

[Home](#) > [Islamic Ethics](#) > [Lecture 13: The Cure of Arrogance, According To Imām 'Alī \(A\)](#) > Practice Not Giving Orders

Lecture 13: The Cure of Arrogance, According To Imām 'Alī (A)

First one must understand what arrogance is and where it comes from, then he will realize how great a sin it is.

Arrogance is a state of feeling important, feeling that one has a special place. Reality is taken from him and he only uses his imagination. Everyone, in reality, is nothing. Every body is from dirt and will return to dirt. One's self is also in real need, his life, health and property are not in his hands.

The Commander of the faithful (a) says in one of his speeches found in *Nahj al-Balaghah*: “O' creatures of Allah! Allah created you without you having a choice and takes care of you for as long as you are alive.”^{[1](#)}

Man is naturally needy, low and in reality nothing. Imām 'Alī (a) said in another tradition: “I'm surprised about the person who is arrogant. At the beginning he was unclean semen and at the end he will be a decomposed body and between these two he is good for nothing.”^{[2](#)} Right now, under our skin, is *najis* blood and it is known what is in our stomachs and intestines.

One Becomes The Measure Of Reality When Arrogance Grows In One's Spirit

Arrogance is the reason behind many of the sins that man commits. One will not accept reality if arrogance is left to grow. One will stand against the truth; one will even think that he himself is the truth. He will think that his own opinions and customs are correct; he will not be a servant of Allah anymore. He will not serve Allah's friends (*awliya Allah*). They will be like those who were arrogant and stood up against the Commander of the faithful (a), they either did not pay allegiance to him or they disobeyed him after they paid allegiance.

What creates arrogance and what strengthens it?

Arrogance Because Of Property Is The Result Of Being Ignorant About Reality

The first thing that creates arrogance is property. The natural result of an increase in wealth is an ignorant form of arrogance. I said that arrogance stems from ignorance, because a rational person would understand that wealth does not add anything to his existence. There is no difference between him and a poor person, even if he has millions of dollars. But, when his wealth is increases he sees himself better than poor people.

Have you heard the tradition where the Messenger of Allah (S) was sitting with a rich person and a poor person entered and sat next to his rich brother in Islam? When he sat down the rich person tucked his clothing in and the Messenger of Allah (S) protested and asked him why he did that.

He immediately became regretful and said that there is something in me that forces me to do these bad actions (arrogance was in him). He said that he is regretful for his actions and to make it up he gave half of his belongings to his poor brother in Islam.

The Messenger of Allah (S) asked the poor person if he accepted that and he said: “No, because I am afraid that if I take it I will do the same thing to another poor person.”

Being Arrogant Because Of Knowledge Is Dangerous

Knowledge that one obtains from learning in a university, for example, is worse than property when one thinks that he is important because of his knowledge. He looks down on others. It is even worse if he thinks this way about religious knowledge and considers himself to be as the tradition says: “The scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets.”³ It is dangerous when he thinks that others must obey him due to his knowledge.

This danger is more evident for religious students than others because in others arrogance shows itself in monetary situations. But, with religious students, arrogance shows itself in position; his *nafs* wants to be in a higher position. He says: “I am more knowledgeable than him, I have studied more than he has.” In reality he is worse than the humble illiterate person. Position is in relation to faith and actions. The knowledge that is important is the knowledge of Allah and the last day; it is a light found in one's heart that humbles him.

I Am The Lowest Of The Lowest

One, no matter how much knowledge he has, is like a drop of water in respect to the ocean with regard to the Imām (a). He will admit this if he is a rational being. Look at what the Imām, who is a source of

knowledge, who is the holder of all fields of knowledge, does.

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (a) said in *Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah*: "I am the least of the least and the lowest of the lowest. I am even smaller than an atom." The infallible Imam said that he was smaller than the smallest thing in the eyes of Allah. Now, should a person who considers himself to be a scholar arrogantly say that he is better than so and so? Allah's scale is piety. A religious student must not forget that he is needy and incapable. He must not consider himself better than others. He should not consider himself to be part of a special segment of society and the rest of the people to be of the laity.

I Feel Lower Than You

One would realize the scale is something other than knowledge if he has become a scholar. For this reason he should think that maybe that person who religiously follows me (*taqlid*) will go to heaven and maybe I will go to Hell. His humility grows and he sees himself lower than others.

The third reason for someone to become arrogant is because of popularity or social status. Sometimes this even comes from family relations, for example one who is from a certain tribe or a certain country looks down at others and even refrains from marrying people from other segments of society.

Sometimes this arrogance comes from being a *sayyid*. A *sayyid* is someone who is from the Messenger of Allah's (S) lineage. How did the Messenger of Allah (S) act? He would sit on the floor and always be the first to greet someone, even a child. But, such and such a *sayyid* expects others to greet him, only because he is a *sayyid*.

An Undeserving Scholar's Fanaticism

Shaykh wrote a tradition from Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a) in *Risalah*, in the section of the single transmission. The Imam described the bad scholar whose harm for the Muslim nation is great. He (a) said: "One of the signs of a bad scholar is fanaticism. The more people who follow him the greater he feels, even if they are corrupt. But, he does not pay attention to someone who does not follow him, even if he is a good person."

Anybody from any social class who obtains a social position is afflicted with this sickness. He must do something to save himself. A rational person would try to escape from having power; he would not accept it unless he is forced to.

Wanting To Serve People And Seeking Power Are Two Different Things

It should not be misunderstood, a leader is necessary in Islam. We need judges and mayors. What is meant is that one should not want position, but if it happens he should serve the people. He should not

want to be the mayor; he should want to serve the city and the Muslims. The danger is when one wants to be in power.

The Cure Of Arrogance

The cure of arrogance is being humble. For example, Prophet Dāwūd became a political leader. He was both a Prophet and a political leader. The following has been taken from the book *Man Lā yahdaruhu al-faqīh*: a voice came from the sky: “Dāwūd, you are a good servant, but you make a living from the public treasury.” Dāwūd cried to Allah for forty nights until Allah taught him how to make armor. Then, Dāwūd would make and sell armor for a living. It has been related that he sold every piece of armor for 300 Dirhams. He would give 100 Dirhams in charity, 100 Dirhams to the public treasury and would spend the rest of it on himself.

Likewise, his son Sulaymān, who had power over jinn, men, birds and other animals, would make a living from making and selling baskets.

It is understood from traditions like these that a person who has obtained power can fight against arrogance if he makes his living like other people; if he is humble. I will not say; “I’m the president!” or “I’m the one behind the desk!” or “Others must stand when I walk in the room!”

In a tradition, Imām Sādiq (a) ordered one of his highest companions, Muhammad bin Muslim to take some dates next to the Kāfa Mosque and sell them. Even though Muhammad was part of the upper class in society he, with all of his heart, accepted the order. One must fight against arrogance even if it is by selling dates.

Practice Not Giving Orders

Another thing one can do is not give orders because when one gives an order it means that he thinks he is bigger than others.

Some trustworthy people relate that the late Mārzī Muhammad Taqī Shērāzī would even refrain from giving orders in his house. He would not order his wife to bring dinner or clear dishes. He would go without dinner if his family forgot to give it to him. Of course, I am not saying that it is forbidden. It is not forbidden to give orders, but one must practice fighting against his *nafs* if he wants to be a man.

[1.](#) Imām ‘Alī, Nahj al-Balāghah Fayd al-Islām, page 183, speech 82

[2.](#) Shaykh ‘Alī Namāzī, Mustadrak Safinat al-Bihar, volume 2, page 360

[3.](#) Shaykh ‘Alī Namāzī, Mustadrak Safinat al-Bihar, volume 2, page 219

<https://www.al-islam.org/islamic-ethics-sayyid-abdul-husayn-dastghaib-shirazi/lecture-13-cure-arrogance-according-im%C4%81m-%E2%80%99Bal%C4%AB#comment-0>