12603 - Seeking knowledge in order to teach people and not for the purpose of showing off

the question

If a person learns one of the branches of religious knowledge in order to play his role in the village where he lives, and he memorizes Qur’aan in order to lead the young men in praying at night in Ramadaan, will that be a kind of minor shirk (al-shirk al-asghar)?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is known from the evidence of sharee’ah that seeking knowledge and seeking to understand the religion is one of the best acts of worship and obedience. The same is true of studying the Qur’aan and trying to recite it a lot and to memorize it or as much as one can. All of these are among the best acts of worship. If you do what you should of teaching the people of your village, guiding them, leading them – the young men and others – in prayer, all of these are good deeds which will be appreciated and for which you will be rewarded. This is not showing off and it is not shirk, if your aim is to seek the pleasure of Allaah and the Hereafter, and you are not doing it to show off to people and earn their praise, but to help them and increase their knowledge and understanding of their religion. That could be minor shirk only if you did it to show off to people or to earn their praise. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, “The thing that I fear most for you is minor shirk.” He was asked what that was, and he said, “Showing off.” “When a man stands up to pray and he makes his prayer beautiful because he thinks that the people are looking at him.” On the Day of Resurrection, Allaah will say to those who show off, “Go to those for whom you used to show off in the world, and see whether you find any reward with them.” Showing off means that you do something with the aim of people seeing you and praising you; reputation is a part of that. For example, if you read Qur’aan so that people will praise you and say, “He is a good reader” or “He reads well”; or you do a lot of dhikr so that they will praise you and say, “He does a

lot of dhikr”; or you enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil so that people will praise you. This is showing off, and this is minor shirk. It is essential to beware of that and to do what you do for the sake of Allaah alone, not for the sake of showing off to people and earning their praise. But you should learn in order to act upon that knowledge and to teach your brothers and lead them in prayer, and hope for the reward that is with Allaah. You should do that with the aim of helping them, not for the purposes of showing off or enhancing your reputation. If you read from the Mus-haf there is nothing wrong with that if you lead your brothers in prayer reading from the Mus-haf in Ramadaan. The freed slave of ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) used to lead her in prayer reading from the Mus-haf. So it is OK to read from the Mus-haf when praying at night in Ramadaan if you have not memorized it, but if one has learned it by heart and can recite it from memory, that is better, but there is nothing wrong with reading from the Mus-haf if necessary.