

# Disbelief and its branches

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## Kufr, Disbelief & Nullification of Islam and Iman

The root, kaaf faa' raa' “k-f-r” [ك ف ر], carries the meanings of covering [تَغْطِيَةٌ]. Farmers are called *kuffaar* because they place the seed in the soil, and then **cover** the soil over the seed, this as in Allah's saying:

{ ... كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ... (20) } سورة الجديد

“like the rain that grows plants, pleasing **the farmers [kuffaar]**” [57:20]

And ingratitude, because the ungrateful one is covering up their gifts, as if they had not been blessed,

{ وَإِذَا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فِي الْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَنْ تَدْعُونَ إِلَّا إِلَيْهِ فَلَمَّا نَجَّكُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ أَعْرَضْتُمْ وَكَانَ  
الْإِنْسَانُ كَفُورًا (67) } سورة الإسراء

“And when harm touches you upon the sea, those that you call upon vanish from you except Him (Allah Alone). But when He brings you safe to land, you turn away (from Him). **And man is ever ungrateful [kafoor].**” [17:67]

Usually though, the word denotes the antithesis of Islam and Iman. Thus, a “kaafir” is anyone who does not follow Islam, a “non-Muslim”.

Studying *kufir* prevents us from succumbing to it inadvertently. Bad deeds can lead to good deeds diminishing, but death in a state of disbelief renders all deeds in vain,

{ ... وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ حَتَّى يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَنْ دِينِكُمْ إِنِ اسْتَطَاعُوا وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ  
فِيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا

### خَالِدُونَ (217) سورة البقرة

“And they will never cease fighting you until they turn you back from your religion if they can. And whosoever of you **turns back** (*riddah*) from his religion and dies as a disbeliever, then his deeds will be lost in this life and in the Hereafter, and they will be the dwellers of the Fire. They will abide therein forever.” [2:217]

And,

{ قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا (103) الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعِيَّهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ  
أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا (104) أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَائِهِ فَحَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فَلَا نُقِيمُ  
لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وِزْنًا (105) ذَلِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَاتَّخَذُوا آيَاتِي وَرُسُلِي هُزُورًا  
(106) سورة الكهف

“Say: should we inform you of the greatest losers of deeds? Those whose efforts were lost in the lowly world while they were estimating that they were doing good works. They are those who disbelieved in the *ayaat* of their Lord and His Meeting, so their actions were nullified, so We will not assign for them, on the Day of Resurrection, any weight. That is their reward: Hell, because they disbelieved and took My *Aayaat* and My Messengers in jest.” [18:103-106]

Apostasy, voluntarily leaving Islam, is called *riddah*, and the one who does it may be called a *murtadd*,

{ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةٍ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٍ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ (54) { سورة المائدة

“O you who believe! Whoever from among you **turns back** from his religion, Allah will bring a people whom He will love and they will love Him; humble towards the believers, stern towards the disbelievers, fighting in the way of Allah, and never fearing the blame of the blamers. That is the Grace of Allah which He bestows on whom He wills. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knower.” [5:54]

If we see from another Muslim or even our own selves something that we'll study now from the acts and characteristics of disbelief, do not rush to judgment of one's self or others. There are other texts of the Quran and Sunnah that promote well-established principles and conditions that preside over making that pronouncement.

Studying the nullifiers of Islam helps us to better understand the degree of submission Allah desires from us. As a direct result, it makes us fear Allah more, and not take our faith as sideshow in our lives. But rather, we should strive earnestly and urgently to reverse any symptoms of un-submission within ourselves.

{ وَذَرِ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا دِينَهُمْ لَعِبًا وَهَوًّا وَغَرَّتْهُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَذَكَّرَ بِهِ أَنْ تُبْسَلَ نَفْسٌ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ لَيْسَ لَهَا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيٌّ وَلَا شَفِيعٌ وَإِنْ تَعَدَلَ كُلُّ قَدْلٍ لَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أُبْسِلُوا بِمَا كَسَبُوا لَهُمْ شَرَابٌ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ وَعَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ (70) { سورة الأنعام

“And leave alone those who **take their religion as play and amusement**, and whom the life of this world has deceived. But remind them with it (the Quran) lest a person be given up to destruction for that which he has earned, when he will find for himself no protector or intercessor besides Allah, and even if he offers every ransom, it will not be accepted from him. Such are they who are given up to destruction because of that which they have earned. For them will be a drink of boiling water and a painful torment because they used to **disbelieve**.” [6:70]

## Major apostatic kufr

Although there are several individual things that could remove a person from Islam, they boil down to a few main ones. They could be summarized as *shirk* (explained in brief [here](#)) and ill will towards Islam. All these things are nullifiers of faith, regardless of what else a person does of good or what they claim about the purity of their heart. The most important foundations to recognize in Islam to avoid all kufr is to respect and honor the symbols of Islam, even if one feels weak to implement some of them.

Ridiculing any aspect of Islam or anyone's practice of Islam, would be a disrespect of the highest magnitude, and akin to apostasy, as Allah says:

{وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّمَا كُنَّا نَخُوضُ وَنَلْعَبُ قُلْ أَبِاللَّهِ وَآيَاتِهِ وَرَسُولِهِ كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَهْزِئُونَ (65) لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا قَدْ كَفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ إِنْ نَعْفُ عَنْ طَائِفَةٍ مِنْكُمْ نُعَذِّبْ طَائِفَةً بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا مُجْرِمِينَ (66) {سورة التوبة

**“If you ask them, they declare: ‘We were only talking idly and joking.’ Say: ‘Was it Allah, and His revelations and His Messenger that you were mocking?’ Make no excuse; you disbelieved after you had believed. If We pardon some of you, We will punish others because they were criminals.” [9:65-66]**

These verses were revealed when a group of hypocrites were making fun of some of the Muslims' appetite, defense in battle and recitation of the Quran. When one of the companions heard about this, he rushed to tell the Prophet, but the revelation preceded him and the Prophet was already informed by Allah with these verses.

As Muslims, we should be respectful of all things Islamic, and the efforts of other Muslims to practice Islam, even if we don't agree with their methods. For example, some Muslims make fun of the face-veil of women, or make fun of the short pants that observant Muslim men may wear. Such behavior definitely falls in that category and we should be careful to avoid that, since in

many cases, it is as a subconscious way of displaying what one does not like about Islam. Rather, by correcting our words, our hearts will follow, just like the gears of faith.

**{ذَلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعِظِمَ شَعَائِرَ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهَا مِنْ تَقْوَى الْقُلُوبِ (32) سورة الحج**

**“Thus it is and whosoever honors the Symbols of Allah, then it is truly from the piety of the hearts.” [22:32]**

So a sign of faith is to glorify and respect the things that Allah loves. Making them the subject of jokes is the ultimate sign of disregard. It is commonplace now for even “clean comedians” to make jokes about Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, Moses, and Jesus. Also, unfortunately, even many Muslims who should know better mock some of the ijthihad and opinions professed by huge swaths of scholars over history, and mock those who practice Islam differently, like the face veil, or not dragging pants on the ground, etc. Similarly, desecrating or abusing a *mushaf* (copy of the Arabic Quran) is immediate apostasy for this reason.

Likewise, belying, doubting, hating, rejecting, changing or denying anything from Islam, since it contradicts the “[conditions of the testimony of faith la ilaha illa Allah](#)” of love, sincerity, and acceptance. Allah says:

**{...أَفْتُمِنُونَ بَعْضَ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَى أَشَدِّ الْعَذَابِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ (85) سورة البقرة**

**“Then, do you believe in part of the Book, and disbelieve in part? What else could then be the recompense of those of you who act thus than disgrace in the life of this world? On the day of resurrection, they will be consigned to the severest of punishments. God is not unaware or unmindful of what you do.” [2:85]**

And,

{فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا (65)} سورة النساء

**“But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you (O Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept them with full submission.” [4:65]**

This verse was revealed on the occasion that someone disagreed with a ruling that the Prophet made concerning a territorial dispute and accused the Prophet ﷺ of favoritism. Another one of the companions, Umar ibn al-Khattab, heard this and beheaded the man on site. Allah revealed this verse confirming the validity of Umar’s response, because they disrespected the one whom Allah chose to give the Message to. Umar understood the man’s rejection of the Prophet’s judgement as apostasy, and as Umar himself was a valid judge for Muslims delegated by the Prophet, he made that ruling and carried out the sentence himself.

This may seem extreme, but we have to remember that Iblees himself was cursed forever because of **one act** that he refused to do out of arrogance while knowing and believing full well that the command was from Allah.

*Knowing* the truth deep down in your heart is not enough. Concerning denial (*juHood*), Allah says,

{الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَعْرِفُونَهُ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّ فَرِيقًا مِنْهُمْ لَيَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ (146)} سورة البقرة

**“Those to whom We gave the Scripture recognize him as they recognize their sons. But verily, a party of them conceal the truth while they know it.” [2:146]**

{وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (14)}

## سورة النمل

“And they denied them wrongfully and arrogantly, though their own selves were convinced thereof. So, see what was the end of the corruptors.” [27:14]

As for doubt (*shakk/raib*), Allah says,

{وَدَخَلَ جَنَّتَهُ وَهُوَ ظَالِمٌ لِنَفْسِهِ قَالَ مَا أَظُنُّ أَنْ تَبِيدَ هَذِهِ أَبَدًا (35) وَمَا أَظُنُّ السَّاعَةَ قَائِمَةً وَلَئِنْ رُدِدْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي لَأَجِدَنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهَا مُنْقَلَبًا (36) قَالَ لَهُ صَاحِبُهُ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَكَفَرْتَ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَكَ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ سَوَّكَ رَجُلًا (37) لَكِنَّا هُوَ اللَّهُ رَبِّي وَلَا أُشْرِكُ بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا (38) سورة الكهف

“And he went into his garden while in a state (of pride and disbelief), unjust to himself. He said: ‘I think not that this will ever perish. And **I think not** the Hour will ever come, and **if** indeed I am brought back to my Lord (on the Day of Resurrection), I surely shall find better than this when I return to Him.’

His companion said to him during conversation, ‘Do you **disbelieve** in Him Who created you out of dust (i.e. created your father Adam), then out of *Nutfah* (mixed drops of male and female sexual discharge), then fashioned you into a man? But as for my part, I believe that He is Allah, my Lord, and none shall I associate as partner with my Lord.’ [18:35–38] – at the end of the story, a few verses later, the doubtful one confesses to his *shirk* with Allah.

And as for hatred (*karaahah* or *bughD*), Allah says,

{ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَرَهُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأَحْبَطَ أَعْمَاهُمْ (9) سورة محمد



“That is because they **disliked** what Allah sent down [as revelation] so He obliterated their deeds.” [47:9]

And as for belying (*takdheeb*), Allah says,

{وَيَوْمَ نَخْشُرُ مِنْ كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ فَوْجًا مِمَّنْ يُكَذِّبُ بِآيَاتِنَا فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ (83) حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوا قَالَ  
أَكذَّبْتُمْ بِآيَاتِي وَلَمْ تُحِيطُوا بِهَا عِلْمًا أَمْ آذًا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (84) {سورة النمل

“And (remember) the Day when We shall gather out of every nation a troop of those who denied Our revelations and then they all shall be driven (to the place of reckoning), till, when they come (before their Lord at the place of reckoning), He will say: ‘Did you deny My verses whereas you comprehended them not by knowledge (of their truth or falsehood), or what was it that you used to do?’” [27:83–84]

Also, consider reasons for the kufr of Quraish, some of the People of the Book, Thamood, and others as you read through the Qur’an or ponder why people you know personally may have chosen not to accept Islam after learning its sublime message.

Finally, completely **abandoning prayer and all Islamic action** (according to most of the earliest scholars if not a consensus), not practicing Islam, not *Islam-ing*. Turning away from Islam, not acting upon it nor seeking to increase in knowledge and understanding. Allah says:

{فَإِنْ تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَإِخْوَانُكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَنُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ  
(11) {سورة التوبة

“But if they repent and perform the prayers, and give Zakaat, then they are your brethren in faith; and thus do we explain the Signs for a people who know.” [9:11]

The above verse indicates that there are conditions to full “adoption” into the faith. While the shahaadah is the beginning point, prayer and zakat must be worked up to, and then maintained throughout life.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “The covenant that [separates] between us and them is the *salaah*, so whoever leaves it off has disbelieved.” [And](#), “Between a slave and disbelief or polytheism is the *salaah*.”

There is a consensus of the scholars that “non-practicing Muslims” do not exist. Islam is not a racial identity but a religious identity. A religion is believed in and implemented in life. If a person does not practice *anything* of Islam, then they have little right to call themselves Muslims. After all, Islam literally means submission and they haven’t begun submitting to Allah. If we see *Islam* as a verbal noun, and verbs are actions, then it cannot be true if there is no action.

Do note, these are all general rulings and do not consider reasons Muslims could have for their beliefs, actions and motives—for example, ignorance or fear of oppression. On the Day of Judgment, Allah will ask everyone about everything, and their hearts will direct their speech about their true intentions for them. And we ask Allah to protect us and grant us prosperity in this life and the Hereafter.

While many scholars list a lot more examples of words, actions and beliefs that are tantamount to apostasy, they are mostly, in some way or other, covered above.

## Lesser non-apostatic kufr

Many narrations describe sinful actions as being “disbelief” but through other evidences, and consensus of the scholars, are known to be less than disbelief, but still dangerous to one’s faith, wholly uncharacteristic of believers, and ingratitude for Allah’s favors. For example, Allah says:

{يَمْحَقُ اللَّهُ الرِّبَا وَيُزِيلُ الصَّدَقَاتِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ} سورة البقرة

“Allah will destroy usury and will give increase for charities. And Allah likes not every **disbelieving sinner**.” [2:276]

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “*Do not return to being disbelievers after me, striking the necks of one another.*” Here, he clearly described Muslims who act in this manner as disbelievers because their acts *resemble* the acts of people who have never been blessed with Islam, like the pre-Islamic era where people settled their scores with tribal wars. But here, Allah says:

{وَإِنْ طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِنْ بَغَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَى فَقَاتِلُوا  
الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّى تَفِيءَ إِلَى أَمْرِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ فَاءَتْ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ  
الْمُقْسِطِينَ (9) {سورة الحجرات

“**And if two parties among the believers are battling each other, then make peace between them both. But if one of them outrages against the other, then fight you (all) against the one which outrages till it complies with the Command of Allah. Then if it complies, then make reconciliation between them justly, and be equitable. Verily, Allah loves those who are the equitable.**” [49:9]

Allah described two groups of *believers* fighting each other. Both the transgressors and the victims are classified as believers no matter the reason as long as they are practicing everything else from Islam correctly. Perhaps they are fighting over territorial dispute or otherwise. While being extremely hateful, would not render them apostate.

And the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “*An adulterer, at the time he is fornicating is not a believer; and a drinker, at the moment of drinking alcohol is no believer; and a thief, at the time of stealing, is no believer. But repentance will be presented to them afterwards.*” And with different words but with the same gravity as negating iman, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “*he will not enter Paradise: the one whose neighbor isn't safe from his misconduct.*”

However, we hear Abu Dharr, one of the Prophet's companions, [say](#):

Once I went out at night and found Allah's Messenger ﷺ walking all alone accompanied by nobody, and I thought that perhaps he disliked that someone should

accompany him. So I walked in the shade, away from the moonlight, but the Prophet ﷺ looked behind and saw me and said, “*Who is that?*” I replied, “Abu Dharr, may Allah make me a ransom for you!” ((This is a common idiom among the Arabs from that time period. And likewise saying, “may my parents be ransomed for you!” The word used is *fidyah*, which means ransom. Translating it as sacrifice is incorrect and suggests *shirk*, which is not intended at all, but rather an exchange. It is an expression of great respect and admiration to another human being, and an indebtedness to them.)) He said, “*O Abu Dhar, come here.*” So I accompanied him for a while and then he said, “*The rich are in fact the poor (little rewarded) on the Day of Resurrection except him whom Allah gives wealth which he gives (in charity) to his right, left, front and back, and does good deeds with it.*” I walked with him a little longer. Then he said to me, “*Sit down here.*” So he made me sit in an open space surrounded by rocks, and said to me, “*Sit here till I come back to you.*” He went towards the old volcanic rock till I could not see him, and he stayed away for a long period, and then I heard him saying, while he was coming, “*Even if he had committed theft, and even if he had fornicated?*” When he came, I could not remain patient and asked him, “O Allah's Prophet! Let me be ransomed for you! Whom were you speaking to by the side of the lava rock? I did not hear anybody responding to your talk.” He said, “*It was Jibreel who appeared to me beside the lava hill and said, ‘Give the good news to your followers that whoever dies without having worshipped anything besides Allah, will enter Paradise.’ I said, ‘O Jibreel! Even if he had committed theft or fornication?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ I said, ‘Even if he has committed theft or fornication!?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ I said, ‘Even if he has committed theft or fornication!?’ He said, ‘Yes.’*”

Had those sins been *major kufr*, apostasy, then they would have barred their perpetrators from ever entering Paradise, but from this text, and others, we know that this is not the case, and that Allah may forgive such a person immediately, or may punish them in the afterlife *temporarily*, before sending them to Paradise.

All these are examples of major sins and *lesser* disbelief. They do not remove a person from faith entirely, but they severely damage their faith and could *lead* to disbelief. Even though the doors of repentance are always open, it is the sinner that must choose to repent.

## Blurred lines: Ruling by other than what Allah revealed

Allah says in the Quran:

{...وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ (44) سورة المائدة }

**“...And whoever has not been judging by what Allah sent down [of revelation] then they are the disbelievers.” [5:44]**

The great scholar of the Quran, and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Abdullah ibn Abbaas, said about this verse, “it is not the disbelief of one who disbelieves in Allah, His angels, His Books, His messengers and the Last Day” and “it is disbelief less than apostasy”. Latter scholars distinguished, in light of what else we’ve learned above, saying that the one who rules by other than what Allah revealed due to external pressures, for example, like threat, bribe or enticement, and not making it a habit, then for them it is lesser disbelief. But for the one who rules by other than what Allah revealed *believing that manmade laws are equal to or better than Allah’s guidance or that Allah does not care if you choose His guidance or not*, then that is apostasy. Essentially, it is like saying, “Islam is great, but not the greatest, or other ideas are just as great, or why would Allah care anyway?”

And along those lines, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “Judges are of three types, one of whom will go to Paradise and two to Hell. The one who will go to Paradise is a man who knows what is right and judges accordingly; but a man who knows the truth but oversteps in his judgment will go to Hell; and a man who gives judgment for people while ignorant will go to Hell.” [Another narration clarifies](#) that knowing the truth is believing that to be true after reasonable research, even if they are mistaken.

Historically, the subject of legislating, judging and ruling has differentiated mainstream Muslims from renegade Muslims who use these scriptures, and more, as excuse to fight against the reigning authority and declare their apostasy. Those groups, collectively referred to as *khawarij*, although in different times and places may give their own groups and organizations different names or be referred to by the name of their leader, locale, or a distinct trait they held. Scholars have distinguished between a ruler or judge who in general aims to implement God's laws as opposed to one who has no commitment or desire to do so—the latter being an apostate.

## Hypocrisy *Nifaaq* against Islam

The Arabic word *nifaaq* has the root meaning of concealment. A tunnel, like a mountain road tunnel, is called a *nafaq*.

### The Quranic context

A person who outwardly expresses faith, but inwardly conceals disbelief, is called a *munāfiq* or a hypocrite in the Quran.

Anyone who fits that description has reached *apostatic hypocrisy*. When they are alone or not being watched, they do not practice anything of Islam. And when they are around other Muslims, even then, their practice may be lazy and is just for show, so that no one suspects them.

Sometimes even their words hint of hypocrisy, as they may be testing the waters or looking for friends, while they stealthily garb their disdain for Islam, in part or in whole. They may secretly wish that the Muslims are destroyed, so that they have no pressure to act like them at all. And they may even assist and aid the efforts of the greatest enemies of Islam to harm the Muslims to

accomplish that purpose, and also to secure their own skins. That is the type of hypocrisy that is often described in the Quran.

In the Prophet's life, hypocrisy appeared in Medinah, after battle of Badr. When the Muslims were victorious, the rest of the pagans of Medinah accepted Islam because they thought Islam was gaining strength, and they could profit materialistically from its strength. When the Muslims were tested with defeat, they told the Muslims' enemies that they were really with them and would help them and be on their side should the need arise. Even when battle came to the Muslims, the hypocrites found excuse not to participate, even though it was their own city and homes they needed to defend. Their concern was material.

Those hypocrites accepted Islam with a deficient intention. But could someone turn into a complete hypocrite when before they were a believer? Nifaaq usually comes as the product of another disease. When a person becomes obsessed by that disease, then they hate to be reminded of Islam and what Allah and His Messenger ﷺ have to say and Allah's judgment.

Sometimes hypocrisy grows from a desire (shahwah), like a sin they crave and ultimately prefer over Islam; or from a misconception (shubhah) that they recognize goes against Islam, but they feel it negates Islam in their hearts, because they never searched for or found the answer to it, and so they abandoned Islam.

## Hypocrisy in word and deed (نفاق عملي)

Nearly all of us have traits of hypocrisy that we have to struggle against throughout our days and lives as Muslims. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described some actions as the actions of hypocrites. Most of what these actions and behaviors have in common are **laziness with worship**, and **untrustworthiness in interactions**. Hypocrisy is a blameworthy characteristic, but one is not a "full hypocrite" until they disbelieve in Islam, while they're only putting on a show for others.

## More blurred lines: Allegiances, love and hate, and its relationship to faith

As has preceded, hating Islam or some of its tenets is tantamount to disbelief. Could one truly claim to be a Muslim *submitter* while hating the concept of prayer or zakat for example? Or while hating Allah or His Messenger ﷺ? By extension, if someone truly loves Allah and His Messenger, prayer and zakat, etc., then they come across individuals who hate those and meet other individuals who love and follow those, then what would or should be their stance towards those two groups? Does it make sense to love Islam and then love those who hate Islam while hating those who love Islam? That would be unimaginable. If someone loves Islam's detractors while hating practicing Muslims, it instead suggests that their heart is in fact full of disbelief with little or no faith.

Islam is a communal religion. That not only refers to praying together in the masjid, and extending the golden rule to each other, but concern for the affairs of fellow Muslims around the world, and a desire for their unity and collective strength, to serve Allah in unison. Allah says:

{وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ  
الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ (71)}  
سورة التوبة

**“And the believing men and the believing women, they are allies of one another; they command towards good and prevent from vice, and they establish the prayer and give the zakaat, and they obey Allah and His Messenger. Those, Allah shall be merciful to them, and Allah is the Mighty, Wise.”**

Even while the Muslims are “decentralized” and scattered about around the world, they should still see each other as one faith community, one *ummah*. Allah says:

{إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ (92)} سورة الأنبياء



“Truly, this your Ummah is one Ummah, and I am your Lord, so worship Me.” [21:92]

Thus, helping disbelievers *against* Muslims in religious war, promoting the extinction of Islam and its people, rejoicing at their defeats, being saddened by their gains, and taking polytheists as allies and masters (*wulaat*) instead of the Muslims and giving allegiance to them and their causes, while abandoning Islamic causes, can one validly claim to be submitting to Allah while doing all that?

Allah says:

{الَّذِينَ يَتَّخِذُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَيْبَتُغُونَ عِنْدَهُمُ الْعِزَّةَ فَإِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا (139) وَقَدْ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْكِتَابِ أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلَا تَقْعُدُوا مَعَهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ إِنَّكُمْ إِذَا مِثْلُهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَامِعُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْكَافِرِينَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ جَمِيعًا (140) سورة النساء

“Those who take the disbelievers as allies instead the believers: do they seek glory from them? Then to Allah belongs all glory. And it has been revealed upon you in the Book, that if you’ve heard the verses of Allah being rejected and ridiculed, then do not sit with them until they turn to a different discourse. You would then otherwise be just like them. Because Allah is the gatherer of the hypocrites and disbelievers in Hell all together.” [4:139-140]

And,

{لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ أُولَئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُمْ بِرُوحٍ مِنْهُ وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ (22) سورة المجادلة

“You will not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, making friendship with those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred. For such He has written Faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a *rooh* [light of iman, increase of guidance, spirit] from Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein forever. Allah is pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the party of Allah.

Verily, it is the party of Allah that will be the successful.” [58:22]

However, love for some non-Muslims, for natural reasons is not disbelief, but should not come to the point of aiding them to the detriment of the Muslims,

{ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَدُوِّي وَعَدُوَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ تُلْقُونَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِمَا جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ الْحَقِّ يُخْرِجُونَ الرَّسُولَ وَإِيَّاكُمْ أَنْ تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ رَبِّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ خَرَجْتُمْ جِهَادًا فِي سَبِيلِي وَابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِي تُسِرُّونَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ بِمَا أَخْفَيْتُمْ وَمَا أَعْلَنْتُمْ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْهُ مِنْكُمْ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ (1) إِنْ يَثْقَفُوكُمْ يَكُونُوا لَكُمْ أَعْدَاءً وَيَبْسُطُوا إِلَيْكُمْ أَيْدِيَهُمْ وَأَلْسِنَتَهُمْ بِالسُّوءِ وَوَدُّوا لَوْ تَكْفُرُونَ (2) لَنْ نَنْفَعَكُمْ أَرْحَامَكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَفْصَلُ بَيْنَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ (3) قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَاءُ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ الْعَدَاوَةُ وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّى تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَحَدَهُ إِلَّا قَوْلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ لَأَسْتَغْفِرَنَّ لَكَ وَمَا أَمْلِكُ لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ رَبَّنَا عَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ أَنَبْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ (4) } سورة الممتحنة

“O you who believe! Take not My enemies and your enemies as friends, showing affection towards them, while they have disbelieved in what has come to you of the, and have driven out the Messenger and yourselves (from your homeland) because you believe in Allah, your Lord! If you have come forth to strive in My Cause and to seek

My Good Pleasure. You show friendship to them in secret, while I am All-Aware of what you conceal and what you reveal. And whosoever of you does that, then indeed he has gone astray from the Straight Path.

Should they gain the upper hand over you, they would behave to you as enemies, and stretch forth their hands and their tongues against you with evil, and they desire that you should disbelieve. Neither your relatives nor your children will benefit you on the Day of Resurrection. He will judge between you. And Allah is All-Seer of what you do.

Indeed there has been an excellent example for you in Ibrahim and those with him, when they said to their people: ‘Verily, we are free from you and whatever you worship besides Allah, we have rejected you, and there has appeared between us and you, hostility and hatred for ever until you believe in Allah Alone,’ – except the saying of Ibrahim to his father, ‘Truly, I will ask forgiveness for you, but I have no power to do anything for you before Allah.’ ‘Our Lord! In You (Alone) we put our trust, and to You (Alone) we turn in repentance, and to You (Alone) is the final Return.’” [60:1-4]

Allah clarifies further, to prevent extremism, that we should never make our hatred *personal*, or *unconditional*, but it is solely based on faith alone and part of one’s love for Allah and His Messenger, and we should be cautious in how we manifest it,

{عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَجْعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ عَادَيْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَاللَّهُ قَدِيرٌ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (7) لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ (8) إِنَّمَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَنْ تَوَلَّوهُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ (9)} سورة الممتحنة

“Perhaps Allah will create friendship between you and those whom you hold as enemies. Allah is Able. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

**Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who did not fight against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity.**

**It is only as regards those who fought against you on account of religion, and have driven you out of your homes, and helped to drive you out, that Allah forbids you to befriend them. And whosoever will befriend them, then those are the wrongdoers.”**

[60:7-9]

The concept of loving and hating for Allah’s sake is known in Islam as *al-walaa’ wal-baraa’*, allegiance and disavowal. And like other things, we should not rush to judgment against other Muslims that may be seen in conspicuous positions.

Also, scholars have clarified that taking the protection of non-Islamic entities is pardoned when in a state of great weakness, in fear of persecution, although patience may be preferable. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ directed several of his companions to migrate to Ethiopia, a Christian country, when the persecution of Quraish was increasing in severity and audacity.

{ لَا يَتَّخِذِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِي شَيْءٍ  
إِلَّا أَنْ تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمْ تُقَاةً وَيُحَذِّرَكُمُ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ (28) } سورة آل عمران

**“Let not the believers take the disbelievers as supporters instead of the believers, and whoever does that, will never be helped by Allah in any way, *except if you indeed fear a danger from them*. And Allah warns you against Himself, and to Allah is the final return.” [3:28]**

In some of the finer aspects of avoiding helping people against Islam, it is best to consult a scholar. For example, even many conservative scholars of the faith have said, for example, that it’s permissible to drive one’s mother to church service. Likewise, as is well known in Islam, it is permissible for a Muslim man to marry a chaste Jewish or Christian woman.

DRAFT

# Jaahiliyyah

Discussing disbelief and establishing a well-rounded foundation of Islamic theology would not be complete without mentioning *jaahiliyyah*.

Jaahiliyyah refers to the Pre-Islamic era of **Ignorance** of Islam. It is a word that encapsulates how misguided the world was before the guidance of Islam, not only in faith and worship, but socially, economically, etc. Anything from that era that was replaced by a proper Islamic trait is referred to as a trait of jaahiliyyah. For example, idol worship is a trait of theological jaahiliyyah, while infanticide is an example of moral jaahiliyyah. Some aspects of pre-Islamic ignorance are shirk or kufr, while others are great sins or lesser sins, or diseases of the heart, but all are blameworthy.

Some of the companions [asked the Messenger](#) of Allah ﷺ, *would we be held responsible for our deeds committed in time of jaahiliyyah?* Upon this he said: “Whoever among you does well in Islam would not be tasked for those deeds; and he who worked evil (even after embracing Islam) would be held responsible for his misdeeds from jaahiliyyah as well as in Islam.”

When converts accept Islam, they may often refer to their pre-Islamic past as jaahiliyyah. And if society or individuals begin resembling some aspects of pre-Islamic jaahiliyyah, they may be called out on it. Note that pre-Islamic societies are not a monolith, so it's possible to have two opposite examples of jaahiliyyah, if Islam came to replace two separate improper models with something better.

The following are examples of pre-Islamic jaahiliyyah that Islam came to replace:

- Ancestral worship (and its customs)
- Tribalism (48:26)
- Nationalism (49:9, 49:13)
- Racism (7:12, 49:13)
- Misogynism (5:19)

- Goddess worship (53:19–20, 53:27)
- Divine royalty (2:258)
- Proudful disunity (23:53)
- Valuing tradition over scriptural evidence (26:74)
- Using fallacies/sophistry to reject the truth (6:124)
- Pantheism, believing all things are part of God, or animism, praying to the “spirit” of all things (41:37)
- Shamanism, consulting those who claim to contact the jinn (72:6)
- Religionism (3:75)
- Using any means necessary, unethical, to combat Islam (e.g. 3:72)
- Exaggerating the righteous, to the point of deification (7:3)
- Materialism, denying that which they cannot see (45:24)
- Superstitions
- Wailing over the dead, slapping cheeks and tearing at clothes
- Nudism, and any excuse to dress with less or in provocative fashion, promiscuity (7:26–28, 24:31, 33:33)
- Anthropomorphism, likening God to His creation (16:74), giving Him children or parents (9:30, 112:3), putting God in a human form, or even walking on earth.
- Deifying angels and prophets (3:80, 34:40–41)
- Plotting against God (9:32)
- Thinking that you can hide from God (11:5)
- Thinking God has no business in human interactions (11:87)
- Wishful thinking about God and the Hereafter without evidence (18:36)

- Offering high interest loans with the sole intention of profiting off of them, not intending to *lend* a hand to the needy until they can support themselves and give back (30:39)
- Persecuting believers over fear/falsehood (20:63)
- Classism and believing that wealth equals God's pleasure (34:35, 36:47, 46:11, 89:15)
- Legislating injustice (5:50)
- Infanticide, "population control", to preserve food and resources (6:137)
- Preferring male offspring over female (16:58-59)
- Basing inheritance off of preference (4:7, 4:11)
- Disrespecting God (3:181)
- Punishing one's self by forbidding good/halal things (5:87)
- Fabricating religion and scripture, claiming prophethood falsely (2:79, 6:93)
- Fatalism, blaming one's sins and errors on God (6:148)
- Demanding miracles while belying them when presented with them (17:59, 54:1-2)

Those among others are some of the many ideas that the Quran and Sunnah condemn explicitly or implicitly.

## Blurred lines: Resembling non-Muslims or the practitioners of other religions

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), "whoever resembles a people is one of them." He made several decrees during the Muslims' time in Medina with the primary intention of being *distinct* from un-Islamic groups, whether [pagan](#), [Jew](#), Christian or [Zoroastrian](#). Many of these decrees were specifically in how Muslims appear in public, and to have a united form, allowing them to recognize one another and be separate from others. Caliph Umar reinforced that with several



decrees for how non-Muslims dwelling in Muslim-ruled lands should dress. Scholars of Islam have since said that public imitation of the disbelievers is sinful. It would become a form of disbelief if one imitated their religious practices and beliefs. One cannot claim to be a Muslim-Jew, for example, or a Muslim-Christian. Nor claim to be a Muslim yet attend church and participate in all their rites, acknowledging their doctrines.

Between Islamic practices and the practices of other religions, customs and traditions are many blurred lines. Some of them fall into permissible custom which may even be recommended for Muslims to follow and adopt. Others undoubtedly are forbidden customs, while some are disputed. The criterion also comes from weighing the custom against the goals of the Sharia and its current commands and prohibitions, to find anything analogous. For this reason, scholars of Islam have unanimously condemned participation in Halloween, because of its pagan origin. ((Regardless of how many Muslims participate in it today!)) Likewise, Easter and Christmas because of their distinctly Christian identity, apart from the pagan origin of those two holidays as well. And on the other side, scholars have allowed using and benefiting from and even assisting in the technological advancements made by non-Muslims, as well as using innovated textiles of clothing for example, and many inventions and innovations that make modern life what it is and more productive. But in between what is clearly forbidden and clearly safe are doubtful matters over which scholars differ. For example, birthdays (which have pagan origin) and Thanksgiving (which has a secular origin but an apparently harmless meaning without any specific rites or prayers).

Issues of this magnitude have to do with preservation of Islamic identity, and monitoring each arena where Muslims have one or two distinct traditions while non-Muslims have a different or variety of different traditions of varying origins. Monitoring ourselves to make sure we hold on to a strictly Islamic identity in those traditions is the safest protection from inadvertently finding ourselves on the other side of the line between faith and disbelief. Some of those arenas include attire, food, education, ((Malcolm X once said, “only a fool lets his enemies educate his children.”)) epistemology, holidays, language, theology and ontology, purpose, eschatology, business support, family composition and upbringing, ethnonational identity (race and nationalism do not take precedence over religious identity), judicial source, life priorities, pastimes, etc.

On the other hand, loyalty as Muslims is to Islam, and to Muslims by the degree of Islam that they have. So for example, if a Muslim has undoubtedly committed a crime, it would be a kind of reprehensible *religionism* to side with the Muslim just because, in all other circumstances, he is “on our team”. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “help your brother, whether oppressed or oppressing” and this was a motto from tribalism that Islam came to prevent! So his companions rightly asked, “O Messenger of Allah, we understand helping the oppressed, but what about if he’s wronging others!?” And the Prophet ﷺ [responded](#), “to prevent him from his wrongfulness is how you give him victory.” That could even mean testifying against him, as Islam never supports injustice. ((Generously assuming the punishment will fit the crime. Unfortunately, we sometimes find that if non-Muslims judge between Muslims and non, they often hand out unfair and exaggerated sentences to the Muslims, based on flimsy evidence.))

## Takfeer: Anathematization / Excommunication

Making *takfeer*, or **declaring someone who professes Islam to be a kaafir**, is an extraordinarily serious matter that should be avoided without right and without need. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#), “Any person who called his brother: “O unbeliever” then it would be earned by one of them. If he (the accused) was as the accuser claimed (then it is confirmed), but if not, then the accusation returns to him.” The Prophet ﷺ made [a similar statement](#) concerning the invocation of a curse *la`nah*. To be cursed means to be forever deprived of the Mercy of Allah, like Iblees. No believer should ever want that for a fellow believer, or really, anyone that did not deserve it. And if someone did deserve it, it is sufficient to know that the angels invoke curses on them and that the curse comes from Allah. So curses and accusations of kufr are best held back from ever vocalizing.

It is essentially a pattern of Allah that the accuser would fall into a type of disbelief or later voluntarily leave Islam. This has been witnessed multiple times, when people who practice Islam go to extremes, accusing others of disbelief, and then they later mellow down and leave Islam

entirely. In one narration, although of doubtful authenticity, the Prophet ﷺ said that among the three greatest fears he had for the faith community were, “a man who recited the Book of Allah until its splendor is seen on him, and he held the garb of Islam that Allah lent him, he points his sword and strikes his neighbor accusing him of shirk.” Accordingly the Prophet ﷺ was asked, “who is more deserving of the accusation, the accuser or the accused?” And the Prophet ﷺ responded, “the accuser”. [al-Tabarani via Mu`adh with Shahr ibn Hawshab in the chain]

Hence, during the Prophet’s time it was extremely rare, and did not occur explicitly, but only implicitly by derivation from some of the scholars. There were other times when those who professed Islam uttered words of blasphemy, but the Prophet ﷺ neither excommunicated them nor punished them, saying “I do not want it to circulate that Muhammad kills his companions” i.e. that he is killing Muslims. This precise fear of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has in fact taken place with those who did execute or wage war against peoples who had committed apostatic acts while simultaneously professing Islam, and those scholars who made the labels were accused of killing Muslims.

Generally, the *takfeer* declaration should only be made by genuine scholars of Islam or Islamic judges. In history, that has usually only been done by some of the greatest scholars, when there was a perceived need. That need could be when clarifying the extreme deviation of a heretical belief, or to justify war against a dangerous group professing Islam without respecting Islam and its most basic tenets. Scholars are also usually very careful about such declarations, and they may, for example, say “whoever says or believes \_\_\_\_\_ is an unbeliever” or they may say “this group is an unbelieving group” or “the preachers among them are unbelievers while the laity may not be”. Yet they will often abstain from saying that any or each *individual* from among them is an unbeliever, over fear of falling guilty of the Prophet’s threat. And it is extremely rare in history that they will name a person, by name, as an apostate while that individual claims to be Muslim. During the Prophet’s life, he never declared anyone to be an unbeliever for a word they said, even though the Quran did. However, if a person did a permanent act that implied disbelief, then he would consider them an apostate, as happened when a man married his father’s wife—going against the well-known law of Islam, or when a group of supposed converts apparently reneged Islam by killing a group of the Prophet’s companions without provocation.

The point to take from all of this is, as we learn about Islam, we will no doubt see what the Quran and Sunnah say, and see the shortcomings, ignorance and even audacious offensiveness of others who were raised in traditionally Muslim families or even converted to Islam from a background of unbelief but never completely learned the fundamentals of the religion. Some of that ignorance that they display may be antithetical to the very most basic meanings of Islam and its most basic fundamental and foundational doctrines or contrary to the attitude of even the weakest of true believers. The point here is to suspend judgment of those individuals, while knowing that their words are wrong, and to know that ultimately Allah will judge between all of us.

There is one story that the Prophet ﷺ told, which is often cited to prove that some peoples' ignorance may excuse them for their blasphemous utterances. The Prophet [described](#) *"A man who never did any good deed, said that if he died, his family should burn him and throw half the ashes of his burnt body in the earth and the other half in the sea, for by Allah, if Allah should get hold of him, He would inflict such punishment on him as He would not inflict on anybody among the people. But Allah ordered the sea to collect what was in it (of his ashes) and similarly ordered the earth to collect what was in it (of his ashes). Then Allah said (to the recreated man), 'Why did you do so?' The man replied, 'For being afraid of You, and You know it (very well).' So Allah forgave him."* The man was ignorant of Allah's power, thinking he could prevent his own resurrection, which is a kind of disbelief in Allah's ability. But look how Allah forgave him. Hence, even when we hear the words of others that might seem blasphemous, we should always recognize that Allah knows people best and will judge them accordingly.

On one hand, this seems to validate the principle "only God can judge". This is the type of expression we would describe as "a word of truth, by which falsehood is [usually] intended". When someone commits an act of murder and claims it was an accident or that "only God can judge", but yet we may find "how to get away with murder" in their Google search history! So was it an accident or was it premeditated? Likewise, when it comes to ensuring justice in a society, the general principle in Islam is we rule and judge based on what is seen, while Allah will judge based on what is hidden. So with respect to that, an Islamic judge, called a qadi, might declare someone as "a disbeliever *with respect to this life*" while respecting that Allah will deal with that individual however He wills. The purpose of such a declaration might have to do with rulings

that are separate Muslims from non-Muslims, especially regarding marriage and divorce, inheritance, certain social responsibilities like zakaat as opposed to jizyah, and burial procedures.

May Allah keep us safe from falling into any disbelief in its various forms and branches, knowingly and unknowingly!

هذا والله أعلم وصلى الله على نبيه محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم تسليماً كثيراً

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