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The Humility of the Rich and the Pride of the Beggar for the pleasure of Allah (S.w.T.)

Amir ul-Mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) says:

It is good for the rich to show humility before the poor to seek reward from Allah, but better than that is the haughtiness of the poor towards the rich with trust in Allah. 1

The poor can behave with arrogance towards the rich not because he considers himself superior or due to any feeling of pride but because of their trusts and faith in Allah (S.w.T.), and on the basis of this conviction that they are needless of other people and their total reliance is on Allah (S.w.T.) Who is the owner of the treasures of earth and heavens.

It is mentioned in the book Layalil Akhbar that one day a rich man came to the Holy Prophet (S) dressed in expensive clothes and sat down in the assembly. After that a beggar dressed in tattered clothes arrived and sat next to the rich man. The rich man pulled away his dress and moved away a little bit. The Holy Prophet (S) asked if he was worried that his poverty may reach him. The rich man said, "No"! The Prophet (S) asked him if he feared that his wealth will decrease and reach that beggar? 'No', he said. The Prophet (S) asked him if he had moved away fearing your clothes will become dirty?" Again he replied in the negative.

"Then why did you behave like that?" asked the Messenger of Allah (S). He said, "My natural tendency is to regard every good deed as bad and every evil deed as good but now I reform myself. I wish to give half my wealth to this poor person.' The Holy Prophet asked the pauper if he would accept it. The pauper refused saying that he feared he might also fall into pride like the rich man. It must be borne in mind that arrogance towards the rich is only with respect to riches. As far as faith is concerned, we have to be just as humble to a believing beggar as to a believing rich man.

Humility shown differs from Person to Person

In general we have to have a balanced approach in all our actions and dealings with no excess in either direction. The same applies to humility. Humility also should be within limits. Excessive humility is degrading, and a believer should not do anything to compromise his honour and dignity. The degree of humility we show also depends upon the person concerned. For example it would be ridiculous to show the same degree of humility to strangers that we show to our parents and relatives. Similarly respect for scholars who practice what they preach and Sadīq etc must be more than respect for other people. The leaders of the community must be paid more respect than commoners. Actions which are appropriate with the parents and scholars etc, like kissing of their hands, are not to be practiced with other people.

It is narrated in Safinat'ul-Bihār from Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) that one day a religious person from among his companions visited Amir ul-Mu'minīn 'Ali (a.s.) with his son. 'Ali (a.s.) stood up and accorded great respect to him and ordered Qambar to arrange for dinner for them. They ate together, then Qambar brought a pot of water and a towel to wash their hands. 'Ali (a.s.) picked up the water pot and wanted to wash the hands of the guest when he protested. How is it possible for a slave to allow his master to serve him? 'Ali (a.s.) asked,

“What if by washing hands my Lord and master will be pleased with me? You wash your hands as if Qambar is pouring out water for you.”

These words compelled the companion to have his hands washed and 'Ali (a.s.) poured out water for him. After this 'Ali (a.s.) gave the water pot to his son Muhammad bin Hanafiyya and told him to pour out water for the son, so that the status of the father and the son is not made equal. He (a.s.) said:

“If the father had not come with the son I myself would have poured water on his hands. But could not do so in the presence of the father.”

If Amir ul-Mu'minīn (a.s.) had washed the hands of the son himself, the status of the father and son would have been equal. But 'Ali (a.s.) upheld the dignity of the father by not washing the hands of his son after he had washed the hands of the father.

Signs of Humility

A humble person will not mind sitting behind everyone in a gathering. He will be the one to initiate salutations. He will give up arguments and squabbles even if he is in the right. He will not like to be praised for his piety.²

Amir ul-Mu'minīn 'Ali (a.s.) says in his bequest:

“It is necessary that you make humility a habit because it is one of the greatest worship acts.”³

It is mentioned in Safinat'ul-Bihar that after every ritual prayer, Musa Ibn Imran used to touch both his cheeks on the ground with utmost humility before the Almighty Allah. Due to this the Almighty Allah (S.w.T.) gave him the status of Kalimullah (One with whom Allah spoke).

Imam 'Ali ar-Riqa (a.s.) says:

Humility is that you give to the people what they like so that they may also give to you.

Hasan bin Jaham asked Imam 'Ali Riqa (a.s.) what was the standard of humility and what was its nature?

Imam (a.s.) replied:

There are some grades for humility one of them is that a person should understand his value and do everything according to that. Rather he should come down a little bit with perfect consciousness. He should like for others only those things that he likes for himself. If someone is bad to him he reciprocates with goodness and he must swallow his anger and forgive the people. Allah (S.w.T.) certainly like those who do good.

Our Imams (a.s.) were having utmost Humility

It is recorded in Safinat'ul-Bihar that Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far (a.s.) said Salam to a black Sudanese as he passed by him. Then he went near him and spoke with him for sometime. After that he said: Tell me if there is anything I can do for you. People said: O son of the Messenger! You go towards such a person and ask about his needs while he is more needful than you? Imam (a.s.) said:

He is a servant of Allah (S.w.T.) too and our brother in faith. Both of us have got the best father, Hazrat Adam, the father of humanity and both of us are bestowed with Islam, the best religion. May be time would render us more needful than him so why should we feel proud of ourselves?

Pride must be completely rooted out

Muhammad bin Muslim was one of the rich nobles of Kufa and was a companion of Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.). One day Imam Baqir (a.s.) said:

O Muhammad! Be humble!

When he returned to Kufa from Medina he took a container of dates and a balance and sat outside the mosque. He called that whosoever wanted dates could purchase them from him. (He was doing this to destroy his pride). His relatives came and said that by acting in this manner he was causing insult to the family honour. He said that his master had ordered him to do this and he could not disobey his command, and he would not move from the place till he has sold out the stock. His relatives said that if

he indeed wanted to buy and sell he should go to the place where wheat is ground into flour. He agreed to it and procured a camel and a mill stone and started the flour mill so that by this occupation his pride would be destroyed and that he would see himself as a common person.⁴

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1. Nahjul Balagha saying 406
 2. Safinat'ul-Bihar
 3. Safinat'ul-Bihar
 4. Safinat'ul-Bihar quoted from Ikatis

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