

39) Self-Conceit

One of the factors, which must be avoided, is self-conceit. It dismembers the society and leads to the effacement of religious acts. Self-conceit means that one is pleased with himself and considers himself superior to others whether he has an accomplishment or not. In other words, he is proud of himself.

Some people have said that self-conceit means to magnify a feature while forgetting its source.

Sheikh Baha'iy has been reported as saying: "Beyond doubt when a someone does a praiseworthy act, like keeping vigil, it is a source of delight to him. If he considers it as a blessing from God and he fears God at the same time, such condition is not self-conceit. But if he considers it as from him himself and from God and sees it as great, it is as if he lays God under an obligation for having performed prayer or having fasted, and in this case, it is considered as self-conceit.

It is a feature blamed by the Holy Quran and traditions. God says: ***"...therefore, do not attribute purity to your yourselves; He knows him best who guards (against evil)."***^{[1](#)}

Elsewhere He says: ***"What! Is he whose evil deed is made fair to him that he considers it good?"***^{[2](#)}

On the same topics, God says: ***"Shall We inform you of the greatest losers in (their) deeds? (These are) they whose labor is lost in this world's life and they think that they do good work."***^{[3](#)}

Allamah Majlisi says that most ignorant people have this feature, for they do what is, due to reason and religion, forbidden, but they consider them as good features and take pride in them.

About this feature, God says: ***"They make it a favor unto you that they have become Muslims. Say: Deem not your becoming Muslims a favor unto me; but Allah does confer a favor on you, inasmuch as He has led you to the Faith, if ye are truthful."***^{[4](#)}

Ali ibn Sawayd narrated: "I asked Imam Ali (AS) about self-conceit that omits the good deeds, and the Imam (AS) said: 'Self-conceit has certain stages. One stage is that when one does something wrong, but it seems fair to him and he has the impression that he has done a good deed. The next stage is that when one believes in God, but makes favor unto God whereas it is God Who makes favor unto him.'^{[5](#)}

Abdurrahman ibn al-Hajjaj narrated: "I said to Imam Sadiq (AS): 'A man may do something and he is fearful and worried. Then he does something a little good, and he may feel a little self-conceit.' The Imam (AS) said: 'When he is fearful, he is in a better state than when he is self-conceited.'" [6](#)

Imam Ali (AS) said: "A sin, which makes you regretful, is better than a good deed, which makes you self-conceited." [7](#)

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "One day, Prophet Moses (AS) was sitting in a place when Satan entered with a colorful shirt on. When he approached Prophet Moses, he took off the shirt, stood opposite to, and greeted him. Prophet Moses (AS) said: 'Who are you?' He said: 'I am Iblis.' Prophet Moses said: 'You are Iblis?! May God keep you away from us!' He said: 'I have come here to greet you, for you have a high position with God.' Prophet Moses said: 'What is this shirt?' Iblis said: 'I attract the hearts of the children of Adam with it.' Prophet Moses asked: 'What is the sin that, which if is committed by the children of Adam, makes you be dominant on them?' Iblis said: 'Whenever one is self-conceited, his deed seems great and his sin seems little to him.'" [8](#)

God said to Prophet David (AS): "O David, Give good tidings to the sinners and warn the veracious!" Prophet David said: "How can I give good tidings to the sinners and warn the veracious?" God said: "O David! Tell the sinners that I accept repentance, and warn the veracious not to be self-conceited, for there is no servant, who is called for reckoning and is not perished." [9](#)

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "There are three things that cause destruction; obeyed stinginess, followed desires, and self-conceit." [10](#)

It has been narrated: "One day, Prophet Jesus (AS) was making a journey and a short man was accompanying him. They went on their journey until they reached the sea. Prophet Jesus (AS) said: 'In the name of Allah', and walked on the water. Following Jesus, the man too said 'in the name of Allah', and began walking on the water. Self-conceit afflicted the man. He said to himself: 'This is Jesus, the spirit of Allah walking on the water. I am walking on the water too. What is his superiority over me then?' As soon as he said this, he sank in the water. He was about to drown when Jesus (AS) saved him, saying: 'O short one! What did you say?' He said: 'So-and-so thought came to my mind.' Jesus (AS) said: 'You exceeded the limits, hence God became angry with you.'" [11](#)

We must take the devotion and piety of the prophets and the infallible Imams as a model. When Imam Baqir (AS) sees Imam Sajjad with his devotion, Sahifah (supplications), prayer, recitation of the Quran, prolonged prostrations, weeping (out of the fear of Allah), he cannot help weeping. The father calls him, saying: 'Bring me some of the papers containing the supplications of Ameerul Mo'minin Ali ibn Abi Talib.' When they are brought, he looks at, puts them on the floor, and says: 'How can your father's worship be compared to Ali's worship?' In another tradition, it is narrated that 'Who has the power to practise Ali's worship?'

In the Sabah (morning) Supplication, Imam Sajjad (AS) says: "O Lord! My heart is veiled to see You and

my self is sick and defective! Passions have overcome me! My devotion is little! My sins are abundant, and my tongue confesses my sins.”

Addressing God in his Abu Hamzah Supplication, Imam Sajjad (a.s.) says: “Your good comes down to us and our evils go up to You! But this does not prevent You from showering us with Your blessings and being Kind to us with Your inward and outward blessings. Help me to weep over myself, for I have wasted my life with false desires.”

In the Sha'baniyyah Supplication, the Imams said: “O Lord! If my errors have made me abased before You, forgive me for the sake of my confidence in You. O Lord! If my sins have kept me away from Your grace, being certain about Your generosity has awakened me.”

Jesus (AS) said: “What a many lantern which is extinguished by wind and what a many devoted person who has become corrupt by self-conceit!” [12](#)

It has been narrated: “A pious man from among the Israelites said to God Almighty: ‘O Lord! how is my state with You? If it is good, I will add to my good deeds, and if it is bad, I can reproach myself before death.’ Someone came to him and said: ‘There is nothing good for you with God.’ He said: ‘O Lord! Where have all my good deeds gone?’ God said: ‘Whenever you did something good and you informed the people of it, nothing remained for you (from that good deed) except that which you yourself were pleased with.’” [13](#)

It is narrated: “A scholar went to a pious man, saying: ‘How is your prayer?’ The pious man said: ‘One like you asks about my prayer while I have worshipped God for so many years!’ Then, the scholar asked: ‘How is your weeping?’ The pious man said: ‘I weep in a way that my tears run on my cheeks.’ Realizing that self-conceit was about to lead him to perdition, the scholar said: ‘Surely your laughing when you fear Allah is better than your weeping when you offer your worship as a favor from you on God, for the prayer of one who lays God under an obligation shall never go up.’” [14](#)

Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq (AS) have been reported as saying: “Once, two men entered a mosque. One of them was pious and the other was a wrongdoer. They came out of the mosque. The wrongdoer became a veracious man and the pious became a wrongdoer. This is because the pious man entered the mosque while being proud of his devotion, but the wrongdoer was ashamed and asked forgiveness for his sins.” [15](#)

How can we dare then to be proud of our prayer and good deeds before God? Can we really lay God under an obligation? What a shame, what ignorance, what self-centeredness and what folly?!

Imam Sadiq (AS) has been reported by Abu ar-Rabee' as saying: “Whoever is self-conceited is perished, and whoever is proud of his own opinion shall be perished.”

Then the Imam (AS) narrated that Jesus (AS) said: “I have cured many diseases with the permission of

God. I have healed born-blind people and the lepers. I have raised a dead to life by the permission of God, but I could not improve folly.” Jesus (AS) was asked: “O Spirit of Allah, who is fool?” Jesus (AS) said: “One who is self-conceited, one who sees that all favors should be for him not from him towards others, and one who always considers the right for himself and not from towards others. This is a fool for whose disease there is no cure!”

Allamah Majlisi says: “The pests of self-conceit are too numerous to be counted. Hence, more Taqwa is needed to be observed to keep away from it. The word ‘beware’ or ‘avoid’ is used against self-conceit. Imam Ali (AS) in a letter to Malik al-Ashtar writes: ‘Beware of self-admiration, trusting in what pleases you of yourself, and approving to be praised... because this is one of the most important opportunities for Satan to obliterate the good deeds of the virtuous.’”[16](#)

Since self-conceit is a vice and the source of other vices, we will briefly discuss the factors behind it and the way to cure it.

Allamah Naraghi says: “The factors behind self-conceit are: Knowledge, mysticism, devotion, piety, courage, generosity and other good features which attract others. When one sees all these qualities in himself and realizes that other people lack them, automatically he feels self-conceited. He considers himself as worthy and others as unworthy. Now, if such a person analyzes his self-conceit, it will become clear to him that his deed is not much satisfactory.

As for knowledge, a self-conceited person should know what the worth of knowledge is. If knowledge is not accompanied with forbearance and action, then, a scholar becomes lower than an ignorant person. In this connection, the Holy Quran has likened the Jewish scholars to asses. In case of Bal’am Ba’oorah, he has been likened to a dog when his knowledge drove him to self-conceit. A self-conceited person should foresee his state on the Day of Judgment. He should realize that if his knowledge is not accompanied with deed, he will be thrown into Fire and his stink shall harm all the dwellers of hell. He will be the most regretful one on that day.

Imam Sadiq (AS) has been reported as saying: “Seventy sins of an ignorant man will be forgiven against one sin of a learned man.”[17](#)

As for devotion and prayer, a self-conceited person should know what devotion is. Is devotion anything other than feeling humble, resisting one’s passions, seeking nearness to God and feeling low and ashamed before the One God following the models of the worships of the prophets and the Imams? If it is so, what is self-conceit for then? Did Satan not worship God more than we do? Can we catch up with him in worshipping God?

In the words of Imam Ali (AS), Satan worshipped God for six thousand years. It is not known whether this number belongs to the years of this world or it belongs to the years of the hereafter, each day of which is equal to fifty thousand years. But what was the end?

As for piety, a self-conceited person should know what the worth of such a virtue is. He should take into consideration the lineage, beauty, wealth, power, strength, wits and cleverness and see what their worth is. If he manages to gain the points, it will be good for him, and if he fails, he should know that having piety without its positive results is not only useless, but also harmful.

- [1.](#) Qur'an, 53:32.
- [2.](#) Qur'an, 35:8.
- [3.](#) Qur'an, 18:103–104.
- [4.](#) Qur'an, 79:17.
- [5.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 313.
- [6.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 69, p. 312.
- [7.](#) Ibid., p. 316.
- [8.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 314.
- [9.](#) Ibid.
- [10.](#) Khisal, vol. 1, p. 42.
- [11.](#) Mi'raj al-Sa'adah, p. 207.
- [12.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 313.
- [13.](#) Ibid.
- [14.](#) Ibid.
- [15.](#) Ibid., p. 314.
- [16.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 2, p. 1021.
- [17.](#) Mi'raj al-Sa'adah, p. 213.

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