

Who is A KAFIR?

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Introduction

Very few Islamic terms are as misunderstood as the term '*Kafir*'. A few Muslims use this term to humiliate some non-Muslims. On the other hand, our non-Muslim brothers perceive this word as an abuse and take umbrage to it. So, what is so great about this term – *kafir*? Further, a more fundamental question is - to whom this term, '*kafir*' applies i.e. *WHO REALLY IS A KAFIR?*

It is no wonder that today many so-called-Muslims are living in the world of illusion wherein they think that:

1. Just because they are born in a Muslim family they are Muslim and will get paradise.
2. Just because their name is *Ahmed* or *Muhammad* they are Muslim and will get paradise.
3. Just because they go for '*Salah*' once in a week (for Juma) they are Muslim and will get paradise.
4. Just because they believe in Allah and *akhirah* they are Muslim and will get paradise.

Almighty God has strictly put two conditions for the salvation or for entering paradise, 1. Faith 2. Actions. These two conditions are taught throughout the Quran for getting paradise. Or in simple words, only with faith and action a person will really be a Muslim.

However, look at the tragedy. When a Muslim reads Quran and when Almighty God speaks about punishment or condemnation for *Kafir* then the Muslim reader automatically translates the word *Kafir* as non-Muslim in his mind. He thinks that these punishments and condemnations are certainly not for him but for non-Muslims. Similarly, when God talks about reward for *momin* (*believer*) or Muslim then the reader thinks, 'Yes! This ayah is talking about me'. Thus the illusion continues.

Three meanings of the word 'Kafir'

If we ponder over Quran carefully then we find that *kafir* is used mainly as a **state or condition**. Being *kafir* refers to being in the state of *kufr*. One can do an act and enter the state of *kufr* and one can come out of this state by abandoning this act.

The Arabic word *Kafir* has three meanings. And certainly *Kafir* does not mean Non-Muslim. Quran has used the word *Kafir* in any of the three meanings within its text.

1. *Kafir* - One who conceals:

The act of concealing something is called '*kufr*' in Arabic. In Islamic and Quranic terminology '*kufr*' will mean concealing teachings of God or the truth.

Who possess the message of God today?

Who can conceal the message of God today – Non-Muslims or so-called-Muslims?

Examples of *Kufr* as 'to hide or to conceal':

A. *And We have certainly revealed to you Ayah [which are] clear proofs, and no one would **conceal** or deny [Arabic word 'kufir' is used] them except the defiantly disobedient ['fasiq']. Quran 2:99*

وَلَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ وَمَا يَكْفُرُ بِهَا إِلَّا الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

B. *Our Lord, indeed we have heard a caller calling to faith, [saying], 'Believe in your Lord,' and we have believed. Our Lord, so forgive us our sins and **conceal** [Arabic word 'kufir' is used] from us our misdeeds and cause us to die with the righteous. Quran 3:193*

رَبَّنَا إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلْإِيمَانِ أَنْ ءَامِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ فَءَامَنَّا رَبَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا
ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ الْأَبْرَارِ ﴿١٩٣﴾

In the above ayah – dua is made to Allah and it is requested that May Allah conceal [kufir] our past bad deeds.

C. *If you avoid the major sins which you are forbidden, We will **conceal** [Arabic word 'kufir' is used] your lesser sins and admit you to a noble entrance [into Paradise]. Quran 4:31*

إِنْ تَجْتَنِبُوا كَبَائِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلْكُمْ
مُدْخَلًا كَرِيمًا ﴿٣١﴾

D. One important reference is from Quran 57:20 wherein word *kafir* is used for tiller or farmer because he hides seed in the ground for farming.

*Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children - like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the **tillers**; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris.... Quran 57:20*

أَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَهُوَ زِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ
كَمَثَلٍ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ بِنَائِهِ، ثُمَّ يَهَيِّجُ فَتَرْتَهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَمًا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ
عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَمَتَعٌ الْغُرُورِ ﴿٢٠﴾

2. *Kafir* - One who is ungrateful:

The act of being ungrateful is called '*kufr*' in Arabic. Gratefulness is shown for some very important and precious things. We say Quran is the most precious thing. In Islamic and Quranic terminology '*kufr*' will mean showing ungratefulness for favors of God or *emaan* (faith) or Quran or for the message of God.

Who claims to possess *emaan*, Quran and message of God?

Who is more entitled to be ungrateful to *emaan* and truth? Muslims or Non-Muslims?

Examples of *Kufr* as 'being ungrateful':

A. *Therefore, remember Me, I will remember you, and be grateful to Me and never be ungrateful to Me.* Quran 2:152

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكَرْتُمْ وَأَشْكُرُوا إِلَيَّ وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ ﴿١٥٢﴾

B. *They recognize the favors of Allah; then they deny them; and most of them are ungrateful.* Quran 16:83

يَعْرِفُونَ نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُنْكِرُونَهَا وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

C. *It is He Who gave you life, will cause you to die, and will again give you life: Truly man is ungrateful!*" Quran 22:66

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَكَفُورٌ ﴿٦٦﴾

Refer Quran 27:40; 31:12; 80:17; 14:34; 39:7; 17:67; 14:7; 34:17; 43:15; 76:3; 76:24 for more such references.

3. *Kafir* - One who rejects:

The act of rejecting something is called '*kufr*' in Arabic. In Islamic and Quranic terminology '*kufr*' will mean rejecting teachings of God or rejecting the truth.

It is mandatory that something should be presented in order to rejection to take place. If you present *deen*, truth, *emaan* to someone and ultimately he / she rejects it – then it will be said that he / she has done *kufr*.

Examples of *Kufr* as 'to reject':

A. *The example of those who reject [word '*kufr*' is used] is like that of one who shouts at what hears nothing but calls and cries cattle or sheep - deaf, dumb and blind, so they do not understand.* Quran 2:171

وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا دُعَاءً وَنِدَاءً صُمُّ بِكُمْ عُمَى
 فَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧١﴾

B. Beautified for those who **reject the truth** [word 'kufir' is used] is the life of this world, and they ridicule those who believe. Quran 2:212

زُيِّنَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ
 الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٢١٢﴾

C. There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever **rejects** [word 'kufir' is used] in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it.. Quran 2:256

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۗ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ
 فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انفِصَامَ لَهَا ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾

As per this definition – those who are presented with truth in clear terms and then they decide to reject it – they will be *kafir*. By default – no one becomes *kafir*. In Absolute terms, only Allah knows how much truth was presented to someone and how much he / she accepted and rejected.

Those people who don't come under the category of *zalim* because they had not received the message [and hence could not be *kafir*] – are referred as '*ghafil*'.

This is because your Lord would not destroy the (populations of) towns for their wrong-doing while their people were unaware [Arabic word '*ghafil*' is used]. Quran 6:131

ذَٰلِكَ أَن لَّمْ يَكُن رَّبُّكَ مُهْلِكَ الْقُرَىٰ بِظُلْمٍ وَأَهْلُهَا غَافِلُونَ ﴿١٣١﴾

Conclusion:

1. Word *kafir* is one of the most misunderstood terms by both Muslims and non-Muslims.

2. Doing act of *kufr* leads a person to the state of *kufr*. He / She can come out of this state by doing things opposite to *kufr*.
3. Quran has used the word '*kafir*' in any of the 3 meanings: one who conceals, one who is ungrateful and one who rejects.
4. Out of these 3 definitions – 2 are more applicable to so-called-Muslims today.
5. This word is not specific to any particular community.
