

Shirk and its types (part 3 of 3)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

Definition of lesser shirk

Lesser Shirk is what has been specifically called shirk in the Qur'aan and Sunnah, but does not reach the level of greater Shirk. Also, lesser Shirk is said to lead to greater Shirk. Some scholars have said lesser Shirk is so vast that it is difficult to define it precisely. The most important examples of lesser Shirk are:

Charms and omens

Wearing charms, talismans, and amulets for protection against the evil eye, bad luck and the like thinking that Allaah has placed these powers in them constitute lesser Shirk. (See the article *Charms and omens*.)

Swearing an oath in the name of other than Allaah

Taking an oath, or swearing, in the name of someone other than Allaah is a type of lesser Shirk given that a person does not intend to venerate the one in whose name the oath is being taken, else it turns into greater Shirk. The Messenger of Allaah, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said,

“The one who takes an oath in the name of other than Allaah commits disbelief or Shirk.”¹

Riyaa (Showing-Off)

The Messenger of Allaah, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

“The thing that I fear most for you is lesser Shirk.”

They said: “O Messenger of Allaah, what is lesser Shirk?” He (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

¹ Ahmad, Abou Daawood, Al-Tirmidhee, Nasaa'ee, and Haakim.

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“Riyaa (showing off), for Allaah will say on the Day when people are recompensed for their actions: ‘Go to those for whom you were showing off with your deeds in the world, and see what reward you find with them.’”²

Riyaa is to perform worship in order to be seen and praised by people. Riyaa renders a deed void; the person earns sin instead of reward from Allaah, and it exposes him to punishment.

Human beings, by nature like to be praised, are not fond of criticism, and do not like to be seen deficient in any way. Islaam views doing religious acts to impress others instead of pleasing Allaah - what should have been done for Allaah is done for people - as shirk. The Messenger of Allaah, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

“Allaah (glorified and exalted be He) said: ‘I am so self-sufficient that I am in no need of having an associate. Thus he who does an action for someone else’s sake as well as Mine will have that action renounced by Me to him whom he associated with Me.’”³

There is a good chance of a believer falling into riyaa because it is hidden, it sits in the heart, pollutes the intention, and a person has to be extremely vigilant to correct it. Ibn Abbas (*May Allaah the Most High be pleased with him*) - one of the Prophet’s (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) companions- said,

“Shirk in the Muslim nation is more hidden than a black ant crawling on a black stone in the middle of a moonless night.”⁴

Intention is a simple matter, but sometimes changing it can be difficult. A person has to listen to their heart and see what motivates a certain action. A Muslim has to carefully watch his intention to keep it pure whenever he performs a good deed like Salaah, giving charity, fasting, serving his parents, or even smiling. Perhaps this is why the saying of Allaah’s Name has been prescribed before all acts of importance in daily life – eating, drinking, sleeping, going to the toilet, waking up, and going to sleep. Remembering Allaah keeps the heart aware of Allaah and the intention pure.

Let us understand with simple examples how riyaa may affect worship:

(a) Let us say the basic motive when you stand up to pray is for people to see you, or notice you are praying, wish to be praised for that. This invalidates the act of worship.

(b) Let us say you started off to pray with sincerity, your intention was to pray for Allaah, but then you started thinking about pleasing people, and slowly your intention changed. You do one of the two things. If you resist the temptation of getting noticed, it will not have any effect on you because the Prophet, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said: **“Allaah has forgiven my ummah for what crosses their minds, so long as they do not act**

² Ahmad

³ Saheeh Muslim

⁴ Ibn Abee Haatim

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upon it or speak of it.” But if you do nothing and do not resist the temptation of doing the act of worship so you may be seen or noticed; instead you slowly start to beautify your Salaah to be noticed, and so the entire act of worship may become invalid.

(c) Unintended praise is not harmful. The Prophet, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), was asked about that and said: **“That is the first glad tidings of the believer.”** It is not showing off if a person feels happy because he has done an act of worship; actually, it is a sign of his faith. The Prophet, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), said:

“Whoever feels happy because of his good deeds and sad because of his bad deeds, that is the believer.”

The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) has provided us with words of protection against this inconspicuous shirk that can be said anytime of the day. One day the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), delivered a sermon saying,

‘O People, fear ‘shirk’, for it is more hidden than the creeping of an ant.’⁵

Those whom Allaah wished asked, ‘And how do we avoid it when it is more hidden than the creeping of an ant, O Messenger of Allaah?’ He replied,

‘Allaah-humma inna na-oodtho-bika an nush-rika bika shay-ann naa-lamu, wa nas-tagh-fi-ruka limaa laa naa-lam.’

‘Say, “O Allaah, we seek refuge with You from knowingly committing shirk with You, and we seek Your forgiveness for what we do unknowingly.”⁶

Differences between Greater Shirk and Lesser Shirk

- Both are defined differently.
- The greater Shirk expels a person from the fold of Islaam, whereas the lesser Shirk does not take one out of Islaam, but reduces one’s belief in Allaah.
- A person who dies committing greater Shirk will be in Hell Fire for eternity; this is not the case with one committing lesser Shirk.
- Greater Shirk wipes out and annuls all good deeds, whereas lesser Shirk only ruins the deeds it motivates or is a part of.
- Greater Shirk is not forgiven by Allaah except through sincere repentance done before death; whereas it is up to Allaah to punish or forgive lesser Shirk.

⁵ At-Tabaraanee

⁶ Ahmad