

Pretension

In the Name of Allāh, the most Gracious, the most Merciful

Praise to Allāh, Lord of the Worlds, greetings unto Muhammad and his Progeny and the sincere servants of Allāh.

Pretension According To The Qur'ān:

- 1. *So, woe unto the worshippers, who are neglectful of their prayers, those who (want only) to be seen (by men), but they refuse (to supply even) neighborly needs. (Qur'ān, 107:4-7)***
- 2. *And they have been commanded no more than this: To worship Allāh, offering Him sincere devotion, being true (in faith). (Qur'ān, 98:5)***
- 3. *Is it not to Allāh that sincere devotion is due? (Qur'ān, 39:3)***
- 4. *Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him do righteous deeds, and in the worship of his Lord, admit no one as (His) partner. (Qur'ān, 18:110)***

Pretension in traditions:

1. In his book *Al-Kāfi*, according to *isnād* to Yazīd ibn Khalafah, the author cites the narrator saying that Abū Abdullāh, peace be with him, said to him, "Every form of pretension is *shirk*. One who works for the sake of pleasing people is to be rewarded by them, and one who works for Allāh will be rewarded by Allāh."

2. In his book *Al-ʿImāli*, al-Sadīq says that the Messenger of Allāh (ص) was once asked, "What will bring us salvation in the life to come?" He (ص) said, "Salvation then will be in not attempting to deceive Allāh so He lets you be deceived, for anyone who tries to deceive Allāh will himself be deceived. Conviction will be extracted out of him, and he actually deceives none but his own self."

He was asked, "How can anyone try to deceive Allāh?!" The Prophet (ص) said, "He acts upon what Allāh has enjoined, then by the same action he tries to impress others. So, fear Allāh and avoid pretension, for it is *shirk* against Allāh. A pretender will be called upon the Day of Judgment with four names: O *Kāfir* (apostate)! O *Fājir* (debauchee)! O *Ghādir* (deceiver)! O *Khāsir* (loser)! Your deeds are void, your reward is cancelled, and there is nothing good for you this Day; so, seek your rewards from those for whom you used to work!"

3. In *Wasʿil al-Shāh* by al-Hurr al-ʿEmili, quoting *Qurb al-Isnād*, through *isnād* traced to the Commander of the Faithful (ع), the Messenger of Allāh (ص) has said, "One who makes himself look good by doing what Allāh loves then in secrecy defies Allāh by doing what Allāh hates will find Allāh angry with him in the Hereafter, holding him in contempt."

This sacred tradition will later be explained, so wait. There are many such traditions, and what we have stated must suffice and serve the memory.

Meaning of "Pretension"

The word "riyā" (pretension) is derived from "ru'ya" (vision, eyesight), just as the word "sum'a" (reputation) is derived from "sam'" (hearing). In essence, the meaning of pretension is that one seeks, through the medium of his good deeds, distinction and prominence in the hearts of people, even if this can be achieved through good deeds. But the term, according to the Sharḥ, requires this intention to materialize in the rituals and in the deeds intended for seeking nearness to Allāh as a condition for their acceptance according to the Sharḥ.

Thereupon, the meaning of pretension is "doing what is supposed to be a deed for the sake of nearness to Allāh with the intention to seek a status among the people". The leading imām, al-Khomeini, may Allāh prolong his shade, has made a statement in this regard. Its gist is that pretension, according to him, is not exclusively relevant to an act of worship but is broader than that. He says, "Be informed that pretension is showing people some good deeds, or commendable attributes, or true beliefs in order to achieve a status in their hearts and fame among them that he is kind, sound of belief, trustworthy and pious without truly seeking to please the Almighty. This materializes in certain levels:

First Level:

It has two degrees: In the **first** degree, one shows off the true beliefs and divine branches of knowledge so he will be famous for being pious and will have a status in people's hearts such as he may say, "I see none effective in existence save Allāh," or he may say, "I rely on none save Allāh". Or he may identify himself as being associated with true beliefs by either affiliation or reference. This type of pretension is the most widely circulated. For example, when either reliance on Allāh or accepting His decree is discussed at a gathering, the pretender will then sigh or move his head to beckon that he is on the path of those who rely on or who accept the decree of Allāh.

In the **second** degree, he clears himself of or puts it above false beliefs, seeking distinction and prominence in the hearts whether explicitly or implicitly.

Second Level:

It, too, has two degrees: In the **first** degree, one demonstrates the commendable attributes and the virtuous faculties seeking distinction and prominence. In the **second** degree, he holds himself as being above contradictions, clearing himself of contemptible attributes and foul faculties for this same purpose.

Third Level:

It is the pretension known to exist among the *faqīhs*, may Allāh be pleased with them. It, too, has these two degrees: **one of them** is doing what is required by the Sharī`a or legislated adoration, or doing what is rationally commendable seeking showing them off to people and winning their hearts in a wider sense than doing so through what is meant by pretension when doing the same, or in the way he does it, or in meeting its condition or a portion thereof according to what they have stated in the books of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). The second is leaving a job for the same." This is what the imām, may Allāh prolong his shade, describes while classifying norms of pretension.

A scholar of the hereafter has mentioned another classification for pretension after having defined pretension, saying it is what the servants of Allāh fare with obedience to Him, dividing it into five types:

1. pretension about the faith with the use of the body

2. pretension about the faith through the norms of clothing, outfitting, form and attire
3. pretension in speech
4. pretension in action
5. pretension in companionship and in friendliness with the public

This division, though not logical, is backed by examples for each explaining the deceptions of the *nafs*. They benefit those who wish to purify their souls and reform them so they may be guided against the ways of the soul's deceptions. We, therefore, would like to mention some of them here with our own editing:

The first type, that is, the pretension about the faith with the use of bodily parts, means showing thinness, weakness and yellowish facial complexion so one is thus deceived about the extent of exertion, the deep concern about the creed and the overwhelming fear of the Hereafter. He wants to give the impression that he is eating very little, his face is yellow because of spending the night vigilant, greatly exerting himself and feeling depressed out of concern for the religion.

He also makes a pretense by leaving his hair untidy so he may give the impression that his mouth is deeply involved in religious uttering [rather than in eating and drinking]; he has no time to tidy his hair. These causes, no matter how they appear, give the people the impression about these matters, so the pretender's soul is at ease when he gives such an impression; so, his soul prompts him to demonstrate them so that it may be restful.

You may see this pretender lowering his voice when he speaks so that the listener may be duped into believing that lowering the voice is due to abundance of adoration, or his lips are withered because of continuous fast. It is for this reason that Christ, peace be with him, said, "When one of you fasts, let him oil his head, tidy his hair and use *kohl* (arras) for his eyes." The reason why he, peace be with him, said so was out of fear of Satan insinuating pretension.

As regarding pretension coming from clothing and appearance, it is when one does not tidy his hair, lowers his head when he walks more than what is required by modesty and dignity, when he is quiet in movement, keeping the mark of prostration on the forehead and perhaps wearing an outfit that is not clean so he may be counted among the sincere worshippers of Allah.

Clothing pretenders are various classes: Some of them seek a status among the people of righteousness and piety by showing off asceticism. One may wear a worn out garment so he may be regarded by them as an ascetic and lives in the society in this attribute. The mark of his pretension is that if he is asked to wear an average clean garment like that worn by the righteous predecessors, it will be very hard for him to do so, and it will be as if he is being led to his slaughter because he is afraid people will say that he is tired of being an ascetic and returned to his old self, desiring the life of this

world.

Another class seeks acceptance among the people of righteousness and the people of the world such as businessmen and the elite. These poor folks feel embarrassed and alarmed because if they wear luxurious clothes, the ascetics and the servants of Allāh will reject them. And if they wear old worn out clothes, they will perhaps fall in the eyes of the people of this world and in the eyes of the rich. They want to combine between the acceptance of the people of faith and that the people of this world; therefore, they choose clothes the weaving and the fabric of which are valuable, hence the value of their clothes is similar to that of a rich man's clothing, but its form and color give the impression that it is worn by the righteous.

With this trick they seek acceptance by both groups. The mark of pretension of this group is that if they are asked to wear old clothes that are in good shape, it will be very hard for them to do so out of their fear the righteous people will tell them that they desired the life of this world. And if they are asked to wear what is coarse or worn out, it will be a harsh undertaking due to their fear of losing face among the rich. Each of these classes sees its status represented in a particular way of dressing; it is hard for him to move to something less or something more or to anything else, even if it is permissible or preferred by the Sharī'a.

As for pretension in speech, it is when a pretender keeps repeating pieces of wisdom: He keeps reminding others in order to win people's hearts. He memorizes words of wisdom, traditions and biographies in order to use them in his debates to show the richness of his knowledge and to point out to his extreme care about the conditions of the pious ancestors. He chooses statements containing vocal letters, or at least verbal ones, so he may move his tongue in a gathering of the people. If the statement contains both types of letters, it will be preferred by him.

During a public meeting, he busies himself with repeating holy statements although if he sits alone for hours, his lips do not utter anything of the mention of Allāh. His denunciation of what is detestable is intense before the public; he expresses sorrow for people committing transgressions, and he is amazed at how they dare to disobey Allāh. Thus, people may get the impression that he does not commit a transgression, nor does he have the courage to undertake it. The branches of speech pretension exhaust a great deal to mention.

As regarding pretension in action, such as a praying person showing off how he prolongs his standing during the prayers reciting lengthy chapters, especially if he is an imām of a group, so that people may recognize his distinction and that he has memorized many chapters of the Holy Qur'ān, and they envy him for standing so long during his adoration. If he prays at home or outside it, where he is not seen by anyone, he will be satisfied with reciting the shortest chapters. His condition is the same during solemnity and submission as well as lengthy prostration during the prayers. When he is seen by the public, he does so more than during his solitude especially if he is the imām of a group.

He goes overboard in showing off his deep adoration, prolonging his prostration especially during the "sajdat al-shukr", thanksgiving prostration, after the prayer ritual. He may remain prostrating till all those praying behind him disperse. The same applies to the rest of his acts of adoration such as fast, charity and pilgrimage.

Even when he walks to take care of a need, he may hurry, but if one of the men of religion sees him, he immediately reverts to solemnity, to lowering his head for fear of being accused of haste and of being less solemn. When the man of religion is out of sight, the pretender resumes his pace. A pretender may pray by himself without full concentration, but if someone sees him, he goes back to his full concentration. When he is in a place of public worship, he states that full attention must be allotted to the Almighty. He wants people to hear him say so in order that he may be counted among the true servants of Allāh, the righteous ones.

Among them is one who is immersed in pretension: When he catches himself off-guard, he feels so shy that his gait, when alone, is similar to that when he is seen by people, fearing people may get to notice the variation in his gait, so he forces himself to walk properly, humbly, when alone so he may get used to it and it will be the same when he is alone and when in public, and he will not need to shift from one to the other when seen by people. He thus thinks that he gets rid of pretension, being unmindful of the fact that his pretension has intensified, his scheme has doubled, and his pretension has crept into his solitude as well. When he walks properly when alone, so he will do likewise before people, he does not do that out of fear of Allāh, nor feeling shy of Him.

Since the source of what is hidden about pretension can be explained through another example, let us do so to the believing brothers. A pretender may agree that his reason, the hidden messenger or the angel in charge of good deeds according to the traditions, inspires him that prayers, for example, which are performed in public are more profound and contain more remembrance of Allāh than in the prayer ritual performed at home distantly from the public eyes, and there is no doubt that such a prayer is null due to pretension creeping into it, it is then that Satan or the *nafs* may interfere in the subject and set up a hidden trap of which a praying person is rarely aware, which is: The *nafs* and Satan oblige the believer to pray in solitude, too, with full devotion and mentioning lengthy supplications so this will be regarded as the answer for reason or for the angel that "My prayer in public is the same as I perform it in solitude; so, what evidence do you have against me that my prayer is that of a pretender?"

Is not my prayer before people the same as it is in my home? Actually, the prayer which I perform in solitude may be more profound and containing more lengthy praises than it is outside the house and before the public eyes." But the poor man is heedless of Satan, and the *nafs* has not left a sound prayer for him, not even in solitude or in the depth of the night. In other words, among the signs of an action not being pretentious is that the action witnessed by people is similar to it in solitude, not the action in solitude being similar to that performed publicly; so, think about it.

As for pretension in socializing, it is when someone makes arrangements so that scholars may visit him,

and so that it will be said that so-and-so is visited by so-and-so, or that he is respected by scholars. It will be said that the theologians seek the blessings of God by visiting him. And if he can find a way so businessmen and the elite, too, visit him, let it be so in order that people may say that so-and-so is respected by all classes of scholars, worshipers and the folks of the life of this world.

If he cannot attract them to visit him, he himself goes to visit the scholars and worshippers so it will be seen that he met many scholars and worshippers from whom he benefited, so he brags about them. If the kind ones and the righteous are mentioned, he sighs and says, "Yes! How often I have met these kind ones, served them and was glad to be at their service!" so the listeners may get to know that serving the friends of Allāh and the righteous does not go unrewarded by them, that they must definitely have overwhelmed him with their goodness.

Among the pretenders is one who is satisfied with people thinking well of him. Many a worshipper isolates himself from the public and stays at home, feeling elated that people think well of him. Although he no longer covets their wealth, he likes prominence and people thinking well of him; this has a sweet taste, as stated in its right place; it is the sort of power and perfection, though it quickly vanishes, and nobody is deceived by it save the ignorant ones, but most people are!

Had people come to know the truth, they would have thought ill of him, their belief in him would have departed, and they thought that he committed something ugly by thus sitting at home due to his mind being confused. He was not satisfied with Allāh's knowledge of his innocence and the purity of his heart; rather, he is deeply grieved. He may abandon isolation and adoration and comes out to the society. This poor man, though having no desire for people's funds nor for their companionship, looked forward to their good thoughts of him, their praise of him, so the love for prominence set its roots in his heart, and his poor soul felt satisfied with this much pleasure.

This is a collection of the things that entertain pretenders' minds. They all seek prominence and recognition in the hearts of people. Pretension has other sources the mention of which is lengthy, and one who is loved by Allāh may feel alert about them, for if Allāh loves a servant of His, He enables him to see his own faults.

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