

30864 - Different kinds of humility

the question

I suffer from an inclination to be arrogant towards people and to feel superior towards them, and I would like to be humble. I hope that you can tell me something about the virtues of humility and its various types so that Allah may open my heart towards it.

Detailed answer

Humility is one of the greatest blessings that Allah can bestow upon His slave. He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And by the Mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:159]

“And verily, you (O Muhammad) are on an exalted (standard of) character” [al-Qalam 68:4]

This refers to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) being a true slave of Allah in many ways and his treating all people with the utmost kindness. His character was one of complete humility based on sincerity towards Allah and compassion towards the slaves of Allah, which was the complete opposite of the characteristics of the proud and arrogant.

Al-Majmoo’ al-Kaamilah li Mu’allafaat al-Shaykh al-Sa’di, 5/442, 443

There are many means of attaining humility, which no Muslim adopts but he will attain this characteristic. They were explained by Imam Ibn al-Qayyim as follows:

Humility comes from knowing about Allah and His names and attributes, and His greatness, venerating Him, loving Him and being in awe of Him; and also from knowing about oneself and one’s faults, and weaknesses. From that may develop the attitude of humility, which means feeling helpless before Allah, and being humble and compassionate towards His slaves, so that the person does not feel superior towards anyone, or think that he has any

rights over anyone else; rather he thinks that others are better than him, and that their rights come before his. This is a characteristic that Allah gives to those whom He loves, honours and draws close to Him. (Al-Rooh, p. 233)

There are many reports which speak of the reward of humility. For example:

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Wealth does not decrease because of charity, and Allah increases His slave in honour when he forgives others. And no one humbles himself before Allah but Allah will raise him (in status)."

Narrated by Muslim, 2588. Al-Nawawi included it in a chapter entitled: "The recommendation of forgiveness and humility."

Al-Nawawi said:

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "And no one humbles himself before Allah but Allah will raise him (in status)." This is understood in two ways: the first is that He will raise him (in status) in this world, and give him status in people's hearts because of his humility, and give him a high status in people's eyes. The second is that what is meant is his reward in the Hereafter, where his status will be raised because of his humility in this world.

The scholars said: It may be that both are meant, (and that his status will be raised) both in this world and in the Hereafter. And Allah knows best." (Sharh Muslim, 16/142)

Humility may mean various things, such as:

1. A person humbling himself to the commands and prohibitions of Allah, doing what He commands and avoiding what He forbids.

Ibn al-Qayyim said:

Because a person may hesitate to obey His commands out of laziness, thus behaving in a reluctant way in an attempt to flee from servitude towards Allah, and his soul may have the

desire to commit haraam actions, but when the person humbles himself to the commands and prohibitions of Allah, he will humble himself to true submission ('uboodiyyah)."(Al-Rooh p. 233)

2. Humbling oneself before the might, majesty and power of Allah.

Ibn al-Qayyim said:

Every time he feels that he is great, he remembers the might of Allah and that might belongs to Him only, and he remembers His intense anger against those who compete with Him in that, then he humbles himself before Him and submits to the might of Allah. This is the ultimate humility and inevitably includes the first type of humility mentioned above, but the converse can never apply (i.e., this type of humility inevitably leads to the first type, but a person may submit to the commands and prohibitions of Allah but he does not humble himself before His might).

The one who is truly humble is the one who is blessed with both. And Allah is the One Whose help we seek.

Al-Rooh, p. 233.

3. Humility in one's dress and manner of walking.

It was narrated from Ibn 'Umar that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Whilst a man was letting his garment drag out of pride, he was swallowed up by the earth and will continue sinking in it until the Day of Resurrection."

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3297.

It was also narrated by al-Bukhari (5452) and Muslim (2088) from the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah. According to the version narrated by al-Bukhari: "Whilst a man was walking in a garment admiring himself with his hair nicely combed, Allah caused (the earth) to swallow him up and he will continue sinking in it until the Day of Resurrection."

4. Humility towards one who is of a lesser status and helping him

It was narrated that al-Bara' ibn 'Aazib said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was moving soil with us on the day of al-Ahzaab, and I saw him with dust covering the whiteness of his stomach, and he (the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)) was saying, "(O Allah)! Without You, we would not have been guided, nor would we have given in charity, nor would we have prayed. So (O Allah!) send tranquility (Sakeenah) upon us as they (the chiefs of the enemy tribes) have rebelled against us. And if they intend affliction (i.e. want to frighten us and fight against us) then we would not (flee but would withstand them)." And he raised his voice whilst saying it.

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 6809; Muslim, 1803.

5. Humility in interactions with one's wife and helping her.

It was narrated that al-Aswad said: I asked 'Aa'ishah what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to do in his house, and she said: He used to serve his family and when the time for prayer came he would go out and pray.

al-Bukhari, 644.

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar said:

This shows that we are encouraged to be humble and not arrogant, and that a man should serve his family.

Fath al-Baari, 2/163

6. Humility towards the young and joking with them.

It was narrated that Anas said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the best of people in character. I had a brother whose name was Abu 'Umayr. He said, I think he was weaned, and when he (the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)) came he would say, "O Abu Umayr, what happened to the nughayr (a small bird that he kept as a pet)?"

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5850; Muslim, 2150.

Al-Nawawi said:

The nughayr is a small bird.

This hadeeth teaches us many things, such as being kind to small children. This demonstrates the good character of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and how he was of noble character and humble.

Sharh Muslim, 14/129

7. Humility towards servants and slaves

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "If the servant of one of you brings his food and he does not want to make him sit and eat with him, then let him offer him a morsel or two, because he has prepared it and served it."

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 2418 and 5144; Muslim, 1663.

We ask Allah to make us among those who humble themselves before His might.

And Allah knows best.