



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 5

Self-Admiration

In the opinion of the scholars¹, 'Ujb or self-admiration is a state of the heart where a person magnifies his actions, is satisfied with them and feels superior over others on account of those actions. This sense of pride applies to both good and bad qualities and afflicts both the faithful and the faithless. Amongst the faithful, this inner-pride often extends to believing that a person is doing a favour onto Allah (SWT) and to His religion, instead of the other way around!

The signs of 'Ujb are often hidden and very subtle and therefore one has to be extremely critical with his self in order to uproot this vice.

In Imam Khomeini's book '40 Ḥadith', he divides 'Ujb (related to virtues and vices) into the following 3 degrees:

1. in faith and religious doctrines and whose opposite is 'Ujb in disbelief and polytheism
2. in good traits and qualities as opposed to 'Ujb in moral vices and ugly qualities
3. in pious deeds and good actions as opposed to 'Ujb in abominable deeds and repulsive acts

In this lesson we will focus only on the first and the most fatal degree of self-admiration.

'Ujb in regards to faith and religious teachings

The first stage which is the most dangerous kind of 'Ujb is a stage in which the faithful person believes that with whatever good he performs, he is doing a favour onto Allah. He believes that by praying and fasting in the long days of summer, paying 1/5th of his hard-earned savings and by offering a helping hand to others, he or she is actually doing a favour to the religion and to God. Although he may not show this feeling off openly, he thinks in this manner in his heart. In addition to the feeling of doing a favour upon Allah (SWT), the other symptoms are:

- If he hears a lecture describing the pious people, he believes that he is the best example of that description
- When faced with small hardships which greatly disturb his mental peace and his opinion of God, he describes his experience though the hardship hasn't affected him at all because of his high spiritual station. This is done in order to match his outer appearance with his mental image of himself.
- This individual also considers himself to be worthy of reward from God because he believes that the high quality of his actions must necessitate a reward.
- He considers his own faith and belief to be superior to others and the quality of his actions to be far greater than others.
- He magnifies his own good deeds yet undermines the actions of others
- He is very sensitive and critical of the mistakes of others yet overlooks his own faults
- Loves to be praised in public yet will never speak positively about others, particularly those who are involved in the same activities as him, for example one scholar's view of another.
- Begins to expect others to treat him in accordance to the how highly he admires himself. So for example, when a scholar enters a room full of people, he'd expect the crowd to stand up for him as a gesture of acknowledging his greatness.

In this regard, Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) says: "Satan says to his troops, 'If I can gain mastery over three things in man, I will no longer care how much good he does for it will not be accepted from him: If he overrates his good deeds, forgets his sins and is overcome by self-admiration' "ii

THE WICKED ROLE OF SATAN

The tricks of Satan are not haphazard; instead they are very strategic and well-calculated. He will never try to convince a pious person to commit murder or adultery because these sins are obviously abhorrent. Instead, he asks us to focus carefully on all *mustaḥab* (recommended) actions and other acts of piety and then turns our attention to the sins of other believing people. Then he will whisper into our ears that we are definitely, based on logical principles, justified in considering ourselves superior to others.

Gradually, as we obey these Satanic whispers, this vice becomes even more settled in our hearts until eventually our fate becomes exactly like his fate- being expelled from God's kingdom of mercy and residing in hell forever!

HOW TO AVOID THIS SIN

1) Carefully study the dangers of this vice:

It is very effective to learn and remind ourselves of the dangers of 'Ujb both in this and the next world. This can be done by repeatedly reading specific āyāt and aḥādīth in this regard. For example, the Holy Qur'an refers to those who were proud of their supposedly pious deeds in this world as the biggest losers on the Day of Judgment.

"Say: Shall We tell you the greatest losers in respect of (their) deeds? : Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life while they thought that they were acquiring good by their deeds!" (18:103-104)

In a Ḥadīth from Imam 'Ali (as), he says:

"The consequence of self-admiration (in this world) is hatred (of other people towards you)"iii

2) Always give the benefit of doubt to others and be critical on yourself

Often due to self-love, we tend to be very critical of the mistakes of others and are quick to justify our own bad action. This mode of thinking is very dangerous and buries us even more deeply in this the vice of self-admiration.

We should therefore force ourselves to look for excuses for the mistakes of other i.e. give them the benefit of doubt and be more critical towards our own selves. This way we will never feel superior over others.

Whenever one feels a sense of superiority over another on account of seeing another person sinning, he should speak to his own self in the following way:

"Perhaps it is possible that this person who is guilty of committing that sin may possess other good qualities unknown to me or might have performed certain good deeds for which God may bless him with His grace and mercy. Perhaps it is also possible that Allah (SWT) afflicted this person with the sin so that he does not develop any self-admiration ('Ujb), which is even worse than the sin"

3) Belittle your own action and magnify the goodness of others

The Holy Prophet (saw) said, describing the intelligent person:

"He regards the little good that others do as being much and regards the abundance of good that he himself does as being little"

4) Believe that goodness comes to us on account of the grace of the Almighty only

Whichever spiritual or material blessing we enjoy is a gift from Allah (SWT) – a gift that has been given to us solely as a result of the grace and mercy of God and not because of the quality of our actions. Remember! All our righteous deeds are imperfect in their essence and do not warrant any divine reward whatsoever. Who can dare claim to say that his good actions were better than the prayers of Imam al-Sajjād (as)?! Yet, the Imam says in the supplication he taught to Abu Ḥamza al-Thumālī:

“I do not rely on my actions to gain your forgiveness,
but in Your Grace do I put my hopes”

5) Always pray to Allah for protection:

Imam al-Sajjād (as):

“Make me worship You and do not corrupt my worship
with self-admiration”^{iv}

ⁱ Imam Khomeini’s 40 Ahadith – Chapter on Ujb.

ⁱⁱ Al-Khisal p 112, no. 86

Homework:

1) Is it wrong to feel pleased with our good actions? Think about it and answer in class in the following week.

2) Spend some time during the week to go over the signs of self-admiration. Identify which areas you are most likely to be affected by this (for example in religious knowledge & religious actions, or your intelligence when compared to others). Decide how best you can solve this problem. Make sure to write down your thoughts and keep the document safely. Remember to review this in 4 weeks to see whether you are progressing, or getting worse.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid No. 4606

^{iv} Dua Makarimul Akhlaq