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Core Themes  
& Topics of the  
Glorious Qur'an

*NAFS - EGO & DESIRES*

Published By:



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GUIDANCE • UBUNTU • EMPOWERMENT

## **Nafs – Ego & Desires**

The word ‘nafs’ in the Qur’an alludes to the inner self or personality. It is the seat of cravings, passions, and consciousness of right and wrong. The nafs also carries the awareness and the capacity to reach inner peace and contentment through restraint of our selfish desires.

Long before the western psychologists started their study of the human mind, Islam had described the psychological mental illness in Qur’anic language as: Nafs al-Ammara, Nafs al-Lawwama and Nafs al-Mutmainna. The following are the 3 types and conditions,

### **First Type – Blind Following of Desires**

Nafs al-Ammara is the psycho state of a mind where the desires become the mighty instructor to evil and commands the human being to blindly follow his desires with no boundaries. Nafs al-Ammara is such a dominating state of soul that a human being becomes powerless in front of its desires and acts remorselessly and blatantly to fulfil the commands of its master.

*“Indeed the nafs that overwhelmingly commands a person to do sin.”*

*(Surah Yusuf 12 – Verse 53)*

### **Second Type – Struggle Between Good and Evil**

Nafs al-Lawwamah is the state of the soul that reproaches itself for its own actions. At this level, the nafs may at times urge a person towards sin, yet later, it

is overtaken by remorse and self-blame. This guilt can become so intense that a person resolves to abandon wrongdoing and strive for a more noble and righteous life. However, this state is not permanent. It is an ongoing inner struggle, a condition of self-conflict in which the soul struggles between obedience and desire, without reaching a final or lasting resolution.

*“And I swear by the reproaching soul (to the certainty of resurrection).”*

*(Surah Qiyamah 75 – Verse 2)*

### **Third Type – The Tranquil Soul**

Nafs al-Mutmainnah is the tranquil soul. The soul content with Allah’s decree, satisfied with His choices, and at rest in His remembrance. Such a soul is freed from envy, hatred, and rebellion, and is drawn instead toward righteousness and the companionship of the pious. Its desires are no longer scattered; they are gathered upon one purpose alone: seeking the pleasure of Allah Almighty.

*“To the righteous it will be said “Oh reassured soul, return to your Lord well pleased, and pleasing to Him.”*

*(Surah Al-Fajr 89 – Verses 27–28)*

### **The Nafs is like a Wild Horse**

Scholars have likened the nafs to a wild untrained horse. The rider of this horse is required to keep it under control. Taking the reins by restraining one’s base desires tames the wild beast within. Gradually, with constant restraint the beast acquires discipline and direction.

Taming any wild creature requires patience, skill, and an understanding of its nature. One must remain alive to its reality and never believe it to have been totally subdued. Until, eventually, the nafs is humbled and submits to its higher purpose.

## **The Snake Within Us**

Allamah Rumi (Rahimahullah) tells the story of a snake-catcher who finds a huge snake frozen in the mountains. Believing it to be dead, he drags it into the city of Baghdad to display before crowds, assuming it will bring him some money. As the heat of the sun warms up the snake, the snake awakens, breaks free and charges at both the people and the man who thought he controlled it.

This narrative informs us of the reality of the nafs - the snake is the human nafs.

*“Indeed the soul constantly commands to evil.”*

*(Surah Yusuf 12 – Verse 53)*

This is the snake itself. It is instinctive, hungry, and unconcerned with right or wrong. It seeks pleasure, power, recognition, and control. When restrained, it appears harmless. But it is not dead.

The snake was frozen by cold. Cold represents distance from temptation: lack of opportunity, absence of attention, limited power.

Many people mistake this for spiritual success. They believe: “I have changed - sin no longer attracts me - ego is under control.”

The moment the ego is seen, praised, followed, or empowered, what seemed controlled becomes violent. The nafs does not need permission to act, it only needs opportunity.

The Qur'an does not teach negotiation with the nafs. It teaches discipline. This discipline requires structure, limits, obedience, and sometimes forceful restraint. Without this, the snake remains undefeated.

The Qur'an does not promise the death of the nafs in this life. It promises purification:

*“Successful is the one who purifies it.”* (91:9)

**Purification means disciplining it until it no longer rules.**

*“O tranquil soul, return to your Lord...”* (89:27)

Such a soul does not drag snakes into marketplaces. It leaves them buried in the cold. (Mathnavi of Moulana Rumi)

**Man has Power to Overcome**

In Surah As Shams, Allah takes eleven consecutive oaths, and then says:

*“And by the soul and the One Who fashioned it, then with the knowledge of right and wrong inspired it. Successful indeed is the one who purifies their soul, and doomed is the one who corrupts it!”* (Surah As-Shams 91 – Verses 7–9)

Allah Ta'ala has given man options and opportunities for guidance. The human psyche has been infused with an intuitive consciousness of good and bad. Distinction between truth and falsehood, justice and injustice, good and evil has been informed through revelation to the messengers' in a language understandable to the people. After this, if people do not adopt the right path, they are undoubtedly transgressors.

That human soul has been inspired with conscience to distinguish between right and wrong, and has also been granted the ability to do good as well as the ability to commit sin, stands as a testimony that man is not a creature of pure force or coercion. He has free will to choose his path of good or evil. He has the option to do good or refrain from sin. The choice is his, for which he is rewarded or punished.

Sayyiduna Abu Hurairah and Ibn Abbas ؓ reported that whenever the Holy Prophet ﷺ recited the verses (91:7-8) under comment would stop and recite the following supplication aloud:

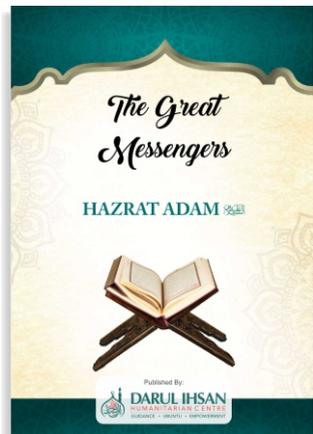
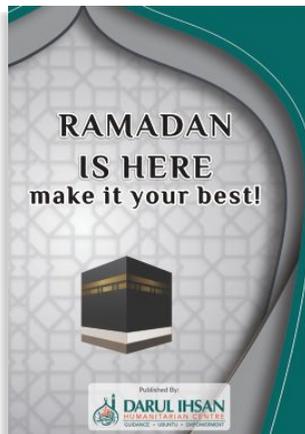
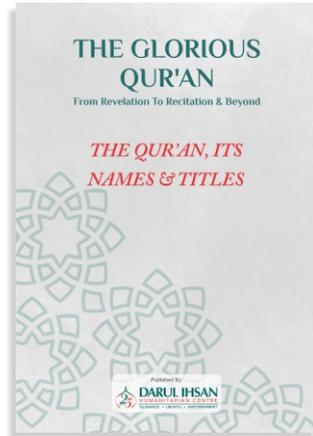
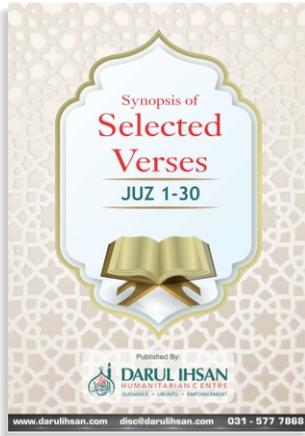
'O Allah! Give my soul its good. You are its Guardian and Master, and the best to purify it.'

*(Mariful Qur'an)*



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## ISLAMIC

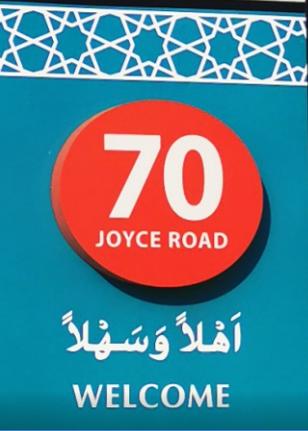
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- Al Ihsan Micro Library
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- Sadaqah Jariyah Projects
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- Siyaphambili Madrasah
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- Azmatu-Ahlil-Bayt-was-Sahaba



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## About Darul Ihsan

Darul Ihsan Humanitarian Centre provides education, guidance, social, empowerment and welfare services to the community. In providing this service, we adopt a holistic approach, that gives due importance to basic needs as well as human rights and dignity of those that we serve.

## Founding Philosophy

Darul Ihsan Humanitarian Centre is a multi-purpose, humanitarian-services providing organisation. 'Ihsan' means compassion towards mankind and to act with excellence. The Centre was established in the year 2000 with the primary objective of serving humanity and alleviating poverty and hardship locally and abroad. Since its inception, it has developed and established many humanitarian projects and provides a variety of free services to the community.

## Key Objectives

One of the key objectives of the Centre is to promote a better understanding of humanity and peace, thereby serving as a bridge-builder between faiths and communities. Through guidance, Ubuntu and empowerment, the organisation hopes to train and develop the youth to become torch bearers of hope, peace and compassion to humanity.

