

# Who are the Disbelievers?

Hamza Yusuf

**K**UFR MAY BE defined as disbelief, ingratitude, or arrogant rejection of truth; it has many other nuanced meanings in the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Qur'an mentions that when man is troubled by truth, he begins to think (*fakkara*) about and determine (*qaddara*) what is the best approach to justify his rejection of the truth. Thus, disbelief and cleverness are related. Aristotle defined intelligence as the mean between stupidity and cleverness or craftiness. Disbelief (*kufr*) is a response to truth that involves covering up the truth. Semantically, the root of *kufr* is *kafara*, which literally means "to cover over." One word for "farmer" in Arabic is *kāfir*, because a farmer covers the seed with soil. *Kufr* is also "concealment," as in *kufr al-ni'mah* (to conceal blessings). *Kufr* is used in the Qur'an as an antonym for faith (*imān*), and *kāfir* (disbeliever) is juxtaposed with *mu'min* (believer) as one of two possible responses to God's signs. It is also used in opposition to "gratitude" (*shukr*).

The term *kufr* has several different definitions (*ḥadd*). Ibn Fūrak defines *kufr* as, "Ignorance concerning God, concerning His attributes, and a denial and rejection of that is understood to be included in that ignorance."<sup>1</sup> What this definition implies is that a man who denies God or associates something else with God is ignorant of God, and his ignorance has led him to reject what is true about God. Ibn Fūrak quotes Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, quoting Abū Ḥusayn al-Ṣāliḥī as saying,

*Kufr* is an ignorance of God ﷻ, and it is one quality that is the opposite of knowledge of God. It resides in the human heart and is in understanding and not in action. Moreover, the ignorance of God is a hatred of God and a puffed up attitude toward God, a mocking of God, and a rejection.<sup>2</sup>

Abū al-Baqā' defines *kufr* as "a single system of belief opposed to the undoubtedly true sacred law of Muḥammad ﷺ." He explains further:

People are categorized into two groups: those who accept Muḥammad’s way, and they are called believers (*mu’minūn*); and those who reject it, and they are called disbelievers (*kāfirūn*). From this point of view, the *kāfirūn* comprise one group even if they differ among themselves; in that way, they are like the sectarians among the Muslims: that is, they have different beliefs within the religion of Islam. *Kufr* itself can be both in word and in deed. A word is one that necessitates *kufr*: that is, a rejection of something agreed upon by consensus among the Muslims [is *kufr*], irrespective of whether it is from a belief, resistance, or derision. An action that results in a judgment of *kufr* would be one that was done intentionally and indicates clear contempt for the religion, such as prostrating to an idol or throwing a Qur’an in the garbage.<sup>3</sup>

This definition is consonant with most modern Muslim understandings of *kufr*. It is simplistic, black and white, and assumes that everyone has heard the message, thought about it, and made a final decision on it. The legal term *kufr* means “a rejection of what is necessarily known from the religion of Muḥammad ﷺ—that is, [*kufr* is] to reject the existence of the Creator or the prophetic mission of Muḥammad ﷺ or the prohibition of fornication and anything similar in enormity.” This definition, accepted by all four schools of jurisprudence, defines *kufr* as a rejection of some essential part of Islam that is known by all who are familiar with it. Logically, if rejecting an essential part is *kufr*, then rejecting the whole is a priori *kufr*. For this reason, Muslims have traditionally seen non-Muslims as *kuffār* (disbelievers), as they are not part of the fold of Islam.

The legal status of a *kāfir* is important to ascertain, as a *kāfir* does not inherit from

Muslims, nor do Muslims inherit from a *kāfir*.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, a *kāfir* is not buried according to Islamic funeral rites, nor is he or she prayed for after death by Muslims. More profoundly, the judgment of *kufr* upon someone means that he is relegated to a state of perdition in his afterlife. The enormity of that judgment on a person is so great that it is legally prohibited to say that anyone is destined for the Hellfire

SOME PEOPLE MAY NOT CONSIDER  
THEMSELVES MUSLIMS AND MAY  
NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ISLAM,  
BUT THEY ADHERE TO MANY OF  
THE MORAL PRECEPTS OF ISLAM AND  
VIEW EVENTS IN THE WORLD  
METAPHYSICALLY, AS  
A MUSLIM SHOULD.

unless a clear verse or a hadith with multiple transmissions indicates such. What this prohibition implies is that one cannot consider a person’s inner state with God, only his or her outward state with people. The Qur’an states in unequivocal terms that the inner reality of *kufr* necessitates a state of perdition, and that [Ultimate] *judgment is God’s alone* (6:57). The profound implications of this must not be lost on Muslims. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ clarified this when he said, “I was commanded to judge by the outward, and to God is left the [matter of judging] inner realities.” Thus, outwardly, a person may have a ruling of *kufr*, but only God knows his inward state, and therefore God alone determines his ultimate destination.

According to the Qur’an, *kufr* is a rejection of God’s signs and is accompanied

by several qualities, including puffed up pride (*istikkbār*), derision (*istihzā*), denial (*takdhīb*), ingratitude (*kufṛān*), cruelty (*qasāwah*), zealotry (*hamiyyah*), impetuosity and ignorance (*jahl*), vaingloriousness (*fakhr*), wantonness (*baṭar*), and envy (*ḥasad*). Many of these vile qualities are found in Muslims and are absent in many people of other faiths and creeds. Some people may not consider themselves Muslims and may not know anything about Islam, but they adhere to many of the moral precepts of Islam and view events in the world metaphysically, as a Muslim should—that is, they view events as occurring by God’s will with an inherent wisdom often concealed from human beings. On the other hand, some Muslims are morally bankrupt and metaphysically blind but nonetheless consider themselves Muslim. The question that arises for many Muslims, especially those living in non-Muslim lands, is this: What happens to people of other faiths when they die? That is, how are non-Muslims who lived good lives and treated others well, who were charitable and self-sacrificing, categorized? Before this question is answered, it is important to look at the types of *kufṛ* mentioned in the Qur’an.

#### TYPES OF KUFR IN THE QUR’AN

The Qur’an identifies several types of *kufṛ* and from these, most scholars distill four generic types and consider any one of the four to be sufficient cause for perdition: *kufṛ inkār*, *kufṛ juḥūd*, *kufṛ mu’ānada*, and *kufṛ niḥāq*.

The first type of disbelief is *kufṛ inkār*, in which God is neither recognized nor acknowledged. It entails a rejection of God’s signs with both heart and tongue and an inability to recognize the unity of God when it is presented. This is the type of *kufṛ* referred to in the Qur’anic verse,

*As for those who reject (kafarū), it is the same for them whether you warn them or not—they do not believe. God has sealed their hearts; and their hearing and their seeing are covered over; and there is a horrendous torment for them. (2:6–7)*

The sealing over of their hearts is further explained in another Qur’anic verse that says, *When their hearts turned and deviated, God caused them to deviate further (2:6–7)*.

The second type of disbelief is *kufṛ juḥūd*, in which God is recognized but not acknowledged, in spite of certainty about Him. It results from the heart’s recognition of the truth of what is presented, and the tongue’s denial of that truth. It is mentioned in the Qur’anic verse, *When the truth came to them and they recognized it, they denied it (kafarū bihi) (2:89)*. This type of *kufṛ* is described in several verses in the Qur’an. For example,

*But when Our signs came to them [Pharaoh and his people] to make them see, they said, “This is obvious sorcery!” And they rejected them (jahadū bihā) wrongfully and arrogantly, though their souls were certain of them; see how the immoral end up. (27:13–14)*

This verse unequivocally states that the *kufṛ* of these people arose from a rejection of what they were certain was true. This is the essence of *kufṛ juḥūd* and is obviously a most odious type.

Many Muslims believe that *kufṛ juḥūd* is the single universal type of *kufṛ*; they read certain verses that describe this particular aspect of disbelief and attribute it to everyone outside the fold of Islam. Some read the verse, *They [some Jews] know him like they know their own sons (2:146)*, and conclude that all Jews are aware of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and, in spite of that, reject him. According to traditional commentar-

ies on this verse, “they” refers to certain rabbis who were aware of the Prophet’s description in the Torah as well as his advent on the Arabian Peninsula. Despite that knowledge, these rabbis kept it hidden from the common Jews. The second part of the verse clarifies the first: *But some of them do conceal the truth even though they know it* (2:146). In fact, Ibn Juzayy says the device is actually rhetorical hyperbole to stress the point that Muḥammad’s prophecy should have been clear to the rabbis and says the Qur’an is reiterating and emphasizing the words and example of Rabbi ‘Abd Allāh b. Salām, who became Muslim when he said, “We rabbis know his description in the Torah like we know our own sons.”<sup>5</sup>



Indeed, several medieval rabbis considered the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ to be a fulfillment of some Jewish prophecies in the Torah. Kaufmann Kohler, a rabbi, theologian, and President of the Hebrew Union College in the early 1900s, writes,

The leading spirits of Judaism have recognized [that Islam was fulfilling a prophecy in Zachariah], declaring both Christianity and Mohammedan religions to be agencies of Divine Providence, entrusted with the historical mission of cooperating in the building up of the Messianic Kingdom, thus preparing for the ultimate triumph of pure monotheism in the hearts and lives of all men and nations of the world. These views, voiced

by Jehuda ha Levi, Maimonides, and Nahmanides, were reiterated by many enlightened rabbis of later times. These point out that both the Christian and Mohammedan nations believe in the same God and His revelation to man, in the unity of the human race, and in the future life; that they have spread the knowledge of God by a sacred literature based upon our Scripture; that they have retained the Divine Commandments essentially as they are phrased in our Decalogue; and have practically taught men to fulfill the Noahitic<sup>6</sup> laws of humanity. On account of the last fact, the medieval Jewish authorities considered Christians to be half-proselytes, while the Mohammedans, being pure monotheists, were always still closer to Judaism.<sup>7</sup>

This understanding is almost non-existent among Christians and unusual among Jews today. The Qur’an states,

*And do not contest the people of the scripture, unless with what is better, except those of them who have been unjust: say, “We believe in what was revealed to us, and what was revealed to you; for our God and your God is one, to whom we acquiesce.” For thus We have revealed the Book to you, so those to whom we have given scripture believe in it; and some of these people believe in it too; and no one rejects (yajhādu) Our signs except the ungrateful. (29:46–47)*

This verse is particularly relevant, for it clearly states that one reason for the revelation of the Qur’an is for the peoples of previous prophetic dispensations to learn of it and accept it. The verse refers to the Jews and Christians who would come to know of the message of Islam and embrace it as another dispensation from the same God that revealed the Torah and the Gospel. The Qur’an states, *Is it not a sign to them that*

the scholars of the Tribe of Israel acknowledged it? (26:197). Two Jewish scholars during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ recognized his message as true, ‘Abd Allāh b. Salām and Mukhayriq, who both fought alongside the Prophet ﷺ at ‘Uḥud.

This second type of disbelief (*kufr juhūd*) can be further categorized as sometimes unrestricted (*muṭlaq*) and other times restricted (*muqayyad*). Unrestricted rejection means a denial of the entire religion, including God’s revelation and His messenger ﷺ. The second category is limited in its rejection and involves denying one or more aspects of the religion. For instance, someone who acknowledges God’s unity, the prayer, and the other five pillars but denies the prohibition of sodomy is in a state of *kufr juhūd* because he knows, in reality, that it is wrong, as it is unambiguously prohibited in both the Qur’an and in the well-known hadith, but he has chosen to follow his caprice in accepting it.

In his didactic poem, *Jawharah al-Tawhīd*, Imam al-Laqqānī says that those who deny (*jāhada*) something known by all in the religion have entered into disbelief (*kafara*). Commenting on this line, Shaykh Bakrī Rajab says,

Every sane, responsible, adult Muslim must believe in everything that God has obliged Muslims to believe in from all those matters that are confirmed categorically and necessarily. This includes the obligation of five prayers a day, fasting, and the other pillars, as well as the prohibition of adultery, fornication, sodomy, and intoxicants. Hence, whoever rejects a clear injunction or prohibition, deeming it less than binding, or who legalizes what God has deemed illegal has left Islam (*kafara*).<sup>8</sup>

The third type of disbelief is *kufr mu‘ānada*, in which a person recognizes God, acknowl-

edges Him with words, but remains in a state of disbelief due to envy, hatred, or some perceived fear of loss in wealth or position. This is the disbelief of Heracles, the Byzantine ruler and of Abū Tālib, the Prophet’s uncle. It differs from *kufr juhūd* only in that the person suffering from this type of disbelief actually acknowledges that he recognizes the truth of Islam but cannot bring himself to become a Muslim. Whether this group will remain in a state of perdition is God’s providence. Some scholars have argued that Abū Tālib will not remain in the Hellfire forever.

The fourth and final category is *kufr niḥāq*, in which one pronounces the belief with the tongue but denies it in one’s heart. This is the disbelief of the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*)

EVERY SANE, RESPONSIBLE,  
ADULT MUSLIM MUST BELIEVE  
IN ALL THAT GOD HAS OBLIGED  
MUSLIMS TO BELIEVE IN FROM ALL  
THOSE MATTERS THAT ARE CON-  
FIRMED CATEGORICALLY  
AND NECESSARILY.

and is considered the worst form of disbelief. These people are protected and considered Muslims; they are even washed and buried as Muslims; and God alone knows their reality. It is not permissible for people to presume that someone is or is not a hypocrite. Behavior, however, is a criterion, and hypocrites have discernable signs in their words and deeds. This type of disbelief can exist in varying degrees.

#### IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYAH’S CATEGORIES OF DISBELIEF

The prolific scholar Imam Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah had only two basic categories of disbelief that include various subcategories.

He considered the above-mentioned four to be different in degree but not in type, and thus, according to him, all culminate in perdition. He called this kind of *kufir* “*al-akbar*” (the “greater”) and the second “*al-asghar*” (the “lesser”). In the past, as a result of ignorance of this lesser category of disbelief, some Muslim authorities misinterpreted verses from the Qur’an and hadith of the Prophet ﷺ, and wrongfully excommunicated some Muslims.

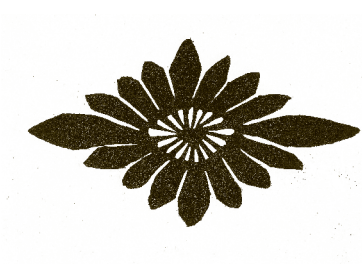
***Kufir al-asghar.*** There are several possible permutations of this kind of disbelief. One is described in the Qur’an: *Whoever does not rule by what God has revealed is among the disbelievers (kāfirūn) (5:44).* This verse was revealed when a group of Jews brought an adulterer to the Prophet ﷺ and asked him to judge the man.<sup>9</sup> God revealed to the Prophet ﷺ, *How can they ask you to judge when they have the Torah, [and] in it is light and guidance? (5:44).* This extraordinary and profound verse left the Prophet ﷺ no recourse but to judge them according to their own Book, the Torah.

Thus, according to the Qur’an, anyone who rejects a law revealed by God is in a state of disbelief. However, Ibn ‘Abbās restricted the applicability of this verse, saying, “This disbelief is less than absolute disbelief and does not remove a person from his religious community,”<sup>10</sup> which is where Imam Ibn Qayyim derived his understanding of a lesser *kufir*. One who is not practicing the law is removed from the community of faith only if such a person denies the law or its legally binding status. If, however, one does not follow a law of God out of laziness, fear, or any other reason that arises from weakness and not conscious rejection, such a person is not considered a disbeliever.

Hence, rulers in the lands of Islam who do not apply the shariah are not considered disbelievers unless they openly deny the sacred law. According to a sound hadith,

as long as rulers establish prayer, do not command anything that breaches sacred law itself, and do not manifest any other form of clear disbelief (*kufir būwāh*), their state authority is to be recognized and honored.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981 due to a “fatwa” labeling him a *kāfir* is an example of the immense evil and injustice that arises from such ignorance. I visited the notable Tunisian scholar and mufti, Shaykh Shadhili Nayfar, in the immediate wake of that assassination, and he said to me, “What those criminals did was a heinous crime against Islam and the sacred law.”

Some hadith mention other examples of actions that are of this type of *kufir*, which do not excommunicate a person. According to a sound hadith related by Muslim, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Two qualities in my community (*ummah*) are a type of *kufir* in those who manifest them: criticizing the lineage of others and wailing over the dead.”<sup>12</sup> Another hadith related by Imams al-Bukhārī and Muslim says, “Do not revert to becoming disbelievers (*kuffār*) after I am gone by killing one another [in civil war].”<sup>13</sup> Although the Prophet ﷺ uses the word *kuffār* here, commentators have agreed that this means “do not do the actions of the *kuffār* by killing one another.” The verses in chapter forty-nine of the Qur’an that clarify rules of engagement should Muslims fight one another are decisive in determining the meaning here. That is, fighting other Muslims does not unconditionally take a Muslim out of the fold of Islam. Understanding this nuanced aspect of *kufir* is essential for Muslims today who are far too quick to anathematize their fellow Muslims. The hadith that should be foremost in our hearts, which is absolutely sound, is, “If a Muslim calls another Muslim a *kāfir*, then the statement is true about one of them.”<sup>14</sup> That is, the very act of calling a



person a *kāfir* is *kufr* itself if the statement is not true.

***Kufr al-akbar.*** The second category, according to Ibn Qayyim, is “greater *kufr*” (*kufr al-akbar*), which he further subdivides into five categories: disbelief arising from incredulity (*kufr takdhīb*); disbelief arising from arrogance (*kufr istikbār*); disbelief arising from neglect (*kufr ʿrād*); disbelief arising from doubt (*kufr shakk*); and disbelief arising from hypocrisy (*kufr nifāq*).

Disbelief that arises from incredulity (*kufr takdhīb*) is a refusal to believe the Messengers of God on the grounds that they are lying. Ibn Qayyim says that the numbers of these disbelievers is insignificant simply because God helped the Messengers with miracles and clear proofs of their veracity. The Qur’an says about the people at the time of the Prophet ﷺ, *Surely, they do not claim you are a liar (yukadhībūnaka), but transgressors deny (yajhadūna) the signs of God (6:33).*

Disbelief that arises from arrogance (*kufr istikbār wa ibāʿ*) involves a refusal to accept the source due to its perceived abjectness. According to Ibn Qayyim, the majority of those who opposed the Prophet ﷺ in his lifetime fall under this category. This type of *kufr* is also the disbelief of Pharaoh, who said, “*Should we believe in two mortals like ourselves whose people are our servants?*” (23:47). Iblīs also suffered from this type of *kufr*, displayed in his refusal to bow down to Adam ﷺ. The Qur’an states, *He was arrogant (istikbara) (38:74).*

Disbelief of dereliction or neglect (*kufr ʿrād*) represents a slothful indifference toward revelation and a failure to investigate the prophetic claims. This corresponds to the sin of sloth or acedia in Catholicism. It involves a complete lack of intellectual and spiritual curiosity. Spiritual sloth is particularly insidious because it is very often veiled in a cloak of useful worldly activity such as medical practice or even charity work. It is not necessarily laziness of body or mind but rather of spirit. The comings and goings of the world provide most people with an excuse for not bothering with religious questions of ultimate concern, but such an attitude constitutes a type of disbelief, a “turning away” (*ʿrād*) from God.

Disbelief arising from doubt (*kufr shakk*) is a lack of commitment, in which one neither denies nor affirms the truth of the prophets, but chooses to remain neutral. In the current vernacular, such a person is an agnostic. According to Ibn Qayyim, this is similar to the disbelief of dereliction (*kufr ʿrād*) because if a doubter undertook a serious investigation, the doubt would be replaced with belief. Hence, again, such a person is turning away from the signs of God and refusing to consider them seriously.

Finally, the last subcategory of greater disbelief is that which arises from hypocrisy (*kufr nifāq*). This is the worst form of disbelief and entails the severest punishment in the hereafter. This further classification adds some nuances not present in the prior one. Both are useful in fully understanding the phenomenon of disbelief in the Qur’an.<sup>15</sup>

#### NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR ANATHEMATIZING AN INDIVIDUAL

While ultimate destiny can only be determined by God, determining a person’s legal standing vis-à-vis religion is essential in this world because of the obvious conse-

quences of such legal standing with regard to marriage, birth, death, and inheritance, to name a few. What determines whether a person is a *kāfir* or a believer is a critical matter. The jurists of Islam thus developed a coda of guidelines necessary to follow before a judge could consider a person a *kāfir*. Six conditions have to be fulfilled in order for a judge to rule concerning a person's faith: Intention; Absence of Coercion; Level of Knowledge; Absence of Esoteric Interpretation; Mental Ability to Reason; and, Proof of Faith.

**Intention.** People's intention must be understood before their actions or words can be judged. For instance, when Hātib betrayed the Prophet ﷺ by revealing his plans of attack to the Quraysh, he was captured and his treachery exposed, and the companions wanted to kill him for treason. The Prophet ﷺ inquired into his intention, and when he learned that Hātib was in fact concerned about his family in Mecca and their well-being, the Prophet ﷺ accepted his explanation and did not consider his treason an act of disbelief.<sup>16</sup> The Qur'an says, *There is no sin upon you for your mistakes* (33:5).

**Absence of Coercion.** The Qur'an says, *And those who disbelieve after they have believed—unless they are compelled while their hearts are firm in faith—but those who find ease in disbelief, on them is wrath from God* (16:106). In other words, it is important to determine whether a person who once believed was compelled or coerced into disbelief or whether a person entered into disbelief simply because it was convenient.

**Level of Knowledge.** This condition holds much weight in light of the widespread ignorance in our communities today. Many ignorant people use oaths that are prohibited; some circumambulate tombs, some sacrifice animals to saints, and some tie pieces of cloth to shrines. All of these actions are absolutely prohibited,

but they do not constitute disbelief unless it is ascertained that a person is engaging in them despite knowing that they are prohibited and constitute idolatry. A clear proof for this is provided in the Qur'an, in Moses' response to the Jews when they asked for idols like the idols of other nations: They said, "*Make for us idols like they have too.*" He replied, "*Surely you are an ignorant people*" (7:138).

This meaning is wonderfully reiterated in the sound hadith in Tirmidhī, in which some companions of the Prophet ﷺ asked him to select a tree to which they could attach cloth before battles in the way the idolaters of Mecca did. He replied,

Glory to God, this is exactly like Banī Isrā'īl's request, "*Make for us idols like they have too.*" By the One in whose Hand rests my soul, you will follow the ways of those who went before you.<sup>17</sup>

The Prophet ﷺ did not call them disbelievers; rather, he explained to them their error and excused them for their ignorance, as they were unaware of the full implications of their request.

Some scholars, such as Imam al-Qarāfi, consider ignorance an excuse in detailed matters of the sacred law (*furū'*) but not in matters of belief or knowledge.<sup>18</sup> However, commenting on Imam al-Qarāfi's position, Imam Šādiq al-Ghiryānī says,

What Imam al-Qarāfi says concerning the inexcusability of ignorance is unsound because it would lead to unbearable responsibilities on people (*taklīf mā lā yutāq*). There are many cogent proofs that refute his position. For instance, there is the sound hadith in which a man ordered his sons to cremate his body and then pulverize the remains and scatter the ashes on a windy day over the ocean. According to the hadith, he tells his



sons, “I swear by God, if my Lord gets hold of me (*qadara ‘alayya*), He will punish me in a way He has never punished anyone before me.”

The Prophet ﷺ said, “They did that to him, and God said to the earth, ‘Restore what you have taken from him,’ and suddenly, there the man was standing before his Lord. God then said to him, ‘What caused you to do such a thing?’

“I was so afraid of you, my Lord!’ the man explained.”

“For that,” the Prophet ﷺ said, “he was forgiven.”

This hadith, which is in the two soundest collections of hadith, reveals clear disbelief: the man did not believe that God was omnipotent or he would not have done such a foolish deed. He also doubted the resurrection. This is without a doubt *kufr*. He was ignorant, but his ignorance was accompanied by a sincere fear and awe of God, and so God forgave him.<sup>19</sup>

This hadith indicates that one’s understanding and intention are crucial matters in how one will be judged on the Day of Judgment.

In another sound hadith, a man presented the Prophet ﷺ with a flask of wine. The Prophet ﷺ explained to him that drinking wine was prohibited. The man then whispered something to his companion, handing him the flask. The Prophet ﷺ asked what the man had whispered to his friend, and was told that the man had just instructed his companion to sell the flask. The Prophet ﷺ then said, “The One who prohibited its consumption also prohibited its sale.” The man then spilled the wine out.<sup>20</sup> In his *Tamhīd*, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr says that this hadith is textual proof that a sin is removed from one who is ignorant of a ruling unless he was able to learn and neglected to do so.<sup>21</sup>

**Absence of Esoteric Interpretation (*ta’wīl*).** A person whose words or actions indicate some disbelief may be excused if that disbelief results from a false interpretation in an attempt to arrive at the truth. This is different from disbelief that results from following one’s whims and caprice. For instance, Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, according to some of his writings, apparently believed that the Fire of Hell would eventually be extinguished, and those in it would no longer suffer. This can be construed as *kufr* in its apparent denial of unambiguous verses in the Qur’an that disbelievers dwell in the Inferno forever (*khālidīna fīhā abadan*) (4:169 and others). Ibn Taymiyyah based his idiosyncratic interpretation on verses that had precedence among a few of the

A PERSON WHOSE WORDS OR  
ACTIONS INDICATE SOME DISBELIEF  
MAY BE EXCUSED IF THAT DISBELIEF  
RESULTS FROM A FALSE  
INTERPRETATION IN AN ATTEMPT  
TO ARRIVE AT THE TRUTH. THIS IS  
DIFFERENT FROM DISBELIEF THAT  
RESULTS FROM FOLLOWING ONE’S  
WHIMS AND CAPRICE.

companions of the Prophet ﷺ, as he shows in his argument. However, he did not reject the Qur’anic verses on the eternity of Hell but felt that they were to be understood in the light of other verses specifying the general applicability, and restricting their apparently unrestricted application.

Although Ibn Taymiyyah’s opinion on this matter is not seen as normative or even as valid by the majority of scholars, very few scholars actually anathematized him because he used interpretation (*ta’wīl*) in

the matter, which meant he did not repudiate the verses that outwardly contradicted his conclusions.

Due to this condition, most scholars do not anathematize the Rationalists (*al-mu'tazilah*) or members of other sects who interpret verses differently than did the orthodox scholars of Islam. Limits, however, do exist that establish what is beyond the pale and what is not. According to Imam al-Ghazzālī, even if an interpretation is far-fetched, as long as it remains within the parameters of reasonableness in accordance with the Arabic language, it should not be considered *kufir*. Abū al-Baqā' al-Kaffawī wrote,

God says, *Surely, God forgives sins—all of them* [39:53], and although disbelief is an unforgivable sin, the preferred position of the majority of people of orthodoxy is that none of the people who face toward Mecca in their prayers should be called *kāfir* among the innovators (*mubtadi'a*) and the esoteric interpreters (*mu'awwila*), as long as their interpretations do not concern essential matters of faith [such as *tawhīd*,<sup>22</sup> prayer, and the prohibition of alcohol] due to the presence of obfuscation (*shubhah*) in the matter.<sup>23</sup>

**Mental Ability to Reason.** The Prophet ﷺ said, “Three among my community are not responsible: the sleeper until he wakes, the child until it reaches puberty, and the deranged person until he recovers his sanity.”<sup>24</sup>

**Proof of Faith.** A firm proof of faith and its requisites must be established before a state of its denial can be considered (*iqāmatu al-hujjah 'alayhī*). According to Shaykh Ṣādiq al-Ghiryānī,

A ruling of disbelief cannot be established concerning anyone until a clear

proof of faith and his or her rejection of it is established, in which case such a person is asked to repent. [In the case of someone outside of Islam, his entering Islam is repentance.] This is clearly understood by the Qur'anic verses, *Messengers bring good news and a warning so that people may have no argument against God after the messengers. And God is Almighty, Most Wise* (4:165), and *We do not punish a people until we have sent a messenger to them* (17:15). A proof is established through an invitation to Islam, in which the unity of God is explained and the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.<sup>25</sup>

In the case of a person who has said or done something that evinces disbelief, a scholar must show such an individual why it constitutes disbelief and why repentance is necessary for a restoration of faith. If that person does indeed return to the fold of orthodoxy, he is not considered a *kāfir*. Or, if he explains that his position is based upon a different interpretation that has validity, or presents his own sources using sound methods to arrive at his own conclusions, such a person is not deemed to be in a state of disbelief. It might, however, constitute a heterodox and innovative belief (*bid'ah*) that, while invalid, does not entail disbelief.

#### THE STATE OF DISBELIEF AND WHAT IT ENTAILS

According to the Qur'an, idolatry is the greatest sin against God. *Surely God will not forgive idolatry, but He will forgive anything less than it for whom He pleases* (4:116). The majority of orthodox scholars do not apply this verse to idolatrous people who have never heard a true message about God. The proof of this is the Qur'anic verse: *We do not punish a people until We send a messenger* (17:15). Commenting on this verse, Imam Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī writes,

One opinion about this verse is that it concerns this world and that God will not destroy a people until a messenger is sent to warn them, [as then] they [will] have no excuse. Another opinion holds that the verse applies to both this world and the next—that God does not punish people in the afterlife unless a messenger had been sent to them in this life whom they had rejected.<sup>26</sup>

This second opinion is strengthened by another Qur’anic verse:

*Every time a group is thrown into it [the Fire], its keepers will ask them, “Didn’t a warner come to you?” They will reply, “Yes, a warner came, but we scoffed and said, ‘God never sent anything down—you are very much mistaken.’” (67:8–9)*

Scholars differentiate between idolatry (*shirk*) and disbelief (*kufr*). Every *shirk* is *kufr*, but not every *kufr* is *shirk*. For instance, in the dominant position of the scholars, neither the Jews nor the Christians are considered idolaters; they are, however, considered disbelievers once they hear of the message of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and reject it. The sound hadith in Muslim’s collection is clear on this matter:

By the One in whose Hand is Muḥammad’s soul, no one from this community (*ummah*), whether Jewish or Christian, will hear of me and then die without having believed except that he is apportioned among the denizens of the Inferno.

Two extremely important points are elicited from this hadith. The first is that when the Prophet ﷺ says, “from this community,” he is referring to all people of the entire world from the time his message began. His community is divided into two



groups: one is the community of acceptance (*ummah al-istijābah*), which includes those who answer his call of submission to God, and the other is the community of invitation (*ummah al-da‘wah*), which includes those who are invited but have not responded yet.

The second important point is that the final judgment on a person’s state cannot be determined until the end of that person’s lifetime. In this hadith, the Prophet ﷺ said, “no one...will hear of me and then die without having believed....” In other words, once the message is heard, a person has the rest of his life to accept or reject it. This understanding is enforced by several verses in the Qur’an, such as *Surely those who disbelieve (kafarū) and then die in a state of disbelief, upon them is damnation from God, His angels, and all of humanity (2:161)*. The Qur’an clearly states that one must die in a state of disbelief to be in a state of perdition. Their disbelief is not in God but in a messenger of God, and disbelief in Islam is defined as denial of God or denial of any of His messengers and what they brought.

In addition to declaring that idolatry (*shirk*) is the only unforgivable sin, the Qur’an also says that Luqmān ؑ said to his son, “Don’t associate anything with God, for surely idolatry is an enormous error (*zulm*)” (31:13). The word used here

THE MAJORITY OF SCHOLARS HAVE PROHIBITED DAMNING AN INDIVIDUAL, WHETHER MUSLIM OR NOT, BECAUSE ONLY GOD KNOWS A PERSON'S ULTIMATE STATUS. JURISTS DETERMINED THAT BECAUSE A MAN'S SEAL IS UNKNOWN TO OTHER MEN, IT SHOULD NEVER BE ASSUMED THAT HE OR SHE IS A KAFIR WITH GOD.

describing the sin of idolatry is the verbal noun that also denotes “oppression.” In several verses, the Qur’an describes the denizens of Hell as oppressors (*ẓālimūn*). Scholars concur that anyone who does not follow the religion of Islam—including Jews, Christians, and polytheists—has the legal ruling of disbelief. However, because all people alive today are considered from the community of Muḥammad ﷺ and are divided into the two groups as mentioned above, it is incumbent upon Muslims to invite to Islam all those who are in the community of invitation and to continue to do so for the lifetime of each person in that community. Let us not forget that Abū Ṣufyān fought the Prophet ﷺ for almost twenty years, yet never did the Prophet ﷺ despair of the possibility that Abū Ṣufyān would accept faith. The Prophet Noah ؑ called his people to God for almost a thousand years and prayed for their destruction only after God revealed to him that they would never believe: *And it was revealed to Noah, “None of your people will believe but those who believe already. So do not be grieved over what they have been doing”* (11:36).

The majority of scholars have prohibited damning an individual, whether Muslim or not, because only God knows a person’s ultimate status. Jurists determined that

because a man’s seal is unknown to other men, it should never be assumed that he or she is a *kāfir* with God. For example, while his action was odious to God, the man ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ was beloved to God even when prostrating to idols because in the eternal knowledge of God, ‘Umar ؓ was not the idolater but the caliph of Islam and a martyr. The Moroccans have a proverb: “Hold no one in contempt, for he may be a friend of God.” Whatever we may see in a person, it may not reflect his actual state with God. The Prophet ﷺ said of the people of Badr, “Who knows—perhaps God looked into the hearts of the people of Badr and said, ‘Do as you will from this day forth, for I have forgiven you.’”<sup>27</sup> The Prophet ﷺ made this statement in reference to a man who had fought on his side at Badr and then later committed a treasonous act that the Prophet ﷺ forgave.

#### WHO IS DESTINED FOR THE HELLFIRE

The Qur’an specifically states that disbelievers will be in Hell. Because there is a consensus that Jews and Christians are legally categorized as disbelievers (not in God and previous prophets but in the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ), most Muslims take this to mean they will be in Hell because of the many Qur’anic verses stating that the disbelievers will be in Hell.

Furthermore, verses exist that indicate that Christians who adhere to the trinity will also be in Hell. The Qur’an says,

*Those who say God is the Messiah, Son of Mary, have certainly blasphemed: whereas the Messiah said, “Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord.” For whoever associates anyone with God, God has forbidden the Garden; his place is the Fire. And there is no savior for those who do wrong. Those who say God is one third of a trinity have certainly blasphemed, for there is*

*no deity but one God. So if they do not stop what they are saying, a painful penalty will strike those of them who blaspheme (kafarū). (5:72–73)*

There are a few important points that should be made: first of all, the disbelief referred to is not disbelief in Islam but disbelief in their own religion. That is, those who originally said that God is a trinity blasphemed. The past tense is used in these verses, and this is strengthened a few verses later when the Qur'an says, *O people of the scripture, do not overdo your religion unrealistically, yet do not follow the desires of people who already went astray before, who misled many and strayed from the balanced way (5:77)*. Those who initially innovated the trinity, which was a pagan belief found in ancient Egypt, Babylon, and India, were the ones who blasphemed against God and entered into a state of *kufr*. However, the Qur'an is saying that once one knows this, one must desist from saying such things or be burnt by the Hellfire.

In the last portion of the verse cited above, the usage of the preposition *min* (from) is a particularly noteworthy construct: *So if they do not stop what they are saying, a painful penalty will strike those of them who blaspheme*. In the Arabic, using *min* to say “of those who blaspheme” indicates that it is those who are in a state of *kufr* from among them who will be burnt by the Fire. This implies that not all of them are in a state of *kufr*. This can only be understood when we remember what *kufr* is according to the theologians:

A refusal to believe based upon a knowledge of what to believe (*ma'rifah*) and a purposeful refusal to do so (*ir'adah*), even if it is concerning only a portion of what the Prophet ﷺ conveyed to us, [as long as it is] transmitted in a clear manner, lacking ambiguity.<sup>28</sup>

IF CHRISTIANS ARE SIMPLY  
REPEATING WHAT THEY WERE TOLD  
BY THEIR PRIESTS AND CHURCH  
INSTITUTIONS, THEY ARE NOT  
BLASPHEMING INTENTIONALLY.  
MANY MAY BE DEEPLY DEVOTED TO  
THEIR FAITH AND ACTIVELY SEEKING  
THE GRACE OF GOD.

This does not negate the legal status of those who believe in the trinity as *kāfirūn*, but rather suspends judgment on their intention since many of them may be unaware that they are in a state of blasphemy. In all three Abrahamic faiths, blasphemy—which is irreverent talk concerning God, His prophets, and other sacred matters—is considered anathema only if done intentionally. There's the rub. If Christians are simply repeating what they were told by their priests and church institutions, they are not blaspheming intentionally. Many may be deeply devoted to their faith and actively seeking the grace of God. These are the very people whom the Qur'an is addressing, as much of the Qur'an is addressed to peoples of other faiths as well as people without faith in the hopes that they will believe.

What then is the fate of those who do not believe in the Qur'an and the message of Muḥammad ﷺ? Are they condemned to the Inferno for all eternity? Imam al-Ghazzālī, known as the “Proof of Islam” and one of the most authoritative theologians and legal theorists in the history of Islam, had a different opinion. He wrote a short treatise entitled *Faysal al-tafriqah* clarifying the dangers of anathematizing other Muslims, but in it he also addresses



the issue of non-Muslims and the vast mercy of God. He points out that although there is a sound hadith that states that only one out of every thousand people will enter Paradise, this does not mean the rest will enter eternal damnation; rather they will spend a purifying period in the Fire. What it means, according to al-Ghazzālī, is that the sinless are only one in a thousand. He then states that the Muslims in the Fire will ultimately be removed and, even more astonishingly, that,

The divine mercy, however, will also embrace many of the bygone nations, even though most of them will be exposed to the Fire, either slightly—for a moment or for an hour—or a greater period of time, so that one may apply to them the expression “the denizens of the Fire.” I would even go as far as to say that most of the Christians among the Europeans and Turks in this time of ours will be embraced by the same mercy, if God most high wills. I mean specifically those who are among the remote inhabitants of Europe and Central Asia whom the call of Islam has not reached [will be embraced by this divine mercy].

Christians can be divided into three classes. One comprises those whom the name of Muḥammad ﷺ has never reached at all: they are excused [for their disbelief]. The second category comprises those who have heard his name and description, and [have heard]

of his miracles. These people live alongside Muslims and interact with them or actually live among them. They are the disbelieving deniers (*kuffār mulḥidūn*). The third category is the class comprising those in between the other two. The name of Muḥammad ﷺ has indeed reached their ears, but they do not know his true description and his character. Instead, they heard from the time they were young that a deceitful liar named Muḥammad ﷺ claimed to be a prophet, in the same way our own children hear that a liar named al-Muqannaʿ claimed to be a prophet. As far as I am concerned, such people are [excused] like those in the first category, for while they have heard of his name, they heard the opposite of his true qualities. And hearing such things would never arouse one’s desire to find out [who he was].<sup>29</sup>

Imam al-Ghazzālī’s insight comes from his deep understanding of human nature and the veils that exist over human hearts as a result of background and prior social conditioning. He remarks in his book *Deliverance from Error*<sup>30</sup> that most people, including Muslims, simply followed the religion of their parents. He noted that few Muslims actually plumb the depths of any matter of religion to ascertain for themselves whether the belief is true or not. After explaining his belief about peoples of other religions, he later reiterates his point with exceptional clarity:

As for the other nations, [consider the person] who imputes lying to the Prophet ﷺ after he has heard of the impeccable and undeniable transmissions of his appearance, his quality, and his miracles that suspended normal laws, such as his splitting the moon, the pebbles praising God in his hand, the welling up of water from between his fingers,

and the miraculous Qur'an revealed to him, that challenged the eloquent to rival it but [all who tried] failed. If all of this [information] has reached his ears, yet he shuns it, turns his back, does not consider it or reflect on it, and does not hasten to believe in it, then such a person is indeed a denier (*jāhid*) and a liar, and he is indeed a disbeliever (*kāfir*).

However, such a person does not fit the description of most of the Europeans and Central Asians who live far away from the land of the Muslims. In fact, I would argue that whoever did hear these things about [the Prophet ﷺ] would have to have wanted to find them out in order to ascertain the reality of what is claimed. [Such a person would have to be] a religious person who did not prefer worldly matters to otherworldly ones. If he felt no urge to find out [the truth], it could only be due to the fact that he was complacent, inclined toward this world, and bereft of piety and a sense of the momentousness of religion, and that is what disbelief (*kufi*) is.

However, if a person felt a desire to find out [the truth] but neglected to do so, that negligence is also disbelief. Indeed, anyone of faith in God and the Last Day from any religion will indefatigably seek the truth after he has seen the appearance of signs that suspend the norms of experience (miracles). If someone sets out and attempts to ascertain the reality but dies before being able to complete his investigation, he is also forgiven and then granted the vast mercy and grace of God. So have a vast view of the mercy of God, the exalted, and do not measure divine matters with limited ordinary standards. And know well that the afterlife is similar to this life, for [the Qur'an states], *Your creation and your resurrection is as one soul* (31:27).



Most people in this world enjoy relative security and ease or a state that makes life enjoyable; for that reason, if most people were given a choice between life and death, for example, they would choose life. As for those suffering to such a degree that they would prefer death, such cases are rare. Those condemned eternally to the Fire in the afterlife will also be rare, for the attribute of divine mercy does not change due to the diversity of our circumstances, and “this life” and “the afterlife” are simply two expressions designating the diversity of our circumstances. Were it not so, there would be no meaning to the statement of the Prophet ﷺ when he said, “The first thing that God wrote in the first Book was, ‘I am God. There is no deity but Me. My mercy takes precedence over My wrath, so he who witnesses that there is no god but God and Muḥammad is His servant and His apostle, for him is the Garden.’”<sup>31</sup>

There is no doubt that the disbelievers are in the Inferno, but Imam al-Ghazzālī is explaining that *kufi* is an active denial, not a passive state of ignorance. That is, denial must follow a clear understanding of what one is denying. Moreover, for those who are sincere, it is not only understandable but necessary that they would search for the truth.

Imam al-Suyūṭī states in his fatwa about the Prophet's father and mother and their place in the hereafter,

He [the Prophet's father] was living during a time in which ignorance pervaded the world from the East to the West; the scholars of the People of the Book were scattered in various lands, such as the Levant, and few among them knew of sacred laws and could convey the divine message correctly. Neither of the two [the Prophet's mother and father] was accustomed to traveling, with the exception of traveling to Medina, nor did either of them live very long; living longer would have enabled them to pursue the truth and examine matters, but, in fact, both lived very short lives. Imam al-Ḥāfiẓ Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-'Alā'ī says in his book *al-Durrah al-saniyyah* that the Prophet's father 'Abd Allāh was just eighteen years old when 'Āmina became pregnant; he traveled to Medina to bring some dates back to his family and died while there with his cousins from Banī Najjār.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, according to the imam, the Prophet's parents did not live long enough to consider matters of ultimate concern, and this factor must be taken into consideration for them and for other people. In addition, a well-known sound hadith tells the story of a mass murderer who sought repentance and was told by a scholar to go to such-and-such land where there were good people who worshiped God. The man set out but died on the way. The angel of mercy wished to claim him because he had repented and his heart was filled with contrition. The angel of wrath, on the other hand, argued that the man had never done anything good in his life. To settle the debate, the two angels were instructed to measure the land and determine if he was closer to the place of disbelief that he had left behind or that of belief to which he was headed. According to the hadith, God shortened the distance between the man and the land of belief, so the angel

of mercy took him. This is a clear hadith showing that a man can be on a journey of faith and not arrive at his destiny before dying, but be saved nonetheless by God's mercy.<sup>33</sup>

According to Imam al-Shāfi'ī, if a person kills another person before Islam was presented to him decisively (*uqimat 'alayhī al-ḥujja*),<sup>34</sup> the murderer must pay the blood money and expiate (*kaffārah*) but not suffer *lex talionis* because the man was not a Muslim legally but was one essentially (*fi ma' nā al-muslim*). Ibn Rif'a commented on this in *al-Kifāyah* saying, "[He is understood to be a Muslim] because he was born with inherent nature (*fiṭrah*) and no outward sign of obstinacy had been displayed."<sup>35</sup> In other words, Ibn Rif'a also states that disbelief is active and not passive. Furthermore, Imam al-Nawawī says in his commentary on Imam Muslim's hadith collection about the children of polytheists,

The preferred and soundest school of thought about them and the one most of the authoritative scholars have inclined toward is that they are in Paradise based upon God's word, *We do not punish a people until a messenger comes to them* [17:15]. So if God does not punish an adult because no message has reached him, obviously, children would be even more secure.<sup>36</sup>

Imam al-Suyūṭī comments:

Does this include all of the people during the pre-Islamic period? No. I would say it comprises only those who were not presented with a prophetic message at all. As for those who were given a prophetic message before and continued on in their disbelief, they are certainly from among the denizens of the Fire.<sup>37</sup>

In their extensive commentary, *Sharḥ jawharat al-tawḥīd*, the two theologians,



Shaykh ʿAbd al-Karīm Tatān and Shaykh Muḥammad Adīb al-Kīlānī, concur with Imam al-Ghazzālī on the matter:

In the hadith in which the Prophet ﷺ said, “By the One in whose Hand lies my soul, anyone, whether Jew or Christian, who hears of me from this community and dies without believing in me is from the denizens of the Fire.” According to the scholars, there are three factors involved here:

A person hears of the Prophet ﷺ, and this includes his message and the proofs of its veracity.

A person refuses to believe in what was given to the Prophet ﷺ.

A person dies in that state.

Hence, a person who never heard of the Prophet ﷺ, such as someone living in a far off place, and [who] was not made aware of the truthfulness of his claims, is not accountable....And some scholars submitted that if the message arrives to someone in a distorted or false and unappealing form filled with the errors of those who lead others astray, then the ruling of such a person is the same as though the message never arrived to him, unless he is able to see through the smokescreen of lies but still turns away.<sup>38</sup>

Ibn Mukandir, one of Imam Mālik’s teachers and a great scholar from among the *ṭābiʿīn*<sup>39</sup> said, “I am shy before God to say that His mercy will fail anyone among the disobedient, and had it not been for the clear revelation concerning the polytheists, I would not have removed them from inclusion in the verse, *My mercy encompasses all things*.” Also, Imam al-Munāwī quotes one of the scholars as saying,

The divine presence is absolute, and God does in it whatever He pleases. No one among the believers has any guaran-

tee of security from divine retribution for his or her sins. But people will be clinging to such things as [God’s statement], *My mercy takes precedence over My wrath*.<sup>40</sup>

Both Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī and Ibn Taymiyyah held heterodox views concerning the Hellfire as a result of their attempts at reconciling divine mercy with the idea of infinite punishment for finite

THE DIVINE PRESENCE IS ABSOLUTE,  
AND GOD DOES IN IT WHATEVER  
HE PLEASES. NO ONE AMONG THE  
BELIEVERS HAS ANY GUARANTEE  
OF SECURITY FROM DIVINE  
RETRIBUTION FOR HIS OR HER SINS.

sins. In one transmission considered sound, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah inclined toward an Annihilationist view, which holds that eventually the Fire is extinguished. The heretic Jahm b. Ṣafwān also shared this view, and it is common among some Jewish ethicists. Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī held that eventually the people of the Fire become fire-like and no longer feel pain but actually come to enjoy the Fire.<sup>41</sup> It was Imam al-Ghazzālī, may God reward him, who was able to elucidate an orthodox resolution to the thorny theological problem of theodicy by introducing the element of conscious rejection of God or any of His messengers as the necessary and sufficient cause for perdition. Indeed, according to al-Ghazzālī, many people will enter the Fire for their various sins that they failed to purge or atone for in this world, but God’s

mercy will take precedence, and the majority will eventually be freed of the Fire.

The Qur'an does make mention of those who remain forever in the Fire. Shaykh Ḥasan al-Ḥabannakah al-Maydānī says,

The Qur'an is unequivocal that the disbelievers who have no excuse for their disbelief (*ghairu al-mā'dhūr bi kufrihim*) are from the denizens of the Fire in the next life and will dwell therein forever in punishment. Moreover, God will not forgive them for either their disbelief (*kufṛ*) or their association with Him (*shirk*), while He will forgive those among the sinful believers, for God's mercy will encompass them with forgiveness and pardon out of divine generosity and grace, if God so wills.<sup>42</sup>

The operative phrase here is “those who have no excuse for their disbelief.” These are the people who willfully rejected the truth, like Iblīs, out of arrogance, not ignorance. Those who were truly unaware may spend time in the Hellfire, but they will eventually be showered in divine grace, as Imam al-Ghazzālī indicates. The Qur'an refers to disbelief accompanied by certain characteristics that indicate the vile nature of those who knowingly and willfully reject the message.

The Prophet ﷺ described the disbelievers in the sound hadith in al-Bukhārī as the “denizens of the Fire,” saying, “Shall I not tell you who the denizens of the Fire are?”

His companions replied, “Indeed, tell us.”

He then said, “Every cruel, harsh, puffed up, miserly, arrogant one.”<sup>43</sup>

In addition, a famous hadith, which is the first hadith transmitted to students of hadith, states, “Whoever shows no mercy will have no mercy shown [to him].”<sup>44</sup> And in another sound hadith, a prostitute is forgiven for bringing water to a thirsty dog.<sup>45</sup>

#### RELATIONSHIP OF MUSLIMS WITH PEOPLES OF OTHER FAITHS

The God of Islam is the God of humanity—the God of the Jews, Christians, Sabians, Magians, and Polytheists. He feeds and nurtures them all forbearingly and gracefully. He allows those who even deny His existence respite that “perhaps they may return.” He has challenged those who believe in Him and honor Him to infuse themselves with the qualities that God has chosen to describe Himself with: mercy, compassion, forgiveness, patience, forbearance, and love.

Our Prophet ﷺ said, “None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” Imam al-Nawawī said in his commentary,

This should first and foremost be understood as universal brotherhood so that it includes the Muslim and the non-Muslim (*kāfir*). A man should want for his brother, the non-Muslim, that he enters into a state of submission with his Lord. As for his Muslim brother, he should want that his state of submission continue. For this reason, praying for the guidance of non-Muslims is beloved and rewarded [by God]. The hadith should be understood to negate complete faith and not faith entirely for the one who does not love for his brother what he loves for himself. Moreover, the meaning of love here is that one desires good and benefit for others. This is a spiritual love and not a natural love. For human nature is such that people loathe good or distinction for others over themselves. But man must go against this nature and oppose it and pray for his brother and desire for his fellow man what he loves for himself. And whenever he is unable to do that, it is because he is envious.... So man should treat himself and force his ego to be content with the decree of God and oppose his own ego by praying for his enemies.<sup>46</sup>

Only when we reach this level of faith and charity that Imam al-Nawawī describes will our condition change. We are in an oppressed, lowly state because it is where we belong in order to learn the lessons we need to learn. Muslims forget that our Prophet ﷺ was persecuted in Mecca for thirteen years, yet he still prayed for his people's guidance. He was abused on the battlefield in Uḥud yet still called out to his Lord, "O my Lord, forgive my people for they do not know what they do."<sup>47</sup> This should be our response to peoples of other faiths. Our concern should never be about where other people are going, nor should we ever desire for others what we do not desire for ourselves. Rather, our concern should be the question God asks us all: "Where then are you going?"



## NOTES

- 1 Abū Bakr b. Fūrak al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-ḥudūd fi al-uṣūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1999), 110.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Abū al-Baqā' al-Kaffawī, *al-Kullīyāt* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1993.), 764.
- 4 This is a nuanced legal judgment based upon the sound hadith. It does not mean that Muslims cannot accept legal bequests from non-Muslim relatives; they can. But they cannot, generally, accept a distribution system in inheritance laws other than the will of a person, such as state division in intestate situations. Each specific case should, however, be referred to a valid mufti.
- 5 Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī, *Tashīl li 'ulūm al-tanzīl*, (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.), 2:100.
- 6 Noahitic laws are those that Gentile nations are required to practice. According to some rabbis, the Jews, who are chosen by God as the law-bearers, must follow 613 sacred precepts and are to teach the Gentiles only seven as a mercy to them. They are: 1) prohibition of blasphemy; 2) prohibition of idolatry; 3) prohibition of murder; 4) prohibition of theft; 5) prohibition of sexuality outside marriage including fornication, bestiality, and homosexuality; 6) prohibition of consumption of blood or meat taken from a live animal; and 7) obligation of establishing courts of law and appointment of judges to ensure people have recourse to justice and the redress of wrongs. Although filial duty to parents is encouraged, it is not a commandment to Gentiles.
- 7 K. Kohler, *Jewish Theology: Systematically and Historically Considered* (New York: MacMillan, 1918), 427.
- 8 Shaykh Bakrī Rajab, *Tawḍīḥ hidāyat al-murīd ilā sharḥ jawharat al-tawḥīd* (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1994), 122.
- 9 Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Wahidī, *Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998).
- 10 See *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* and *Tafsīr ibn Kathīr*.
- 11 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 20, No. 4573 & 4574.
- 12 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 4, No. 2033.
- 13 *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Vol. 9, Book 88, No. 6627.
- 14 *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Vol. 8, Book 73, No. 125; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 1, No. 0117.
- 15 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mallūḥ, ed. *Masū'at naḍrat al-nā'im*, (Jeddah: Dār al-Waṣīla, 1999), Vol. 2, 5, 445.
- 16 *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Vol. 4, Book 52, No. 2809 & 2872.
- 17 Sunan al-Tirmidhī, Vol. 2, Book 1, No. 1446.
- 18 Imam al-Qarāfī says in *al-Furūq*, "Know that ignorance is not an excuse for statements that contain disbelief in them. The reason for this is that a juristic principle states, 'Any ignorance that can be removed on the part of the ignorant, sane, adult Muslim cannot be used as a proof for him.' God has sent to His creation messengers to remove this

ignorance from them. Furthermore, God obliged all of them to learn the message and to act in accordance with it. Hence, whoever abandons learning and right action, and remains in a state of ignorance has sinned doubly, neglecting to learn, and failing to act according to the teaching. If he learns but fails to act, his sin is only the failure to act on his knowledge. However, whoever learns and acts is the one in a state of grace.” See Shaykh Muhammad al-Baqquṛī, *Tartīb al-furūq wa ikhtisārihā*, (Casablanca: al-Awqāf, 1996), 2:374.

- 19 Ṣādiq al-Ghiryānī, *Fī al-ʿaqīdah wa al-minhāj* (Benghazi: Dār al-Kutub, 2002), 106. The six conditions were also taken from this section, an excellent book, with some additions.
- 20 Reported by al-Ḥamīdī in his *Musnad*.
- 21 Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd* (al-Muhammadiyah: al-Matbaʿah al-Fadiliyah, 1988).
- 22 Oneness of God.
- 23 al-Kaffawī, *al-Kullīyāt*, 765.
- 24 *Sunun al-Tirmidhī*, Vol. 2, Book 1, No. 1446.
- 25 al-Ghiryānī, *Fī al-ʿaqīdah*, 104.
- 26 Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī, *Tashīl*, 1:484.
- 27 *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Vol. 4, Book 52, No. 2809 & 2872.
- 28 Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿRaḥmān Ḥasan al-Ḥabannakah al-Maydānī, *al-ʿAqīdah al-Islāmiyyah wa Ususuhā* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1997), 615.
- 29 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Majmūʿat rasāʾil al-Ghazzālī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1994), 96.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., 97.
- 32 Imam Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Hāwī li al-fatāwī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 2:409.
- 33 Imam Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ riyād al-ṣāliḥīn*, trans. and commentary, Ḥāfiẓ Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf (Riyad: Maktabat Dār al-Salām, 1998), 1:32.
- 34 This means that the proofs of Islam have been presented in an incontrovertible manner. It does not mean simply telling them they should become a Muslim. One would think that just seeing the Prophet ﷺ was proof enough, but it took several years before some of his companions realized the truth. Abū Laḥab, on the other hand, would never realize it, and thus his fate was sealed from the outset.
- 35 al-Suyūṭī, *al-Hāwī li al-fatāwī*, 2:408.
- 36 Imam Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-sharḥ al-Nawawī* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿah Ḥijāzī, 1930), Vol. 16, 209.
- 37 al-Suyūṭī, *al-Hāwī li al-fatāwī*, 2:408.
- 38 Shaykh ʿAbd al-Karīm Tatān and Shaykh Muḥammad Adīb al-Kilānī, *Sharḥ jawharat al-tawḥīd* (Damascus: Dār al-Bashāʿir, 1994), 1:146.
- 39 The second generation of Muslims who met the companions of the Prophet ﷺ but not the Prophet ﷺ.
- 40 Imam Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raʿūf al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Islām, 1996), 4:610.
- 41 See *al-Janab al-gharbi*, Rashid Effendi section, Sulaimaniyya Library *Mukhtasaru tadhkīrāt al-Qurtubī*.
- 42 al-Maydānī, *al-ʿAqīdah al-Islāmiyyah*, 622.
- 43 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2000), Vol. 4, No. 9021.
- 44 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 30, No. 5737.
- 45 al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-sharḥ al-Nawawī* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿah Ḥijāzī, 1930), 14:242.
- 46 al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ matn al-arbaʿīn al-Nawawīyyah* (Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Fath, 1970), 123.
- 47 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 19 (*Kitāb al-jihād*), No. 4418.

