

Levels of Conceit

A scholar of the hereafter has divided conceit into two levels. The conclusion of what he says, with some explanation from our part, is this: Conceit exists in man for a merit the owner of which sees it as a mark of perfection, there is no doubt about it, and everyone considers himself, in his innermost, as being complete, whether in his knowledge, or wealth, or all other forms of perfection. He, hence, goes through conditions, including fear of losing these perfections, fear of being robbed of that perfection as a whole or in part, or a shortcoming happens to him which spoils his purity. This condition is not described as making anyone wonder.

Also among them is that he does not fear its disappearance, but he feels elated about this perfection, so much so that he sees it as a blessing from Allāh Almighty; he renders it to the Almighty, not to himself; such elation and pleasure about perfection is not conceit, either.

But man has a third status which is labeled as conceit. He is not concerned about the disappearance of perfection but feels elated about its existence, and he feels glad about it. At the same time, his heart becomes attached to it, and he is happy because it is perfection and eminence, not due to its attribution to the Truthful One, the Almighty, not one of His boons, and he has neither independence nor a principle for this perfection.

If he believes in his heart that this perfection is a blessing from Allāh, that the Almighty can take it away from him whenever He wishes, such a feeling leaves no room for conceit to find its way to his heart. If we suppose there is conceit in him, such a belief, the remembrance that Allāh, the most Praised One, can take it away from him whenever He wills, removes conceit from his heart.

Based on all of this, conceit is that one looks with magnifying glasses at a blessing and perfection for his own self, and his heart becomes attached to it, forgetting to attribute it to the True Giver of Boons. Such a condition is the first level of conceit. If he rises from this condition and sees it in his heart as though Allāh Almighty owes him a favor, that he has a status and nearness to Him, he expects Allāh Almighty to grant him eminence in the life of this world as a reward for his [righteous] deed. And if something wrong happens to him, he goes further in his attitude to the extent that if this wrong happens to a debauchee, it would not have been far-fetched in his view in this goal; this status is called flirtation and coquetry.

For example, it may coincide that he gives someone something. He magnifies this giving in his view and considers himself as having done that someone a favor. This person admires his giving. If he employs the same person to whom he gave something, and if he rests his hopes on getting something out of him, thinking it far-fetched that this person would disagree with him, this condition is called flirtation and coquetry, and it is a higher level than conceit. In every case of flirtation, conceit exists, and not the contrary.

Conceit can exist through the sentiment of flirtation because the balance and the criterion in conceit is over-estimating a deed and forgetting the blessing without expecting a reward. As regarding flirtation, it accompanies the expectation for the greatest reward. If one expects Allāh, Praise to Him, to definitely respond to his supplication, having no inner thoughts of being rejected, he will be surprised if his supplication is not honored. He does not ask himself why his supplication is not honored. Or he is not surprised when the supplication of a debauchee is not honored, but he is surprised when his own supplication is not honored! This poor person, in addition to his conceit, is flirting with Allāh Almighty, too.¹

Be informed that conceit, in each of the previous levels, has [sub] levels some of which are obvious: One goes in its direction without being aware of it, without noticing. And some of them are minute, quite thin to the extent that unless one fully examines, he will not know accurately nor realize properly. Also, some of its levels are more intense and causing more perdition than others.

¹. There is a reference to this in the "Opening Supplication" (du'a al-iftitāh). It states the following: "... so I became supplicating to You feeling secure, asking You, feeling close to You, neither afraid nor being apprehensive, flirting with that for which I seek You; so, if Your response is slow, I remonstrate with You due to my own ignorance..., etc."

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