Hypocrisy in Islam
Sheikh/ Khalifa Ezzat
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Dear brothers and sisters:

Hypocrisy is a topic of extreme importance in our daily lives because it reflects our behaviour, our manners, our faith in God and His teachings. It is a characteristic that Islam abhors. The Qur’an warns against hypocrisy and explains the characteristics of hypocrites in numerous places.

God has disclosed their beliefs, their qualities and made their goals clear so that believers can beware of them. He divided mankind into three groups at the beginning of Surat al-Baqarah; the believer, the disbeliever and the hypocrite. He uttered four verses concerning believers, two verses concerning disbelievers and thirteen verses concerning hypocrites because of their plenitude and the great harm and tribulation they bring to Islam and Muslims.

Because of the serious harm they cause, the hypocrites will be in the lowest level of Hell, as God says: "Verily, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depth [grade] of the Fire." [4:145]

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) explained their characteristics in the Hadith: "There are four [characteristics]. Whoever has all of them is a complete hypocrite and whoever has some of them has some element of hypocrisy, unless he gives it up. When he speaks, he lies; when he makes an agreement, he violates it; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; when he quarrels, he resorts to insults." [Muslim]

This does not mean that, if a Muslim tells lies, breaks promises or betrays trusts, he becomes a hypocrite. It means that these qualities, if found to be a part of their nature in their regular dealings with people, are strong indicators that the person's faith is weak.

Only God knows for sure who amongst us is a sincere believer and who is a true hypocrite. Sometimes hypocrites don't even realise that they are hypocrites. They are so convincing, they even convince themselves that they are believers, whereas their behaviour shows quite the opposite.

The Prophet (pbuh) spoke about it several times and every time he used some graphic description that showed how ugly and unbecoming all types of hypocrisy are. For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) informed us that a hypocrite is a mischievous person. He said: “You will find that the worst person is two-faced. He meets one group of people with one side of his face and another with the other side.” [Al-Bukhari]

Dear brothers and sisters: Scholars regard these characteristics as signs of minor hypocrisy. Minor hypocrisy shows good morals and hides the bad ones. A hypocrite is a dissembler of virtue and piety. Major hypocrisy is to hide disbelief and display belief.

There is certain behaviour that some people think to be hypocrisy but is not, such as smiling at someone one dislikes, welcoming one whom he hates or showing compassion and gentleness to a bad or evil person. This is not hypocrisy. It is the noble morality that every
Muslim should have. This is called *Mudaraah*, which means to show noble morality to one who does not deserve it. This is the teaching of the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. The Qur’an says: “*Repel evil with that which is best.*” [23:96]. The Prophet (pbuh) did so when a man of bad morals came to meet him. Before their meeting, the Prophet (pbuh) warned against his immorality and said, “What a bad person he is.” When he met him, he treated him gently, astonishing ‘Aishah by this treatment. The Prophet (pbuh) said, “The worst person on the Day of judgment is the one whom people leave because of his immorality.”

Dear brothers and sisters: If we go back into history, we can see how hypocrisy had a negative impact on Islam and the nations of Islam. We see many disasters and trials afflicting Muslims owing to hypocrisy. After the death of the Prophet (pbuh), Abu Bakr led the Muslims for a few years. Owing to hypocrisy, he faced many trials and hardships. For instance, the hypocrites refused to pay zakah after the death of the Prophet. They said, “We paid it when his prayer was tranquility for us as the Qur’an declared in 9:102.” Abu Bakr replied, “I would fight against those hypocrites and zakah refusers.” He successfully did.

During the era of ‘Umar, hypocrites were few. Nevertheless they assassinated him when he was praying. In the reign of ‘Uthman, hypocrites increased. The most infamous were Abdullah Ibn Sab’a and his followers, who caused many conflicts and destabilised the Muslim community. Finally, they besieged him for forty days and killed him.

Under Ali, the hypocrisy of some Muslims caused conflicts, resulting in the battles Siffin and Al-Jamal. In the end, he was killed by Abdur-Rahman Ibn Maljam.

Hypocrisy played a terminal role in the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate, through the efforts of the hypocrite Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Talib, nicknamed Ibn al-‘Alqami, who was a minister under al-Mu’tasim. He showed piety and sincerity to al-Mu’tasim until appointed minister. Ibn Kathir relates the whole story in *Al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah*. He betrayed al-Mu’tasim by facilitating the Tatar invasion of Baghdad. Ibn Kathir adds that al-Mu’tasim was killed and the Abbasid dynasty collapsed. After the fall of Baghdad, Holaco asked Ibn al-Alqami to reward him for his help. He told him, “Whatever reward we give you, we will not trust you.” Then, he killed him. This is the consequence of hypocrisy.

Dear brothers and sisters: Hypocrisy is when your sayings differ from your actions. The Qur’an says: “*Most hateful it is with God that you say that which you do not do*” [61:3]

God hates those who acquire this fault and He therefore warns them that their punishment is indeed hell. God says in Surat At-Taubah: “*God hath promised the hypocrites, men and women, and the rejecters of Faith the fire of Hell; therein shall they dwell; sufficient is it for them; for them is the curse of God and an enduring punishment.*” [9:68].

Dear brothers and sisters: The way to cure this disease is to have faith, to fear God by following his teachings and to avoid his prohibitions. Sincerity is the opposite of hypocrisy. I ask God to grant us sincerity and keep us away from hypocrisy. I ask him also to guide us all. Ameen