

Hypocrites: A Commentary on Surah al-Munafiqun

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Introduction: Contention In Society is The Basis For Mankind's Perfection

Contention in society and contrasting ideologies are the basis for mankind's development. Contrasting ideologies are not only the sources of mankind's development, rather opposing forces, the foundations of the universe's order, are considered sources for the advancement of the world. If these opposing forces in nature were absent, the order of the universe would fall apart.

Opposites in the solar system and the stars that rotate around each other are the guardians of the system's order. The gravitational force of the sun and the centrifugal force are the reasons for the harmony that exists in the world. Were these opposites to become defunct no trace of life would be left nor would progress be possible.

Such is also the case with microbes, which are spread out in the environment. They provide the most valuable service for man at the same time as being at war with man. This is because they strengthen our white blood cells' defense vis-à-vis internal and external dangers. If such an enemy was not in our environment, if man lived for some time free from all microbial infections, he would be incredibly fragile when faced with physical hardships. He would lose his ability to resist different ailments. These enemies are similar to vaccines in that they strengthen our cells to fight against disease.

The basis for human development is polarity and competition. A rival lays all of his enemy's faults on the table before him, and, since the smallest mistake will be used to the enemy's advantage, man is forced to improve himself.

Sociologists believe that opposing parties and criticisms are what cause progress in human civilization. A critique warns man and displays his faults. It gives him the ambition to change his life, to make his life better.

Societies without oppositional parties or rivalries are similar to glasses of water equally filled. Instead of allowing the water to flow, such a society forces it to remain stagnant, water becomes unsanitary by doing this.

Factories and cultural organizations that do not have a competitor stay in their place, they are unable to improve and attain levels of excellence. On the contrary, organizations that have competitors concentrate on expanding their goals, ideas and personnel to be able to surpass their antagonist and take a step, or even steps, forward.

Abilities will not blossom in a society where appropriate competition and fundamental differences are removed. They will not thrive in societies where all of the wealth is in the hands of the government, where individuals work only to the ability of their bodies and intellects and where their salaries are just enough to cover their basic needs. An innovative or mentally active spirit will not blossom in these conditions.

Carnal desires (nafs ammarah) are the basis for the intellect's and the spirit's improvement. They are the basis for man's sense of self-preservation and for his spiritual progress. If there were no carnal desires in man, he would not be able to reach high spiritual ranks, obtain Allah's satisfaction or achieve eternal bliss.

The devil (shaytan), using his evil powers, is waiting to ambush mankind. This is how he misguides humanity. Man knows about this adept enemy and prepares his spirit to fight against him. Man tries to strengthen his spirit with piety, the power of resistance and restraint, because of his comprehensive knowledge of this foe. Sometimes he is able to reach so lofty a spiritual peak that he becomes immune from committing sins.

As was mentioned, known enemies and targeted opponents are the basis for man's advancement along the path of spiritual and physical perfection. Man should not be afraid of the presence of such an enemy nor should he consider this enemy dangerous. The human intellect and man's love of self prepare him to combat this rival. In this battle, one must not satisfy oneself with physical and spiritual weapons, equal to those of his enemy's; instead he must try to equip himself with weapons more powerful than those of his opponent.

In addition to these enemies there are unfamiliar enemies as well. They are imposters, those who pretend to be one's friend, but beneath this façade they are more dangerous than wolves or any other predator.

They take advantage of the intimacy and comfort one assumes with a friend. Apparently, they are caring friends, but in actuality, they are enemies. They insist on their being trustworthy and their ability to keep secrets, but in reality, they are spies and traitors. They are conscious of human strengths and weaknesses. Staying away from these unknown enemies is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

These enemies are the hypocrites, whom the Qur'an discusses in various chapters. An independent chapter was even sent down regarding hypocrites. The Commander of the Faithful (a) related the following from the Prophet (S) about those adversaries: *"I have never been frightened of any country taking of Islam. I only worry about one group of people, the unbelievers who pretend to be Muslim, the two-faced hypocrites. They have eloquent speech, but in actuality, they are the Muslims' enemies. They are with you in their words, but, in reality, they would never take a step with you."*¹

Two Surahs That Stand Out From The Rest

The author has decided to choose two surahs from the Qur'an to sincerely, in straightforward language, comment upon. They were chosen because of special importance that the hypocrites played in Islamic history. These two surahs explain the relevance and reality behind hypocrites more than any other chapters do. The goal of this effort is for the children of Islam to become more aware of their heavenly scripture.

These two surahs are:

Surah at-Tawbah (Repentance, n 9). A commentary on this surah has been published as a series of articles in the magazine *"Lessons from the School of Islam"* (Darshaye az Maktab Islam). Now, with the will of Allah, it is being published as a book.

Surah al-Munafiqun (Hypocrites, n. 63). This surah has revealed the intentions of this group. It has also gone on to mention every other kind of enemy that Islam has.

The different topics that are covered in this commentary of the Qur'an have also been published in the aforementioned magazine. Now, this

commentary is being presented to the reader, with additions, in the form of a book.

Note

1. Nahj al-Balaghah, 'Abduh, volume 3, page 33

Special Qualities of Surah al-Munafiqun

Surah al-Munafiqun is the sixty-third surah of the Qur'an and is comprised of eleven verses. All of the commentators of the Qur'an are certain that it was revealed in Medina. The subject matter of the surah proves that it was revealed in Medina, since it describes the state of the hypocrites.

This treacherous gang was formed when the Prophet migrated to Medina. The reasons for this will be explained later. Before the migration there was no mention of hypocrites at all. These hypocrites were an unhappy, disbelieving minority who pretended to be Muslim out of fear of the majority. Their hearts remained firm in disbelief. Their outward appearances were different from their inward beliefs. This phenomenon occurred only when the Muslims were in Medina.

A number of important verses in the Qur'an refer to the hypocrites. These verses discuss their history, the forms of sabotage they undertook and the serious harm that they forced the Muslims to endure. These verses can be found in the following surahs: Al 'Imran, Nisa', Ma'dah, Infal, Tawbah, 'Ankabut, Ahzab, Muhammad, Fath, Mujadilah, Hadid, Hashr and the surah under discussion. It would be a great help to Islam if all of the verses regarding hypocrites were gathered, and the time and reasons for their revelation were investigated. This study would be helpful and beneficial if it were well-organized and written as a single report.

It is up to those who love the Qur'an and the history of Islam to write about the social topics discussed in the Qur'an, such as the topic of hypocrisy. It is up to them, also, to write in a way that is interesting for the people of the present age. It is up to them to relate the hypocrites of yesterday to the hypocrites of today and their plans in order to shed light on the hypocrites' plans in both ages.

This study would be similar to a subject-based exegesis (tafsir mudhu'i) of the glorious Qur'an, but it is only a small part of the Qur'anic subjects that should be discussed. Most topics have not been discussed properly. Whenever a scholar writes about hypocrisy or any other Qur'anic theme he has paid his debt to the Qur'an.

The author is hopeful, with the grace of Allah, that as long as a studious atmosphere is available in places such as Qom, a small part of this duty will be achieved.

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 though 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 Ummayah tribe.

In a strategic time, he confessed his disbelief in Islam and professed his belief in polytheism. Abu Sufyan said in an Ummayah 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 Ummayah 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:

مُذَبِّذِينَ 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.”***

Notes

1. 63:1
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

Detrimental Effects of Hypocrisy

اتَّخَذُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ جُنَّةً فَصَدُّوا عَنْ 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.

Notes

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

Signs of Hypocrisy

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِنْ يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعُ لِقَوْلِهِمْ كَأَنْهُمْ خُشْبٌ مُمْسَدَةٌ يَحْسَبُونَ كُلَّ صَيْحَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ هُمُ الْعَدُوُّ فَاحْذَرْهُمْ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَتَى يُؤْفَكُونَ

“When you look at them, their exteriors please you. When they speak, you listen to their words. They are as (worthless as hollow) pieces of timber propped up, (unable to stand on their own). They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies; so beware of them. The curse of Allah be on them! How deluded they are (from the truth)!”¹

The goal of this verse is to make clear the signs of hypocrisy. One can differentiate a hypocrite from a believer by looking for these signs. These signs are, to a certain degree, general and are present in hypocrites of this day and age. We will now explain these characteristics.

They Have The Ability To Hide Their True Face

Commentators of the Qur'an say: ***“The hypocrites were handsome men during the time of revelation. 'Abd Allah bin Ubay was at the head of the hypocrites and his followers were all tall and handsome. They used their good looks for profit.”²*** Because of the historical circumstances surrounding this verse, we cannot take the appealing appearance of the hypocrites as a general principle.

Perhaps the meaning of the sentence: ***“When you look at them, their exteriors please you,”*** is that the hypocrites hide their true face in front of the believers. The way that they conduct themselves, with peace and tranquility, would please anyone. Believers think them to be righteous individuals.

This possibility might be closer to the actual meaning of the verse than what other commentators have mentioned. According to this interpretation a general or at least prevailing principle is formed. Hypocrites hide their faces to cover up their hypocrisy and find a place amongst the believers while, in reality, they are predators and hold a deep-rooted animosity. Of course, this peace and tranquility does not prevent them from speaking their minds at necessary times.

They Are Both Outspoken And Eloquent Speakers

This point is clear. The hypocrite does not believe what he is pretending to be. Sometimes he thinks that others can understand that he is a hypocrite, so he tries to cover this feeling of theirs by being generous in speech.

The hypocrite tries to gain trust by paying attention to the believer. In the early Islamic period, they were so eloquent in their speech that sometimes it seemed as if they attracted the Prophet's (S) attention as the verse says: ***“When they speak, you listen to their words.”***

We must not be tricked by a group's generous speech. At the very least we should consider the possibility that one is speaking this way to trick us, not because they care for us.

They Are As Worthless As Hollow Pieces Of Timber Propped Up

Hypocrites, at the time of revelation, would enter the mosque at sit leaning against the walls at the end of the hall. They did not gain the least out of divine revelation or the Prophet's (S) words. They did not understand reality. They were like spiritless bodies or dry sticks that did not show the smallest reaction towards the Prophet's (S) wise and logical speeches. Let the reader think: was there a soul in their bodies?

Occasionally it is understood from depicting them as pieces of timber leaning against a wall that they have a useless existence. Wood is useful when used for work or holding up a building. If it is not being used, it is not profitable. This explanation is a little too far from the apparent and common ('urfi) meaning of the verse.

There is also a third possibility which might be more correct than the first two. It is possible to say that the reason they are depicted as timber leaning on walls is that they are like dry wood in front of natural disasters. They do not show the smallest amount of compassion. The Arabic word 'khashab' means dry wood devoid of softness or, metaphorically, compassion.

Showing the correct amount of sympathy in the face of events is a sign of belief. Examples of not showing correct sympathy are using flattery, opportunism or going back and forth in a decision.

Opportunistic people do not have a clear aim in life. They do not keep to any principle in life. They throw all of their principles aside when various circumstances appear in their life. Compassionate people will make peace with the public and even with their enemies if their principles or goals are not in danger. They would rather hold to their principles then make a little extra profit.

Nature teaches us that a tornado does not discriminate between young and old trees, flowers, plants or farmlands. Fields of grain and gardens full of plants and flowers do not show resistance against the tornado. They bend down while the tornado passes by. Then, after one minute, these plants return to their normal state. In contrast to this, dry trees lack such flexibility and try to resist the tornado, but are destroyed after only a few minutes.

The Prophet of Islam (S) explained this social reality in one of his speeches: *"A believer is like a spike of wheat. When strong wind hits him sometimes he stands up and sometimes he sits down. Disbelievers, who do not bend down with compassion and who do not make peace with people, are like sturdy trees that are destroyed by a strong wind."*³

Because of their lack of a good mind and intellect, hypocrites did not listen to these words of the Prophet, even though it would have brought them profit. They were never willing to analyze Islamic principles and laws because their hearts were blind. They were never willing to act on principles that were only to their advantage.

Hypocrites' actions and words are illogical because of the disease of hypocrisy which is inside of them. An example of such illogical thinking occurred when the Messenger of Allah (S) and the believers in his religion made peace with Islam's obstinate enemies in the land of Hudaibiyah and a group of near-sighted people because angry.

We will now relate an example of humanity's greatest sympathizer, the Prophet of Islam (S) and his actions at the war of Hudaibiyah. It will

become clear that the exalted leader of Islam (S) displayed the highest level of compassion since his principles were not in danger:

The Muslims were confronted with strong resistance from the polytheistic army of Mecca in the days of Hudaibiyah. The days of Hudaibiyah were when the Muslims stopped in a place called Hudaibiyah in order to make the lesser pilgrimage ('ummrah).

An intense war was about to begin between the two parties. Various representatives of the Quraysh came to the Prophet (S) to discuss the situation. None of them was able to solve the situation diplomatically. Finally Suhayl bin 'Umar was sent to end this situation by making a peace treaty.

The Prophet saw Suhayl and said: *"Suhayl has come to make a peace treaty between us and the Quraysh."* Suhayl came and sat down. He spoke as a diplomat and sparked the generosity of the Prophet to perform a few actions.

Suhayl said: *"Oh Abu al-Qasim! Mecca is our holy ground and a place of honor for us. The Arab world knows that you have fought against us. If you enter Mecca with force and with your great strength, you would make our weakness and helplessness known to the whole Arab world. Tomorrow all of the Arabs will be mocking our land. I swear by the pleasant thoughts that you have towards us, by the respect for Mecca and by your birthplace..."*

The Prophet of Islam (S) then interrupted Suhayl and asked: *"What are you getting at?"*

Suhayl said: *"The leaders of the Quraysh want all of you to go back to Medina this year and leave your obligatory pilgrimage for next year. Next year, the Muslims will be able to participate in all of the pilgrimage ceremonies like every other Arab tribe, with the two conditions that they do not stay in Mecca for more than three days and that they cannot have a weapon other than the traveler's sword."*

Suhayl's conversation with the Prophet (S) resulted in a comprehensive peace treaty between the Muslims and the Quraysh. Suhayl was extremely demanding in the specifics and the conditions of the peace treaty. Sometimes the peace treaty was close to being ripped up before it was signed, but because both sides wanted peace they would start over.

The peace treaty, despite Suhayl's inflexibility, was written. It was decided that the peace treaty should be written on two pieces of paper and both documents signed by both parties.

According to most historians, the Prophet (S) ordered 'Ali (a) to write the peace treaty in the following manner:

The Prophet (S) ordered the Commander of the Faithful to write: 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.' 'Ali (a) wrote it, and Suhayl said: *"I am not familiar with this sentence, Do not write the Compassionate, the Merciful. Instead, you should write: 'In your name, Oh God.'"*

The Prophet of Islam (S) accepted and 'Ali (a) wrote it the way Suhayl wanted. The Prophet (S) then ordered him to write, 'This peace treaty was written by Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah.' Suhayl objected and said:

“Your prophethood is not part of our customs. If we accepted your prophethood we would have never come to fight against you. You must write it in your and your father's name alone. The phrase 'the Messenger of Allah' must be erased.”

Some of the Muslims did not agree with the Prophet (S) in surrendering this much to Suhayl's wishes. But the Prophet (S) was thinking about the enormous consequences of this peace treaty and accepted Suhayl's objection. He ordered 'Ali (a) to erase the phrase 'the Messenger of Allah.'

Here, 'Ali (a) said with the utmost respect: *“I do not have the ability to erase prophethood from your holy name.”*

Then the Prophet (S) told 'Ali (a) to place his finger over the words 'the Messenger of Allah' and he would erase them himself. 'Ali (a) did this and the prophet erased the phrase.⁴

The flexibility that the honorable leader of Islam (S) showed, while writing the peace treaty, was unprecedented in the world. This is because he was not engrossed by materialism or his own personal feelings. He knew that the truth would not be changed by writing or erasing a word. He agreed with everything that his opponent proposed in order to protect the peace treaty.

History Repeats Itself

The first student of the Prophet of Islam (a) faced this very hardship. The Prophet's second breath, 'Ali (a) was like a photocopy of the Prophet. In many instances, he was faced with situations similar to those the Prophet faced and he acted as the Prophet would have. When 'Ali (a) refused to erase the words 'the Messenger of Allah' the Prophet (S) turned towards him. The Prophet (S) knew that 'Ali (a) would face a situation similar to his own, so he said: *“The children of these people will invite you to do this and you, being totally oppressed, will do it.”*⁵

These words were in 'Ali's (a) mind until the war of Siffin presented itself. The Commander of the Faithful's gullible army was tricked by Syria's army. Syria's army was led by Mu'awiyah and 'Amr 'As. 'Ali's (a) own army forced him to agree on a peace treaty. A group was formed to compose the peace treaty.

'Ubayd Allah bin Abi Rafi', the Commander of the Faithful's secretary, was ordered by 'Ali (a) to write: *“This is what the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, decrees...”*

At that moment, 'Amr 'As, representing Mu'awiyah and the Syrian army, turned towards 'Ali's (a) secretary and said: *“Write 'Ali's name and his father's. If we officially accepted him as the Commander of the Faithful we would have never entered into war against him.”* The speech was long, and the Commander of the Faithful did not want to give his gullible soldiers an excuse. The peace treaty was debated for over a day when 'Ali (a) gave the permission to erase the phrase 'the Commander of the Faithful' because of his own officer's insistence.

'Ali (a) then said: *“God is the greatest, custom to custom (sunnah bi-sunnah).”* He then related the story of Hudaibiyah and what the Prophet (S) had said to the people.⁶

The Text of The Peace Treaty of Hudaibiyah

The Quraysh and the Muslims both agree not to fight each other for ten years, so that there will be general peace and safety in the Arab Peninsula.

Muhammad must send back any person of the Quraysh if he leaves Mecca, becomes Muslim, and joins up with the Muslims without the permission of his elders. But it is not necessary for the Quraysh to send back a Muslim who comes to them.

The Muslims and the Quraysh can make agreements and pacts with any other tribe.

This year, Muhammad and his followers must return back to Medina from this place. In the years to come they can come freely to Mecca and visit the house of God, with the conditions that they do not stay for more than three days in Mecca and that they do not carry any weapon with them except for the traveler's sword.⁷

Muslims who live in Mecca can perform their religious ceremonies freely. The Quraysh do not have the right to bother them or make them return to their previous religion. The Quraysh also do not have the right to ridicule their religion.⁸

The two signature parties agree that each other's property must be respected. All deceptions should be stopped. The hatred that they have for each other must be erased from their hearts. When a Muslim enters Mecca, his money and possessions should be respected.⁹

This is the text of the peace treaty of Hudaibiyah. It has been collected from different sources, and some of these sources have been mentioned in the footnotes. This peace treaty was written on two pieces of paper and approved by a group of both the leaders of the Quraysh and the Islamic community. One of the documents was given to Suhayl and the other to the Honorable Prophet (S).¹⁰

This peace treaty and others like it that were written in the lifetime of the Prophet and other leaders of Islam reveal the flexibility that they displayed before their enemies. This also allows us to show flexibility when our principles and goals are not in danger. In doing this, our opponent will be attracted to our sympathy and trustworthiness.

Islam shows us, with these historical treaties, that wars or any other trials in life are goals in and of themselves; they should not be seen as means to a separate goal.

They Are Frightened by Any Calamity

Hypocrites commit all kinds of atrocities behind the mask of their good appearance. They hide their actions behind an urbane façade. But they always fear that the curtain will be lifted and that their crimes will manifest themselves. A huge cloud of fear has engrossed their hearts.

Because of this, they are scared of anything that might remove the smoke screen they have put up. Sometimes they become frightened by a simple letter or by someone asking them to explain a small point. Whenever they are confronted with the smallest change in society, even if it is due to an unforeseen event, or whenever they examine the society, they think that

everyone has found out their secret. They imagining that they are going to be arrested and punished.

The reason for this is that optimism, dignity, bravery and firmness come from those people of society who have pure hearts and stay away from sin and hypocrisy. Fear, anxiety and agitation are the direct results of sin and hypocrisy. The Arab proverb: "*A treacherous person is always scared,*" expresses this point.

The Qur'an mentions that fear and agitation dominate the hearts of hypocrites. They are scared of any commotion, change or sound which they think is to their detriment. This is seen in the verse under explanation, "*They think that every cry is against them.*"

They Are Enemies in A League of Their Own

The holy religion of Islam claims to be the last heavenly religion brought down by the Seal of the Prophets (S). It states clearly that the reign of other religions has come to an end. Only one religion, Islam, will rule over the people.

It goes unsaid that this statement that 'the reign of other religions has come to an end,' created many different kinds of enemies. The followers of the Church, for example considered themselves enemies of Islam. With all of these great enemies, the Qur'an still only alludes to one enemy, and proclaims that this enemy is the real enemy of the Muslim people. Other enemies are not given importance. It is believed that the Muslims have only one enemy: the hypocrites. This has been clearly mentioned by the verse: "*They are the enemies; so beware of them.*"

The question might be asked: "*How do you say that the hypocrites are the only enemies of Islam when the enmity of the Christians and Jews was and still is manifest?*" The answer to this question becomes clear with the explanation of the previous verses.

The hostility that other groups had for Islam was obvious; it was written on their foreheads. But the damage caused by the hypocrites, who pretended to be friends and showed not the smallest sign of ill will, was greater than any other group. For this reason it is not an exaggeration to say that the hypocrites are enemies in a league of their own. Turn the pages of history with precision, examine the damage caused by those who pretended to be Muslim, and be the judge of this claim yourself.

During the age of the khulafa¹¹,

Jewish Rabbis like K'ab al-Ahbar, Wahab bin Minbah and 'Abd Allah bin Salam, who pretended to be Muslim, caused irreconcilable damage to Islam. They were either companions (sahabah) or companions of the companions (tabi'in). They invented superstitious traditions and spread them between the Muslims. They wrote commentaries on the Qur'an and related traditions from the viewpoint of Judaism.¹²

For centuries, the results of the evil actions of these imposters were accepted as truth by the Muslims.

Samarah bin Jundab, who is considered a companion of the Prophet, was Mu'awiyah's publicist. He falsified the occasion and reason of revelation for two verses of the Qur'an for the price of 1,400 dirhams. He said that the verse which was revealed about 'Ali (a) when he slept in the Prophet's bed

on the night of the migration¹³ was actually about 'Abd al-Rahman bin Muljam, who murdered 'Ali (a). He also said that a verse concerning the hypocrites¹⁴ was about 'Ali (a).

He said these incredible lies in front of thousands of Syrian Muslims who did not know 'Ali's (a) position vis-à-vis the Prophet or Allah. He enticed them to spill 'Ali's blood (a) and his follower and the blood of his followers.

The war between the Syrians and 'Ali (a) took place as a result of the actions of these hypocrites. The war ended deceitfully after Syria lost 125,000 soldiers. Moreover, 65,000 members of 'Ali's (a) army were martyred.

It is here that one must recall one of the Commander of the Faithful's important sayings about hypocrites. He said the following about the group of hypocrites who pretended to be companions of the Prophet and attributed many lies to him for their own benefit: *"People would never believe them if they knew that they were hypocrites and liars. But people have been deceived about their companionship with the Prophet. They tell themselves that these people saw the Prophet, heard and accepted truths from him and that they never say anything in opposition to the truth, while in fact they, the Muslims, do not know the condition of these people."*¹⁵

Abu Hurayrah was present for three years during the time of the Prophet. He made up many strange traditions and attributed them to the Prophet. This angered 'Umar immensely. 'Umar whipped him and said: *"You do not have the right to relate traditions from the Prophet. If you do, I shall exile you to the land of your ancestors."*

One day, in the presence of 'Ali (a), Abu Hurayrah's name came up. 'Ali (a) said: *"He attributed the most lies to the Prophet."*¹⁶

There are just some examples of the irreconcilable damage that was caused by the hypocrites at the beginning of Islam. If we look at the damage that the rest of the hypocrites caused to our noble religion, we would see the truth behind Allah's words: *"They are the enemies."* We would always supplicate to Allah to rid our society of their evil.

Notes

1. 63:4
2. Tabarasi, Majmu 'Al-Bayan, volume 10, under the commentary of Surah Munafiqun
3. Ruh al-Bayan, under the explanation of the same verse
4. Shaykh Mufid, Irshad, page 61; 'Allamah Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, volume 20, page 368
5. Ibn Kathir, al-Kamil, volume 2, page 138; 'Allamah Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, volume 20, page 353
6. Ibn Kathir, al-Kamil, volume 3, page 162
7. Halabi, Sirah, volume 3, page 24
8. 'Allamah Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, volume 20, page 353
9. Shaykh Tabarasi, Majmu' al-Bayan, volume 9, page 117
10. Halabi, Sirah, volume 3, pages 25-26
11. This is the age of the first three caliphs, namely Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman. During this time, Islam spread to far away lands and, because of the dominance of the Islamic society and culture, all opposition parties were forced to swallow their hatred.
12. Ibn Khaldun, Muqadamah, page 416
13. 2:207
14. 2:204

15. Imam 'Ali (a), Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 205
16. Sharef al-Din 'Amuli, Abu Hurayrah, page 27 (Arabic version)

Hypocrites And Repentance

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا يَسْتَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ لَوَّاْ رُءُوسَهُمْ وَرَأَيْتَهُمْ يَصُدُّونَ وَهُمْ مُسْتَكْبِرُونَ

“When it is said to them, 'Come, the Messenger of Allah will pray for your forgiveness,' they turn aside their heads, and you see them turning away their faces in arrogance.”¹

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَسْتَغْفَرْتَ لَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ لَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ

“It is the same for them whether you pray for their forgiveness or not. Allah will not forgive them. Surely, Allah guides not rebellious transgressors.”²

A sinner, who realizes that he is a sinner and that he has transgressed the limits set for him by Allah, will, try to find a way to repent. But a sinner who does not recognize that he sins, who thinks that the sins he commits are actually good deeds, will not try to find a way to repent. If one suggests to him to follow the correct path, the path which will bring him success, he will arrogantly reject it because of his ignorance.

Hypocrites belong to this second group of sinners. They pretend to be Muslims and to have faith. All that they do is fake; they do not have sincere faith in Allah or His Messenger. In reality, they epitomize compound ignorance (jahl murakkab) unaware of both of their mistakes and of their ignorance.

It is because of this kind of ignorance that whenever anyone of the hypocrites during the time of the Prophet was encouraged to go before the Prophet (S) and ask him to ask for forgiveness, he would arrogantly refuse and shake his head, showing that he does not need the Prophet to do that for him. The reason for this is that such hypocrites did not believe in the Prophet or his religion.

This kind of behavior is not exclusive to hypocrites, rather it is found in any society that is ignorant, but unaware of its ignorance. Such a society will never do anything to fix itself. It is for this reason that scholars have said that guiding people who possess simple ignorance (jahl basit), or ignorant people who admit that they are ignorant, is easy, while guiding people who possess compound ignorance, ignorant people who do not know that they are ignorant, is difficult or even impossible.

The Prophet's Repentance Results In The Pardon Of Sins

It can be gathered by the verses regarding the prophets who repented for a sinner that people would come to the prophets because of the close relationship that they had to Allah, asking them to ask for forgiveness. They would, in other words, ask the prophets to ask Allah to forgive them.

Jacob's (Ya'qub) sons regretted their evil deed when they saw Joseph (Yusuf), whom they had thrown into a well, become the vizier of a part of Egypt's land. They went to their father and said:

“Oh father! Ask forgiveness for our sins for us, for we were truly at fault.”³

Jacob told them that he would soon do this for them, that is, he would plead for their forgiveness once he saw the signs of regret on their faces. He said:

“Soon I will ask my Lord for forgiveness for you, for he is indeed the oft-forgiving, the most merciful.”⁴

Sometimes the prophets would promise to ask Allah to forgive sinners. An example of this is when Abraham (Ibrahim) made such a promise to Azar:

“I shall pray for forgiveness for you, though I have no power (to get) anything on thy behalf from Allah.”⁵

The meaning of this sentence, which sheds light into the reality of the prophets performing repentance for others, is that the prophets are not in charge of forgiving or punishing sinners. Allah did not give the task of judgment to them. The prophets are nothing more than a means; if Allah's permission was not prevalent, such asking for the forgiveness of others would be ineffective.

The Qur'an's Order To The Muslims

The Qur'an clearly orders sinners to go to the Prophet and ask him to seek their forgiveness from Allah. The Qur'an states, with no uncertainty, that if the Messenger of Allah prays for a sinner and asks Allah to forgive his sins, his sins will be forgiven. The verse reads as follows:

“We did not send a messenger, except to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of Allah. If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come to you and asked Allah's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah indeed the oft-returning, the most merciful.”⁶

For this reason the Muslims of the past would ask their infallible leaders to repent in their stead. Thus, the infallibles interceded for them in this world.

This ability and this kind of intercession are not exclusive to prophets. A believer can ask Allah to forgive other believers, resulting in the forgiveness of their sins. But the believers cannot ask Allah to forgive the polytheists, as it says in the Qur'an:

“It is not fitting for the Prophet and those who believe that they should pray for forgiveness for the polytheists.”⁷

Sometimes the 'throne-bearers' (these are Allah's infallible angels) pray for the pardoning of believers' sins, as mentioned in the Qur'an:

“Those who sustain the throne (of Allah) and those around it sing glory and praise to their Lord, believe in Him, and implore forgiveness for those who believe.”⁸

This verse, as well as the verses mentioned from the Surahs Nisa' and Yusuf, are proofs of the Qur'anic validity of intercession. Allah, because of the station that the prophets occupy in proximity to Him, accepts their intercession and forgives the sins of those who take the prophets as intercessors.

A Misunderstanding

Some of those who do not believe in the Shia creed claim that the intended consequence of coming to the Prophet and his asking for forgiveness is that the Prophet forgives those who have transgressed his own rights.

The reason for this is that the hypocrites were people who oppressed the Prophet, and because of this, the Prophet had a right over them. According to this, the station that the Prophet had, namely being able to ask Allah to forgive the sins of others, was not a special station.

Every human is equal to the prophet in this sense. Anyone who oppresses another must ask that person to forgive him. The people holding this opinion did not pay attention to one point: if the meaning were this, that is that the Prophet would forgive them for the oppression that they had committed against him, the verse would read as follows: ***“Go to the prophet and he will forgive you.”*** But in the verse the term ***“pray for your forgiveness”*** is used. The difference between the two is clear for those who can see.

A Condition For Making The Repentance Of Others Effective

The Qur'an states plainly that Allah will not forgive the sin of polytheism, as the following verse says:

“Allah does not forgive setting up partners with Him, but He forgives anything else.”⁹

Hence, polytheism is an unforgivable sin and a barrier for the forgiveness of other sins.

The Prophet's asking for the forgiveness of hypocrites is ineffective because of their being polytheists. Polytheism is a crime that cannot be excused. The heart of a polytheist is dark and thus unsuitable for being forgiven. This reality is lucidly explained in the Qur'an:

“Whether you ask for their forgiveness or not (their sin is unforgivable); even if you ask seventy times for their forgiveness, Allah will not forgive them, because they have rejected Allah and his Messenger.”¹⁰

Since the topic of intercession has come up, we will discuss it in order to remove some doubts. But this subject should be discussed elsewhere in more detail.

Sometimes people think of intercession as favoritism or as an excuse to supersede the divine law. This would result in a person gaining a recompense of which he was unworthy.

It must be realized that intercession is a definite part of the Islamic belief system. Anyone who has even a little information about the Qur'an, the prophetic traditions or the belief system of the Muslims in all ages and places would know that intercession is given only to those who deserve it. This point should not be subject to doubt.

We must define the reality of intercession and its conditions before we relate the verses regarding it. The purpose of doing this is to distinguish between real intercession and the fake intercession which some people claim that they will receive in the future.

The Literal And Figurative Meaning Of Intercession

Intercession comes from the Arabic word "shifa'ah," the literal meaning of which is to put two things together, to pair them. In religious terminology, it means the friends of Allah (the prophets, Imams and righteous people) help those who have committed mistakes in their lives. There are two cases of helping a sinner. This first kind is similar to favoritism, where oppression and unjust discrimination take place. The second kind is similar to reform, giving hope and a way to reach perfection.

If one would help undeserving people and place them before others this would be unjust discrimination and an encouragement for committing sin. This is the incorrect form of intercession. Sinners having such a hope of intercession do not cease to commit sins. Obviously this is not the goal of the verses regarding intercession. Intellect would reject such a belief.

It is not unjust discrimination when a sinner who has a spiritual relationship with Allah and faith in Allah's friends receives the help of the intercessors on the Day of Judgment. This is not only an encouragement, but it is justice, a way of obtaining spiritual growth and a reason for a sinner to turn back after he has walked half way down the road of destruction.

The explanation for this is the same as that found in the glorious Qur'an - the intercession of the friends of Allah depends on Allah's permission. No one can intercede until Allah permits it. It goes unsaid that Allah does not give permission superficially, or without wisdom behind it. Allah's permission only includes those who deserve forgiveness, who have made mistakes in their lives but have not reached the level of disparagement and insolence.

If one's relationship with Allah has become weak on certain levels, it is still not completely broken. Such people deserve intercession.

Intercession has a condition that makes it serve as a warning sign. When a person realizes that he occasionally commits a sin, he must stop doing that sin immediately. He must cease sinning because he does not want the doors of intercession to close on him. There will be no road of salvation for one stuck behind closed doors.

Attention to this matter has an affect on sinners. It makes them return to the correct path and change their incorrect lifestyle. In reality, it encourages them to clean up their lives.

Experience shows us that a criminal will turn back from the road of destruction if given hope. He will turn back if he feels that there is salvation in changing his wrongful ways.

In international law, there is a law that forgives and releases prisoners who have been sentenced to life in prison. The reason this law exists is to give the prisoners hope, resulting in a change in lifestyle. If this hope were not present, there would be no reason for them to sit peacefully in the prison. There would be no reason for them to stop committing crimes, because there is no punishment worse than life imprisonment.

Intercession is the hope given to deserving people. It makes them change their religious and ethical lives. It is exclusive to those who have protected their relationship with Allah and His friends. But, the person who has not performed good deeds, has not been benefited with faith in Allah and has spent his life in sin and corruption will never receive intercession. The

difference between these two groups of people can be brought to life by an example:

Imagine that some soldiers are ordered to build an army base on the top of a mountain. Building this army base is incredibly important to protect their country from foreign attack. An adept general gives them the necessary tools to build this army base. He then gives the order. Some undisciplined and scared soldiers do not obey the general's command and remain at the bottom of the mountain. These soldiers will never receive the general's help. But, another group of soldiers sacrifice themselves and quickly climb up the mountain. The general will take care of weak soldiers in this second group when they tremble out of fear. He will also help them climb the mountain at its difficult parts.

This kind of help is a form of intercession given to those walking along the path. There is no problem with the general the general announcement of this before climbing the mountain by saying: *"I shall help you if you cannot climb up the difficult parts. I shall use all of my strength to help you achieve this goal."*

This sentence from the general will encourage the soldiers. It will give them hope. It will increase their strength and power of resistance. In reality, this is a way to train the soldiers and a tool for them to reach perfection.

The Qur'an And Intercession

The verses regarding intercession can be divided into three categories:

First: verses that negate intercession. For example:

"Then guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted for it, nor shall compensation be taken from it, nor shall anyone be helped (from outside)."¹¹

Second: verses that specify intercession for only Allah. For example:

"You have none, besides Him, to protect or intercede for you."¹²

Third: verses that state clearly the existence of those who intercede by the permission of Allah. Allah also limits the acceptance of this intercession as He pleases. For example:

"Who is there that can intercede in His presence except as He permits."¹³

And:

"On that day no intercession will avail except for those for whom permission has been granted by (Allah), the Most Gracious, and whose word is acceptable to Him."¹⁴

These verse and the verses that are mentioned in the footnotes clearly state the fact that there will be intercessors on the Day of Judgment. They will intercede, with the permission of Allah, for sinners and Allah will accept their intercession.

One who doubts the validity of intercession or completely rejects it can understand the matter clearly by studying the relevant verses.

What Are The Meanings Of The Verses That Negate Intercession?

The goal of the first group of verses which downright negate intercession becomes clear when one looks at the superstitious beliefs that the

polytheistic Arabs had about intercession. They said: ***“These idols are our intercessors before God.”*** Allah related this belief in different chapters of the Qur’an. For example:

“They say: ‘These are our intercessors with Allah.’”¹⁵

Many of the verses that negate intercession are negating the kind of intercession that the ignorant Arabs believed in. Because of this, when the Qur’an mentions the subject of interceding idols it quickly negates it, then says intercession belongs to Allah. The Qur’an states:

“What! Do they take for intercessors others besides Allah? Say: ‘Even if they have no power whatever and no intelligence?’ Say: ‘To Allah belongs exclusively (the right to grant) intercession.’”¹⁶

What is understood is that the purpose of the verses which negate intercession is not to negate the correct form of intercession, which, as the third group of verses state, is done with Allah's permission. Instead, they negate the intercession of idols, to which Allah has not granted the authority of intercession.

The goal of some other verses that apparently negate intercession is, instead, to condemn some of the false notions held by the Jews in the Prophet's time. They thought that they would receive the intercession of the prophets from whom they descended, regardless of the sins they committed. They thought that they could expunge their sins, just as they expunge their crimes in this world, with bribery, favoritism, gifts and so forth. They thought that they could sway the Judge's mind.

The Qur’an states, in order to negate this kind of thinking and in order to announce that no person has an absolute right to intercession, that bribery and gifts will not be accepted, and that nothing other than one's actions will be a source of salvation. The Qur’an states:

“Then guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted for it, nor shall compensation be taken from it, nor shall anyone be helped (from outside).”¹⁷

As a result, when one considers the popular beliefs or the polytheistic Arabs and Jewish beliefs about intercession and looks, as well, at the previous and subsequent verses, one realizes that the verses which negate intercession are negating the false forms of intercession that these two groups believed in.

This false intercession differs from the intercession that the second and third groups of verses mention.

The verses that state that intercession is only for Allah and the verses that state that intercessors exist with the permission of Allah do not contradict each other in the least. The reason for this is that intercession belongs to Allah and others only have this ability through Allah's permission.

Notes

1. 63:5
2. 63:6
3. 12:97
4. 12:98
5. 60:4
6. 4:64
7. 9:113

8. 40:7
9. 4:48
10. 9:80
11. 2:48 ,also refer to 2:123, 2:254 and 74:48
12. 32:4, also refer to 6:51, 6:70, 39:44 and 40:18
13. 2:255
14. 20:109, also refer to 10:3, 21:28, 19:87, 34:23, 43:86 and 53:26
15. 10:18
16. 39:43-44
17. 2:48 This verse is about the history of the Israelites. This is negating the intercession that the Jews believe in.

Hypocrites' Dangerous Plans

هُمُ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ لَا تُنْفِقُوا عَلَى مَنْ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ حَتَّى يَنْفَضُوا وَلِلَّهِ خَزَائِنُ السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَكِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ

***“They are the ones who say, 'Spend nothing on those who are with Allah's Messenger, to the end that they may disperse (and leave Medina).'* But to Allah belong the treasures of the Heavens and the Earth; but the hypocrites understand not.”¹**

يَقُولُونَ لَئِنْ رَجَعْنَا إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ لَيُخْرِجَنَّ الْأَعَزُّ مِنْهَا الْأَذَلَّ وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَلَكِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“They say, 'If we return to Medina, surely the more honorable (element) will expel from there the meaner.' But honor belongs to Allah and His Messenger, and to the Believers but the hypocrites know not.”²

Economic embargos and acts of injustice can be used to subdue movement or an active minority group. Influential individuals of society sanction groups that they deem harmful. They make the minority group kneel to the ground, and they stop these groups from following the path that they were taking.

Revolutions and social advancements almost always start from the few, the weak and the poverty-stricken. In order to silence and disperse such a group, the influential members of society need only stop all sources of funding from reaching them. By doing this, hunger and poverty will prevail, and the minority group will be forced either to relinquish their or to forget completely their goals and ideas.

The polytheists of Mecca used this political tactic in a most severe and dreadful way at the beginning of Islam. They forced the Muslims to live in Sh'ib Abu Talib for three years. During this time the Muslims lived in extreme poverty and were faced with unbearable hunger. The leaders of the Quraysh, at the beginning of the prophetic mission posted an announcement on the Ka'ba. This announcement forbade all kinds of business transactions and legal rights for Bani Hashim.

Everyone, either out of fear or personal choice, cut off all economic and business ties, even small transactions, with the family of the Prophet. The family of the Prophet was put under a tremendous economic embargo. The cries of their children from hunger were heard at night until the sanctions were nullified.³

The leaders of many countries do not have a positive outlook on religion; they see religion as an imposing barrier, keeping them away from their goals. Because of this they deprive believers in various religions of certain social, political and cultural rights, so that the next generation will not show this same inclination to religion and so that the people of faith will leave their ways.

The leader of the hypocrites, 'Abd Allah bin Ubay, made the following two plans to destroy Islam. He wanted his companions to act upon these plans:

Forbid all kinds of transactions with the Muhajirin and all those who are with the Prophet (S), so that they will leave him because of severe hardships.

The citizens of Medina who own land in Medina should expel the Muhajirin from their land, so that the Prophet (S) will also leave. The leader of the hypocrites mentioned this plan when an argument erupted between two members of the Ansar and Muhajirin. The following explains certain events found in history books and certain verses found in the Qur'an.

The War Of Bani Mustalaq

Bani Mustalaq⁴ surrendered to the Islamic army after losing ten soldiers. The war ended in favor of the Muslims. After the war, two Muslims, one from the Muhajirin and the other from the Ansar began arguing over water. Both parties sought help from their respective tribes. Both sides were on the verge of a battle which would culminate in losing the peace that was achieved after years of work. The Prophet (S) became aware of the situation and thought the cries of both sides were unfounded. He (S) said: *"The age of ignorance has not yet left your hearts."* He then separated the two sides.

'Abd Allah bin Ubay (the leader of the hypocrites who pretended to accept Islam out of fear of public opinion) tried to use this opportunity to his advantage. He told those around him: *"We are to blame for the calamity that has befallen us. We, the people of Medina, gave the Muhajirin shelter in our land. We protected them against their enemies. Our situation is now like the famous saying: 'Train your dog and he will kill you.' I swear by Allah, if we return to Medina, we must cut all economic ties with those who follow the Prophet so that they will leave our land. The strong and the honorable must expel from their land those who are weak and ignoble."*

The man instilled hatred for the Muhajirin in the hearts of some Muslims by provoking arguments between the Muhajirin and the Ansar. Luckily, there was an intelligent young man sitting amongst that crowd. He answered 'Abd Allah bin Ubay's statement in the following way: *"I swear by Allah that you are despised and wretched. You are the one who has no place in your own family. Muhammad is beloved by the Muslims. Their hearts are filled with compassion and love for him."*

He went to the Prophet (S) and informed him of 'Abd Allah's poisonous statements. This young man proposed to execute 'Abd Allah. But the Prophet (S) said: *"This action would never be correct because the people would say that Muhammad killed his friends after he came to power."*

Asid came to the Prophet (S), consoled him, and said: *"Bear with 'Abd Allah. He is a low man. Islam has taken away his social status in Medina. Islam toppled his government, his dictatorship which was about to come into existence."*

The Prophet (S) gave the order for the Muslims to march in harsh circumstances so that the two sides would forget what had happened and abandon their satanic thoughts. He did not allow any rest in an entire twenty-four hour period, except for during prayer-time. On the second day, the weather was so hot that no one could walk. The order was given to the Muslims to dismount their horses. Then they fell into such a deep sleep that

all of the bitter events that had happened in the territory of Bani Mustalaq were forgotten. Later, all traces of this event were forgotten.⁵

The Qur'anic Condemnation of Hypocritical Beliefs

Hypocrites claim that the sustenance of humans is in their own hands. But they are neglectful of the important principle that the sustenance of humans is under the control of Allah. Allah, who gives sustenance to his enemies, would never let His own friends remain in a state of hunger and difficulty. All of the treasures of the earth and the skies are under the control of Allah.

This great system of life, where sustenance is granted to everything on every corner of the world is wisely controlled by Allah. People of faith will be relieved from economic hardships through resistance and strong belief. Only impatient groups will fall and eventually yield to the deviant ideas of influential people.

Righteous people, with the strength that comes from faith and patience, make their enemy understand that eventually economic embargos will be lifted and that they will have to change their minds. This reality was made apparent in the very beginning of Islam, through the events of Sh'ib Abu Talib.

The hypocrites claimed that honor and strength came from possessing land and water. They thought that the Muhajirin were despised and wretched because they possessed less land than the Ansar.

They were unaware of the fact that sometimes these possessions result in despicableness, helplessness and being despised by others. In reality, both honor and dishonor come from the inside. What is meant here by “*inside*” is the faith that carries man from the depths of wretchedness to the peak of honor. For this reason, the Qur'an says that honor is for the believers; it belongs to those who have faith.

A person of faith, one who believes in human principles, ethical values and the Day of Judgment, is not fooled by many of the world's tricks. The possibility of worldly gain cannot lure him into falling for such tricks. He would rather die protecting his honor and his pure soul than live a life of dishonor. He believes dying honorably is nobler than live dishonorably. He deems an honorable death to be a victory, while he deems a dishonorable life to be a form of imprisonment.

The Commander of the Faithful (a) has alluded to this point by saying: “*To die is to be truly alive. Real life, a life of honor, is martyrdom.*”

Everyone witnessed how the Prophet (S) and the believers behaved during the events surrounding Bani Mustalaq. Fourteen centuries have passed, and still Muslims mention the prophet's and the believers' names with the utmost respect. But 'Abd Allah bin Ubay and his followers lived the rest of their lives in dishonor. This dishonor became so intense that his own son was ready to execute him, but the Prophet did not allow him to do that.⁶

Notes

1. 63 :6-7
2. 63:8

3. Ibn Hisham, Sirah, volume 1, page 350
4. A tribe who fought against Islam
5. Ibn Hisham, Sirah, volume 2, page 292; 'Ali bin Ibrahim al-Qumi, Tafsir al-Qumi, page 681
6. Ibn Hisham, Sirah, volume 2, page 292

The Islamic Viewpoint of The World

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُلْهِكُمْ أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

“Oh believers! Do not Let your riches or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. If any one acts this way, the loss is his own.”¹

وَأَنْفِقُوا مِنْ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ فَيَقُولَ رَبِّ لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي إِلَى أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ فَأَصَّدَّقَ وَأَكُن مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

“Spend something (in charity) out of the substance which We have bestowed upon you, before death should come to any of you and he should say, 'Oh my Lord! Why didn't you give me respite for a little while? Then I would have given (largely) in charity, and I would have been one of the righteous.’”²

وَلَنْ يُؤَخِّرَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِذَا جَاءَ أَجَلُهَا وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

“But Allah will not grant respite to any soul when its appointed time when has come, and Allah is well acquainted with (all) that you do.”³

There is no doubt that worldly wealth and physical abilities can lead to man's success. With these, it is possible for man to gain Allah's pleasure and save himself from undesirable characteristics and evil actions.

A financially stable person is free from the bonds of poverty. He is able to live a healthy life. He is able to protect his freedom and honor because of his independence.

Poverty and neediness are the most common causes of crime and social deviance. For example, the main reason women fall into prostitution is poverty. Of course, some unethical forms of action have causes other than poverty and neediness.

There is, of course, forms of logic behind the Qur'anic statement that wealth is one of the greatest blessings from Allah. It is mentioned in the Qur'an that sharing wealth is the best form of charity.

The Honorable Prophet (S) said the following to a group of people who thought that being poor is better than having wealth: ***“Worldly possessions are the best means for obtaining piety (taqwa).”⁴***

What Is Considered Lawful Property And What Is Considered The Base World?

Rightful possessions are those that lead to success and improve one's environment, those that save people from hopelessness and destitution. It was this sort of property that the Commander of the Faithful described when he saw 'Ala bin Ziyad's glorious castle: ***“This castle can be a tool for success, if guests and family members are treated with hospitality inside it.”⁵***

Man's essential purpose will remain misunderstood if one lives in a world of passions and carnal desires, a world where only pleasure is important. Were one to live in such a world one would think that life's only goal is love of oneself and worldly possessions. There is, of course, no problem if one approaches this world in a way where possessions and children do not take

one away from the remembrance of Allah. Anything else will lead to destruction and loss.

One clear point of the ninth verse of Surahal-Munafiqun is that the Qur'an does not give the order to stay away from the world. It does not say: *"Do not seek profit and livelihood."* Instead it uses the Arabic word 'tulahikum.' What is meant by this is an approach to the world that does not keep one away from the remembrance of Allah and does not keep one unnecessarily busy.⁶

The reason this world leads to loss is because one spends all of one's physical and spiritual strength on something that will not remain after death. A person who seeks only this world will not benefit in the least from the blessings that are reserved for the believers.

The Commander of the Faithful has a succinct and beautiful saying about this world: *"One who looks at the world as a means of obtaining success in both worlds can see, and one who thinks of the world as the final goal is blind."*⁷

One who thinks that gold, silver and mansions are the goals of life will not respect any moral principles. Such a person will abandon truth, justice, equity and other ethical virtues.

Death Cannot Be Delayed

People whose highest goal in this world will wish to prolong their lives when they are confronted with death and will have the feeling that the wealth they have amassed will not benefit them anymore. During these last moments of life they will desire to spend their money in the way of Allah so that they can secure provisions for the next life.

They are neglectful of one of the divine secrets (sunnat illahi). This secret is that death cannot be delayed. Death arrives once one has exercised all of one's abilities and has lived a full life. In the same way that a ripe fruit must be picked, a soul that has reached its personal perfection must leave the body and enter the next life.

Not only does the person who was in love with this world wish that his death could be delayed, but when he enters the next world and the curtains of ignorance and neglect are lifted from him, he will wish to be sent back to the world. The Qur'an describes this intense regret in powerful terms:

"Oh Our Lord, we have seen and we have heard. Send us back (to the world). We will do righteousness because we surely believe now."⁸

Notes

1. 63:9
2. 63:10
3. 63:11
4. Shaykh Saduq, Man la yadharah al-Faqih, page 353
5. Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib, Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 207
6. Refer to 24:37
7. Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib, Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 80
8. 32:12

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