



SELF PRAISE

العجب

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand the meaning of pride ('ujb)
- Understand that self-praise, one of the consequences of pride, makes people turn away from us
- Understand that all forms of pride ('ujb) are abominable in Islam and that we should always be humble
- Discuss some ways of avoiding pride

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 4

Pride

Pride or 'ujb is a feeling of exaggeration of one's virtues and good deeds, their overestimation and satisfaction with them, accompanied with a sense of superiority on their account. A person with pride considers him or herself free from all shortcomings and faults. In contrast, a feeling of pleasure and delight on performing virtuous deeds accompanied with a sense of humility and modesty before Allah (SWT) and gratitude for His favours is not pride.

The following narration from Imam al-Kāḍim (as) explains the different levels of pride:

“There are several levels of `Ujb. One of them is when one's bad actions appear to him as good; he reckons them as good and loves himself, imagining that he is performing virtuous deeds. Another level of `Ujb is represented by a person who believes that by having faith in God he has done God a favour; whereas (in reality) it is God Almighty who has conferred a favour on him (by endowing him with faith).”ⁱ

SOURCES OF PRIDE

We are feeble beings in need of many things in life. One of our basic needs as humans is the need of the sense of security. Security can be either physical or psychological. Both types of security help us function better in our daily lives.

PHYSICAL SECURITY

If one was asked to learn a chapter from the Qur'an in a cage with a tiger, he would be unable to learn because of the fear of falling prey to the wild animal. However, if there was no tiger, learning a short chapter from the

Qur'an wouldn't be that hard. This is an example of (a lack of) physical security.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SECURITY

If one was asked to learn a chapter from the Qur'an in a cage, outside of which a tiger roamed freely, and was told that the tiger will only leave if the person learnt a chapter, it wouldn't be that hard. This is because there will be a sense of security that the 'situation' will come to an end.

'Ujb or pride is linked to psychological security. When a person thinks that he or she is superior to others, he is feeding on this fear that stems from psychological insecurity.

As social beings, we humans want acceptance and appreciation from our friends, family and peers. We want to fit in. So we try to excel at things. Sometimes we reach that level of excellence. At other times, we don't. Taking pride by repeatedly and thanklessly acknowledging our achievements is 'Ujb. According to the traditions reported from the Ahlul Bayt (as), 'Ujb is worse than sin, so much so that Allah (SWT) makes a believer commit sin so that he may be saved from 'Ujb. 'Ujb or pride leads to a number of major sins and evil traits. When its roots permeate the human heart, it leads the person to disbelief. In addition, a person afflicted with 'Ujb never cares to rectify himself. Rather, he considers himself as a pious and virtuous person. He belittles his sins and never thinks of purging himself from them, and ultimately leads himself to eternal damnation.

People can be involved in performing the greatest of deeds like serving the poor, helping the needy, building hospitals, mosques etc...but if they take pride in that, and consider themselves superior to others because of their actions, Allah (SWT) will not reward them for those deeds. However, if they are humble, and are thankful to Allah (SWT) by acknowledging that *all* praise belongs to Allah (SWT) and realising that no achievement would be possible without His beneficence, a person's delight in his achievement will be considered a praiseworthy trait.

PRIDE AND ARROGANCE

Pride ('ujb) is the feeling within a person's heart that he is somehow better or superior than others, or deserves merit for his actions. Arrogance (kibr) is when a person

acts out these thoughts, by looking down at or belittling others.

PRIDE IN THE HOLY QUR'AN

Allah (SWT) severely condemns 'Ujb in several places in the Qur'an.

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا

الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ

يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا

“Say, ‘Shall we inform you about the biggest losers in regard to works? Those whose endeavour goes awry in the life of the world, while they suppose they are doing good.’ (18:103-104)

At the beginning of the creation of mankind, when Allah (SWT) ordered all his angels and Satan to bow down in obedience to Prophet Adam (as), all bowed down except for the accursed Iblis. The reason for his refusal was his pride in himself, he felt superior because he was made of fire while Prophet Adam (as) was made of clay. He assumed that his worship of 6000 years would have granted him a superior status.

Allah (SWT) tells us in the Qur'an that:

“Certainly We created you, then We formed you, then We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam.’ So they [all] prostrated, but not Iblis: he was not among those who prostrated. Said He, ‘What prevented you from prostrating, when I commanded you?’ ‘I am better than him,’ he said. ‘You created me from fire and You created him from clay.’” (7:11-12)

In the second verse quoted above, Iblis is clearly indulging in self-praise. He is belittling a creation of Allah (SWT) that he believes is inferior to him, but what he does not know is that superiority is ranked via righteousness and God-wariness in the eyes of Allah (SWT). As a result of this undue self-praise, Allah (SWT) punishes him by banishing him from His presence and proximity:

:Get down from it!’ He said. ‘It is not for you to be arrogant therein. Begone! You are indeed among the degraded ones.’ (7:13)

In one of his famous sermons, Imam 'Ali (as) enjoins us to take a lesson from what happened to Satan:

“You should take a lesson from what Allah did with Satan; namely He nullified his great acts and extensive efforts on account of the vanity of one moment, although Satan had worshipped Allah for six thousand years - whether by the reckoning of this world or of the next world is not known. Who now can remain safe from Allah after Satan by committing a similar disobedience? None at all”

EFFECTS OF PRIDE

One of the effects of pride or 'ujb is that a person will praise themselves regularly, sometimes obviously and directly, and at other times in an indirect way. No one likes people that are proud and praise themselves. It is only natural for us to turn away from such personalities. Those who praise themselves, whether intentionally or not, are belittling others around them. In almost all cases, this leads to such proud persons losing important people in their lives such as their family and friends.

Imam 'Ali (as) said:

“No loneliness can be compared in dreadfulness to the one that is the result of 'Ujb.”

He has also said:

“You should avoid self-admiration, having reliance upon what appears good in yourself, and love of exaggerated praise because this is one of the most reliable opportunities for Satan”ⁱⁱ

AVOIDING PRIDE

Pride is a trap which is very easy to fall into. Sometimes one may do it without realising. Therefore, the most important thing to do to avoid this sin is to actively assess ourselves. Reflecting on our actions and words at the end of each day can be a good start. We must think about how we went about our day – realising which sins we committed, how we can seek forgiveness for them, and how we can ensure we do not repeat them. We must assess all the blessings granted by Allah (SWT) during the day and thank Him for everything. We must think about what we said in praise of ourselves, and what we said in praise of our Lord.

Imam al-Bāqir (as) has taught us:

“Block the way of 'Ujb with the knowledge of the self.”ⁱⁱⁱ

There are other ways of training ourselves to avoid self-pride and self-praise:

- We should frequently praise others for their positive traits. Once praising others becomes second nature, the mind will subconsciously become more humble
- When we are proud of an action of ours, we should remember that it is God who provided all the causes for our good action
- We should remember our sins and shortcomings so that we do not become too proud of our good actions and perfections
- Even if we do feel a sense of pride, we should never act on it by praising ourselves or acting arrogantly.

We must remember that any good trait we have is a blessing given to us by Allah (SWT). Whether it may be knowledge, strength, wealth or health - all are blessings that Allah (SWT) has endowed upon us and if we are not thankful for them, they may be taken away from us at any time.

Review Questions

Q1. Pride or 'ujb is:

- a. Arrogance in action
- b. An overestimation of a person's own good qualities in their mind
- c. Frequently praising oneself

Q2. We can avoid pride or 'ujb by:

- a. Putting ourselves down in front of others
- b. Praising ourselves in front of others
- c. Praising others for their good actions and traits

Q3. The reason for the fall and cursing of Iblīs was:

- a. His dishonesty
- b. His refusal to worship God
- c. His pride and arrogance

ⁱ Al-Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 313, hadith # 3

ⁱⁱ Ghurar al-Hikam, p. 298

ⁱⁱⁱ Mizaan al-Hikmah, hadith # 11859

