

Analytical study and discovery of the relationship between "Self-conceit" (‘ujb) and "Horror" (Waḥsha) in the hadith "Indeed, the most terrible of the wicked is the ajab"

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Introduction

The ethical vice of ‘ujb (self-conceit), defined as the attribution of virtues to oneself, is one of the major plagues of individual and social conduct in the Islamic system of knowledge. A key consequence highlighted in the hadith “Indeed, the most terrible of the wicked is the self-conceit (innā awḥash al-waḥshati al-‘ujb)” from Nahj al-Balagha (Wisdom 38), is waḥsha (terrifying). This study analytically examines the causal link between these two concepts. It addresses core questions: What is the precise meaning of ‘waḥsha’ in this tradition? How does ‘ujb mechanically produce waḥsha? And Why is this kind of horror called “the most terrifying”? Through textual analysis, this research elucidates the underlying dimensions of this relationship within Islamic hadith scholarship.

Materials and Methods

A descriptive-analytical methodology rooted in hadith textology was employed. The process involved: 1) Lexical Analysis: Precise semantic investigation of ‘ujb and waḥsha using classical Arabic lexicons (e.g., Ibn Fāris, al-Muṣṭafawī) to distinguish them from related terms like kibr (arrogance) and khawf (fear). 2) Textual Validation: Assessing the hadith’s reliability through source criticism (Nahj al-Balagha), content analysis (consistency with Islamic doctrine), and isnād examination. Although its chain is technically weak, strong peripheral evidences (qarā’in)—including its presence in authoritative early Shi‘i (e.g., al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī, al-Ṣadūq’s Man lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh) and Sunni sources (e.g., al-Jāḥiẓ’s Mi‘at Kalimah)—support its authentic provenance. 3) Forming a Scholarly Dossier: Systematically collecting and categorizing congruent traditions on the definition, condemnation, and consequences of ‘ujb. 4) Textual Pathology: Analyzing variant readings (e.g., awḥash al-waḥshati vs. ashadd al-waḥdati) and potential causes like paraphrase or scribal error. 5) Exegesis Critique: Reviewing and synthesizing eight major interpretive approaches from classical and modern commentators (e.g., Maytham al-Baḥrānī, Āqā Jamāl al-Khunsārī).

Results and Findings

Findings are presented across several axes: 1) Nature of 'Ujb: It is an internal psychic state stemming from ignorance of the divine origin of virtues, leading to self-glorification and a sense of entitlement vis-à-vis God, distinct though related to kibr. 2) Meaning of Wahsha: The core meaning was identified as "avoidance", "Not getting used to", and "solitude", with "fear" being a secondary, concomitant element. Thus, the hadith denotes "the most terrifying solitude is (that caused by) self-conceit." 3) Mechanism of causation of wahsha by 'Ujb generates through a multi-layered process: (a) Active Withdrawal: The mu'jib (self-admirer), driven by pride, consciously shuns others and turns to seclusion and conversion. (b) Social Repulsion: His arrogant demeanor and demand for excessive respect provoke avoidance by society. (c) Inner loneliness: Even when surrounded by people, a narcissist suffers from deep inner loneliness due to a lack of intimacy and not seeing anyone on their level. (d) Self-Perpetuating Cycle: Isolation impedes intellectual growth through consultation, leading to errors that further deepen alienation. 4) Reason for Severity: This wahsha is "the most terrifying" because 'ujb is uniquely self-blinding, preventing self-awareness and thus any corrective pursuit, trapping the individual in deepening solitude. 5) Gradational Nature: Both 'ujb and its resultant wahsha possess varying degrees of intensity. 6) Ultimate Consequence: At its peak, 'ujb leads to ingratitude towards God, resulting in a metaphysical alienation—the most profound form of horror and isolation.

Conclusion

This study establishes that the relationship between 'ujb and awḥash al-wahsha is causal, governed by defined psycho-social and spiritual mechanisms. 'Ujb acts as a self-isolating vice, inducing both active withdrawal and passive societal exclusion. The resulting loneliness is deemed the "most terrifying" due to the vice's self-concealing and self-reinforcing nature, which obstructs repentance and remedy. The research concludes that wahsha here encompasses a spectrum from subjective inner loneliness to objective seclusion, and ultimately, spiritual alienation from the Divine. By systematically analyzing the terminology, validating the text, and synthesizing classical exegesis, this investigation provides a coherent framework for understanding one of the most severe moral-psychological consequences of narcissistic conceit in Islamic ethical teachings.

Keywords: 'Ujb (Self-conceit), Narcissism, Wahsha (horror), Loneliness, Hadith Textual Criticism (Naqd al-Ḥadīth).