

Hypocrisy

إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُنَافِقُونَ قَالُوا نَشْهَدُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُهُ وَاللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَكَاذِبُونَ

When the hypocrites come to you, they say: “We bear witness that thou are indeed the Messenger of Allah.” Yea, Allah knows that you are indeed His Messenger, and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars.” ¹

What is A Hypocrite?

The word hypocrite (*munafiq*) is derived from the Arabic word “*nifaq*” or hypocrisy. The term hypocrite refers to a person whose inward reality differs from his outward appearance, one who is two-faced or a double-dealer. Hypocrites do not use logic or rational reasoning to achieve their personal goals or profits; instead, they unjustly oppose the majority. As long as conditions permit, they will obstruct the majority, but because of their fear of the majority or their love of profit, they pretend to be friends with the majority, united to them.

Hypocrites are not exclusive to Islam or to any other religion and can even be found in political parties. Sometimes one political party jeopardizes the goals of another party, while the second party lacks the ability to challenge the first. When this happens, the political party in danger might gather groups that share their beliefs and create a counterfeit political party.

Sometimes people join a group from the outside to cause division within that group from the inside. They hold the group back from accomplishing its goals by causing mayhem.

Some people, also, might join a faction without believing in that faction's ideals. They affiliate themselves with such a group only in hopes of being financially successful or protecting their lives or property.

Such a situation is found in hypocritical parties around the world that rely on the common man's mindset.

Islam was no exception to this. A minority, consisting of hypocrites, formed alongside the majority of the

Islamic society, one that was based on theology, social justice and moral excellences. They outwardly respected Islamic principles and laws, but in secret they were grave enemies of Islam.

They would corroborate with Islam's enemies during the most sensitive times. They would share military secrets with the enemy. They would bring fear into the hearts of Muslims by spreading rumors and lies. They would try to subvert the Islamic government by interacting with governments who were against Islam.

The harmful effects of the hypocrites are not limited to the past, rather they continue to cause difficulties for the Muslim community. This will be completely understood by referring to the circumstances and causes of the revelations regarding hypocrites and by referring to Islamic history.

The hypocrites formed as a party in Medina. A small minority of the people in Medina disliked the way that the majority warmly welcomed the Prophet after his migration. They, in their hearts, fought with fervor against Islam in their hearts and held on firmly to their polytheistic beliefs. There were different reasons as to why this group was formed. These reasons will be explained below:

1. Some hypocrites were opposed to Islam because of their personal desires and profit. They thought that Islam would cause them harm. Hence, an opposing minority was founded who started to attack the Islamic government in various ways.

Before the Prophet of Islam migrated to Medina, the two tribes, *Aws* and *Khazraj* were tired from their hundred-year war. They decided to form a government in Medina consisting of members from both tribes.

They agreed to have 'Abd Allah bin Ubay as their leader. This was just about to happen when the light of Islam entered the hearts of a group of youth and tribal leaders who asked the Prophet to migrate to Medina. Most of the people of Medina openhandedly welcomed the Prophet when he entered the city of Medina.

'Abd Allah bin Ubay, who thought that becoming a Muslim would be against his interests, was not able to hide his jealousy and ill will. He turned to the Prophet on the day of his arrival and said: "Oh Muhammad, go to those who tricked you and brought you here. Go to them and don't deceive us in our land."

At this moment the coalition of hypocrites was formed and he became their leader. Even though the general public thought he became Muslim, and even thought he would participate in religious gatherings, he did not become Muslim in his heart. He kept his hypocritical strivings secret with the help of those sympathetic to his cause.

2. Some of the members of the coalition of hypocrites sincerely became Muslim at the start of the migration. They even propagated the religion. But, after the advent of Islam as they began to lose their

social rankings, their convictions were altered and they became hypocrites. An example of this is Ibn 'Amir.

Before Islam he was the leader of one of the revealed religions in Medina. When the Messenger of Allah (S) was chosen as a leader for all of Medina, Ibn 'Amir's position collapsed. He fled Medina for Mecca in fear of retaliation for the sabotages he committed. Then, after Mecca was overtaken by the Muslims, he fled to Rome. He was the leader of *Masjid al-Dharar* which is mentioned in *Surah Tawbah: 70*.

3. A group of people joined the coalition of hypocrites after the conquest of Mecca. These are the enemies of Islam who pretended to become Muslim when Islam spread throughout Arabia. They never relinquished the grudge they had for Islam. One of the leaders of this group was Abu Sufyan, a member of the *Umayyah* tribe.

In a strategic time, he confessed his disbelief in Islam and professed his belief in polytheism. Abu Sufyan said in an *Umayyah* tribal meeting held at 'Uthman's house during the first few days of the third caliph's reign: "The position of leadership has reached you after *Tim* and *'Uday* (The tribes of the first two caliphs). Play with it like a ball under your feet and only pass it along to members of the *Umayyah* tribe. This caliphate is what is meant by governing mankind. I have never believed in Heaven or Hell."²

During 'Uthman's reign, Abu Sufyan kicked Hamza's grave as he passed by it and said: "Oh Abu 'Amarah (Hamza's nickname)! The government that we were fighting against yesterday, the government that we tried to destroy by the sword, is now in the hands of our youth. They play with it like they play with a ball."³

Abu Sufyan tried to cause disagreement amongst the Muslims when Abu Bakr became the caliph by trying to incite 'Ali (a) to stand up against the caliph. The Commander of the Faithful was aware of Abu Sufyan's evil intentions and told him: "You have been an enemy of Islam and the Muslims from day one." 'Ali (a) not only did not shake Abu Sufyan's hand when he stretched it out as a phony swear of allegiance, but he also turned his back towards him.

Ibn Abi al-Hadid writes: "Abu Sufyan said, when the emigrants (muhajirin) gathered around Abu Bakr: 'Islam has been encompassed by a great tornado which will not be calmed except by the spilling of blood.' He then approached 'Ali (a) and 'Abbas and said: 'Abu Bakr has won, even though he is in the minority.'

Subsequently, he stretched his hand out to 'Ali (a) to swear allegiance and said: 'I shall fill Medina's Mosque full of soldiers against Abu Bakr.' 'Ali (a) did not accept his allegiance and when Abu Sufyan became hopeless he recited the following two lines of poetry:

No man will tolerate inequity aimed at him,
Except the two most base ones, who lack both life and spine,
This one is bound completely to a hoof,

While that one's head is cracked open, such that no one will mourn him.[4](#)

“Abu Sufyan recited the following poem to the Commander of the Faithful on the day that Abu Bakr became caliph:

Oh Bani Hashim, do not let the people covet what is yours,
Especially not Taym ibn Murra or 'Uday,
For the affair (of the caliphate) is yours alone and will return to you,
And none is (fit) for it, except Abu Hassan, 'Ali.

“The Commander of the Faithful responded: “You are after something that we will not do.’
When he lost hope in 'Ali (a) he turned to 'Abbas and said: “You, being your cousin's inheritor, are better than anyone else is. If I swear allegiance to you, nobody will oppose your leadership.’

“'Abbas laughed and said: “Would 'Abbas go after something that belongs to 'Ali (a)?’
“At this moment, Abu Sufyan, whose sole purpose of this allegiance was to cause contention between the Muslims which would lead to a civil war, left.”[5](#)

4. Some of the members of the hypocritical faction were people who did not have any resolve. They did not know which side to join. They had weak spirits and hearts. They were confused because of their weak intellects. The Qur'an describes them in the following manner:

مُذَبِّبِينَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ لَا إِلَى هَؤُلَاءِ وَلَا إِلَى هَؤُلَاءِ

“***Swaying between this (and that), (belonging) neither to these nor to those.***”[6](#)

These were the different groups of hypocrites. The danger that they imposed as internal enemies of Islam was beyond measure. They were more dangerous than eternal enemies could be.

Commentary

One of the clear characteristics of a hypocrite is mendicancy. This can even be considered the foundation of hypocrisy. A hypocrite says something with his tongue that he does not believe in his heart. In this verse, the hypocrites bear witness to the messengerhood of the final Prophet in their speech, but they do not believe it in their hearts.

Allah emphatically dismisses their testimony (*shahadah*) by saying: “Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars.” Allah emphasizes this sentence: “Yea, Allah knows that you are indeed His Messenger,” to match the hypocrites, who also falsely emphasized their words: “We bear witness that you are *indeed* the Messenger of Allah.”

- [2.](#) Ibn Hajr, Al-Asabah, volume 4, page 88
 - [3.](#) Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Shushtari, Qamus al-Rijal, volume 10, page 89
 - [4.](#) Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Nahj al-Balaghah, volume 1, page 221-222
 - [5.](#) Sayyid 'Ali bin Ma'sum, Al-Darajat al-Rafi'ah, pages 86-87
 - [6.](#) 4: 143
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