

Diseases of the Soul: Hypocrisy (Nifaq)

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Article

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“When the hypocrites come unto thee (O Muhammad), they say: We bear witness that thou art indeed Allah's messenger. And Allah knows that you are indeed His messenger, and Allah bears witness that the Hypocrites are speaking falsely” (Qur'an, 63: 1).

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a) said: "One who meets Muslims with a double face and a double tongue, on the Day of Judgement he will come with two tongues of fire."

[Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi* (Akhundi), vol. 2, p. 343]

Hypocrisy or double-facedness is the evil characteristic of the person who assumes an outward appearance and simulates a behaviour that is contrary to his inner state. For instance, one may give an impression of friendship and affection and pretend to be sincere and sympathetic, or show to apparently follow a faith or creed, while in his heart he harbours an opposite feeling. Such a person displays sympathy and friendship in front of people, but is different or opposite in their absence. According to Islamic teachings, hypocrisy is regarded as a grave moral vice. This factsheet throws light on various types and degrees of Hypocrisy, their evil effects and treatment.

Basic Types of Nifaq

- **Behavioral *Nifaq*:** When outward appearance of person is friendly, giving impression of being sympathetic, supportive and sincere while in reality, it is opposite inside his heart.
- **Verbal *Nifaq*:** The state of double-tonguedness when a person praises and flatters another person or people in front but denounces him or them and speaks slanderously in absence.

Degrees and Forms of Nifaq

- One of the forms of *nifaq*, double-facedness and double-tonguedness is *nifaq* with the Almighty Allah, the Bestower and the Nourisher, with which a person can be inflicted in

this world but is not aware of it. He claims to have faith in the Unity of God throughout his life, professing to be Muslim and true believer, and even making ardent claims of His love. However, his inner nature doesn't comply with his appearance and his utterances.

- *Nifaq* can be in relation to the religion of God, sometimes with respect to virtues, sometimes in regard to righteous deeds and holy rites, and sometimes in ordinary matters of day-to-day life and common civilities. Also, sometimes one may act with *nifaq* with respect to the Prophet (s) or the Imams (as), and sometimes with regard to the *awliya'* [friends of God], the scholars and the believers. Sometimes one may behave with *nifaq* with Muslims and sometimes with God's creatures belonging to other communities and creeds.
- *Nifaq* can show itself in different forms pertaining to the status of the person having this deadly disease. For a layman, it can be seen in boasting of faith in Islam, sincerity of faith and piety. For *ulama* [scholars] and jurisprudents, pretending the highest degree of sincerity (*ikhlas*) and putting forth claims to the *wilayah* and the *khilafah* of the Prophet (s). For the scholars of philosophy and the rational sciences, claiming to possess true faith and knowledge based on deductive proofs. For the mystics and men of *'irfan*, claiming mystic knowledge, ecstasies of love, states of annihilation in God and subsistence through Him (*fana' fi Allah*, *baqa' bi Allah*) and His vicegerency (*wilayat al- amr*), while the inner state in all the above situations doesn't comply with what is claimed by tongue and behaviour of the person.

Few Signs and Devastating Effects of Nifaq

- Giving oneself right to harass and hurt subordinates, and never hesitate to cause them inconvenience or to create problems for them harming them not only in actions but also hurt them with the dagger of tongue, by using derogatory language in their presence, or, in their absence, by disclosing their secrets, by slandering them and making false accusations against them. Thus, as a Muslim from whose hands and tongues other Muslims should be safe, claim of adherence of such a person to Islam contradicts his reality, and the state of his heart and his actions are opposite to his claim of being a Muslim.

- Being subdued and humble in front of the people. Idolizing people and considering them more powerful, influential and wealthier than God. This is against one's claim that God is Almighty and of only worshipping God. If one's outward state truly mirrored his inward reality, he wouldn't be afraid of people or influenced by their wealth or power and fear no deity except God.
- Being humble, fearful and subdued in front of all the external phenomena, yet neglectful towards the really Powerful God, the First Cause. Yet, with this state of mind, asserting faith in the Unity of God. In this state, such a person is a foreigner to the community of believers, and belongs to the group of hypocrites and the double-tongued and will be resurrected with them.
- Loves to hear one's praise that so and so is such a pious man or a talented person and expresses jubilation when someone says such a thing. Feeling unhappy when opposite happens. If a person really believes and utters that all praise is for God, the Almighty, and all his qualities are gifts that God has bestowed him, then such an attitude contradicts his claim that all praise is for God and he lacks sincerity towards God, both as Creator and as Bestower.
- Eagerness to be in the company of the rich, affluent, kings, rulers and nobles, and having averse to be in the company of poor and needy. In this state, a person's monotheism and piety are not genuine. His piety and abstinence are for the sake of the world, and he is not sincerely devoted to God.

The Malady of Nifaq – A Dialogue

- O you who claim to possess faith in God, His prophets and hereafter! If you were a true believer, you should not have found peace for a while in this world and should have spent each and every moment of your life in the construction of the life in eternity. You should have sought refuge from this world and its temptations. If you really believed in the torments, darkness and severities lying ahead and what awaits those who do evil deeds and possess love the life of this world, then why didn't you step out from behind the curtain of mere verbal utterances and claims? Why actions contradicted your words and

appearance? Why didn't you think about the journey of death, which is so full of perils? Your days are past, yet you have not given up your lusts and desires. The time of your death draws near, yet you are enmeshed in your vicious deeds and entrapped in your indecent conduct.

- O God, awaken us from this protracted spell of deep slumber, and bring us back to our senses from this state of intoxication and unconsciousness. Illuminate our hearts with the light of faith and have mercy on us. We are your weak and humble creatures. You Yourself succour us and deliver us from the talons of the Devil, for the sake of Your chosen servants, Muhammad (s) and his undefiled progeny, upon all of whom be God's benedictions.

Treatment of Nifaq

- If a person is afflicted with this ugly disease, first of all he should think about the harms caused by it, both in this world as well as in the Hereafter. He should think that it is totally against Godly created human nature to be a hypocrite. One should deliberate seriously upon the important matter that if he becomes known in this world for having this bad trait of hypocrisy, he will be degraded in the eyes of his friends and become infamous among his fellow human beings. They will avoid his company and he will be deprived of their respect and friendliness.
- A person with *nifaq* will ultimately fail to achieve any merit and to reach his higher goals. Thus, it is necessary for a man of honour and dignity endowed with the conscience to purge himself of this ignominy that consumes honour and respect, and not to allow himself to be entrapped in its disgraces. *Nifaq* will ultimately lead him to failure and disgrace.
- In the hereafter, where secrets that remained concealed from the eyes of people in the world shall not be hidden, there, he will be raised as a deformed, ugly creature possessing two tongues of fire and punished along with the hypocrites and devils. Therefore, it is incumbent upon a man of wisdom, who sees no good in it but harm, ugliness and abomination, to get rid of this deadly vice.

- The afflicted person should be extremely vigilant regarding his acts and utterances, and that he should act deliberately against his base wishes, wage an outright struggle against his inner self and try to improve himself inwardly as well as outwardly, both in actions as well as words. He should judge well his friendliness and enmity. He should abstain from affectation, coquetry and dissemblance in practice, and beseech the Almighty's help and assistance during this period to give him supremacy over his devilish self and its desires and to guide and accompany him in this undertaking. His mercy and grace towards His creatures are boundless, and whosoever advances towards Him wishing to reform himself, He extends His support and help to him.
- If one perseveres in this exercise for several days, his soul would become purified and the rust of hypocrisy and double-facedness will be removed from it. The mirror of his heart and his inner being will be cleansed of this vice, and it will be ready again to receive the favours and blessings of the Bestower. [Adapted from, Al-Khomeini, *Forty Hadith*, chapter 9, p. 187–196]

Conclusion

- Prophet Muhammad (s): “Three signs when found in anyone, is a hypocrite even though he fasts and offers prayers and thinks that he is a Muslim: When he is trusted, he is dishonest, when he talks, he lies, and when he makes a promise, he breaks it.”
[Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol.2, p. 290, hadith # 8]

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