or whether that we do our deeds in vain, or that Allāh dooms us. The basic point is, that the mercy of the Prophet ﷺ is to us. How? Because he said "I fear most for you". He feared this for us, meaning he's concerned for us, he feared for us. So that shows the mercy of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

2. There are sins worse than each other. Meaning sins are not all in one level. There are sins that are above each other. How to withdraw that from this hadīth? How do you know from this hadīth that there are sins worse than each other? The Prophet said "most", meaning there are other things he feared for us they're not the most. This is among the most things. So, this shows you that sins are not all in one category, sins are above each other. Some are worse, some are a little bit less.

3. There's a lesser shirk. What does that mean? There's a big shirk and that's why we have a shirk asghar and a shirk akbar. This shows you that this classification of shirk asghar and shirk akbar, was from the Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم.

POINT 1: One of the danger of shirk ar-riyā

This shirk, if you don't cure it, ends up making you a hypocrite basically. How? All your ibādah, you start off a little bit of your worship saying "hey let me go so the shaykh can see how I read Qur'ān and show off in front of him". Then you go and make your Salāh bigger so your friends can see how long you stay in the Salāh. If you don't cure that disease, you are going to start making your whole Salāh for your friends. All of it for your friends. You are going to start making all your Qur'ān for your friends. You are going to start making your charity for your friends. That's why this is so dangerous.

POINT 2: There's an ibādah that was done, and it was tainted with riyā. What happens to that ibādah? What's the hukm on that ibādah?

The ruling on a ibādah that's been tainted with riyā. This riyā has to happen either before or after the ibādah was done. Let's take after. I pray two rak'āt over here and there was no riyā, no showing off in them but after that, someone came up and said "wow, I've seen you praying those two rak'āt, that was really good". That does not affect the ibādah itself. You still get the reward for it and there's no problem with that unless you don't struggle with that, unless you don't fight it. You like it and start saying "yeah you know it was real good" and you start talking about your own Salāh or your own deeds. So, basically if the riyā comes to you after you've done the deed, the ruling on that: your deed is good, unless you go with the flow of the shaytān. Your deed is good, unless you go with the flow of the shaytān.

POINT 3: What if the riyā comes to you within that matter of worship?

I got up to pray and I'm by myself, and then people started walking in and I was going to make it a snappy two rak'at, when people started walking in, I started to make it a long two rak'at. The ruling on that:

The ibadāt are either connected or disconnected. What do I mean with connected and disconnected, first example salāh is all connected, you can separate them. So I am in a prayer, someone comes in and I make it longer, according to most scholars that invalidates that prayer. Some scholars do say you only invalidate the addition but the true opinion on that is it invalidates all that prayer because shirk ar-riyā entered in it, it kills it. Some scholars said, the addition part is not going to be accepted, the original is going to be accepted but that's the weaker of the two opinions.

What if it's disconnected?

Meaning, I heard someone say "give charity" and I was already going to give 20 dollars but when I see other people looking, I pulled out another 50 dollars, now when it's disconnected already got the ajr for the 20 dollars, I gave that for the Sake for Allāh. I get the reward for that. Then I pulled out another 50 dollars for riyā, I will not get the ajr for that second part.

1. If the riyā comes to you after your ibādah; you get credit for the deed unless you go with the flow of the shaytān.

2. If the riyā comes to you within and that's either connected [it is not going to be accepted] or disconnected [it's going to be accepted, the portion that's for the Sake of Allāh is going to be accepted, the portion that you did for riyā, is not going to be accepted].
3. I got up to pray totally for riyā; there's no reward for that, no doubt about that.

POINT 4: Small and big shirk [shirk al asghar and shirk al akbar]

Shirk al akbar:

- Shirk ar-Rububiyyah e.g. there are two gods, one creates the good and one creates the evil.
- Shirk al-Uluhiyyah e.g. I pray for the sake of that statue.
- Shirk Asmā wa-s Sifāt e.g. to say Allāh has a Hand just like my hand.

Shirk al asghar: there's apparent and hidden shirk. Apparent shirk has two categories which are words and actions.

Small shirk in words: the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says *whomever gives an oath by other than Allāh, has committed shirk*. And that is the small shirk right here. Or a man came to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and said *whatever Allāh wills and you will* and the Prophet ﷺ got upset and said *you make me a partner to Allāh?* that's the small shirk, shirk of words.

Small shirk in actions: when an amulet or a ring, like I say "this ring gives me goodluck". Or a rabbit's foot, or a lot of people wearing that Qur'ān, they believe that Qur'ān is going to protect them.

How could that be shirk akbar? You see that amulet I wear, or that rabbit's tale that I have or that ring that I have, if I believe that's a cause for me to get goodluck, that's shirk asghar. If I believe that in itself provides good and bad for me, that becomes shirk akbar, it takes me out of Islām. So I believe that ring is going to help me, is a cause you know it's going to be one of the causes to help me. That's shirk asghar, it's not going to take me out of Islām but if I believe that in itself is the source of good and bad, that's shirk akbar.

The hidden part is perfecting your prayer for other people, giving charity so other people can praise you. Making an ibādah for other than Allāh or combining him in your ibādah. Perfecting your Salāh, perfecting your Qur'ān for other people. Longing your Qur'ān, giving extra charity so other people can see. Allāh says in the Qur'ān:

فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو لِقاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلاً صَالِحاً وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِنْدَةَ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا
 Whoever wishes Allāh on the Judgement Day,
 فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو لِقاءَ رَبِّهِ
 Let him do good deeds,
 فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلاً صَالِحاً وَلَا يُشْرِكْ
 And commit no shirk in it. [2]

So if you want Allāh and the goodness of the Judgement Day, do good deed *وَلَا يُشْرِكْ* and commit no shirk. That's the small shirk that we're talking about here.

Ibn al Qayyim رحمه الله said *this is the shirk, that is the sea with no shore to it*. He described this shirk with no shore to it. Very few of this Ummah are ever saved from it. Then he gave advice that one should stay away from this

shirk ar-riyā.

POINT 5: Shirk is more hidden than the crawling of an ant. [3]

The Prophet ﷺ said: *the shirk in the Ummah is more hidden than the crawling of an ant.*

You know how an ant crawls you can't hear him, the same way an ant can crawl and you can't hear them and see them unless you look very well for them, the same way this infects you without even knowing it.

The Sahābah asked: *so what do we do oh Prophet of Allāh?* The Prophet ﷺ said: *you make a du'ā.* That du'ā is oh Allāh I seek refuge that I commit shirk in you without me knowing it.

اللهم إني أعوذ بك أن أشرك بك وأنا أعلم، وأستغفر لك لما لا أعلم

Oh Allāh, I seek refuge in You that I commit shirk in You while I know it and I ask You for forgiveness in that which I don't know.

POINT 6: What is the effect of the shirk? What does it do to your deed?

It takes away your deed. Could you get sins for this, shirk? If I get up and pray two rak'āt just to make you guys like me more or think I'm more pious. That's the only reason I pray those two rak'āt. Okay that Salāh I prayed, I got a zero out of it. I just wasted my time. I got a zero for it.

How could I get a sin out of this kind of shirk?

If you do a Fardh Salāh and you commit this kind of shirk in it. I got up to pray, you know what, I was sitting over there and I wasn't praying the Duhr or the 'Asr and cause you guys are here I got up to pray the Duhr or the Asr. Just for you guys.

Even if it's not Fardh ayn you should get up and pray two rak'āt?

You don't get sins for it. It doesn't count. You got exed out. You should kill it, you should suppress it. If you keep doing that, it is going to make all your deeds gone. Only someone who fights his temptation by doing it once in a while for other people. If you keep doing it, it leads you to become a hypocrite. You can get the sins out of this, if it's a fardh. I went to go to Hajj, just so people can call me Hajj. Hajj Ahmad. I got a sin, why? Hajj is fardh, I'm supposed to do it but that Hajj is invalid because I did this shirk in riyā, so that means I get a sin. I got up to pray to please you guys with Salāh ad-Duhr, I got a sin. I got up to please you with the two rak'āt after Salāh Duhr, the Sunnah, that just exed out. Zero, zero deeds.

POINT 7:

If I do something for two reasons, for example, the best example for this would be if I go to Jihād to fight for the Sake of Allāh and I want money. Booty. You know when you fight in Jihād and the Muslims take the booty of the enemies, what happens to that? It gets split up among the soldiers, it starts with the soldiers, they get the biggest percent. I go and say "you know what I'd like to fight for the Sake of Allāh, I want to defend the Muslim lands but you know what, I also want some of that booty". That's why I went there. I give you two scenarios. The next one is, someone who went for Jihād and he wants people to say "this guy has a lot of courage. Man, he left all his families and all his house and he has a lot of courage in the fighting".

What's the hukm for the two and what's the difference between the two?

Let's start off with the easy one. I say I want to fight Jihād so people can say I'm a good warrior. That one for sure, no question about it, cause in fact there's a special hadīth the Prophet ﷺ was asked a man went for Jihād and to be mentioned in good. What is he get out of it? He sincerely went for Jihād, a part of it, like maybe could have been 99% he went for Jihād and 1% so that people can talk. What did he get? The Prophet ﷺ said nothing. The man said a man went for Jihād and to be mentioned in good, what did he get? The Prophet ﷺ said nothing. Three times, the Prophet ﷺ said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَقْبِلُ

Allāh doesn't accept except that which is a 100% for His Sake. Now let's go to the second one.

Did such a person die a Muslim?

He dies a Muslim but they don't get the great reward for that being a martyr. We treat him as a martyr because we don't know what's in their hearts, but in front of Allāh it's different.

The next one is, someone who said I want to go for Jihād and get booty. What is that? The answer to that is, ibn al Qayyim said he gets nothing out of it. That's the opinion of ibn al Qayyim. Ibn Rajab and a lot of other scholars said he gets reward for it.

What's the difference to ibn Rajab between the second one and the first one?

Ibn al Qayyim said *there's no difference*. Ibn Rajab said *there's a difference* and I think there is a difference. The difference is, taking the booty is a legit cause. You can go for the Sake of Allāh and get that wealth to you. You know, that's one of the things that encourages it. It's part of the benefits of Jihād and it's no problem if someone seeks that, however it's not like some guy who went solely for the Sake of Allāh, he doesn't want nothing, he is not going to take nothing and another guy he went for the Sake of Allāh and for that. The difference between the two: one is a legitimate reason. It's one of the benefits that Allāh approved for us and gave us. The first one is not. You apply this rational to anything else similar to this.

How do you know shirk al asghar [the minor shirk] when you see it?

Shirk al asghar, this is general, not just about riyā, shirk al asghar has to be mentioned in the Qur'ān or in the Sunnah. Always.

POINT 8: Shirk al asghar must have proof that it's not from shirk al akbar [the major shirk].

So this one [showing off] we know it's not shirk al akbar, because the Prophet ﷺ said that in the hadīth. So there are two rules for shirk al asghar.

- First of all: Allāh or the Prophet have to say that it's shirk.
- Second one: Allāh or the Prophet have to say that it's not of the major shirk.

That's how you know if it's shirk al asghar or not. Other than that, it would be shirk al akbar.

POINT 9: Kinds of riyā

Classification

1. Physical riyā. You know how that is? Like some guy going and pretending he's weak and he's doing that in the purpose of what? To show that he's fasting. You know his lips are drying, he's trying to make it obvious his lips are dry. He's showing, you know you guys are playing and he doesn't want to play. He wants you to ask him why don't you play? So he can say "I'm fasting". He wants to make it obvious in some physical appearances or he makes his face somewhere or somehow a yellowish, you know doesn't take care of himself, the reason he does that he wants people to think he prays all night long, he makes Salāh all night long and he worships Allāh all night long. Or he doesn't comb his hair and the reason he doesn't comb his hair is he wants people to think all he's worried about is he's a Muslim, his Islām and the causes of Islām. These are categories that the scholars said is among the riyā. So basically all falls under physical riyā.
2. Riyā in appearance like wearing thick clothes or clothes that are all stitched up and say "Wallāh, all I care is Islām and all I have been doing is praying at night" or like the sufīs do, they wear very, very thick clothing some of them in a way to show off. The reason they do that and a lot of people would do that is to show zuhd. Zuhd means that you're careless of this life and you're among the people of the Life After. Some of this stuff may be good but the point about it is you should note this so that you avoid the riyā in these matters.
3. Sayings and that's like reciting Qur'ān, verbal. Anything verbal. You start doing dhikr so people can say "Wallāh you're doing dhikr". You start moving your lips so people can think you're doing dhikr. You take a Qur'ān and you start reading.
4. Actions like Salāh.
5. Riyā in friendship for example I'm a bomb and I hang around with good people. Sometimes. Why? To show people "Wallāh look this guy, he is good, cause his friends are shaykhs". But he does it not to learn or benefit, he does it so people can say that he is good.

Any riyā that you have is going to fall on one of these 5 categories.

Why we mention them?

So you can stay away from them.

POINT 10: What's the cure for riyā, the best and most cure?

1. Do your deeds in secrecy unless you have to do it in public.

2. Do a lot of the deeds that no one knows about. For example I'm going to the masjid, the masjid has a lot of people there I have the choice between praying the two Duhr rak'āt in the masjid or have the choice to pray it in my house. Which one should I do? If you want to kill riyā or you're in the process of killing that disease within you, you pray it over here instead of the masjid, so people don't know.
3. Do the deeds that are usually done in secrecy. One of those is Salāh or night prayer. No one knows of those unless you go talk about them.
4. Do more deeds in private than you will ever do in public. Because if you only do two rak'āt in the masjid and people see you, you're riyā. But if you pray 200 rak'āt at home and you only do two in the masjid, it's not even going to hit your mind, the riyā. So do more worship in privacy than you do in public.
5. Know and keep in mind what you are doing this for. Why are you doing ibādah? For the Life After to preserve you in the Life After. So when you're doing it for the Life After, you get your reward to it, if you do it for people they're going to talk about you, they're going to think good of you and that's about it. You do it for the Life After, Allāh will be happy with you and Jannah will be your reward. Keep that thought in mind. Always. So I mean also keeping that thought in mind, you say to yourself "who is that human being just like me and him that I would want to please or made him think he's better. Big deal. Who is he? Who does he think he is? You go for a bigger goal, you go for Allāh and the Jannah.
6. Friendship. Have good friendship because when you have good friendship and they are good and they read like two Juz of the Qur'ān and you read only half of a Juz, there's not going to be no riyā there. Not only that, they help you kill the riyā by other means as well.

Let me add one more point. Important point: people who leave deeds for riyā. You know what, you go to the mosque and you say "should I pray the two rak'āt or not, people are looking at me and riyā may come to me" I'm not going to pray them. Should you do that? Leaving deeds for riyā.

Leaving deeds in that particular situation is from the devil because the devil comes to you and tells you "everything is riyā" and you leave everything. So if that happens to you, what you do is fight your struggle in your heart, start to fight, cause this is for the Sake of Allāh and get up and do it.

Ibrāhīm an-Nakha-ī, a big scholar said: *if the shaytān comes to you, before or during Salāh and he says you're doing riyā or people are looking at you or prolong it, then make it longer.* Why? To try to kill that feeling within you. Make it longer and fight that temptation. Some of the Sahābah and after them when someone walked in and they were reading the Qur'ān, they would take away the pages so no one would see them. That's for something you could do later. For example you're sitting here, and you could do it later on and you fear riyā and you have the exact time to do it later on, okay prolong it. But if it's something that will only be done in that time, like the two rak'āt of Duhr and you're in the masjid before Duhr, then you should pray them and fight that temptation. If it's something you can delay, for example read Qur'ān, then you have an option of either fighting your temptation or doing it when no one is around.

That's about it on that matter.

Footnotes:

¹ Rawāḥ Ahmad

² Sūrah al Kahf verse 110

³ Al-Adab al-Mufrad 715