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Al-Shirk-ul-Asghar

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The First Question from Fatwa no. 3419

Q1: Al-Fudayl ibn `Iyad (may Allah be merciful with him) said, "Refraining from doing a deed because of people is Riya' (showing-off) and doing a deed because of them is Shirk (associating others in worship with Allah)." Many of my Muslim brothers and I sometimes feel obliged to refrain from some supererogatory acts of `Ibadah (worship), fearing Fitnah (trials) to ourselves, being beaten, or being insulted; or that our Muslim brothers in general will be subjected to Fitnah by the government tightening its grip around them. By Allah! I ask you, have we, as a consequence, fallen into Riya' and if this is the case, what is the way out?

A: The second part of the statement of Al-Fudayl, namely, that doing a deed because of people is Shirk, is absolutely true. As the evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah shows that the obligation of sincerity in `Ibadah should be for Allah Alone and the prohibition of Riya', called Al-Shirk-ul-Asghar (minor form of associating others in worship with Allah) by the Prophet (peace be upon him). He declared it as being the thing he fears most for his Ummah.

As for the first part of what he (Al-Fudayl) said; that refraining from doing a deed because of people is Riya', this is not absolute and it needs some elaboration as it depends on the intention. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ("Actions are but by intention, and every man shall have that which he intended.")Special care should be taken over making sure deeds are in conformity with the Shari`ah, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ("Anyone who does something that we have not ordered (in worship) it will be rejected.")Therefore, if it happens that

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due to a person's situation they refrain from certain deeds, which are not obligatory on them, through fear of contingent harm, this will not be considered as Riya'. Instead, it belongs to Al-Siyasah Al-Shar`iyyah (Shari`ah-oriented politics)?????????????. The same applies to refraining from performing some Nafilah (supererogatory) acts of `Ibadah in front of people, fearing to be praised in a manner that may lead to harm or through fear of Fitnah. However, the obligatory acts of `Ibadah can not be forsaken, unless for a valid Shar`y (lawful) reason.

May Allah grant us success! May peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family, and Companions!

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