

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

TAQIYYA

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INTRODUCTION

'Taqiyya' is an Arabic term which is often misunderstood and misconstrued by elements from both Muslim thought and Muslim critics alike. Common interpretations of the term include 'wilful lying' or 'permissibility to deceive' with a view to address a wider good.

From a Quran's perspective, such an understanding of blatant deception and lying at any given moment for what one may perceive as 'wider good' finds no warrant. Furthermore, the Quran's focus is primarily with respect to religious beliefs and in the **real danger of possible persecution for those beliefs**.

Furthermore, the Quran considers the preservation and protection of life as sacrosanct which is more than alluded to in many different verses. This is also powerfully underscored in the Quranic sentiment where if one kills a soul without warrant, it is akin to having slaughtered all of mankind and in contrast, one who saves a soul, is akin to having saved all of mankind (5:32). Therefore, preservation of life remains a key teaching of the Quran.

It would be an absolutely untenable proposition to even suggest that if one's life, limb or property were in serious danger, that they pander to those circumstances which will only inevitably cause further strife with the possibility of a fatal outcome.

WHAT DOES 'TAQIYYA' ACTUALLY MEAN?

The Arabic term '**taqiyya**' is formed from the root 'Waw-Qaf-Ya' and inherently carries the meaning of '**caution**'. Such a meaning of caution is also captured in other terms which are formed from its root meaning.

وقى

1. وَقَاهُ اللَّهُ السُّوءَ *God preserved him from evil.* (Mṣb.) See a verso cited voce نَقَشَ. — وَقَاكَ اللَّهُ كُلَّ مَحْذُورٍ *God preserve thee from all fear:* see مَحْذُورٌ. — قَى, or قَهُ, and تَوَقَّى, are imperatives [meaning *Be thou cautious*]. (JK) — وَقَاهُ and قَى عَلَى ظَلْعِكَ: see ظَلَعَ. — وَقَاهُ and اتَّقَاهُ both signify *He was cautious of it*; syn. حَذِرَهُ. (K.)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

...and words which form from the root

5. تَوَقَّاهُ (and, accord. to a usage in the K, art. حَرَزَ, also تَوَقَّى مِنْهُ) *He guarded against it; was cautious of it*; syn. احْتَرَزَ مِنْهُ and تَحَرَّزَ مِنْهُ. (S, K, * art. حَرَزَ.) — تَبَّقَهُ وَتَوَقَّاهُ: see 4 in art. بقى.

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

8. اتقى *He preserved, or guarded, himself exceedingly, or extraordinarily*: (Ksh, Bḍ in ii. 1:) *he put a thing between him and another to preserve him, or guard him.* (Ḥam, p. 359.)
 — In the conventional language of the law, *He preserved, or guarded, himself exceedingly, or extraordinarily*, (Ksh, Bḍ, ubi supra,) *from sin, of commission or of omission*, (Ksh,) [or] *from what would harm him in the world to come.* (Bḍ, who describes three degrees.) It may often be rendered *He was pious*; or *careful of his religious duties*. — اتقى عليهم وحذر [He guarded himself against them in an extraordinary degree, and was cautious, or wary]. (JK, TA, in art. حشى.) See 1. — يتقى, for يتقى: see art. تقى: and see a verse of Khufāf Ibn-Nudbeh, (quoted in the Ṣ, in art. وقى,) cited voce أتر. — متأوب يتقى: see a verse cited voce متأوب.

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

SEEKING GUIDANCE FROM THE QURAN

Two verses seem to support the notion that under a real threat of persecution to life, one will not be held accountable for their denial of faith, reserved or lacklustre expression of outward religion until the threat is removed.

Even in dire circumstances of persecution, the Quran encourages one to migrate to avoid harm to person and property with a view to preserve life. Please see related article [1] below.

016.106

"Whoever disbelieves in God after his belief, **except one who is forced while his heart is content with faith**, but he who opens (his) breast to disbelief, then upon them is the wrath of God and for them is a grievous punishment"

040.028 (part)

"And a believing man from the family of Pharaoh, **who had concealed his faith said** "Will you kill a man because he says, 'My Lord is God'?..."

One notes from both verses above, that any caution exercised remains within the sphere of religious expression and should not be misconstrued as a wilful form of open deception / lying to be exercised in all matters for any perceived 'wider good'.

Misuse of verses where oft critics of Islam and even some Muslims believe that Islam sanctions deception / lying to others for any 'greater purpose' has no unequivocal warrant in the Quran.

WIDER APPLICATION

Although popular Muslim thought often exclusively ascribes such a practice of 'taqiyya' to those of the Shi'a school of thought, this is not entirely an accurate portrayal.

There have been proponents of Muslims in general throughout Islamic history that have at times been known to remain **cautious** of expressing their beliefs at times of possible persecution.

"The Islamic principle became very important in Spain in the course of the sixteen century, as the Muslims of Granada, Castile, Aragon, Valencia, and Navarre were forced to convert to Christianity and then became crypto-Muslims, practicing Islam only in secret." [4]

Often Muslim jurists would issue a 'fatwa' (legal responsum)...

"...allowing Muslims in Spain to make extensive use of taqiyya in order to maintain their faith despite the strict restrictions placed on them by Christian authorities" [5]

However, it is accepted that the concept of 'taqiyya' in Shi'a theology has a much wider purport which is not the focus of this article.

As a scholar notes with regards a Shi'a perspective:

"Looked at from the point of view of motive, there appear in fact to be two main types of *taqiyya*: one which is based on fear of external enemies and another which is based on the need to conceal secret doctrines from the uninitiated" [6]

Furthermore, as a relative minority throughout Islamic history, the Shi'a would have arguably been more exposed / susceptible to persecution for their beliefs and hence the greater use of the concept amongst the adherents of this particular school of thought.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There is no warrant for the aggressive interpretation of the term 'taqiyya' to imply wilful deception or lying at any given moment for any wider good.

In contrast, the Quran acknowledges situations whereby a believer may be forced / coerced by circumstances to exercise 'caution' of outward religious expression. This is especially if by not doing so, they would expose themselves to persecution and death.

Related Article:

- (1) [The Concept of Hijrat](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 8, Supplement, Page 3059

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] STEWART. D, Islam in Spain after the Reconquista, Department of Middle Eastern Studies, Emory University.

[5] Ibid.

[6] KOHLBERG. E, Taqiyya in Shi'i Theology and Religion Introduction, Page 345 - See Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions, Edited by Hans G. Kippenberg & Guy G. Stroumsa, E.J. Brill. 1995

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