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The Problem of Selfishness

The problem we are talking about today is one of the problems that are related to human being in general. Some psychologist said “ The greatest motivation in the human nature is the desire to be important or to get the attention”, which means the human being wants to feel important .This characteristic has been created with us since we were born and some people misunderstand it or how can they express it to others.

This characteristic is very well known among Arabs and the Arab tribes and the love for being masters and leaders of the others, but when Islam came , the first thing was fighting the Infidelity or association worship with Allah and then fighting the love of self or being selfish.

Let’s look at some of the examples of selfishness:

- Abu Sufian said : “ I am the master of this Valley”
- Abu Jahl the uncle of the Prophet (PBUH) said: We were the leaders of the tribes with tribe of Abdu Manaf (The prophet’s tribe), when Muhammad (PBUH) become prophet, they started to brag that the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is one of us and started to brag about it in a selfish way.
- The Poet Al-Mutanabi said” I am the one the blind can see my literature and poems, and my words are heard by the dumb and mute person, this refers to the selfishness and being arrogant as of the time of before Islam (Ignorance Era).

So the problem of selfishness is one of the problems that faced Islam after infidelity or association of other Idols with Allah. How did Islam deal with this problem????

Allah (SWT) says in the Quran:” I have sent you nothing but mercy to all mankind”, and substituted the self (I) with the group or (We), Islam made the Muslims change their thinking and look what is the best for the Muslims in general not themselves as individuals, Islam also prohibited arrogance, showing off and love oneself.

Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in several of his statements urged his companions and followers not to be selfish and kill any desire for Muslim to be selfish because that will lead to arrogance, superiority and discrimination against each other. He substituted the feeling of I with the feeling We to each other as a Muslim nation and love to each other.

prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said in one of the hadeeths (Statement):

“Four things from the time before Islam people will not leave and one of them is being arrogant and selfish”, and we have seen in several situations where people side with their relatives even they are wrong, just because the love of the self or love for their tribe or because being relatives, and they forget their religion, and their God, and they know that they have to side with the truth regardless of the relationship.

Allah (SWT) says in the Quran:” O’who you believe be among the people who offer justice in your testimony even against your parents and relatives”.

Telling the truth and siding with the truth even against yourself is a sign of a good believer, even against your parents, or closest relatives, and never side with evil.

Pharaoh King of Egypt said:” I have the kingdom in Egypt”. And said to Prophet Moussa (PBUH): “I am better than this man (Moussa) who is humiliated” and we all know what Allah (SWT) did with Pharaoh by drowning him in the Red Sea.

And same story with Qaroon who was very rich and arrogant and Allah destroyed him with all of his wealth. We have so many examples about the people and nations before such as the people of Bilqees the Queen of Yemen when they were saying we are the strongest nation by mocking other people, this is when Allah destroyed them. Also the story of the Devil or Satan who refused to bow down to Adam and said I am better than him, as a result Allah casted him away from his mercy.

Another example of the person who owned a beautiful garden and was bragging about it by saying to his neighbor” I am richer than you and higher dignity” and because of his arrogance Allah destroyed his garden which was mentioned in Surat Kahf (The Cave).

Let’s take a look at our beloved prophet Mohammad when he was saying:” Don’t let me depend on myself for a blink of an eye” and in another narration “If you let me rely on myself not Allah, I will be relying on a weakness and pitfall” as sign of humiliation to Allah and his trust in and reliance on nobody but Allah.

There is certain situation when we use the I as a pronoun and will not mean selfishness as the prophet Mohammad said: I am the son of Adam without any pride or arrogance. Also when prophet Youssef (PBUH) said” Make me a trustee on the treasury and I will be a trustworthy and knowledgeable.

The selfish people who say I all the time has five characteristics:

1. They say I in front of people all the time, so can appear as an important person.
2. People will avoid their company because they have an impression that the selfish person look at them in a superior way. Because people avoid them they will feel isolated.
3. Selfish person always feel the people are trying to slander them, hurt them, not doing enough for them which will make them unhappy and in bad mode most of the times.

4. Selfish people feel that others are less important, their work is not that important, they feel people did not reach their level in the social status, they will resort to joking, ironic joking and mocking other people.
5. The selfish people refuse any criticism and correction of their mistakes or advice, this is indeed one of the Hypocrites characteristic.

Selfish people have false belief in themselves:

The selfish people believe that they are something that they are not, they love to keep looking at the Mirror and they will see themselves as Lions but they are not, but his behavior indicate how they see themselves, but indeed they are not Lions but like cats. Their behavior include hurting people, talking negatively about other people, object to everything other people do.

Another example of this is what is happening in our Masajid; however we have more good than bad in our Masajid. We see people in these Masajid object to almost everything so they can feel that they are important and have a voice.

Selfish people will use everything in their power including religion, Masajid to reach a higher and an important position.

Islam treated the selfishness in different ways by fighting arrogance, pride, love of self.

Story about selfish people false belief in themselves:

There was a man with high power in one of the non-democratic countries, he was very corrupt and corrupted other people, and he was eating from unlawful earning (Haram) way. One day his friends and superiors gather in a meeting to discuss what are they going to do with him, they said "this man is exposing us " because he they corrupt like him, one of them said let's demote him to a lower rank at work and they did to see if he is going to correct himself and be better, but he continued to be corrupted, so they held another meeting to decide the next action, so they decided to demote him to a lower rank and make him as the Company Gate Keeper, he continued his bad behavior and start to give the visitors of the company a hard time and delay their entrance to the company

by making false excuses, he would make it difficult people is entrance and exiting.

The lesson from this story is no matter how high or low position you have, if you are selfish and love yourself more than anything else, you will be corrupt and a person with bad behavior.

Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) statements in warning us about selfishness:

1. “No one will enter to heaven if he has an iota of arrogance in his heart”
2. “ A man keeps getting arrogant and looking at people with superiority until Allah will write him among the wicked people”
3. “ Whoever relied on himself not on Allah he will be a selfish and looser”

In order to avoid selfishness, seek help and rely on Allah, we should always humble ourselves; accept criticism from others especially if we were wrong.

Aysheh the wife of the prophet may Allah be pleased with her was asked when a person become a sinner; she said “when he thinks he is a righteous person and he is not”.

Muslim Scholars recommendation to avoid Selfishness:

1. Imam Ghazali said: the treatment for selfishness is to avoid using your position and power intentionally, that will humble yourself.
2. Do not show off your actions unless it is necessary especially when you are giving a charity. Allah says in the Quran :” Among people who will be under the shade of Allah at the day of judgment, person gave charity in secret”
Scholar Abu Othman Neisabouri was patient with his wifes sickness for 15 years and no one knew about that except one of his friends and was making prayer to Allah to accept this deed in his secret.
3. Scientist Einstein said: getting rid selfishness can be done when you know it is false, and the problem is that most of the people do not realize that it is false.

In Conclusion: the warning by the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) about selfishness to Muslims by knowing its falsehood, humbleness of ourselves and hiding of our good deeds as much as we can, if we do all of that we will get rid of our selfishness and become rich not selfish people.