

Third Degree

The pretender does not seek fortune, wealth, or marriage, but he shows off his adoration for fear people may look at him as if he lacks something; therefore, he is not considered to be among the elite and the ascetics, and he is regarded to be among the commoners, such as one who walks to the congregational prayer services, to mosques, in a hurry, and when people see him, he adjusts his walk and abandons haste although it, at that time, was legitimate. But he abandons it so he may not be labeled as one of those who love distraction or negligence and not one of the men of eminence.

Also, if he is the first to burst laughing or demonstrates merriment, so he is afraid he will be looked down upon with eyes of contempt, he follows it by seeking Allāh's forgiveness and pretends to be sad on its account and says, "How unmindful a human being is! But Allāh knows that if such an individual is left to himself, he would not consider doing so as being too much; rather, he fears he will be looked down upon with contempt and not with respect. He is like one who sees a group of worshippers offering supererogatory prayers, or making *tahajjud*, or fasting each Thursday and Monday, as is transmitted about the imām of the nation who ordered the youths (of Hizbollah) to fast both these days, so the man goes along with them for fear he will be described as lazy and thus is not attributed to the party of Allāh.

If he is left alone, he does no such things. And he is like one who endures the thirst on the Day of Arafa, or in days during which fast is highly recommended, so he does not drink water for fear people may get to know that he is not fasting. So, if they think that he is, he abstains from eating as well. Or he may be invited to partake of food, so he abstains in order that he will be perceived as observing the fast. He may openly state that he is fasting or says he has an excuse. Such a pretender combines two contemptible acts: He is seen by others as fasting, then he is seen as a sincere one and not as a pretender.

He is cautious lest he should mention his act of adoration to people for fear he will be seen as a pretender. He, hence, wants to give the impression that he is continuing his act of adoration. If he is obligated to drink, he rushes to remind himself that he has an excuse, either explicitly or implicitly, such as seeking an excuse because of an ailment that causes him to have an acute need to drink water and stops him from fasting.

Or he may say, "Today, I visited so-and-so who pressured me to eat, so I ate." He may not then say

that in connection with his drinking water so that he will not be regarded as seeking an excuse as a pretender, but he perseveres then mentions his excuse casually in his narrative of an incident such as his saying, "So-and-so loves his brethren. He so much loves them to partake of his food. Today, he insisted that I should do that, and I had no choice except to cool his heart." Or he may say, "My mother is weak-hearted, compassionate in my regard. She thinks if I fast one day, I will fall sick, so she does not let me fast."

Such is the doing of the ills of pretension. It does not jump to articulation except due to the deeply rooted pretension in one's innermost. Similar to this is something which I have seen more than once. Someone says, "I spent the night over the house of so-and-so. During the *sahar* [pre-dawn] time, I wanted to rise for the *tahajjud*. But I was concerned the owner of the house might think I was a pretender, so I did not stand for the prayers." Or he may say, "I did not worship during a particular time for fear I would be regarded as a pretender."

This poor person sees himself, when he does not pray or worship his Lord, as being sincere to Allāh Almighty, fleeing from pretension whereas in fact he has already fallen into it; both his *nafs* and Satan have taken control of him. In other words, man in such situations has two states: The first is his fear when he prays in someone's house or in the company of a crowd of people that his prayers may be pretension, yet he knows himself best and his weakness, and that he cannot safeguard his sincerity in public as he used to do in private; in this case, the prayer is abandoned so one may not fall into pretension.

The second is that he is concerned about people considering him as being a pretender, although he feels comfortable that he is not praying pretentiously but purely for seeking nearness to Allāh. In this case, if he abandons a ritual, he will prove that he is a pretender who does not like people to think anything about him except being sincere.

Abandoning the worship in the first case was for the sake of Allāh and in the second for the sake of the *nafs* and its desires, for the *nafs* loves its reputation to be good among the people. Such is love for life and eminence. If one who is sincere to Allāh sees in himself a desire to perform a commendable fast, for example, let him do so; he must not pay attention to what others say about or think of him. And if he does not find in himself such a desire, he must not fast, and he must not pay attention to what is said about him. Rely on Allāh and forget about them all.

A sincere worshipper does not care about how people look at him or think of him. If he has no desire to fast, and Allāh knows about it, he must not want others to believe something different from what Allāh knows about him, thus confusing them. And if he wishes to fast for the sake of seeking nearness to Allāh, he should contend himself with Allāh's knowledge, associating none with Him.

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/pretension-and-conceit-sayyid-ahmad-al-fahri/third-degree>