



IN THE NAME OF ALLAH THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

## NAFS - HOW TO CONTROL OUR NAFS DURING RAMADAN

In Ramadan, everyone knows that with the Mercy of Allah, shaytan is locked up:

Al-Bukhaari (1899) and Muslim (1079) narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "When Ramadaan comes, the gates of Paradise are opened, the gates of Hell are closed, and the devils are chained up."

However, there are other factors which may lead others to commit sins, as mentioned below.

SURAH AN NAZI'AT 79: 34-41

34. But when there comes the greatest catastrophe (i.e. the Day of Recompense, etc.),
35. The Day when man shall remember what he strove for,
36. And Hell-fire shall be made apparent in full view for (every) one who sees,
37. Then, for him who *Tagha* (transgressed all bounds, in disbelief, oppression and evil deeds of disobedience to Allah).
38. And preferred the life of this world (by following his evil desires and lusts),
39. Verily, his abode will be Hell-fire;
40. But as for him who feared standing before his Lord, and restrained himself from impure evil desires, and lusts.
41. Verily, Paradise will be his abode.

Human beings are given a choice and a free will – We can choose which path we would like to take. When we make our choice, several factors would influence our choice:

1. Allah's Guidance
2. Shaytan
3. Our Nafs
4. Attraction of this world

#### Other factors

- companions
- culture/traditions

#### 1. ALLAH'S GUIDANCE

"While as for those who accept guidance, He increases their guidance, and bestows on them their piety." 47: 17

Example - the people of the cave:

We narrate unto you (O Muhammad ﷺ) their story with truth: Truly! They were young men who believed in their Lord (Allah), and We increased them in guidance.

And We made their hearts firm and strong (with the light of Faith in Allah and bestowed upon them patience to bear the separation of their kith and kin and dwellings, etc.) when they stood up and said: "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, never shall we call upon any *ilah* (god) other than Him; if we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity in disbelief.

Quran 18: 13 - 14

Ibn Kathir says:

"The Mu'min are a people who have been prevented through the Qur'an from indulging in the pleasures of this world; it comes between them and what might destroy them. The Mu'min is like a prisoner in this world, who tries to free himself from its shackles and chains, placing his trust in nothing in it, until the day he meets his Creator. He knows full well that he is accountable for everything that he hears, sees and says, and for everything that he does with his body."

(Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 9 pg. 276, Cairo 1352)

#### 2. SHAYTAN

Shaytan's promise to Allah:

"(Iblis) said: "Because You have sent me astray, surely I will sit in wait against them (human beings) on Your Straight Path. Then I will come to them from before them

and behind them, from their right and from their left, and You will not find most of them as thankful ones (i.e. they will not be dutiful to You)." 7: 16-17

"O Children of Adam! Let not *Shaitan* (Satan) deceive you, as he got your parents [Adam and Hawwa (Eve)] out of Paradise, stripping them of their raiments, to show them their private parts. Verily, he and *Qabiluhu* (his soldiers from the jinns or his tribe) see you from where you cannot see them. Verily, We made the *Shayatin* (devils) *Auliya'* (protectors and helpers) for those who believe not." 7: 27

### 3. OUR NAFS

Those desires that push you to seek fun in every possible way – permissible or otherwise. It drives you to compete with your peers just to pass time and maintain the status quo. In the same way you are driven to an inner battle against yourself. You are drawn in different directions.

*To do or not to do;*

*To say or not to say;*

*To listen or not to listen;*

Your **nafs** whispers to you, telling you how much you need to blend with the culture, lifestyle or friendship. It tells you that you have many years ahead & should not stress about worship. And encourages you to live beyond all limits.

Such whispers pull you away from the truth and distract you from submission to the Will of the One true Lord & Creator.

Those distractions can make you feel troubled, anxious and far from contentment.

So set you (O Muhammad ﷺ) your face towards the religion of pure Islamic Monotheism *Hanifa* (worship none but Allah Alone) Allah's *Fitrah* (i.e. Allah's Islamic Monotheism), with which He has created mankind. No change let there be in *Khalq-illah* (i.e. the Religion of Allah Islamic Monotheism), that is the straight religion, but most of men know not. [*Tafsir At-Tabari*, Vol 21, Page 41] 30: 30

The Nafs is an inherent part of you – an innate portion of your pure fitrah [natural inclination].

It has the potential to drive you towards the good and not-so-good direction in life. Yet your inner self or nafs, and its lowly desires constantly directs you towards evil. You have a duty to overcome its weakness and win over its plots. You can achieve

this through cultivating a sound heart, one that submits and surrenders to Allah, the Almighty.

#### 4. ATTRACTION OF THIS DUNYA

*Dunyâ* literally means 'closer' or 'lower'.

The word *dunya* comes from *danaa* (root: dal nun wau). This root word has two meanings: 1) near and 2) lowly. This life has been called *al-hayaat ad-dunya* because it is the near (or "nearest"), the apparent and the current existence which we know and also because it is lesser, despicable and superficial in comparison to the real life as Allah called it - the life in the hereafter.

*Ad-Dunya* is the place which contains all the objects of desire of the human *nafs* in this life. It is in reality a mere transition or place of passing and has no permanence or lasting meaning. The life of this world and all that is in it is like the beautiful plants or crops which impress those who look on them but which shortly are turned into dead leaves and dust blown about by the wind.

*Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said - Maa ad-dunya fiy al-aakhirati illa mithlu maa yaj' alu ahadukum usbu'ahu fiy al-yammi li yandhura bima yarja'"*

***"This life in comparison to the life hereafter is nothing except like that which one of you finds if he sticks his finger into the ocean and then sees what it brings back with it." -Muslim***

Verily! We have made that which is on earth as an adornment for it, in order that We may test them (mankind) as to which of them are best in deeds. 18: 7

Beautified for men is the love of things they covet; women, children, much of gold and silver (wealth), branded beautiful horses, cattle and well-tilled land. This is the pleasure of the present world's life; but Allah has the excellent return (Paradise with flowing rivers, etc.) with Him. 3: 14

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#### NAFS

There are two kinds of people, one are those whose Nafs have overcome them and led them to ruin because they yielded to them and obeyed their impulses. The other kinds are those who have overcome their Nafs and made them obey their commands.

Nafs (pl. Anfus or Nufus) lexically means soul, the psyche, the ego, self, life, person, heart or mind. (Mu'jam, Kassis)

Although some scholars have classified the Nafs up to 7 stages, there is agreement among Ulama' that in the Qur'an, Allah (s.w.t.) has described at least 3 main types of the Nafs. And these are in rank from the worse to better:

1. Nafs al-Ammara Bissu' (the Nafs that urges evil),
2. Nafs al-Lawwama (the Nafs that Blames) and
3. Nafs al-Mutma`inna (the Nafs at Peace).

(Chapter 12 v. 53 in the Tafsir of al-Tabari: Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, 30 vols., Bulaq 1323 & also in Imam Baghawi's Tafsir: Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'alam at-Tanzil, 8 vols. Cairo, 1308)

A summary of these states of the Nafs are given by Imam Tabari in his Tafsir of Surah Yusuf verse 53:

**(1) Nafs al-Ammara Bissu' (The Soul which Commands):**

This is the Nafs that brings punishment itself. By its very nature it directs its owner towards every wrong action. No one can get rid of its evil without the help from Allah. As Allah refers to this Nafs in the story of the wife of al-Aziz (Zulaikha) and Prophet Yusuf (as):

**"The (human) soul is certainly prone to evil" (12:53).**

Allah also says:

**"And had it not been for the grace of Allah and His Mercy on you, not one of you would ever have been pure; but Allah purifies whomever He wishes, and Allah is Hearing, Knowing." (24:21)**

This Nafs resides in the world of the senses and is dominated by earthly desires (Shahwat) and passions....

Evil lies hidden in the Nafs and it is this that leads it on to do wrong. If Allah were to leave the servant alone with his self, the servant would be destroyed between its evil and the evil that it craves; but if Allah grants him success and help, then he will survive. We seek refuge in Allah the Almighty, both from the evil in ourselves and from the evil of our actions.

EXAMPLE - ADAM AND IBLIS

**(2) Nafs al-Lawwama (the Soul that Blames):**

Allah refers to this Nafs,

**"And I do call to witness the Nafs that blames" (75:2).**

This Nafs is conscious of its own imperfections.

Hasan al-Basri said, "You always see the believer blaming himself and saying things like 'Did I want this? Why did I do that? Was this better than that?'...."

### (3) Nafs al-Mutma`inna (the Soul at Peace):

Allah refers to this Nafs,

**"O Self, in complete rest and satisfaction!" (89:27).**

This Nafs is tranquil as it rests on the certitude of Allah.

Ibn Abbas (r) said, "It is the tranquil and believing soul".

Al-Qatadah (r) said, "It is the soul of the believer, made calm by what Allah has promised. Its owner is at rest and content with his knowledge of Allah's Names and Attributes, and with what He has said about Himself and His Messenger (الله صلى الله عليه وسلم), and with what He has said about what awaits the soul after death: about the departure of the soul, the life in the Barzakh, and the events of the Day of Qiyamah which will follow. So much so that a believer such as this can almost see them with his own eyes. So he submits to the will of Allah and surrenders to Him contentedly, never dissatisfied or complaining, and with his faith never wavering. He does not rejoice at his gains, nor do his afflictions make him despair - for he knows that they were decreed long before they happened to him, even before he was created...."....

(Al-Tabari: Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, vol. 13, Bulaq 1323)

"Verily, those who say: "Our Lord is Allah (Alone)," and then they *Istaqamu* , on them the angels will descend (at the time of their death) (saying): "Fear not, nor grieve! But receive the glad tidings of Paradise which you have been promised!

"We have been your friends in the life of this world and are (so) in the Hereafter. Therein you shall have (all) that your inner-selves desire, and therein you shall have (all) for which you ask for.

"An entertainment from (Allah), the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

40: 30-32

Ibn al-Qayyim also mentioned the states of Nafs:

"The Nafs is a single entity, although its state may change: from the Nafs al-Ammara, to the Nafs al-Lawwama, to the Nafs al-Mutma`inna, which is the final aim of perfection...."

It has been said that the Nafs al-Lawwama is the one, which cannot rest in any one state. It often changes, remembers and forgets, submits and evades, loves and hates, rejoices and become sad, accepts and rejects, obeys and rebels.

Nafs al-Lawwama is also the Nafs of the believer...It has also been mentioned that the Nafs blames itself on the Day of Qiyamah - for every one blames himself for his actions, either his bad deeds, if he was one who had many wrong actions, or for his shortcomings, if he was one who did good deeds. All of this is accurate.

(Madarij as-Salikin fi Manazili Iyyaka Na'budu wa Iyyaka Nasta'in, vol. 1 pg. 308)

Sa'id Hawwa says regarding these Nafs:

"Depending upon its condition, the Nafs exist in multidimensional. When the Nafs is tranquil because of obeying Allah, and the soul opposes its desires, this soul is known as Nafs al-Mutma`inna. Regarding this, Allah has spoken about it in the Qur'an (89:27-28). But if the soul does not attain peace with itself, rather being exposed to desires, then such soul is known as the Nafs al-Lawwama because this soul reproaches its owner due to the owner's carelessness in fulfilling out Allah's wishes - Qur'an (75:2). More so, if the soul submits to lusts and allows itself to be seduced by Shaytan, such a soul is known as Nafs al-Ammara Bissu'. Allah tells the story about the wife of al-Aziz (Zulaikha) in Qur'an (12:53).

(Tarbiyatun nar Ruhiyah, pg. 32, Cairo: Dar al- Salam, 1408)

There is a famous Arabic saying:

"O soul..Watch out! Help me with your striving,  
in the darkness of the nights;  
so that on the Day of Qiyamah,  
you will win a good life on those heights."

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## 10 ways you can overcome your Nafs

**1. Constant purification.** Increase in your worship acts and strive for obedience of Allah (swt) at all times. Follow His guidance through the teachings of the Quran and Hadith. You should prioritise with the compulsory acts such as five daily prayers, even as you try to pick up the supererogatory ones.

- 2. Conscious awareness.** Your nafs is conscious and as such you have control over decisions you make that will impact your daily life and the hereafter. Therefore be conscious of Allah (swt) at all times and make a choice to break free from the negative desires and inclinations.
- 3. Avoid sins and prohibitions.** And always follow an evil thought, speech or act with a good one. You can achieve this through learning and seeking beneficial knowledge. In that way, you can sieve the truth from falsehood; and permissible acts from prohibitions.
- 4. Remember the test of life.** This temporary life is a test and a preparation for the ultimate abode – the everlasting world and hereafter. Which then is more worthy of striving for?
- 5. Follow the Sunnah.** In our beloved Prophet (saw), we have the perfect example. So follow him and you won't go wrong.
- 6. Think of positive & negative effect of every action.** For example, with the 5 daily prayers the benefits from physical to psychological bring serenity and a tranquil effect even beyond the prayers. While delaying/missing prayers due to laziness and negligence may bring about guilt, feeling of burden, regret, need to make excuses etc in addition to amassing sins.
- 7. Use your time wisely.** Assess your time & accompanying deeds. And try to keep positively busy with rewarding acts. Do something for the Ummah without expecting a profit. Make it an investment for your hereafter.
- 8. Keep good company.** Mind your environment and those you choose to stay around. Choose those who can help guard your creed & deen.
- 9. Purify your acts through your intention.** Renew them as often as you can, centred on Allah's pleasure and to earn paradise. Isn't paradise and its wonders enough motivation to give up the instant gratifications for?
- 10. Make Dua.** Make supplications for a sound & pure heart; one that is filled with Allah's love but yearns for even more of Allah's (swt) love.

{The heart can only become sound, achieve success, take pleasure, be satisfied, experience enjoyment, become pleased, attain serenity and calmness through the ibadaah (worship) of its Lord; having love of Him and turning to Him (in repentance). Even if it were to attain every type of pleasure from creation, it will not acquire serenity & tranquillity. This is because the heart possess an intrinsic need for its Lord, since He is its deity, love and pursuit and with Allah the heart achieves joy, pleasure, delight, amenity, serenity and tranquillity.}

*[Ibn Taimiyyah's essay of Servitude]*



