

Home > 180 Questions Enquiries About Islam Volume Two: Various issues > 42. What is the aim of Taqiyyah (Dissimulation)? > Taqiyyah, a Change in the Form of Combat

42. What is the aim of Taqiyyah (Dissimulation)?

It is true that, at times, man is prepared to sacrifice his dear life for the sake of lofty causes – safeguarding honour, supporting the truth and exterminating falsehood – but can any sane and intellectual person permit man to imperil his life for an unimportant cause and objective?

Taqiyyah, a Defensive Shield

Islam has explicitly permitted that when a person's life, wealth or honour is in danger and manifestation of the Truth yields no significant benefit, he should refrain from manifesting it, and continue to fulfill his responsibilities secretly and in a concealed manner – as the Qur'an has indicated in verse 28 of Surat Ale 'Imran or in verse 106 of Suratul Nahl, when it says:

إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَ قَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ

“Except he, who is compelled while his heart is at rest on account of faith.”

History and the books of Islamic traditions have not forgotten the story of 'Ammar and his parents and how they had fallen into the clutches of the idolaters, who subjected them to intense persecutions in order that they disown Islam. 'Ammar's parents refused and were killed by the polytheists, but 'Ammar uttered what they wished to hear and then, weeping out of Allah's fear, hastened towards the Noble Prophet (S), who consoled him by saying:

إِنْ عَادُوا لَكَ فَعِدْ لَهُمْ.

“If they seize you again, say out what they desire you to speak out, and in this manner put his anxiety to rest.”

The point that needs to be taken into complete regard is that taqiyyah does not possess one ruling on all occasions – at times it becomes compulsory while on occasions it becomes prohibited while there are instances when it is permissible to either adopt it or decline it.

Taqiyyah becomes obligatory when a person's life is endangered for no important benefit, however, when taqiyyah becomes a cause for the promotion of falsehood, deviation of people and strengthening of tyranny, it is unacceptable.

And it is on this basis that all the objections leveled in connection with this issue shall be answered. If the faultfinders were to have conducted a study in this regard, they would have concluded that the Shi'ites are not alone in this belief since the issue of taqiyyah, per se, is a categorically rational ruling and in accordance with the natural disposition of man.¹

This is because, when the wise and intelligent people of the world find themselves at a cross road wherein they have to either disregard manifesting their internal beliefs or manifest them and in the process place their lives, wealth and honour in peril, they take stock of the situation.

If the manifestation of their beliefs is in an instance which deserves the sacrifice of one's life, wealth and reputation, they regard such a sacrifice as correct, but if they do not perceive great effects and benefits in performing such an act, they refrain from revealing their beliefs.

Taqiyyah, a Change in the Form of Combat

In the course of religious, social and political struggles, there are times when, if the defenders of a right cause were to engage in a manifest combat, they, as well as their cause would either be obliterated or in the very least, find themselves in jeopardy – like the state of the Shi'ites of 'Ali (a.s.) during the period of the rule of the usurper Umayyads.

In such situations, the correct and rational way is to refrain from uselessly squandering one's forces and to embark upon an indirect combat to advance towards the achievement of the sacred objectives. In reality, taqiyyah, for such sects and their followers in such circumstances, can be looked upon as a kind of change of form of combat, which would save them from destruction and grant them success in the continuation of their struggle.

It is not known what plan those who totally reject taqiyyah have to present for such situations? What is better – to be destroyed or to carry on the struggle in a logical and correct form? The former is something which none can recommend, while the latter is nothing but taqiyyah itself.²

The true Muslims, the protégés of the Noble Prophet (S), possessed an astonishing spirit of endurance against the enemies. Some of them, such as 'Ammar's father, despite the fact that their hearts were replete with faith in Allah (s.w.t.) and love for the Noble Prophet (S) were unwilling to utter even one sentence that was to the liking of the enemies, and even gave up their lives in the way of Allah.

And some, like 'Ammar himself, who were willing to utter the sentence, considered themselves to be accountable for the act and were so overcome with dread that until the Noble Prophet (S) reassured them that the act adopted by them as a tactic to save their lives had been totally permitted according to the religious laws, they did not attain ease and tranquility of mind!

Regarding Bilal we read that when he embraced Islam, and then courageously stood up to defend it and support the Noble Prophet (S), the polytheists subjected him to immense persecution, to the extent that they would drag him under the hot and scorching sun, place a large boulder upon his chest and say to him: Disbelieve in Allah.

He refused to give in to their demands and, almost on the verge of death, he would repeatedly say: **أحد أحد** (He is the One Allah, He is the One Allah). He would then say: By Allah! Had I known of an utterance that was more distasteful to you than this, I would have surely uttered it (before you!)³

About Habib ibne Zayd Ansari we read that Musailamah, the Liar, upon capturing him, questioned him: “Do you testify that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah?” Habib replied: “Yes.” He then asked: “Do you testify that I am the prophet of Allah.” Habib, by way of ridicule and mockery, said: “I do not hear what you say.” Musailamah and his followers cut him up into pieces, but Habib stood as firm and steadfast as a mountain.⁴

There are numerous examples of such shocking instances in the history of Islam – especially during the life of the early Muslims and the companions of the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).

It is for this reason that scholars have declared that in such instances, non-observance of taqiyyah and non-submission before the enemies is permissible, despite the fact that it could result in one's death. This is because the aim is to hold aloft the flag of Unity and monotheism, and ensure the superiority of Islam, and this was an issue that possessed special importance, especially during the initial stages of the Noble Prophet's (S) invitation towards Islam.

Despite this, there is no doubt that observing taqiyyah in such cases is permissible, while in cases that are less severe than this, it becomes obligatory. And contrary to what some ignorant individuals are wont to imagine, taqiyyah is neither a sign of weakness, and nor is it fear of the great number of enemies in the face of pressure. Rather, taqiyyah can be viewed as a calculated tactic for protecting the forces and preventing useless loss of believers for the sake of issues that are inconsequential.

It is a common practice all over the world that a small combating minority, in an effort to overthrow an oppressive, selfish and tyrannical majority, chiefly employ the strategy of concealment. They establish an underground group, possess secret plans and on numerous occasions they take up for themselves the appearance of others; even when arrested, they try their very best to ensure that their true acts are not divulged so that they do not lose their forces uselessly and keep them reserved for the continuation of their struggle.

No intellect ever permits that in such situations, the soldiers, who are in a minority, openly manifest themselves and thus get easily identified and detected by the enemy and are subsequently exterminated.

It is for this reason that before being an Islamic strategy, taqiyyah is a logical tactic for all those people, who oppose and combat a strong enemy.

We observe that in the Islamic traditions too, taqiyyah has been compared to a defensive shield. Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

التَّقِيَّةُ تُرْسُ الْمُؤْمِنِ وَالتَّقِيَّةُ حِرْزُ الْمُؤْمِنِ.

“Taqiyyah is a believer's shield and a means for his protection.”⁵

(Do note that taqiyyah has been compared to a shield, and a shield is a tool that is only employed in the battlefield while fighting the enemy for the purpose of protecting the revolutionary forces.)

And if we observe that in Islamic traditions taqiyyah has been regarded as a symbol of religion, indicative of faith and nine parts out of a total collection of ten parts of religion, it is for this very reason.

Of course, the topic of taqiyyah is a very vast one and this is not the place for dwelling upon it in detail. The only aim of presenting the above discussion was to clarify that the criticisms which some have leveled against this issue, is indicative of their ignorance of the conditions of taqiyyah and the philosophy that lies behind it.

Undoubtedly, there are instances when practicing taqiyyah is prohibited; this is when taqiyyah, instead of serving to protect the forces leads to their destruction or imperils the religion or brings about a great evil. In such cases taqiyyah ought to be disregarded and the consequences, whatever they might be, must be tackled head on.⁶

1. An extract from the book Ain-e-Ma, pg. 364

2. Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 2, pg. 373

3. The commentary In the Shade of the Qur'an, vol. 5, pg. 284

4. The commentary In the Shade of the Qur'an, vol. 5, pg. 284

5. Wasa'il ash-Shi'a, vol. 11, no. 6, Chapter 24 from the chapters of 'Amr Bil Ma'ruf

6. Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 11, pg. 423

<https://www.al-islam.org/180-questions-about-islam-vol-2-various-issues-makarim-shirazi/42-what-a-im-taqiyyah-dissimulation>