

Question 31: What is the criterion of taqiyyah {dissimulation}?

Reply: *Taqiyyah* means concealing one's conviction and faith from the enemies to avoid worldly, spiritual or religious harms, and it is one of the religious obligations of every Muslim on which the Holy Qur'an emphasizes.

Taqiyyah from the Qur'anic viewpoint

The Glorious Qur'an has referred to this obligation in many verses. Here are some of them:

﴿لَا يَتَّخِذِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِي شَيْءٍ إِلَّا أَنْ تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمْ تُقَاةً﴾
﴿

“The faithful should not take the faithless for allies instead of the faithful, and whoever does that Allah will have nothing to do with him, except when you are wary of them out of caution.”¹

This verse vividly testifies to the fact that friendship with the infidels is not permissible. But, in case of dissimulation {*taqiyyah*}, i.e. when one intends to save his life or parry dangers, then outward friendship and concordance with them is permissible.

﴿مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنْ مَنْ شَرَحَ بِالْكُفْرِ صَدْرًا فَعَلَيْهِمْ غَضَبٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ﴾

“Whoever renounces faith in Allah after {affirming} his faith—barring someone who is compelled while his heart is at rest in faith—but those who open up their breasts to unfaith, upon such shall be Allah's wrath, and there is a great punishment for them.”²

Regarding the circumstances surrounding the revelation of this verse, the exegetes {*mufasssirun*} thus

say:

One day, ‘Ammar ibn Yasir, his father and his mother were captured by the enemies and the infidels asked them to renounce Islam and acknowledge disbelief {*kufr*} and polytheism {*shirk*}. All those who were with ‘Ammar bore witness to the Oneness of God and the prophethood of the Holy Prophet (S).

Therefore, some of them attained martyrdom while others were tortured by the enemies. In order to avoid the enemies’ torture, ‘Ammar uttered what the infidels wanted him to utter, and so, he was freed.

When he met the Messenger of Allah (S) he was very regretful and dejected for what he had said. So, the Holy Prophet (S) comforted him and then the aforementioned verse was revealed.³

From this verse and statements of exegetes, it becomes clear that hiding one’s inner conviction for the sake of saving his life and avoiding material and non-material harms was practiced during the time of the Prophet (S) and so it is acceptable in Islam.

Taqiyyah from the Shi’ah viewpoint

Because the despotic Umayyad and ‘Abbasid governments throughout history were inimical to the Shi’ah and resolved to eliminate them,⁴ the Shi’ah used *taqiyyah* as per Qur’anic injunctions by hiding their true beliefs. In doing so, they saved their lives as well as the lives of their Muslim brethren under those critical circumstances.

It is clear that with an atmosphere full of despotism and strangulation the Shi’ah had no other way to protect themselves against the storm of oppression that was threatening their lives than using *taqiyyah*. As such, if tyrant kings and their agents had not been inimical to the Shi’ah and if they had not taken as the main agenda of their governments the brutal carnage of the Shi’ah, there would have been no reason for the Shi’ah’s resorting to *taqiyyah*.

It is necessary to note that *taqiyyah* is not practiced only by the Shi’ah. In fact, other Muslims also make use of the shield of *taqiyyah* vis-à-vis such murderous enemies who show hostility to the Muslims of all schools of thought like the Kharijites {*khawarij*} and oppressive governments that resort to all unlawful ways. When they see that they cannot confront their enemies, Muslims conceal their inner beliefs in order to save their lives.

On this basis, if all the members of Muslim community have mutual understanding and live in unity and cooperation, there will be no ground for *taqiyyah* among the Muslims.

Conclusion

From what have been stated so far, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. *Taqiyyah* has its root in the Qur'an and in the conduct of the Prophet's Companions, and the Prophet's (S) approval of it is a vivid testimony to its existence and permissibility during the early period of Islam.
2. The motive behind the Shi'ah's use of *taqiyyah* was to escape the brutal killing and the storms of tyranny and oppression that were intended to eradicate this school of thought.
3. *Taqiyyah* is not practiced only by the Shi'ah; in fact, other Muslim groups also resort to it.
4. The aim of using *taqiyyah* is not only the abandonment of and concealing Islamic beliefs from polytheists; rather, the criterion of *taqiyyah* which is intended to ensure the Muslims' safety is more general, and hiding one's inner beliefs vis-à-vis any murderous enemy, either because one lacks the ability to confront or because the conditions for resistance are not available is an indispensable affair.
5. If there is good understanding between all the members of Muslim community, there will exist no ground for *taqiyyah* among the Muslims.

[1.](#) Surah Al 'Imran 3:28.

[2.](#) Surah an-Nahl 16:106.

[3.](#) See Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti, Ad-Durr al-Manthur (Beirut), vol. 4, p. 131.

[4.](#) For more information on the merciless killing of the Shi'ah perpetrated by the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphs, see Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyin; 'Allamah Ammini, Shuhada' al-Fadilah; Muhammad Jawad Mughniyyah, Ash-Shi'ah wa'l-Hakimun.

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