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CHAPTER 12
ON ARROGANCE AND HUMILITY

Arrogance is a state in which we are convinced that we have the right to be above others. Justifiable self-regard, without comparing ourselves to others and feeling superior, is not the same thing. That is, at worst, vanity. Arrogance is unlawful in Islam. It is considered to be a disgraceful state.

The opposite of arrogance is to look at ourselves with the intention of truly knowing ourselves. Self-examination is a virtue, and one that is expected of a Muslim. Whether our self-regard is justifiable or not, whether truly in our hearts we believe that we are superior to others or not, if our conceit is exteriorized, manifested, communicated to others by mind or deed, it is a sin. The worst version of this sin occurs when no justification exists for the feeling of superiority we cherish. Allah Most High, one of whose attributes is the Proud One, is the only one with a right to that name.

The only occasion when the attitude of pride is not a sin is when it is manifested against an aggressive, arrogant person or against a tyrannical enemy, when we are waging battle in defense of our religion or country. In fact, to show pride toward an arrogant person is considered to be a good deed.

Jabir related that the Prophet said:

> The only state of pride Allah permits is the one shown in battle or while performing a generous act. (Abu Dawud)

The meaning of pride while helping a person in need is belittling our own generosity while pretending that we could have done much better.

Modesty, to appear less than we are, is commendable. Yet, the exaggeration of humbleness to the extent of appearing abject is a sin. Mu`adh ibn Jabal reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> Showing excess attachment and appearing abject, reducing oneself to the state of a beggar, does not suit the character of a believer. The only exception is the humbleness of a student toward a teacher, seeking to receive knowledge. (Ibn Adiy)

Only knowledge is worth begging for, and worth humbling ourselves to receive.

To illustrate the right and wrong way to manifest humility, imagine a totally coarse, ignorant person entering into the company of the wise. If these wise people show excessive respect to the newcomer, stand up to

greet him, offer him the best place, see him to the door when he is leaving, that is definitely wrong. On the other hand, if they show him kindness so as not to make him feel unwelcome, listen to and answer his questions at the level of his understanding (even if the questions are beneath them), and especially never think of themselves as better than he, doing all they can to make him feel he is their equal, then indeed their behavior is proper.

Another example of unlawful humility in Islam is to beg while we have shelter and food, even if only enough for one day. To give someone a small gift with the hope of receiving a greater benefit is equivalent to begging.

Allah Most High says:

> Do no favor seeking gain. (*Mudaththir*, 6).

To go to feasts without being invited is humiliating and a kind of begging. `Abdullah ibn `Umar reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> If a person refuses an invitation, he is revolting against Allah and His Messenger. If someone goes to a feast or a wedding without being invited, he has entered that house as a thief and left as a plunderer. (Abu Dawud)

To seek out, visit, and frequent dignitaries, people in power, high government officials, judges, generals, or influential rich people, with the hope of obtaining benefit from these relationships, is forbidden humility according to our religion, unless these people possess the means of our receiving what is rightfully ours and we are in real need of it. When in the company of such people, to remain standing, to bow, to show excessive respect in action and speech, are demeaning, and the wrong kind of humility as well.

To work hard—even far beneath our qualifications—to support our families, to help with the menial chores of our houses, shopping, cooking, cleaning are commendable signs of true humility. To be ordinary in appearance, to wear inexpensive and worn clothes, to befriend the poor and disadvantaged, to eat simple food and not throw away leftovers, not to seek reputation-building, self-glorifying jobs, not to consider it beneath you to be a shepherd, a gardener, a porter, a carpenter, or a mason—these are signs of true humility. These kinds of manifestations of humility are worthy of great divine rewards, for they resemble the behavior of prophets and saints. But many people do not know it and think of a life like this as reprehensible. They are the arrogant ones who do not know themselves.

Arrogance becomes more dangerous when it is manifested and directed. Some people are arrogant toward human beings. They are not any better

than the accursed Devil who refused to obey Allah when He asked all the angels to prostrate to Adam (a.s.). The Devil thought that he was created of fire while Adam was created of earth, and that fire was superior to earth. He did not know himself and he did not know Adam. Therefore he was punished and rejected from Allah's mercy until the end of time.

Some are arrogant toward Allah, like the Pharaoh who said, "I am your Lord, the Supreme." Or like Nimrod, who said to the Prophet Abraham (a.s.), "Your God may be the Lord of the Heavens. I am the lord of this world," and dared to challenge Allah to fight him. Allah drowned the Pharaoh and his armies while they were chasing the Prophet Moses (a.s.) and the children of Israel. Nimrod was killed by a mosquito that devoured his brain.

Some are arrogant toward the Prophet of Allah, like Abu Jahl, who said, "Is this who God chose as His Messenger? Couldn't He have revealed the Qur'an to a celebrated man of Mecca or Medina?"

Allah seals the eyes and ears and hearts of the arrogant so that they cannot know the truth. He declares in the Holy Qur'an:

> I shall turn away from My revelations those who are unjustly proud in the Earth. Even if they see every sign, they will not believe in it. And if they see the right path to salvation, they will not take it. If they see the wrong path to error and sin, they will take it. This is because they reject Our messages and are heedless of them. (*A'raf,* 146)

Abu Hurayrah said that the Messenger of Allah *(s.a.w.s)* reported from Allah Himself:

> Grandeur is My shirt, majesty is My lower garment. Whoever compares himself to Me is arrogant. I throw him to the Fire and do not regret it. (Abu Dawud)

Ibn Mas`ud related:

> The Prophet said, "Whoever has an atom of pride in his heart will not enter Paradise."
>
> Then one of his Companions asked, "What do you say about someone who likes to dress in fine clothes?"
>
> He answered, "Allah is beautiful and likes that which is beautiful. Arrogance is to deny reality and to consider others beneath oneself." (Muslim and Tirmidhi)

Thawban reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> A believer who dies free of debt, treachery, and arrogance enters Paradise. (Tirmidhi)

Anas ibn Malik reported that the Prophet said:

> In Hell the proud will be locked in coffins of fire and kept there forever. (Bayhaqi)

`Abdullah ibn Salam was seen in the marketplace with a heavy load of wood on his back. Someone said to him, "What makes you do this? Allah has freed you from doing such chores."

Ibn Salam answered, "I wished to rid myself of all signs of pride with this, as I heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) say, 'The one who has pride in his heart, even as little as a mustard seed, will not enter Paradise.'" (Tabarani)

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> There are three kinds of people Allah Most High will not address nor will He forgive on the Last Day. They are adulterers, rulers who lie, and poor people who are arrogant. (Muslim)

During his caliphate, `Umar ibn al-Khattab (r.a.) was marching upon Damascus with his army. Abu `Ubaydah ibn Jarrah was with him. They came upon a little lake. Hadrat `Umar descended from his camel, took off his shoes, tied them together, and hung them on his shoulder. He took the halter of his camel and together they entered the water. Seeing this happening in front of the army, Abu `Ubaydah said, "O commander of the faithful, how can you be so humble in front of all your men?"

Hadrat `Umar answered, "Woe, Abu `Ubaydah, if anyone else other than yourself thinks this way! Thoughts like this will cause the downfall of the Muslims. Don't you see? We were indeed a very lowly people. Allah raised us to honor and greatness through Islam. If we forget who we are and wish other than Islam, which elevated us, the One who raised us surely will debase us."

Ibn Tirmidhi reported that the grandfather of `Amr ibn Shu`ayb heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) say:

> On the Day of Judgment, the haughty will be raised as small as ants but in their own countenance. They will be guided by huge hordes of horrors to a dungeon called Bulis. There they will be fed with poisonous human excretions like dirty blood and pus.

Muhammad ibn Zayyad reported that when Abu Hurayrah was appointed the governor of Medina, he used to walk into the marketplace with a load of wood on his back and shout, "Open the way, let the governor pass!" and others would cry, "Open the way, let the people see their leader pass!" (Muslim)

Imam Tirmidhi related that Jubayr complained that people thought he was proud. He said, "I ride a donkey, I wear the coarse wool clothes of the poor, I milk my goats myself. I heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) say that whoever acts thus is not proud."

Seven qualities are said to be causes of pride: education and knowledge; religious piety; the fame and nobility of one's family and ancestors; physical attractiveness or physical strength; wealth; achievement; and the number of one's admirers and followers. In reality, none of these qualities necessarily produces arrogance. On the contrary, they are positive values for which every person strives. The real cause of arrogance is stupidity, and the inability to comprehend what is offered as knowledge. Yet there is no other medicine but knowledge for curing this stupidity.

A superior education and acquired learning are the first and most dangerous cause of pride. This case is most difficult to cure because its cause is also its medicine. To acquire knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim. Therefore to refuse to learn so as not to be proud of one's knowledge is not a solution for this problem. The solution is in educating ourselves that the superiority of knowledge depends solely on the sincerity of the intention to act upon it. To learn how to apply our knowledge in everyday life and to teach it to others for Allah's sake alone, without any wish to receive compensation or recognition from people, is a whole spiritual and social education in itself. Anyone who has achieved this state will not feel superior to the lowest and most ignorant person in existence.

Ibn `Umar reported that he heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) say:

> Whoever seeks knowledge in order to have recourse to something other than Allah, or for the pleasure of anyone except his Lord, might as well prepare himself for punishment in Hell. (Tirmidhi)

Abu Hurayrah related that the Prophet said:

> Whoever studies his religion in order to secure his livelihood and to benefit materially, or in order to seek fame, is bound to distort religious knowledge. He will interpret it for his personal purposes, removing all that is holy in knowledge. Such a holder of knowledge will not have even a whiff of the perfumes of Paradise on the Day of Judgment. (Abu Dawud)

Ibn `Abbas reported that he heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) say:

> There are two kinds of men of knowledge among my people. One spends all that Allah has taught him freely, offering it to anyone who wants it without accepting anything in return. All the birds in the skies, all the fish in the seas, all the creatures on land pray to Allah for his forgiveness. The other man of knowledge who has received his knowledge from Allah

does not share it with any other creature. He keeps it to himself or sells it for the lowly benefits of this world. He thinks his price is high. He does not realize that he is exchanging the finest for the coarse. On the Day of Judgment, this sort of man will be made to wear a collar of fire attached to a chain. A demon of Hell will pull him around and show him to others, shouting, "This is the creature who was stingy with the greatest gift of Allah. Knowledge was given to him, and he sold the most valuable thing in existence for the lowest price: the comforts of temporal life." (Tabarani)

`Usamah Ibn Zayd reported that he heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) say:

On the Day of Judgment, a man of knowledge will be thrown into Hellfire. They will tie his intestines to a pole and he will turn round and round like a donkey working in a mill. Other inhabitants of Hell, curious about the punishment, will ask him what terrible sin he committed. He will answer, "I used to teach people to do good but I did not do it myself. I used to teach them not to do wrong, but I did it." (Bukhari, Muslim)

In another tradition reported by `Usamah, the Prophet said:

On the night of my ascension to the Heavens, I saw some people whose tongues were torn from their mouths with red-hot pincers. I asked the angel Gabriel who they were. He answered, "They are those of your people who taught others to do that which they did not do themselves." (Muslim)

Anas ibn Malik reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

The demons of Hell will begin by torturing the men of knowledge who have the whole Qur'an in their memory. When these complain, asking if they were worse than the people who denied Allah, that they should be punished before them, they will be asked, "Are the ones who know and the ones who do not know the same?" (Tabarani and Abu Nuaym)

Anas ibn Malik also reported:

The Prophet said that the holders of knowledge are the inheritors of the prophets. They should be fully trusted by the people as long as they do not become tools in the hands of worldly rulers and are not trapped by the false attractions of this life. But if they are submerged in the world and seek the company of rulers, they become traitors to the station bequeathed to them by the prophets. (Hakim)

Mu`adh ibn Jabal reported:

While we were circumambulating the Ka`bah, I asked the Messenger of Allah, "Who is the worst among men?"

The Prophet said, "O Lord, forgive me! O Mu`adh, why do you ask about bad things? Ask about that which is good. But the answer is that the worst among men are the men of knowledge who behave badly." (Bazzaz)

Abu Hurayrah reported that he heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) say:

The ones who suffer the most punishment in Hell are the learned whose teaching did not do anyone any good. (Tahrani, Bayhaqi)

Mansur ibn Za`dan reported that he was told:

The sinners in Hell will complain of the stench coming from some new arrivals to Hell, and they will tell them, "Woe to you! What terrible things you must have done that you add to our misery by the terrible stench you emanate!"

And they will say, "We were men of knowledge, but we did not improve ourselves with it." (Bayhaqi)

Abu Hurayrah and Abu Darda' reported that they heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) say:

A wise man is not wise until he acts upon what he knows. (Bayhaqi, Ibn Hibban)

Anas ibn Malik reported that the Prophet said:

There will come a time when many among the devout will be ignorant, and many among the people of knowledge will be sinners. (Hakim)

Abu Sa`id reported that the Prophet said:

Whoever hides from the people something he knows about Islam, the knowing of which would profit the Muslims, will find a bit in his mouth made out of fire on the Day of Judgment. (Ibn Maja)

`Umar ibn al-Khattab reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

As long as people voyage upon oceans and ride over land freely and safely by the permission of Allah, Islam will be victorious. Then will come a time when people will recite the Qur'an and say, "There is no one who under-

stands Allah's words better than we do; there is no one superior to us in knowledge of anything." Those are people from among my people, just like you. Those people! You will know those people. They are the fuel of Hell. (Bazzaz, Tabarani)

Ibn `Umar reported that he heard the Prophet say:

Whoever claims to be wise is surely ignorant. (Tabarani and Mujahid)

It is indeed rare to find a possessor of knowledge who is also a possessor of conscience, who guards himself against these evils. A wise man is he who sees his shortcomings and is not proud; for whom the more he knows, the more he realizes how little he knows.

Of course, to stop pride, one first has to admit that arrogance in any form whatsoever is a sin, and that only Allah the Proud One is worthy of that attribute.

It is said that only the ones who know can fear Allah. By the same token, only the ones who fear Allah can know. These are free of the sin of keeping their knowledge to themselves, selling it for personal benefit, being proud of it, or becoming guilty of any of the other forms of evil that superior knowledge may induce. These rare servants of Allah are the true inheritors of the wisdom of the prophets who were without exception fearful of their Lord and humble, in spite of being the best and most knowledgeable of all human beings.

That which befits the true servant of Allah is not to have (or at least not to express!) any feeling of superiority toward anyone.

Such a person, when he encounters an ignorant sinner, thinks, "He sins because he does not know, yet I sin in spite of my knowledge. Therefore, he is certainly better than I." When he encounters knowledgeable people, he considers them more devout than himself, for who may judge the quality and quantity of wisdom? When he meets an older person, he considers the elder more devout than himself, for he certainly has had more time to pray. When he sees a younger person, he reflects that he himself has had more time to sin than the youth. When he encounters someone of his own age and status, he considers that while he knows nothing of the life of the other, he knows very well how he has conducted his own life, and something known is more justifiably open to criticism than something unknown. Even when he meets someone who is without faith and openly denies God, he thinks: "How secure is my own faith? How do I know that I will end my days as a believer? And how do I know that this poor man will not be honored by Islam before he leaves this world?" Let him even look upon a dog or a pig, and he will lament that these creatures have not revolted against their Maker, so that there is no judgment nor punishment for them, yet he

himself, created as the best of creation, has revolted against his Lord and is deserving of punishment.

These are the good servants of Allah who see themselves clearly and are making their accounting before they are obliged to make it. Engaged in repentance, they have no occasion to criticize others or show pride.

One may object that Allah Most High has ordered us to oppose the faithless and the sinners, so how are we to see ourselves as beneath them? Indeed, we are urged to help such people to mend their ways; and if they cannot be helped, to fight them to prevent their harming others. However, we cannot do this for our own benefit, but only for Allah's sake. We cannot undertake that struggle while thinking that we are the saved and they are the damned. You should know that Allah is aware of the wrongdoings you are hiding from others while you are busy reprimanding them for sins that show. You must consider that in the end you may be worse than the ones you oppose, and fear for yourself, rather than fearing the effects of the acts of the people you blame.

When you are led into a situation in which you are obliged to reprimand a sinner, you should behave like a nurse charged by a great lord to educate his children. That nurse, when necessary, may reprimand and punish the children of the lord, but will never feel superior to them, for he knows that those children are dearer to their father than he is himself. Only Allah knows who is dearest to Him. The best way is to think that everyone else is better in the Lord's opinion than one is oneself.

The second cause of arrogance is a feeling of superiority in one's spiritual and religious state. Someone who has chosen the lifestyle of an ascetic, who has devoted his life to praying, fasting, and meditating, withdrawing from the world, runs the greatest danger of this sin. The real cause of it is very much the same as the cause of pride in one's knowledge. Just as in that case, the lack of knowledge and wisdom is responsible. A pious person should know that our spiritual state as Muslims does not depend on prayer, fasting, meditation, or seclusion from the world. We are given numerous actions in life that bring spiritual rewards, and warn off many others that we are forbidden to pursue. And in whatever we do, we are taught that our intentions, sincerity, and love and fear of Allah are of the greatest importance for our salvation.

Allah Most High indicates that salvation is only possible through the love and fear of Allah, and that the truth of our love and fear of Allah is known only to Him. He says:

> Do not feel superior and claim that you are pure. Allah is the one who truly knows those who forbid themselves from doing wrong for the love of Allah. (*Najm*, 32)

The third cause of sinful arrogance is to be proud of one's ancestors and their merits, nobility, and distinction. Is this reasonable, if those attributes are not also one's own? How can we hope that the virtues possessed by somebody else will benefit ourselves? A poet has written:

If you are proud of your forefathers:
You are indeed telling the truth.
Woe to them! How their souls must suffer
That they have fathered such a bad son!
What safety did Cain find in Adam's nobility?
Was Kanan saved from the Flood by being the son of Noah?

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Prophet said:

The one who does not act for himself cannot be saved by his parents. (Muslim)

The fourth reason that some people are arrogant is their physical beauty. This pride most often afflicts women. Why do they not know that exterior beauty is but temporal and passes very quickly? Allah has created only animals to be attracted to exterior beauty. Allah and the wise look at the beauty of the heart in human beings. The fact is that our beginning is a blood-clot in our mother's womb, and our end is a foul-smelling, decaying corpse thrown into a grave. How attractive can that body be? Its belly is filled with excrement, its bladder with urine. Mucus comes from its nose, spittle from its mouth, blood from its veins, pus from under its skin, its armpits stink. Thinking on all this and more will reduce vanity. In any case, eventually our tight skin will sag and our shiny hair turn into a donkey's tail, and make us feel humble.

The fifth reason for some to be proud is their strength. Physical power, like beauty, is short-lived. Even more temporal and fragile than good looks, strength melts away with a few days of fever or sickness. One need not wait for old age: an accident, a broken bone, takes it away for good. And when you think of it, elephants, bulls, even donkeys are more powerful than men. How can one be proud of a quality in which animals are superior to human beings?

The sixth cause of pride is wealth and fame, and the seventh is numerous followers, students, employees, and dependents. These two reasons are the most unseemly causes of arrogance because they depend on conditions entirely outside of ourselves. These conditions, though so difficult to obtain, can very easily be lost. The sickness of these causes of pride is common to all people, faithful and faithless, honest and dishonest alike. When we find ourselves in these conditions, we feel like kings. When we lose them, we feel ourselves the lowest of the low. How can someone be

proud of possessing a thing that pleases a thief when he succeeds in his misdeed?

There are other influences from outside ourselves that may induce arrogance. Hatred and vengeance, which are great sins in themselves, will give birth to yet another great evil: pride. When we are angry at someone above us, especially, our ego will immediately raise us to a level above the superior adversary. We imagine ourselves more righteous, more intelligent, more powerful, closer to Allah. Even if the adversary is right, he is wrong. If he is powerful, that is temporary, he is a soldier of Satan. If he is devout, his devotion is hypocritical. If our enemy wins, then vengeance sets in. The injustice has to be righted! The arrogance of the imagined victim is very long-lasting.

Then there is envy; again a great sin in itself. It forces us into denial of Allah's will, questioning His justice. Why should somebody who is inferior to us be blessed with more sustenance and a better life? Woe to the arrogant who think that they know the value of the envier and the envied, and what each deserves, better than God!

Hypocrisy, to think of ourselves and to behave as other than we truly are, is likewise tied to pride. An arrogant person is truly the worst of hypocrites, for he certainly thinks and behaves as if he is worth more than his actual value. But the person whose arrogance derives from prior hypocrisy has two faces. In public, he sells himself as better than the people who are better than he. But in the presence of a person with whom he is in competition, he pretends to be respectful and humble. Excessive attention to the judgments of others while expecting their good opinion reveals that even simple acts like dressing better in public, living above one's means, putting on airs in company, are signs of the arrogance of the hypocrite.

The only cure for arrogance induced by hatred, envy, or hypocrisy—all greater sins—is to remember in our combat against these that further evils will attach to us if we fail to stop them.

It is best to mention some of the common signs of arrogance so that we do not feel safe from the evil of pride. Suspect the presence of arrogance:

- If you need to be recognized by people and are pleased when they show you signs of respect, such as standing up when you enter a room, saluting you on the street, or paying you compliments. In fact, arrogance should be feared if you do not feel embarrassed and uncomfortable when these things happen.
- If you feel important and pleased when surrounded by admiring companions who insist on walking one step behind you. Abu `Umamah reported:

  The Messenger of Allah was walking from his house to the graveyard of

Jannat al-Baqi, and many of his blessed companions were following behind him. He turned and asked them to walk in front of him. When he was asked the reason, he said, "When I heard the shuffling of feet behind me, I feared that pride might enter my heart." (Imam Ahmad, Ibn Maja)

- If you refuse to visit someone, making the excuse that it would serve no purpose.
- If you refuse to sit next to someone whom you consider inferior.
- If you refuse to enter the company of the sick and the lowly.
- If you refuse to do any housework in your home.
- If you refuse to carry heavy loads in public.
- If you refuse to wear cheap or worn clothing.
  Abu `Umamah related that the Prophet said:

  To wear old and worn clothing is a sign of the faithful. (Abu Dawud)

- If, while enjoying the invitations of the rich and important, you refuse to accept the invitations of the poor.
- If you are embarrassed to shop for cheap things in inferior markets.
- If you put yourself forward, ahead of other people, on occasions of introduction to important personages.
- If you put yourself forward, in discussions and debates, against what happens to be right, and hope to be convincing nonetheless.

These are just a few samples of behaviors that, if engaged in privately, are signs of arrogance, and if manifested publicly, are signs of both arrogance and hypocrisy.

Love of oneself is a very maleficent character; especially when people are proud of their achievements; worse still if they are enamored of their imagined religious or spiritual state. Such may forget that the honor bestowed on them because of their achievements, as well as those achievements themselves, belong to Allah Most High alone. People forget this because they are unaware and heedless that every person is created by the Creator, and that each person's actions are his destiny decided by Allah. The realization that all is done by His will, and that everything belongs to Him, will cure us of this ill. Then we will be thankful for everything that happens to us or through us, and be obedient to the will of our Lord.

To save ourselves from egoism, it should suffice to see its results in ourselves and others. The egoist thinks of his state as a blessing. He thinks that he knows everything and that he controls his life, and even the lives of others. He is heedless of the suffering he causes for himself and others. He thinks that he is physically, socially, and spiritually on the top of the world. Yet he has no thought for an occasion when he might fall from the

heights to which he has climbed, nor does he recognize any other power other than the one he imagines he possesses. He takes himself as his own God—and he will be devastated when Allah acts upon what He says:

> Woe to the one whose evil deed is made fair-seeming to him, so that he considers it good. (*Fatr*, 8)

Anas ibn Malik reported that the Prophet said:

> Three things are devastating: to believe in the good of avarice, to cater to one's lust, and to be an egoist. (Bayhaqi)

The same source reported that the Prophet said to his Companions:

> Even if you have never committed a sin, I would be afraid for you of the greatest sin: pride in one's spiritual state and self-regard.

To know some of the vast benefits of humbleness encourages us to fight the evil of arrogance. Humbleness is the profession of prophets and saints, of the truly wise and pious servants of Allah. It is this character praised by Allah that brings one to the highest spiritual levels.

To be humble, we have to know ourselves: where we come from, where we are going in this life. We must be aware of the facts and exclude the inventions of our ego and imagination. The ego is not only resistant to accepting religious norms but also defies reason and awareness of facts. It prefers imagination and exaggeration. It loves heights and loves itself. It likes to see itself up above everything and everybody. It is blind and deaf to reality. To know ourselves, we have to stop doting on ourselves and become objective. We must look at ourselves with neutral eyes, the eyes of the norms of revealed law. Surely every believer will be able to locate generosity between avarice and wastefulness; honest work between ambition and laziness; courage between brazenness and cowardice; hope between doubt and rigidity. The median is the center of perfect balance. That is what one has to discover in oneself. But because our ego is apt to push us upwards, it is best to consider ourselves as lesser than we have found ourselves to be. That is what humbleness is.

The safest state of being is to consider oneself lower than everybody else. That was the way of the generation of Muslims after the Prophet.

Imam Shibli said:

> Abasing myself stopped the aggression of my enemies.

Abu Sulayman al-Darani (q.s.) said:

If the whole world tried, they could not have reduced my self-regard to a lower level.

Can you sincerely bring yourself to admit that you are even worse than the accursed Devil? If not, then think! The Devil and those like him are where they are because Allah chased them out of His mercy, while He has blessed us with faith, the ability to obey, and His Beloved as our guide. These and all the good we possess are His gifts. If we do right, it is from Him, not any doing of ourselves. When we behave like Satan, it is our own doing and we have no excuse for having tyrannized ourselves. Yet we do not blame ourselves: either we ignore or we forget our faults. We do not even know our faults, yet we count our every little deed as if it were a great achievement. The unknown is always infinitely greater than the known. May Allah protect us, but our unknown wrongs, unadmitted by us, may by their weight pull us to the depths. There we may end up sharing the punishment of those who were chased from the mercy of Allah. When one reasons this way, indeed one should feel humble.

Ibn `Abbas reported that the Prophet said:

Surely Allah Most High ordered us to be humble. I tell you that none among you shall belittle any other, nor are you permitted to insult them. (Abu Dawud)

Rakb al-Misri reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

I bring good tidings to the one who is humble while mindful of the honor of being created a human being; also to the one who has given up his self-regard, yet does not beg for favors; to the generous one who spends freely for Allah's sake from what he possesses; to the one who seeks the company of the wise and knowledgeable; to the one who is compassionate to those in need. I bring good tidings to the one who gains his livelihood lawfully with his own hands; to the one who cleanses his heart; to the one whose inner beauty shines in his face; to the one who holds back his anger; to the one who does not say what is not to be said; and to the knower who acts upon his knowledge. (Tabarani)

Abu Sa`id reported that the Prophet said:

Whoever humbles himself for Allah's sake, Allah raises to the highest levels. Whoever is arrogant against Allah, Allah reduces to the lowest of the low. (Ibn Hibban)

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> When someone is humble toward fellow Muslims, Allah raises that person's state. When someone tries to belittle fellow Muslims and claims to be better than they, Allah lowers that person far below the others. (Tabarani)

Sometimes some people will abase themselves in front of the powerful out of fear, or in front of the rich because they want to get something from them, or in front of people in general in order to receive their sympathy or pity, or simply to be accepted by them. All these and similar shows of hypocritical humbleness are fraudulent and wrong.

"On Arrogance and Humility"

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