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Levels of Pretension from the Aspect of what is Hidden and what is Manifest, a Precise Research in the Issue of

Be informed that pretension, in as far as being manifest or hidden, has several levels. Some levels are obvious, some are more obvious, whereas some others are hidden, and some are more so.

The **first** level: It is the most obvious level: Someone undertakes an action in order to show off in a way so as if the need to pretend is not there, he will not do it. It is the most obvious of its levels and needs no explanation.

The **second** level: It is a little bit more hidden: The pretending side is not initially prompted to undertake the action; rather, the side that urges the origin of the action is the Divine side, the nearness to the Almighty, but the non-divine side intrudes into it, so much so that the act, despite the care of this side, becomes easier to undertake without it, such as one whose habit is to perform the *tahajjud* and to perform the night prayer (*qiyam*).

He performs it every night, but while feeling lazy and drowsy. But when he has a guest, he stands up from his bed with agility and ease. Had he not hoped for rewards from Allah, he would not have abandoned the pleasure of sleep not only due to the presence of the guest but this presence had an impact on him, making it easier for him to pray and to offer *tahajjud*, and the prayer will then be easier than it would have been if he had been by himself.

The **third** level: In it, the pretension is more hidden than it is in the second level: The non-divine side has nothing to do with the original intention to undertake the action, nor in the ease of doing it. But, at the same time, the substance of pretension is present in the heart. It is known that such pretension cannot be identified except through the precise experiment such as suspected terminal physical ailments since these, after medical analyses, indicate the presence of a disease which the doctor starts treating.

So is the case with this spiritual disease: Precision is a must in diagnosing it. If some traces of the ailment are found, its substance will be known to be present. Its indication is that one must test himself at a time when people accidentally get to see his adoration. Will he then feel happy and elated on account of their seeing him or not?

An individual may undertake an action with a sincere intention, desiring no pretension in it; rather, he even avoids pretending and hating it. But, at the same time, if he realizes that someone accidentally gets to know about it, he becomes happy, as if he feels restful when he gets to know that the individual saw how that act exhausted him. Such happiness and elation form the mark of pretension which is hidden within him, inside him, from which elation drips.

Had he directed his attention towards anyone other than Allah, and had he paid no attention to people, there is no sense in this elation when he knows that others came to know about his [righteous] deed. Happiness [in such a case] is like a fire that is hidden inside a stone. It becomes evident when the stone hits iron and the hidden fire comes out to the open and becomes obvious when the stone hits a stone. People who are acquainted with and knowledgeable about the stone hitting the iron expose the hidden pretension.

At that time, if this person does not react to this pleasure, that is, when happiness appears in his heart, and if he does not rebuke himself for it, reprimand it and meet it with hatred, this pleasure will be like nutrition for the disease's substance. It grows undetected, and the effect of that growth gradually creates in him the need to find a reason for people having to be familiar with his work. It is like talking about a subject and saying something casually. For example, if he is one of those who offer *tahajjud*, he talks about how the weather is cold or hot at the end of the night, or about something like that, so that others will understand that he was awake at that time [for *tahajjud*].

It may even be more hidden than that, too, such as one does not say anything to suggest to others familiarity with them, with his actions, neither explicitly nor implicitly. But people can get to know it from the way he dresses himself, his appearance or general conditions, such as drowsiness, the low tone of his voice, how his lips are withered…, etc. Or he may not watch himself during his prostration in order to avoid hitting the ground so prostrating will bear an impact on his forehead. Deep inside his conscience he will be elated about it, that is, that he has a visible mark of adoration.

Or he may be at a mourning commemoration for Imam al-Hussain (ع) or a gathering for supplication. At the end of the gathering, he does not remove the tears from his eyes fully. There are marks like these, and even more hidden than that, which show no such indications: This means that he may perform a [righteous] deed sincerely without desiring anyone to notice it, nor does he like it to show, yet he expects people to start greeting him, to be generous to him, to meet him with a smile, with respect, to praise him, to be energetic in carrying out his errands, to be tolerant as they trade with him, etc. If he goes to a meeting place, they make room for him.

If anyone falls short of doing any of these things, he will find it in his heart to be too heavy, and he will find it unsuitable for his status. It is as if he is rewarded by people for the worship which he hides, so much so that had he not performed such worship, he would not have demanded all of this, nor would he have found it unacceptable when people treat him any less than that. In my view, this has roots which also extend to conceit. In reality, he demands that from Allah, the most Glorified One, and even wonders why the Almighty did not cast love for him in the hearts of people so they may respect him although he did perform that "sincere" act of worship!

As a whole, unless the presence of worship is similar to its absence with regard to everything relevant to people, and had one not contended himself with the fact that Allah knows about what he does, such an individual will not be free of pretension, even as low as the sound of ants' tracks, nor is he free of conceit either which we, by the will of Allah, will discuss.

It is possible this much pretension voids one's rewards. Nobody is spared such type of pretension except Allah's sincere worshippers, for Satan can have no way of reaching them. Perhaps a reference to this lies in a statement by the Commander of the Faithful Ali (ع) who is quoted as having said, "Allah, the most Great, the most Exalted, will say to those who recite [the Holy Qur'an in public] on the Judgment Day: 'Did people not sell to you cheap? Did people not start greeting you? Were your needs not taken care of by people?' According to tradition, [the Almighty adds saying] 'There are no wages for you here; you were paid your wages in full.'"

Abdullah Mubarak is quoted as having said that it is narrated about Wahab son of Muneer saying that a man from among the travelers said to his fellows, "We left behind the wealth and the sons fearing oppression, now we fear lest more oppression has afflicted us than that with which people who have wealth have been afflicted!

If one of us is met, he likes to be respected because of the station of his piety. If he asks for something, he likes to be given on account of his faith. And if he buys something, he likes the seller to sell it to him cheaper because of his faith!" This reached the knowledge of their king who rode among a crowd of people. The valley and the mountain became full of people. That traveler inquired about it and was told that the king was coming.

He asked his servant to bring him food. He was brought beans and oil which he kept stuffing in his mouth, eating violently. The king asked the travelers, "Where is your fellow?" They pointed to him, whereupon the king asked him, "How are you?" The man said, "Like anyone else," but according to another way of telling this incident, "I am fine." The king said, "There is nothing good with this man," leaving him. The traveler said, "Praise be to Allah Who sent you away from me, thinking ill of me!"

Yes, my dear one, the sincere ones were apprehensive of hidden pretension, trying hard to mislead people about their righteous deeds out of their concern about hiding them more so than people's concern about hiding their bad deeds and sins, all of this in the hope their good deeds will be sincere, so Allah

will reward them on the Judgment Day by hiding these bad deeds and sins from people. These sincere folks knew and became convinced that Allah Almighty does not accept anything but what is purely for His sake, for He has said,

"And they have been commanded no more than this: To worship Allah, offering Him sincere devotion, being true (in faith): To establish regular prayers, and to practice regular charity: such is the right and straight religion" (Qur'an, 98:5).

The Judgment Day is the Day of their want and need for righteous deeds; it is the Day when neither wealth nor offspring will be of any benefit save for one who reaches Allah with a sound heart.

A scholar has provided this example: The desert travelers go there with the best currency in circulation because they know that the need for it is the greatest in the desert, and that the desert people accept only the best currency. The same applies to those who have hearts. They witness the Day of Judgment and the rations whereby they supply themselves: piety, knowing that the best of rations is piety. They bring about deeds that are free of pretension, protecting themselves against all levels of pretension.

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