

Detrimental Effects of Hypocrisy

اتَّخَذُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ جُنَّةً فَصَدُّوا عَنِ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُمْ سَاءَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

“They have made their oaths a screen (for their misdeeds): thus they obstruct (men) from the path of Allah. Truly evil are their deeds.”¹

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ آمَنُوا ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا فَطُبِعَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ

“That is because they believed, then they rejected faith; so a seal was set on their hearts; therefore they understand not.”²

Generally speaking, the most dangerous enemy is an unknown one. A known enemy, no matter how powerful he is, causes less damage than an unknown enemy does. In addition, the damage caused by a known enemy can be made up for. The reason is that the enemy is identified, his bad intentions are clear, his strength is recognized and his goals are well-known.

His enmity is written on his forehead and all are prepared for him to commit some kind of atrocity. For this reason man is always ready to defend himself against this enemy. Man never tells him his secrets. He is completely prepared to carefully protect himself against the danger that this enemy poses.

On the other hand, the unknown enemy, however small and powerless he may be, can cause serious damage because he pretends to be a friend or at least pretends to be indifferent. He can cause irreconcilable damage and at the same time not lose anything.

Such an enemy will remain a friend even if his bad intentions are made clear. The reason for this is that the victim considers the enemy to be one of his own. His false vows will be accepted and the victim will be tricked by his excuses. The enemy will then persist with his evil deeds.

The hypocrites gained the love and respect of the early Islamic leaders and common Muslims by pretending to be Muslim. Because they were considered Muslim, people did not look at them suspiciously and the atrocities that they committed were kept in the dark. If they were ever exposed they would swear that they were innocent and thus their evil actions would be covered up. The hypocrites would use their oaths to hide their disbelief and would therefore protect themselves from punishment.

Islam's Most Dangerous Enemy

The Prophet of Islam (S), in one of his treasured speeches, introduced the hypocrites as Islam's most dangerous enemy. He even said that they were Islam's only enemy. The following is the text of his speech: "I have never been frightened of any nation conquering Islam. I only worry about one group of people: the unbelievers who pretend to be Muslim, the two-faced hypocrites. They are with you in their words, but they would never take a step with you."³

The Prophet of Islam's best student, the Commander of the Faithful (a) said the following regarding the hypocrites: "I warn you about the hypocrites. They are misguided and they misguide as well. They have appeared in society in different colors and with different faces. Their speech is eloquent, profitable and is even a cure for pain. But their actions are like incurable diseases."⁴

The Islamic world must heed this warning given to us by our master, 'Ali (a) during the early days of Islam. The Muslims must take this advice and, with the utmost scrutiny, become aware of the hypocrites. Hypocrites must be banished from the community. Their appearances should not fool the Muslims and their vows should not be accepted. The Muslims should know that they cover up their evil actions by taking part in religious ceremonies.

Sealed Hearts

Specialists in the field of ethics claim that there are three stages for any spiritual trait: action, habit and second-nature.

I shall explain this by giving an example:

A twenty-year-old youth has obtained the base trait of being a liar. He lies without thinking about it. His whole life is founded upon his lies. He even lies when there is no advantage in lying. The origin of this trait that is found deep down in this young adult's spirit should be found.

When he was four, or even six, years old it was impossible for him to lie. He would only be able to express what he saw or heard. There was no thought of adding or subtracting from it.

The thought that it is possible to say an untruth entered his head through his father, mother, or an older playmate. From here, a couple of opportunities presented themselves for him to use this new course of action and lie. This is the first step towards obtaining unethical traits which was labeled "action."

If one continues to use these opportunities and persist in lying, one would advance to the second level, that of “habit.”

In this step, the unethical trait becomes part of his psyche. Treatment at this level is still somewhat easy. Caring spiritual coaches can cleanse his soul of this immoral trait by giving him advice and warning him of the dreadful outcome destined for liars. But if this action is repeated again and again, the trait will move from being a habit into becoming second-nature, the third stage. Treatment is difficult at this level. This level, itself, has stages. The more the action is repeated the more embedded the trait becomes. Likewise, the less the action is repeated the weaker the trait becomes.

Spiritual attributes are composed of both immoral and ethical traits. Examples of immoral traits are lying, treachery, murder and oppression. Examples of ethical traits are justice, trustworthiness, equality and keeping one's word. Each one of these can be obtained by consistent and repeated action and by progressing through the three stages mentioned above.

From the viewpoint of Islamic philosophy, spiritual traits, whether good or bad, are the results of man's daily actions. The repetition of an action causes a habit to form. It is because of this that it is said that every man creates his own spiritual and ethical traits.

If one finds in oneself a spiritual trait or habit, be it moral or immoral, it is because of repeated action. An example is one who lies so often that it becomes second nature so that he or she is unable to tell the truth. One even lies when lying has no benefit.

I see one who is drowning in sin but has not once been frightened or regretful of his actions. This is the same person who has been saturated by unethical traits because of his repetition in committing sin. His heart is closing and will soon be unable to accept the light of guidance. The highest spiritual mentors and psychologists have given up on him.

The glorious Qur'an, in the verse under explanation, says: “***So a seal was set on their hearts.***” This means that their hearts have been sealed because of their immoral actions. Their hearts are filled with satanic traits to such an extent that there is no room left for ethical traits.

In contrast to this group I see and know a group of people who shakes as if they are having a seizure when they commit a sin. They shed tears out of fear from the punishment of that sin.

If one ponders upon the meaning of this verse it will become clear that determinism cannot exist. In fact, this is one of the strongest proofs for free-will.

[1.](#) 63:2

[2.](#) 63:3

[3.](#) Imam 'Ali (a), Nahj al-Balaghah, volume 3, page 29 ('Abduh

[4.](#) Imam 'Ali (a), Nahj al-Balaghah, speech 192

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