

Abu Hurayrah narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said:

1

Greatness is His garment

2

and pride is His cloak.

3

I shall punish anyone who competes with Me.⁽¹⁾

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Do not walk on earth with an air of self conceit; for you cannot rend the earth asunder, nor can you rival the mountains in height.﴾ (17: 37)
- ﴿We grant that happy life in the Hereafter to those who do not seek to exalt themselves on earth or to spread corruption. The future belongs to the God-fearing.﴾ (28: 83)
- ﴿Do not turn your cheek away from people in false pride, nor walk haughtily on earth. God does not love anyone who is arrogant, boastful.﴾ (31: 18)
- ﴿On the Day of Resurrection you will see those who invented lies about God with their faces darkened. Is not there in hell a proper abode for the arrogant?﴾ (39: 60)

The Narrator

The first narrator: Abu Sa'īd Sa'd ibn Mālik ibn Sinān al-Anṣārī belonged to the Khazraj tribe and to Madinah, and is known as al-Khudrī. He took part in the Encounter of the Moat and joined God's Messenger on another twelve military expeditions. He also took part in the pledge given to the Prophet under the tree. He narrated a large number of hadiths, and issued fatwas. He was a distinguished scholar. He died in Year 74 AH, 694 CE.

The second narrator: Abu Hurayrah 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ṣakhr al-Dawsī embraced Islam in the year in which the Battle of Khaybar took place, i.e. Year 7 of the Hijri calendar. He was keen to learn and memorize the Prophet's hadiths. He was considered in the middle rank of the Prophet's companions who issued fatwas. He was the companion who narrated the largest number of the Prophet's hadiths. He died in Madinah in Year 58 AH, 678 CE.

Summary

In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) narrates from God, Mighty and Exalted, that pride and greatness are two traits that belong only to God. If anyone of His creation claims them, God will punish him in Hell.

1 Related by Muslim, 2620.



Message and Meaning

In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us what God revealed to him concerning these two qualities:



1 Greatness, which signifies power and supremacy in names and attributes, belongs only to God Himself. To Him, greatness is like a garment which covers a man's body. Such a garment belongs to the person wearing it and cannot be claimed by anyone else. Hence, greatness is an attribute that belongs solely to God, and no created being has any claim to any portion of it so as to claim any superiority over other people.



2 Pride indicates one's superiority over others. As such it belongs only to God. It is like a cloak which covers a person's body from the shoulders down. As such, it belongs to the person wearing it and cannot be claimed by anyone else.

The meaning of the hadith is further amplified in a different version, narrated by Abu Hurayrah quoting the Prophet (peace be upon him): 'God, Mighty and Exalted, said: Pride is My cloak and greatness is My garment. Whoever competes with Me for either of them I shall throw in the Fire'. The difference between the two is that a proud person requires someone else to treat as inferior. The Prophet (peace be upon him) defines it as being 'scornful of the truth and contemptuous of people'.⁽¹⁾ Greatness is different in that a person may feel one's own excellence, without looking down on others. Since pride is more extensive than greatness, God likens it to a cloak which covers everything else, while He likens greatness to a garment which may cover only a part of the body.



3 Therefore, whoever tries to have a share of these two qualities, behaving arrogantly towards people, God will throw him in Hell where he will receive his punishment. It is not up to any created being to assume these two qualities, because a created being should behave with humility. God has forbidden arrogant behaviour and treating others with contempt. He states His commandment: 'Do not walk on earth with an air of self conceit; for you cannot rend the earth asunder, nor can you rival the mountains in height'. (17: 37) He also states that the Fire of Hell shall be the abode of those who are conceited: 'Is not there in hell a proper abode for the arrogant?' (39: 60)

1 Related by Muslim, 91.



Implementation

1

The truth should always be presented most clearly and in the most appealing way. This *qudsī* hadith uses fine and beautiful metaphors that illustrate its meaning and drive its message home. Advocates of Islam, scholars and lecturers should make use of such figures of speech.

2

We should always examine our attitude to ensure that it is free of pride and conceit. When any of us examines his behaviour, he may discover that he behaves arrogantly, feeling the importance of his own wealth, position, knowledge, strength or social status. He may look down on a stranger or a poor person, or on a community.

3

It is not an aspect of pride or greatness that a person is keen to have a good appearance. ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘A person with an atom’s weight of arrogance in his heart will not enter Heaven’. A man said: ‘A man loves to wear fine clothes and shoes’. The Prophet said: ‘God is beautiful and He loves beauty. Arrogance is to be scornful of the truth and contemptuous of people’.⁽¹⁾ What is forbidden is arrogance that denies the truth and makes a person treat others with scorn and contempt.

4

We should always acknowledge God’s greatness in our hearts, discourse and gatherings. Let it be the way by which we erase all conceit. The phrase *Allah akbar*, which means ‘God is supreme’, is made an essential part of prayers, the *adhān* which is the call to prayer, and the celebration of the Eid. It is also recommended to say it when one goes up a hill or a high position, or rides a mount or a car, etc. It is reported that it helps to extinguish a fire, even when it is raging. At the time when the *adhān* is called, Satan runs away.

5

We all realize our inability to secure our own interests and requirements, for reasons we cannot control. We may hold a view today and discard it tomorrow. We may feel that we are able to achieve something we like, but then a minute impediment places it beyond our reach. Such matters make it clear to us that God has forbidden pride because it is one of His attributes. It is not right that a created being with deficiencies and needs should behave arrogantly, stressing his own greatness. Hence, Islam forbids human beings from assuming either of these two qualities: pride and greatness. Both are cardinal sins. A person who thinks himself superior and forgets the favours God has bestowed on him personally is one who has no knowledge of himself or his Lord. This is the characteristic of Satan that made him refuse to prostrate himself before Adam in obedience of God’s command, arguing: ‘I am better than him’. (7: 12) It is also Pharaoh’s characteristic which made him declare to his people: ‘I am your supreme lord’. (79: 24) Therefore, these two will have the most severe punishment in Hell.

6

God loves for His servants to possess some of His own attributes, such as mercy, forgiveness, generosity, etc. These are, in essence, qualities of excellence. If a person demonstrates such qualities, he is simply looking to achieve excellence. There are other attributes which belong to God alone, such as pride and greatness. He forbids His servants to assume these because they only fit the One who is absolutely perfect. If these are claimed by a person who does not deserve them, the claim is false at best.

1 Related by Muslim, 91.

7

Man should always steer away from feelings of pride and greatness, and should suppress any leanings towards these qualities whenever he has gained something in this life. These are qualities that condemn a person to the Fire. Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah said: 'You may hope for the forgiveness of one whose sin is an indulgence in some desire. Adam disobeyed God in satisfying his desire and he was forgiven. By contrast, a curse is feared for the one whose disobedience is motivated by pride. Satan arrogantly disobeyed God and he was cursed'.⁽¹⁾

8

A person who experiences some feeling of pride and arrogance should warn himself of a result that is the opposite of his purpose. An arrogant person feels himself great. Therefore, God punishes him by showing him as contemptuous and insignificant. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'On the Day of Judgement, arrogant people will be resurrected infinitely small, but having men's form. Humiliation surrounds them on all sides.'⁽²⁾ God may even punish him in this life, before He punishes him in the life to come, as happened to Qārūn, or Korah, when God made the earth swallow him, and as happened to Pharaoh, when God caused him to drown. Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'As one person was walking proudly, wearing his two garments, admiring himself, God made the earth to swallow him. He continues to turn over and over in it until the Day of Judgement'.⁽³⁾

9

It is advisable when one engages in a scholarly or social discussion to examine one's attitude. Pride is one of the most frequent reasons for rejecting the truth, and it is the reason that caused the punishment of many early communities. They were too proud to follow the prophets sent to them. In reference to Noah's people, God says: 'Whenever I call on them, so that You may forgive them, they thrust their fingers into their ears, draw their garments over their heads, grow obstinate and become even more arrogant and insolent'. (71: 7) He also says: 'And Qārūn [Korah], Pharaoh and Hāmān! Moses had come to them with all evidence of the truth, but they behaved with arrogance on earth. Indeed, they could not escape. (29: 39) God says: 'As for the 'Ād, they behaved arrogantly through the land, against all right, and said: Who is mightier than us?' (41: 15) It should be noted that in all these cases God links their punishment and destruction to the fact that they were arrogant. Every Muslim should always endeavour to remove all traces of pride and arrogance from their feelings and behaviour.

10

Muṭarrif ibn 'Abdullāh ibn al-Shikhhīr, who belonged to the *tābi'īn* generation, saw Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab ibn Abi Ṣufrah, who was the Governor of Basrah, walking proudly, with his robe dragging on the ground. Muṭarrif said to him: 'You, servant of God! God and His Messenger dislike this kind of walking'. Yazīd said to him: 'Do you not know me?' Muṭarrif said to him: 'I do know you: you started as an insignificant sperm, and you will end as a dirty carcass. In between, you carry foul smelling dirt within you'. Yazīd then stood well and walked normally.⁽⁴⁾

1 Al-Mazzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl*, Vol. 11, p. 191.

2 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2492.

3 Related by al-Bukhari, 5789; Muslim, 2088 (Muslim's text).

4 Ibn Khillikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, Vol. 6, p. 284. Al-Dhababī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, Vol. 4, p. 505.

