

Home > Pretension and Conceit > Explaining how to scientifically and Practically cure the Heart of the Disease of Pretension > Ares where Showing Acts of Worship is Permissible

---

## Ares where Showing Acts of Worship is Permissible

There is no doubt in the requirement of sincerity in the act of adoration and obedience to win the pleasure of Allāh Almighty. This is taken for granted as one of the principles that have to be taken into consideration in all conditions and circumstances. No other rational or legislated incentive advances an act for the Divine One more than it. Sometimes what the *nafs* insinuates is not even considered: A deed has a great benefit; therefore, it must be undertaken in order to show people. A pretentious deed gives the person who undertakes it nothing in return as the Holy Qurʾān clearly states:

***"... like those who spend their substance (just) to be seen by men but do not believe in Allāh or the Last Day. They are in parable like a hard, barren rock on which there is a little soil; a heavy rain falls on it, leaving it (just) a bare stone. They will be able to do nothing with whatever they had earned" (Qurʾān, 2:264).***

Besides adhering to this accepted principle of the Sharʿa, we say that hiding a righteous deed, although it contains the benefit of sincerity and the absence of pretension, yet, on the other hand, if it is done openly, it may also produce a benefit which is: making it desirable to people. Thus, people may emulate the one who does it even if the deed may be threatened with pretension. The deed in both cases is raised in the Holy Qurʾān:

***"If you disclose (acts of) charity, even so it is well, but if you conceal them and make them reach those (who are really) in need, that is best for you: It will remove some of your (stains of) evil from you. And Allāh is well acquainted with all what you do" (Qurʾān, 2:271).***

Disclosing them is of two types: One is disclosing the act itself publicly, and the other is talking about it after it has been secretly done.

As regarding the first, it in fact has preference over what can be done secretly and what can be done publicly. If the act cannot be hidden, such as performing the pilgrimage, going for a holy war, attending

the congregational prayer service, and the like, it ought to be undertaken and not to let the insinuation have room in it. Doing such deeds openly has nothing to do with making a show or with pretension. Rather, the benefit of taking the initiative in such deeds is to let people desire them, but the condition in them, as we stated, is that they must not be done just to show off. They are to be done publicly.

Rather, perhaps the catalyst to hide such forms of worship is pretension as we pointed out before. It is this: Some souls covet to have a status in the hearts of people, so people may think well of them. In such case, what is also known is this: One who knows that they cannot be hidden, that they will eventually be known, he tries to hide doing them. This is so because if people see the action later on, and they will have to, they will think that this person does what he does for the sake of Allāh, praise belongs to Him, and he does not like people to get to know his deeds.

For example, if someone wants to perform the pilgrimage, he knows that this action cannot be hidden from people because later he will have to be seen in Mecca and Mina and perform the rounds and other rituals which will be seen by a huge number of people. And he, once back from the pilgrimage, will be visited by the brethren; so, this deed will imminently be known. But if people come to know about it, they will state that he was hiding the preparations for it, so they will consider him as being sincere in his action and will think well of him. Such an individual is either a fool or a deceiving pretender who wants to hide his pretension from people.

But if the deed can and cannot be hidden, such as offering charity and prayers, it has to be manifested so long as there is no pretension in such manifesting, that there will be no harm in it such as showing the act of offering charity while harming the one receiving it. In such a case, it has to be hidden. But if it has no other harm, it is better to manifest it because it contains a public invitation to others to do likewise. This is proven by the tradition of the prophets and friends of Allāh (رضي الله عنهم) who has said the following about such a person: "... He will have the reward of doing it as well as that of anyone else who emulates it."

Tradition narrates that doing a deed secretly equals doing it publicly seventy times. There are manifold rewards for doing a good deed secretly, as many as seventy times, if it follows the custom of doing it secretly. As long as the heart separates itself from the impurities of pretension, and sincerity is complete in both cases, there is no doubt that anything good which is emulated by others is surely better. The concern is only about pretension being unveiled. When the impurity of pretension takes place, emulation of others will not avail the doer, and he will perish by it; secrecy in such a case is better.

But one who manifests the deed must take two matters into consideration:

**First**, he must manifest it while knowing or thinking it will be emulated, such as a man doing something good for his family, or a mentor in his quarter, or a scholar in his country, regardless of the variation of individuals' stations. In other words, the emulation intention is sound in one who is apt to be emulated; otherwise, there is no benefit in manifesting it, and he will miss out on the benefit of doing it secretly.

**Second**, one must monitor his heart; it may have hidden pretension, so it invites him to manifest in the

excuse of emulation. It, in reality, covets that undertaking the effort to win a station of emulation, and this is a hurdle that cannot be transcended except by the strong ones, the sincere. Others, the weaklings, must not deceive themselves, so they will perish and cause others to perish unknowingly.

The similitude of the weakling in this dilemma is one who does not know how to swim well. He looks at a group of drowning persons, so he feels pity for them and goes to them to cling to him so he may save them from drowning. They cling to him, whereupon this weakling perishes just as they perish. Thus do the feet of the servants of Allāh and of the scholars slip away. Some of them hold on to the strong in their manifestation, but their hearts are not strong enough for sincerity, so their rewards are cancelled by pretension.

Notice that this is shrouded with ambiguity. One who wants to know the treachery of his soul and whether his aim in manifesting the good deed is to propagate it and advocate it, or if he has already fallen into Satan's trap, he must subject himself to a test. The test is: He must ask himself if a man of truth, the one who works for Allāh Almighty, tells him to hide the deed so people may emulate another scholar or worshipper from among his peers, and he will have the same reward of doing the good deed publicly..., and if his heart inclines to be the one to be emulated, so he manifests the deed, let him know that the incentive of pretension is there rather than the desire for divine rewards. It is the desire for people's goodness because they aspired to achieve goodness through the action of some other worshipper who received his reward.

He obtained it despite his secrecy. So, what is wrong with his heart inclining towards manifesting it other than the eyes of people noticing it, making a pretense for their sake? Let the servant of Allāh beware of the soul's deception, for it often deceives, while Satan ever lies in ambush. Love for a public status subdues one's heart. Seldom are manifested deeds safe from perils; so, he must not substitute safety for anything else, the safety in hiding and in manifesting, perils that our likes cannot bear; therefore, we and all other weaklings ought to be cautious.

A scholar who was propagating the creed was seen in a vision and was asked what was done to him. He said, "When I arrived at the *barzakh* [perhaps equivalent in Catholic theology to the purgatory], I was called upon by my name and was asked what I had done in my lifetime. I said, 'Lord! I wrote many books to promote the faith.' I was asked, 'While propagating the creed, did you intend that the faith was to be promoted, or did you want your own self to be widely known?' I was too puzzled to answer." This is why the tradition states the following: "Be sincere in doing your good deed, for the critic is quite observing."

As regarding the second type, it is one talking about the deed and announcing it after having secretly done it. Like the first, this, too, is dangerous. It is even much more so: The tongue is easy to articulate and move about narrating the tale with ease, and it may increase, decrease or exaggerate. The *nafs* enjoys manifesting claims supportive of love for itself; so, one whose heart is strong, sincere, in whose eyes people look small, it is equal with him whether they speak well or ill of him. If mentioning it to those whom he hopes will emulate it, thus seeking goodness because of it..., it is permissible to talk about the

deed.

He will even be required to do so if his intention is pure and free of all perils because it is an invitation to others to do (similar) acts of righteousness, an invitation to do good which is good by itself, especially if one's nature is molded on loving to emulate others and being emulated, feeling the weight of its burdens. Talking plays a strong role in bearing an impact on people's hearts, on their emulating the speaker.

Perhaps a pretender manifesting an act of worship, when people do not know that it is pretension, has a great deal of good in it for people, yet it is evil against the pretender; so, how many sincere people have been the reason behind their sincerity is to emulate one who in the eyes of Allāh is a pretender! A narrated tradition states this: "Allāh strengthens this religion through the sinning man, and through people who do not ponder on consequences"; it refers to that. Talking about a good deed, if one is sincere without any pretension, is good, although there is something quite interesting which we noticed about great men and which we would like to state here:

The men of divinity, those who rid themselves of desires, used to discourage others from narrating visions while attributing them to their own selves. They used to say instead, "I know someone who does such-and-such" or "Such-and-such happened the following to him by way of self-disclosure," for example, because the objective is achieved through the action or disclosure itself, and it is not needed to get to know who did it except if knowing so also plays a role in impressing, in emulating. It is only then that they used to identify themselves.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/pretension-and-conceit-sayyid-ahmad-al-fahri/ares-where-showing-acts-worship-permissible>