

The philosophical and humanitarian implication of Kufr

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In a previous [Blog](#) I had given a small summary on the concept of Amina and Salama being concepts that refer to the state, action and intention of a person which is not directly to the details of their 'faith/religion' as it is traditionally understood. Amina in Arabic refers to making people to be in safety and without fear and Salama refers to be in good health and safety and living in peace. Salama is thus the result of Amina.

Thus a Muslim is a person that wants and lives in peace and health and a Momin is a person entrusted with the peace and safety of everyone else¹. Thus Mutaqeen are people who guard the safety of themselves and others, as they guard the human rights². This is done by upholding the morality of justice and equality in the world as lined out in the Qur'an. Since these are guidelines every good willed person will agree on, the Qur'an gives freedom of belief (2:256 & 5:62 & 11:117-118 & 49:13) to anyone that is acting righteously and contributes to society as a whole. In this way the Qur'an shows it is universalistic, humanitarian and secular as expected from a neutral First Cause of all existence which knows the defects of mankind and still wants them all to develop further (Rabbi 3lameen 1:2).

In the Qur'an, the term Kafara is used in several ways. In Arabic, the term Kafara is opposite of Shakara which means Gratitude, thankfulness³, thus Kafara means ingratitude, unthankfulness. But it also referred to everything that came along with this ungratefulness, including to deny it, to hide your gratitude, to cover it up⁴. Because of this it was even used for a farmer as they cover up the seeds while planting, or a person hiding behind its shield.

The Qur'an is remarkable when it comes to the Arabic language as it combines words that were never combined before in Arabic, and thus creating new meanings and concepts. In the Qur'an, Amina was put opposite of Kafara and thus to create and uphold safety and peace was the opposite of Kafara. So what do we learn from this? As said before, Kafara refers to ingratitude to cover up something, to hide it and deny it. Since the Qur'an deems life to be worth protecting, it is thus grateful for its existence and gives it as the prime goal of the Qur'an, Amina and Salama. Kafara thus entails of seeing life not worth of protecting, being ungrateful that it exists, denying its rights and needs, and thus tries to cover up life. In simple terms, Amina is protecting life, Kafara is destroying it.

Thus a Kafir is a person who denies morality, peace and justice and wants to hide these concepts and destroy life without any guilt. Since the above concepts are the main proponents of the Qur'anic message, a Kafir thus denies also the Qur'an and everyone who follows this message. Which was the reason how in traditional Islamic theology the concept of unbelief was created as a definition of Kafara, but in this way the whole worldview the Qur'an tries to present, is limited to a religious one and misses the original humanitarian focus. This is also how Amina/Iman and Momin all got the meanings that were focussed on faith and belief in traditional theology, which again completely missed the humanitarian meaning of the original definition of protecting life. This is how the Qur'an was changed from a universalistic humanitarian revelation into a exclusivist religious revelation⁵, changing Islam from a peace maintaining social system into a religion that could even be upheld by dictators and oppressors. The Sharika (root of Shirk) which means to have partners or uphold something next to God was only seen as to refer to idolatry, while when viewed together with the true Arabic meaning of Amina, it clearer that Sharika refers to upholding and following any authority which tells the person neglect and to not protect and honor the human rights of other people. Since most religions and traditional human systems do not honor and protect human rights in some form, they are opposite to the Qur'anic message and its Author. But today we see many changes, most religions and human systems are being adapted to be social, humanitarian and upholding peace, and thus coming in line with the Qur'anic message.

Thus in the Qur'an the term Kafara is one that describes inhumane tendencies and behaviour, denying human rights and freedom and thus also the Qur'an and its Author, since God is the ultimate form of goodness, a Kafir denies the Absolute Good being themselves the ultimate Evil. This is how the term Shaitan is used, which means something distanced, far away, to be rebellious and opposite⁶, and thus represents the human psyche when it wants to act opposite of good. Thus behaviour mostly comes forth out of nihilism and egocentrism which in the Qur'an is represented by Iblis coming from the Balasa which means to be in despair and not able to see the right way⁷. Normally these terms are approached as things outside of us represented by the Devil, and thus denying the human potential of choice and cause and effect of one owns thinking and view on life.

The terms Amina and Kafara have thus very important implications for the Qur'anic philosophy in terms of the humanitarian focus of its message which has been downplayed over the centuries which can be seen today in the absolute importance of rituals among Muslims while at the same time having oppressing governments and living in sub-social standards. The religious understanding of these words have created a wrong worldview and have given a wrong order how evil is created as today it is mostly understood as denial of God creates and is evil. But a person not understanding God or denying the prevalent views on God doesn't make a person evil, it is the acting of evil which is the denial of God. And thus any outrageous evil committed makes someone a Kafir, even though the person itself views himself as a 'believer'.

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Alvin Plantinga, a well known Theistic professor of philosophy, while discussing different arguments for the existence of God, gives a reflection of evil that is a direct and true description of the Qur'anic understanding of Kafara:

"For a third example, consider the argument from appalling evil. Many philosophers offer antitheistic arguments from evil, and perhaps they have some force. But there is also a *theistic* argument from evil. The premise is that there is a real and objectively horrifying evil in the world. Examples would be certain sorts of appalling evil characteristic of Nazi concentration camps: guards found pleasure in devising tortures, making mothers decide which of their children would go to the gas chamber and which be spared; small children were hanged, dying (because of their light weight) a slow and agonizing death; victims were taunted with the claim that no one would ever know of their fate and how they were treated. Of course, Nazi concentration camps have no monopoly on this sort of evil: there are also Stalin, Pol Pot and a thousand lesser villains. These states of affairs, one thinks, are objectively horrifying, in the sense that they would constitute enormous evil even if we and everyone else came perversely to approve them.

Naturalism does not have the resources to accommodate or explain this fact about these states of affairs. From a naturalistic point of view, about all one can say is that we do indeed hate them; but this is far short of seeing them as intrinsically horrifying. How can we understand this intrinsically horrifying character? After all, as much misery and suffering can occur in a death from cancer as in a death caused by someone else's wickedness. What is the difference? The difference lies in the perpetrators and their intentions. Those who engage in this sort of evil are purposely and intentionally setting themselves to do these wicked things. But why is that objectively horrifying? A good answer (and one for which is hard to think of an alternative) is that this evil consists in defying God, the source of all good and just, and the first being of the universe. What is horrifying here is not merely going contrary to God's will, but consciously choosing to invert the true scale of values, explicitly aiming at what is abhorrent to God. This is an offence and affront to God; it is defiance of God himself, and so is objectively horrifying. Appalling evil thus has a sort of cosmic significance. But of course there could be no evil of this sort if there were no such being as God." ⁸

Footnotes

1. Page 267-269 under the root Salima. Dictionary of the Holy Qur'an by Abdul Mannar Omar, 2006 4th edition. Salima means: "Safety, security, freedom, immunity, peace, deliver, acknowledge, pay in advance, submit, sincerity, humility, submission, conformance, obedience, resign, quit, relinquish, to be in sound condition, well without blemish, gentle, tender, soft, elegant". Thus a Muslim is a person who acknowledges the general values of peace and freedom and makes sure these are secured for everyone on Earth. It is not a religious title, but a secular description of someone's values and goals, not his personal beliefs. See also V4, pages 136-141, Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane. And page 137-138, Professor Arne Ambros' A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic.

From the root Amina. Page 24-27, Exposition of the Holy Qur'an, Mafhum Al-Qur'an by G.A. Parwez. 1990. It quotes the dictionaries and explains: "Aminun means peace, safety, state of mind where one feels safe from fear or danger (2:24). Also when one feels safe, secure and at peace. Ibn-e-Faris says that its basic meanings are: Peace of mind, To testify, The opposite of dishonesty. Amana is to satisfy someone and put him at ease without fear, to provide peace or protection to someone, to take over the responsibilities of someone's protection (Taj). Aitimanun is to trust someone, have confidence on someone, take someone as trustee or protector (Taj). Naq'atun Amoon is a she-camel which is dependable by virtue of her qualities and can take one through the journey without getting weak or falling down after stumbling (Taj). Momin is one who stands guarantee for peace, upon whom one can depend, rely and then rest at peace, one who guarantee international peace (Taj). manat is something which is entrusted to someone (Moheet). Ameen is one who is contended, at peace, trustworthy, reliable, dependable. Baladun Ameen is a city where peace and security prevails (95:3). Muqamun Ameen is a place which provides adequate provisions of protection and security (44:52). To declare Ei'man, therefore, means:- To believe, admit, accept or not to reject. To testify the truthfulness, not to contradict. To have confidence, reliance, trust. To accept, to obey, to bow in obedience. [...] Ei'man on the following five fundamental entities is needed in order to become a Momin (2:177):- Allah (God). The Law of Mukaf'at (Cause and Effect) and the life Hereafter (Akhira). The Malaika (Laws of Nature). The revealed Books (That God has given Revelations given to previous nations and now are all presented in the Qur'an). The Anbia (The Prophets send to mankind as helpers and mediator of Revelation). [...] In the Holy Quran, Allah has called Himself Al-Momin (59:23) - as He is responsible for the safety, security of the entire Universe - and, therefore, Momin is also a person who ensures peace and security in the world by acting and enforcing the Laws given by Allah.

See also V1, page 102-103, Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane. And page 29 Professor Arne Ambros' A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic.

2. Page 618-619 under the root Waqaya. Dictionary of the Holy Qur'an by Abdul Mannar Omar, 2006 4th: *"To protect, save, preserve, ward off, guard against evil and calamity, be secure, take as a shield, regard the duty. muttaqii - one who guard against evil and against that which harms and injures and is regardful of his duty towards human beings and God."*

3. Page 30-33, God and Man in the Koran by Toshihiko Izutsu.

Page 296-297 under the root Shakara. Dictionary of the Holy Qur'an by Abdul Mannar Omar, 2006 4th: *"To give thanks, be grateful, realize or acknowledge one's favour, praise. shukrun - giving thanks, gratitude. shaakirun - one who gives thanks or is grateful, appreciated and bountiful in reward. shakruurun - thankful. Sometimes a distinction is made between this word and shaakirun. The former is used to denote a person who is thankful for little or for nothing, the latter grateful for large favours. mashkuurun - gratefully accepted, acceptable."*

4. Page 489-491 under the root Kafara. Dictionary of the Holy Qur'an by Abdul Mannar Omar, 2006 4th edition.

Page 14-15, Exposition of the Holy Qur'an, Mafhum Al-Qur'an by G.A. Parwez. 1990. It quotes the dictionaries and explains: *"Kufr means to conceal, to hide, to cover. Ibn-e-Faris also agrees that its basic meanings are to cover or conceal. Therefore, A person whose body is fully covered with weapons is called K'afir. Night is also called K'afir, as its darkness covers everything. A farmer is called K'afir as he hides the seed under the soil (Taj). A grave is called Al-Kafro as it hides the dead-body. In the same way, K'afir is a person who conceals the fundamental and absolute values of life, given to man by Allah. A person who hides his own or other peoples' potentialities and does not permit them to develop is also known as K'afir. Keeping in view this meaning of hiding or covering, it was also used in the meaning of denial, refusal or rejection. Therefore, it was also used in contrast to the concept of Ei'man, i.e., one who denies the absolute truth as given in the Quran (2/4-2/6). K'afir is used as an opposite of Momin. Kufr is also used as antonym of Shukr, as Shukr means something which gets prominent (14/7). From here the word "Kufran-e-N'aimat" is derived which means to hide bounties of nature, or to refuse to offer them for the good of mankind."*

5. Universalism means the idea that all humans will be accepted by God, whatever their view on the universe. Exclusivism is the idea that only the people who followed a specific belief/religion will be accepted by God and all others will be condemned.

6. Page 78-79 under the root Shatana. Exposition of the Holy Qur'an, Mafhum Al-Qur'an by G.A. Parwez. 1990. *"Shatan is a string which is long, twisted and strong. Beirun-Shatunun is a well which is very deep. In fact, anything which is far away is called Shatunun or Shatinun. Ar-Rumani has written that words like Shatta, Shatana and B'aoda are synonyms (Alf'az-ul-Mutradif'at). Ibn-e-Faris has also written that its basic meaning is to get far away. Shatana means that a person went far away. Shatana-Sahibuhu means that person opposed the intention as well as direction of his companion or kept his companion's intention different than his own, and from this reference the meaning of opposition and rebellion were derived (Taj / Lane)."*

7. Page 62-63 under the root Balasa. Dictionary of the Holy Qur'an by Abdul Mannar Omar, 2006 4th: *"Person of desparate character, to be overcome with grief, disheartened, Good and virtue became less or decreased, give up hope, become broken (in spirit), mournful, become silent/confounded/perplexed unable to see right way or course, repent/grieve."*

Page 22-24 under the root Balasa. Exposition of the Holy Qur'an, Mafhum Al-Qur'an by G.A. Parwez. 1990. *"Ab-Lasa means to get dejected (Ibn-e-Faris). It also means to get dazed and disillusioned on account of frustration or bafflement (Taj / Moheet). In ancient Semitic dictionaries, its meanings are given as "crushed to death" or that which is run over (Gharibul Quran by Mirza Abul Fazal)."*

8. Page 326, Arguments for the existence of God by Alvin Plantinga. The shorter routledge encyclopedia of philosophy.

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