

*Search of Truth : Series-05*

*Three Misunderstood Terms;*  
*Kufr*  
*Kafir*  
*Shirk*



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In the name of Allah, most Gracious, most Merciful

## *Kufr and Kafir*

In Islamic terminology Kufr and Kafir are two well defined terms. They have specific meanings. But it is deplorable that these terms, have often been misinterpreted and efforts are made to give an impression which is much far from the truth. The word Kafir is presented as one having traits of contempt and disregard for all Non-Muslims, denial of their fundamental human rights and even the right to life. This impression is quite contrary to reality.

The words Kufr and Kafir have been used in the Qur'an at many places. The meaning of Kufr varies in accordance with the given context. It means rejection, negation, ingratitude, sealing the truth and irreligiousness. And one who commits Kufr is called Kafir in the Arabic language.

Grammatically, the word Kafir is an adjectival noun. This by itself is not a derogatory term. The word Kafir has been used to mean those whom the teachings of the Divine Religion Islam were presented, and they rejected them (for any reason whatsoever). The word Kufr has been also used to mean those who called themselves followers of Islam viz. Muslims but were not sincere believers. For example, the Messenger of God, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) says:

*“He (Muslim) who did not say prayers (Namaz) deliberately did an act of Kufr.”*

*(Hadith)*

The Qur'an says :

*“And those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed are indeed Kafir (unbelievers).”*

*(Qur'an 5:44)*

In the teachings mentioned above, the addressees are indeed those who claimed to be followers of Islam and called themselves Muslims; but they were not committed to Islam.

At one place the Qur'an says :

*“He who does Kufr with (i.e. rejects) Taghoot (imaginary gods) and believes in*

***Allah has indeed taken hold of the firm, unbreakable handle."*** (Qur'an, 2:256)

In this verse of the Qur'an, the word Kufr means 'to reject' and the Muslims are expected to reject Taghoot (imaginary gods).

Kufr is an Arabic word. Its literal meaning is to hide or cover something. Likewise, Kufr is also used to mean ingratitude or thanklessness. That is, when a person turns ingratitude or thankless, he hides the favours and blessings of the Giver and covers them. In the same way, Kufr also means rejection of the commandments the Creator of the universe has sent through His Messengers to guide human beings onto the Right Path.

In the Holy Qur'an, the word Kufr has also been used in some other senses. For example, since the farmer covers seeds with soil, he is called Kafir (one who covers). At some places, this word has been used to mean ingratitude as against gratitude; therefore, the attitude of the ungrateful towards the blessings of the Creator is Kufr and one who does so is called a Kafir.

At another place the Qur'an says :

***"Know well that the life of this world is merely sport and diversion and adornment and an object of your boasting with one another, and a rivalry in multiplication of riches and children. Its likeness is that of rain: when it produces vegetation it delights the tillers. But then it withers and you see it turn yellow, and then it crumbles away."***

(Qur'an 57:20)

In this verse of the Qur'an, the word Kuffar (pl. of Kafir) has been used for farmers.

At one place Allah says in the Qur'an :

***"Remember Me and I shall remember you; give thanks to Me and do not be ungrateful to Me for My favours."*** (Qur'an 2:152)

In this verse of the Qur'an, the word Kufr has been used to mean ingratitude.

Wherever the Qur'an uses the word Kafir to mean those who reject God and His teachings and

commandments, it is not a term of abuse. It simply presents the ground reality based on their act of rejection. Nor is the word Kafir a synonym of Hindu, as misinterpreted by many in India. An approximate synonym of the word Kafir is adharmi (one who rejects religion).

In the Holy Qur'an, the word Kufr has been used mostly to mean rejection as against Eiman (Belief). Every religion has some specific terms to define those who do not believe in the religion.

Likewise, in every religion, specific terms are used to define those who believe in the fundamental beliefs and teachings of that religion and those who do not believe therein.

One meaning of the word Kufr is to cover the truth. All the bounties are given by Allah, the Most Merciful. Putting a covering upon this truth, ascribing these bounties to others, and being grateful to others other than Allah are the ways of Kufr.

The word Kafir in fact intends to clarify the difference between those who do not believe in the Divine True Religion and those who believe therein, rather than to abuse or disrespect anyone.

Islam distinguishes, in a principled manner, between those who believe in the True Religion and those who don't, so that the two may be treated accordingly when it comes to implement Islamic commandments. The followers of Islam may be made steadfast onto its path and unbelievers distinguished from them. Calling one who does not believe in fundamental teachings of Islam a Kafir, Islam has indeed clarified his position. However this does not affect his fundamental rights in an Islamic state or society and no discrimination can be meted out to him in the affairs of the world.

Allah has created man in the best form, provided him with all provisions to lead a sensible life, and meet all his needs. It is a natural demand of this kindness that people believe in Allah, who has blessed them with these bounties. They should also believe in all Messengers of Allah, especially the Last Messenger Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh), as well as in the Everlasting Life after Death, and in the

accountability of good and bad deeds of all human beings, before the creator. They should worship Allah alone and follow His commandments in an unalloyed manner. Those who get benefitted with the bounties of Allah, but do not believe in Him or associate others in His Divinity are ungrateful and tread the path of Kufr.

To know the commandments of Allah one may study the Holy Qur'an revealed to the Last Messenger of Allah Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh). The epitome of Qur'anic teachings can be found in the life of Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh). Both of these sources are available, well-preserved and unmodified, which is the proof of its truthfulness and authenticity.

## ***Shirk (Polytheism)***

Shirk means to make partners or associates. In the Qur'anic parlance, to treat someone as an associate or partner in the existence, attributes and rights of Allah is Shirk. One who commits Shirk is called Mushrik in the Arabic language.

The Qur'an rejects polytheism and idol-worship; it warns of Divine chastisement to apostates, polytheists and idol-worshippers. Allah has every right to issue this warning. The real Creator, Master, Sustainer, the Most Merciful and Benevolent Allah is the one who created us, fulfilled and has been fulfilling our needs, and who provided us with all provisions. Naturally He commands that His own created human beings do not hold anyone as partner or associate with Him. In this world a master has the right to chastize his servant for his mistakes or disobedience. No ruler can tolerate a revolt against his right to governance. A person who does not accept the constitution of a country and its sovereignty can not be given the charge of ministership. Even his citizenship cannot be tolerated. In this world the bounties of the Merciful Lord are available even to atheists and the disobedient, for it is their period of trial; but in the Life after Death the Lord will hold each and every person accountable for his deeds and give him return



of whatever he has done in this world. He will grant success to His obedient servants and punish the disobedient and the wrongdoers. Allah will treat them differently because these are people having different and opposite traits. To reward the obedient and the righteous with Paradise and to punish the unbelieving disobedient rebels, with Hell is absolutely proper and justified.

Now, it is for us to choose what attitude we should adopt while enjoying innumerable favours and bounties of Allah all the time. Can we reject Allah? Can we hold anyone partner or associate with Allah in His favours and bounties? This would be a great sin.

Allah says in the Qur'an :

*"As for those who disbelieved (did Kufr), the Fire of Hell awaits them. There they shall not be finished off and die; nor will the torment of Hell be lightened for them. Thus do We punish every Kafir (thankless being). They will cry out in the Hell and say: 'Our Lord, let us out so that we may act righteously, different from what we did before'. (They will be told) 'Did We not grant you an age long enough for anyone to take heed if he had wanted to take heed? Besides, there came a warner to you. So have a taste of the torment now. None may come to the help of the wrongdoers'." (Qur'an 35:36,37)*

At another place Allah the Exalted says :

*"If you do Kufr (disbelieve), know well that Allah has no need of you. Yet He does not like Kufr (unbelief) in His servants. But if you are thankful, your thankfulness will please Him. No one shall bear another's burden. You are destined to return to your Lord and He will tell you what you used to do. He is well aware even of what lies hidden in your breasts."*  
(Qur'an 39:7)

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