

Meaning of Conceit

Conceit means one sees and admires himself and his actions. It is a psychological condition which we *sometimes* find in ourselves. The meanings given to it, that have been mentioned in language books, mostly explain its requirements or consequences such as elation, arrogance, and denying what others hold against you as objectionable, according to *Al-Munjid*.

These meanings, as you can see, are among the requirements of the state which we mentioned in one's *nafs*. As regarding the idiomatic meaning for conceit, according to the definition of the scholars of mannerism, it is, according to some scholars of the hereafter, magnifying the blessing, taking it for granted while forgetting to attribute it to the One Who bestowed it.

'*Allama* al-Majlisi, may Allāh sanctify his soul, has said that conceit is magnifying the good deed, seeing it as plentiful. As regarding feeling pleased with it while feeling humble to the most Exalted One and thanking Him for enabling its doing, it is good, commendable.

I say that what this great traditionist has said, that is, conceited is "one who sees himself as not having fallen short of undertaking the deed", a reference to a particular conduct to which narrations have referred. Among such traditions is one recorded in the sacred book *Al-Kāfi* from the father of al-Hassan, namely Imām Mousa son of Ja'fer, peace be with both of them, who said once to one of his sons, "O son! You have to maintain your endeavor.

Do not ever think of yourself as having transcended the stage of falling short of perfecting your worship of Allāh, the most Exalted, the most Great, and are obeying Him, for Allāh is never adored as He should be." It is also as the Messenger of Allāh (ص) had said, being the best of all descendants of Adam, the one who is the best of them in his knowledge of Allāh, and the one who adored Him the best, addressing Him thus: "We did not know You as You ought to be known, nor did we adore You as You should rightly be adored." *Al-Kāfi*, too, cites Jābir [son of Abdullāh al-Anṣari] saying that the father of Imām Ja'fer (ع) said to him, "O Jābir! May Allāh never get you out of the feeling of being neglectful and of being derelict in worshipping Allāh."

The great traditionist, '*allama* al-Majlisi, has quoted the knowledgeable critic, the great scholar, and the

most revered mentor Bahá' ad-Deen al-`Emili, may Alláh be pleased with him, saying, "There is no doubt that if one does a righteous deed, such as fasting on certain days, spending the night praying and the like, feels happy about it. If he feels like that on account of these deeds being a boon from Alláh, a blessing from Him, the most Exalted One, upon him, while being afraid of their disappearance, pleading to Alláh to grant him more of them..., such feeling is not conceit. But if he thinks that they represent his own characteristic, that they are done by his person, being attributed to him, thinking much of them and feeling reliant upon them, seeing himself as being outside the limit of dereliction, having the attitude as if he is doing Alláh, Praise to Him, a favor because of them, such is conceit."

Explanation by Imám Al-Khomeini

Imám al-Khomeini, may his shade prolong, has a viewpoint about this definition. He says the following:

"The explanation of conceit according to what is mentioned by the greatest mentor Bahá' ad-Deen is correct, but the deed has to be examined more generally than just inwardly and outwardly, more generally than a good or an ugly deed, because conceit, just as it is ascertained by the acts of the senses, it also is compared with the side actions, running them.

Just as the person who has a commendable merit feels conceited, admiring his merit, so is the case with the one who has the bad characteristic, too, for he may also feel proud of himself or of his characteristic. It is as has been indicated in the sacred tradition which we mentioned as narrated by Ali son of Suwaid quoting the father of al-Hassan (ع) in which the Imám (ع) says, "... And among them is that the bad deed of a servant of Alláh is decorated for him, so he sees it good, and he feels proud of it, thinking that he is doing well. And among them is that a servant believes in his Lord, so he thinks he is thus doing Alláh a favor.

The reason why he mentioned these two is because they are hidden from the sight of most people, and so that people may also get to know that the good feeling and elation, which the Bahá'í mentor excludes from conceit and regards as good, is according to the type of one's attitude."

The gist of the viewpoint of imám al-Khomeini with regard to the statement of the mentor indicates three matters:

First: The mentor, may Alláh have mercy on him, has specifically talked about conceit when someone feels conceited about his physical deeds, such as fasting during the time and praying during the night, and the like, and apparently his objective from doing so is not the same as he had mentioned of the deeds of adoration, benevolence, etc., not looking at the inward deeds.

Conceit, as we have already stated, is found in the innate, the inwardly, deeds such as one feeling proud of his belief, which is an action relevant to the heart, an internal submission, feeling proud of his belief in the Messenger as though he feels he is doing Allāh and His Messenger a favor, as stated in the tradition quoted above. Thus, conceit is found in the inward characteristics and faculties such as conceit about knowledge, courage, generosity, etc.

Second: The mentor, may he be sanctified, specifically discussed conceit about side deeds, with regard to the good deeds, too, saying, "There is no doubt that one who does good deeds feels elated." The case is that conceit is not confined to the good deeds but it may also take place in the bad ones. Quite many unbelievers and hypocrites feel proud of their unbelief and hypocrisy.

Those whose faculties are mean are dragged into feeling proud of their bad characteristics as we, God willing, will mention. We have pointed out to all of this in the tradition cited above, which is the statement of the imām in which he says that a servant's bad deed is decorated for him, so he sees it as being good, and he likes it. Such is the result of Satan, the evil one, confusing him, and such is the bad *nafs* decorated for man.

Third: According to the imām's viewpoint with regard to the statement of the mentor, that is, the feeling of happiness and elation that happens to man upon doing some righteous deed, if it is according to what the mentor says, that is, with regard to such deeds being a boon from Allāh..., etc., such elation is not conceit. This pursuit, with regard to most people, is according to its kind and is not applicable to all persons.

There are individuals among people who are among the sincere worshippers of Allāh. They have gotten rid of the *nafs* and of its desires. Their eyes are too blinded to see their *nafs* in its entirety, so they do not see any deed for themselves except that they feel happy and pleased about it. They see their souls being owned by their real Owner; they have neither power nor might of their own. Their will is fused into the will of Allāh. They are described by this verse:

"Allāh sets forth the parable (of two men: one) a slave in the service of another; he has no power of any sort, while (the other) a man on whom We have bestowed goodly favors from Us, and he spends (freely) of it, privately and publicly: Are the two equal? (By no means;) praise be to Allāh. But most of them do not understand" (Qur'ān, 16:75).

They are the testimony to this verse of the Almighty:

"They are (but) servants [whose status is] raised to honor [and distinction]" (Qur'ān, 21:26).

These are the sincere ones who, when being heedless about Allāh and cast a look at their good deed, they find happiness and pleasure, whereupon they seek forgiveness of Allāh for such a sentiment despite their lofty status with Allāh, for the good deeds of the kind ones are the bad deeds of those close to Him.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/pretension-and-conceit-sayyid-ahmad-al-fahri/meaning-conceit>