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All Praise is due to Allah, and may Allah's salaah and salaam be on Prophet Muhammad, his household, the noble companions and those who follow their path until the Day of Resurrection.

To proceed:

The fitnah of Takfeer: The Trials and Tribulations associated with imputing kufr (disbelief) on Muslims (rulers or ruled), is one of the most dangerous fitan [plural of fitnah] in our times. Many people whether well-versed scholars or tenderfoots have handled this subject, yet their intentions and techniques varied. Some of them involved themselves into this subject either with the intention of proving that their sick concepts (of the subject) are the truth or just to satisfy the hatred -against Muslims- in their hearts. Others intended to accomplish certain goals for their own sect which is (i.e. the sect) far away from truth, while a shar'i issue should be scholarly inspected objectively with the intention of fulfilling the truth provided with the sound and solid evidences. Therefore I will handle this subject in a way that fulfills the truth which pleases Allah (Exalted be He), following the Qur'an and Sunnah guided by the understanding of the rightly guided Imams of salaf. Meanwhile I ask Allah (subhannahu wa ta'ala) for help and guidance.

Definition of Kufr:

To better understand takfeer, it is necessary to first define kufr.

Linguistic meaning:

Ibn Jareer At-tabari (may Allah have mercy upon him)-in his tafseer (commentary on the Qur'an) (1110) says:

"According to Arabs the term kufr originally means, "covering and shielding." If an object covers something, then that object kafarahu (covered and shielded it). Similarly, they (Arabs) named the night darkness kaafir because it covers what they wear. Lubaid bin Rabee'ah said:

In a night where the stars were covered by its clouds."

Ibn Abdul-barr in "at-tamheed" (4240) says:

"Kufr originally means: covering"

Thus the meaning of Kufr linguistically is: "covering and shielding."

Islamic meaning:

As for the Islamic meaning, sometimes the word kufr means:

The major kufr, which takes a person out of the fold of Islâm. Kufr could also refer to the lesser type, which does not take a person from the fold of Islâm, known as al-kufr al-asghar.

So the major kufr is the opposite of Eeman (faith) as Al-azharee reported in "tahtheebul-lughah" (43163) on the authority of Al-laith. Ibn faris reported it as well in "Mu'jam maqayees al-lughah" (5191). Refer also to "Lisanul-Arab" (5144).

Ibn Hazm Adhahiree in "Al faslu fil milali wal-ahwaa'i wan-nihali" (3118) says:

"The major kufr is denial (juhood) of ruboobiyyah, denial of the prophethood of one of the prophets who have been mentioned in Qur'an, denial of any of the prophet's (peace be upon him) deeds that were reported by sound and trustworthy narrations or committing an act which is proved to be kufr."

Ibn Abdulbarr in "Al istithkar" (8549) says:

"Kufr does not exist except by abandoning what makes the Eeman exists."
This definition is close to the first one. And while Eeman does not exist except by utterance, believing or acting, kufr also does not exist except by saying, believing or acting and it has six types:

The categories of Al kufrul-Akbar (the major kufr):

1-Outright Rejection (taktheeb):

This occurs when one disbelieves with his tongue and his heart what the Messenger of Allah (sall-Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) brought. He is a disbeliever both outwardly and inwardly. Yet this type is slightly known among the disbelievers as Allah (Exalted be He) has supported his messengers with signs and convincing irrevocable evidences that proved their truthfulness as Allah (Exalted be He) says:

"And who does more wrong than he who invents a lie against Allâh or denies the truth (Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his doctrine of Islâmic Monotheism and this Qur'ân), when it comes to him?

Is there not a dwelling in Hell for disbelievers (in the Oneness of Allâh and in His Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him))?" (Al-'Ankabut 29:68)

This type of kufr opposes the acceptance and believing of the heart.

2- Denial (juhood):

It is when somebody acknowledges the haqq (truth) but still he denies and rejects it. This is like the disbelief of pharaoh and his people. Allah (subhaanahu wa ta'aala) said: "And they belied them (those Ayât) wrongfully and arrogantly, though their ownselves were convinced thereof [i.e. those (Ayât) are from Allâh, and Mûsa (Moses) is the Messenger of Allâh in truth, but they disliked to obey Mûsa (Moses), and hated to believe in his Message of Monotheism]..." (An-naml: 14). Allah (Exalted be He) also told our prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) about the disbelievers of quraish that:

"We know indeed the grief which their words cause you (O Muhammad, it is not you that they deny, but it is the Verses (the Qur'ân) of Allâh that the Zâlimûn (polytheists and wrongdoers) deny." (Al-An'am 6:33) .

This type of kufr contradicts with the deeds of the heart and the utterance of the tongue as well.

3- Arrogance and Obstinace ('inaad):

In some cases, one approves of the truth of the message outwardly and inwardly, with both his tongue and his heart, but he does not comply with it out of anger, arrogance and resistance to Allah and His Messenger, he contests the judgement and questions the justice of what he has been commanded with. Even if he trusts this truth (of the message), his denial and resistance for it negates that trust. This is like the disbelief of the accursed Iblees. Allah (subhaanahu wa ta'aala) said:

"Except Iblees, he refused and was proud, and he was one of the disbelievers." (Al-baqarah:34) .

This type of kufr is the popular among the enemies of the messengers. It negates the deeds of the heart and jawaarih (extremities limbs).

4-Turning away (I'raadh):

Ibn al-qayyem in "madaarij as-saalikeen" (1338) says:

"kufr al-I'raadh is to turn one's ears and heart away from what the prophet (peace be upon him) has come with, so he neither approves of nor denies him, neither is he an allegiant nor is he an enemy and yet he never listens to what he has brought..." etc.

He also said in "Tareeq al-hijratayn" (p 611):

"Verily one deserves the punishment due to two reasons; one of them turning away (I'raadh) from the evidence, rejecting it and refusing to act upon its obligations. The other one is being arrogant and obstinate ('inaad) against the absolute evidence and rejecting its obligations. Therefore the first one is kufr of I'raadh and the second is kufr of 'Inaad ...etc". You can refer to "miftaahu darus-sa'aadah" of Ibn al-qayyem (194).

I say: The evidence for that is what Allah (Exalted be He) has said in Qur'an: "And who does more wrong than he who is reminded of the Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of his Lord, then he turns aside therefrom? Verily, We shall exact retribution from the Mujrimûn (criminals, disbelievers, polytheists, sinners, etc.)." (As-Sajdah 32:22) .

He also said:

"We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them except with truth, and for an appointed term. But those who disbelieve turn away from that whereof they are warned." (Al-Ahqaf 46:3)

And:

"And who does more wrong than he who is reminded of the Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of his Lord, but turns away from them forgetting what (deeds) his hands have sent forth. Truly, We have set veils over their hearts lest they should understand this (the Qur'ân), and in their ears, deafness. And if you (O Muhammad) call them to guidance, even then they will never be guided." (Al-Kahf 18:57)

This type of kufr negates the acceptance of the heart if the person turns away from the principle or the root of the messenger's call. It also negates the acting of the jawaarih (limbs) if his heart accepts the call yet he turns away from acting completely.

5- Doubt (shakk):

It is when somebody doubts the truthfulness of the prophet (peace be upon him); so he is sure of anything.

Allah (Exalted be He) says:

"And he went into his garden while in a state (of pride and disbelief) unjust to himself. He said: "I think not that this will ever perish. And I think not the Hour will ever come, and if indeed I am brought back to my Lord, (on the Day of Resurrection), I surely shall find better than this when I return to Him." His companion said to him, during the talk with him: "Do you disbelieve in Him Who created you out of dust (i.e. your father Adam), then out of Nutfah (mixed semen drops of male and female discharge), then fashioned you into a man?" But as for my part (I believe) that He is Allâh, my Lord and none shall I associate as partner with my Lord." (Al-Kahf 18:35-38)

This type of kufr negates the acceptance of the heart.

6- Hypocrisy (nifaaq):

Abu Al-Mudhaffar As-sam'aanee, in his tafseer (interpretation of the Qur'an) (146-al-baqarah: 6), said:

"The kufr of nifaaq is to disbelieve the message inwardly, but submit to it outwardly."

Similarly stated Al-Baghawee, in his tafseer (interpretation of the Qur'an) (164-al-baqarah: 6), and "Ibn Al-qayyim in "madaarijus-saalikeen" (1338).

I say: This type of kufr negates the acceptance as well as the obligatory deeds of the heart in the existence of the utterance and the deeds of the limbs just like the kufr of raafidhah (Shiites) who claim the alteration of the holy Qur'an, the fornication of 'Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) and the kufr of sahaabah (companions).

So the kufr of these people is like the kufr of Abdullaah ibn Abee Salool who at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was pretending to be a believer while in fact he was hiding his inwardly kufr. There are many verses of the holy Qur'an that point out this type of kufr especially in the surah of al-baqarah like:

"And of mankind, there are some (hypocrites) who say: "We believe in Allâh and the Last Day" while in fact they believe not. They (think to) deceive Allâh and those who believe, while they only deceive

themselves, and perceive (it) not!" (Al-Baqarah 2:8-9)

My previous statement "...negates one of the principles of Eeman" does not mean that it does not negate other principles of Eeman sometimes. Yet what I have mentioned first is the basic rule.

To conclude:

Kufr is opposite of Eeman. It may be rejection by heart which negates the utterance of the heart, it may be an act of the heart; like hating Allah (Exalted be He), His signs, the Qur'an, or His messenger (peace be upon him) and this negates one of the obligatory deeds of the heart.

Kufr could also be uttered by the tongue; like cursing or insulting Allah (Exalted be He), His messenger (peace be upon him) or the religion of Islam. And could be an obvious deed of the jawaarih like prostration for an idol, slaughtering (animals) for the sake of other than Allah (Exalted be He) or vowing to other than Allah (Exalted be He). So the Eeman could be accomplished by heart, tongue or limbs and so does the kufr it occurs by either one of those.