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27. Humbleness

Allah, the Wise, has said:

وَعِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ الَّذِينَ يَمْشُونَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ هَوْنًا

“And the servants of the Beneficent Allah are they who walk on the earth in humbleness.”¹

The Noble Prophet (S) has said:

مَا تَوَاضَعَ أَحَدٌ لِلَّهِ إِلَّا رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ.

“There is none, who exhibits humility for (the sake of) Allah, except that Allah grants him greatness and eminence.”²

Short Expalantion

Humbleness is the root of all virtues. A humble person is always submissive before the majesty and greatness of Allah, and lays the foundation of his acts of worship on the platform of this significant virtue.

None can comprehend the reality of humility except the Near Ones, from amongst the servants of Allah who have comprehended the Unity of Allah. Submissiveness and fear (with respect to Allah) can only stem from humbleness and it is for this reason that the humble ones possess an appearance which causes them to be recognized by the angels and divine Gnostics.

Their appearance, demeanor, and social and domestic conduct clearly reveals that they are far away from every kind of pride and arrogance.³

1) The Humbleness of Salman Farsi

Salman had been the governor of one of the cities of Syria for some time. His conduct during the period of his rule remained unchanged from that before his governorship; he would always wear ordinary clothing, travel on foot and even place his household things as security and surety (for borrowing money).

Once, while moving through the bazar, he saw a man who had purchased some alfalfa and was looking for someone to carry it to his house for him. Salman approached the person, who failed to recognize him, and agreed to carry his load free of charge. The man placed the load of alfalfa on Salman's back. As they were walking, they came across a person who immediately recognized Salman.

"O' Leader! Where are you carrying this burden?" he exclaimed.

Hearing these words, the owner of the load realized that the person carrying his load was Salman. He fell down on his knees and implored: "Forgive me, for I had failed to recognise you."

"Nevertheless, I must carry this load to your house," said Salman.

When he had done so, he said to the man, "I have fulfilled my promise; now it is for you to promise that henceforth you will never seek the services of anyone for anything. (And know!) By you carrying things which you are able to, it will not reflect negatively upon your manliness."⁴

2) Bilal the Abyssinian

Bilal was one of those Muslims who had made great progress spiritually to the extent that he became the muezzin of the Noble Prophet (S). The Noble Prophet (S) would say to him: "O' Bilal! Invigorate my soul (by means of your Adhan)."

The Noble Prophet (S) not only placed him in charge of the public treasury, but also treated him as if he were his blood brother.

"When I enter Paradise, I shall hear your footsteps ahead of me, as you walk on its lush-green ground," he had told Bilal.

Consequently, the other Muslims would approach Bilal and congratulate him for the lofty rank that he had come to acquire for himself, but he never allowed their compliments to make him arrogant, nor did he permit the people's praises to change him. With great humbleness, he would respond to their praises by saying, "I am an Abyssinian and (till yesterday) I had been a slave."⁵

3) The Humbleness of the Noble Prophet

Abu Dharr narrates: “Once, I observed Salman and Bilal arriving in the presence of the Noble Prophet (S). Salman, out of respect, fell down at the Prophet’s feet and kissed them. The Noble Prophet (S) endeavoured to prevent him from performing this act.

“Do not perform acts that the non-Arabs perform for their emperors,” advised the Noble Prophet (S). “I am (just) a servant from amongst the servants of Allah – I eat what they eat and sit where they sit.”⁶

4) Muhammad Ibn Muslim

Muhammad Ibn Muslim was a wealthy individual from the nobles of Kufah and a companion of Imam Baqir (as) and Imam Sadiq (as). Once, Imam Baqir (as) advised him: “O’ Muhammad! You must be humble and modest.”

On his return to Kufah from Madinah, Muhammad Ibn Muslim picked up a pair of scales and a container of dates. He then sat down at the door of Kufah’s main mosque and began calling out: “Whoever needs dates, should purchase them from me.” (He acted thus so that not the slightest pride should remain within him).

His relatives objected to him by saying that he had disgraced them through this act of his.

“My Imam has instructed me to perform a task and I shall not disobey him; I shall not move from this place till I have sold all the dates that are in this container,” said Muhammad.

“If it is as you say, then you might as well take up the work of a miller,” his relatives said to him sarcastically.

To their surprise, Muhammad agreed. He purchased a hand-mill and busied himself with grinding wheat into flour, the intention being to emancipate himself from vanity and self-importance.⁷

5) ‘Isa and the Washing of his Disciples’ Feet

‘Isa Ibn Maryam (as) once told his disciples that he sought a favour from them.

“What do you want us to do?” they asked.

‘Isa (as) moved from his place and washed the feet of all the disciples!

“O’ Spirit of Allah! It is more befitting that we should wash your feet!” they exclaimed.

“The person who is the most deserving to serve is one who is a scholar. I have acted thus in order that I may have demonstrated humbleness. You too should develop the quality of humbleness and after I have

gone you should behave with the people with humility and modesty just as I have behaved with you,”

‘Isa (as) said. “It is by means of humbleness and not arrogance that wisdom flourishes, just as it is on soft ground that plants grow, not on hard mountainous terrain.”⁸

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1. Noble Qur’an, Suratul Furqan (25), Verse 63
 2. Jame’ al-Sa’adat, Volume 1, Page 359
 3. Tadhkeratul Haqaiq, Page 55
 4. Jawame’ al-Hikayat, Page 178
 5. Hikayat-ha-e-Shanidani, Volume 4, Page 173; Tabaqat Ibn Sa’d, Volume 3, Page 238
 6. Dars-hai Az Zindagi-e-Payambar, Page 162; Biharul Anwar, Volume 76, Page 63
 7. Riwayat-ha Wa Hikayat-ha, Page 103; Dastan-ha-e-Parakandeh, Volume 3, Page 18
 8. Namunah-e-Ma’arif, Volume 3, Page 223; Al-Wafi, Volume 1, Page 4

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