



SURAH AN NAAS

Introduction

This Surah was revealed at the same time as the preceding Surah, Al Falaq. and is the second of the Muawwizatain¹.

However despite this there are a number of asymmetries between the two. Surah Al Falaq dealt with the physical and apparent dangers the human, and every other being faces, whilst this Surah deals with the spiritual dangers (to faith and belief) the believer faces.

The ﷻ Quran has countlessly reminded us that our greatest and most open enemy is the devil, who is ever present. Allaama Ibn Katheer states the devil is with every human, portraying evil and sin in a very beautiful way, ever trying to steer him away from the straight path. The Prophet ﷺ himself confirmed this by stating ‘The devil is with each one of you’. The people asked ‘Even with you Yaa Rasoolallah?’ The Prophet ﷺ replied ‘Yes, but Allah ﷻ has aided me and I am secure, the devil only tells me good things’.²

The devil uses his proximity to the human to constantly place evil thoughts into his heart and mind. It is narrated in Bukhaari and Muslim from Syeduna Anas ‘One night the Prophet ﷺ was in the mosque and his wife Syeda Safiya came to visit him. When she was ready to return the Prophet ﷺ escorted her home. En route were two men of the Ansaar who on seeing the Prophet ﷺ with a woman began walking (away) quickly. The Prophet ﷺ stopped them and said ‘This is my wife, Safiya bin Hay, with me’. The men said ‘Yaa Rasoolallah, there was no need to tell us that’. The Prophet ﷺ explained ‘The devil runs where the blood runs, I feared he may have put an evil thought in your heart’³.

It is obvious that the aim of the devil is to mislead and destroy the faith of the believers. Thus the purpose of his whispering and evil thoughts must be to achieve this end.

It was in response to these evil thoughts and whispers that this chapter teaches us how to supplicate for the protection of our belief and faith.

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ
مَلِكِ النَّاسِ
إِلَهِ النَّاسِ

Verses one, two and three instruct us to seek the refuge of the Lord of Mankind, the King of Mankind and the Deity of Mankind. Rather than mention Allah ﷻ by a single attribute as in the preceding surah here Allah ﷻ is invoked with three different attributes. The Mufasireen have explained this asymmetry in great detail. Firstly it

¹ See Tafseer of Surah Al Falaq for explanation of Muawizatain

² Tafseer Ibn Katheer from Bukhaari and Muslim.

³ Tafseer Ibn Katheer

signifies the relative importance of Imaan, which is more significant than one's physical well being and thus necessitating the seeking of refuge and invoking Allah ﷻ thrice.

Another possible reason for mentioning Him thrice is to ensure that every human can relate, as per his intellectual and spiritual level, to the entity with whom he is seeking refuge for this is a grave matter that affects every human. The Mufasireen explain that although all three attributes refer to the same entity the human will identify more with one of them.

One interpretation is that these three attributes symbolise the different stages of a human's physical development:

The term رَبِّ النَّاسِ (Rabb un Naas) refers to the developer, nourisher and sustainer of Mankind. The human is in the greatest need of sustenance and development when it is in his childhood, at that stage the human's greatest involvement with his Lord is as Him as his sustainer and nourisher and recognises Allah as his Rabb more than any other attribute.

مَلِكِ النَّاسِ (Malik un Naas) refers to the ruler and sovereign of mankind. As the human grows older his need for physical growth and nourishment recedes and as he enters and involves himself in society as a fully grown adult he begins to require rules and regulations to guide his involvement and interaction, for example guidelines for trade, marriage, divorce, religious rituals etc, Thus at this stage of his life his greatest contact with Allah ﷻ is as Him as the ruler and law giver.

The term إِلَهِ النَّاسِ (ilaah un Naas) refers to the deity and object of devotion. As the human passes further through life and into the latter years he begins to retreat from society; either because of physical deterioration or simply through disillusionment with the world. As he withdraws from society and becomes ever aware of his mortality he begins to increase the reflection and remembrance of God and more time is devoted to worship.⁴ At the latter stages of his life the human's relationship with God is as Him as the centre of devotion and worship.

The mentioning of the three different attributes of Allah ﷻ tells us that irrespective of the stage of life the human is at he needs to protect himself from the devil, he can and will attack at any stage of life, either through the exuberance of youth, or the expediency of adulthood, or in the remissive years of one's latter life.

Tafseer Mazhari states that the implicit reference to children (in Rabb un Naas) and old people (in ilaah un Naas) is to attract the mercy of Allah ﷻ and keeps calamities away. He then quotes the Prophet's ﷺ hadith mentioned in Bayhaqi, Bazaar and Abu Ya'laa 'If it was not for the old, the suckling children and the grazing animals there would be showers of punishment upon you.'⁵

Another interpretation is that these three attributes of Allah ﷻ mentioned here refer to the maturity and state of the human's imaan and belief: Initially a person becomes aware of his Rabb's apparent blessings (of food, shelter, health etc), he then becomes aware of Allah's ﷻ attributes and majesty and that he is independent of all and thus recognises

⁴ Tafseer Mazhari is a lot more direct: 'all they can do at their age is worship'

⁵ Tafseer Mazhari

Him as Maalik (sovereign). He then discovers that in greatness, majesty and all attributes he is above everything else and in whose reflection the intellect is limited and he admits to Him as his Ilaah (deity).⁶

This implies that whatever level of imaan man is he needs to protect it as even the minutest seed of imaan is worth more than the entire world.

In these verses Allah ﷻ has mentioned himself in relation to Man. This is to show His greatness for Man is the best of the creation and he is the creator of the best of the creation. In addition in the preceding surah Allah ﷻ was referred as Lord of Falaq whereas here He is referred to in relation to mankind. Mankind has been specifically mentioned as the protection of Imaan only affects the humans.⁷

From the evil of the whispering retreator

مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ

Instead of simply saying 'From the evil of the devil' the Quran has chosen to describe our enemy with two of his attributes, Khannaas and Waswaas, which are pertinent in attacking our Imaan. This is a great mercy of Allah for one of the ways He protects us from dangers is by identifying them out to us. Thus we should here try to understand the two attributes of Khannaas and Waswaas.

Waswaas is the active noun (faail) of Waswasa which is defined as '*Hadith un Nafs*⁸, (the inner voice), the silent speech which the heart can hear but not the ear⁹. From this we realise that the inner voices we hear in our hearts and mind are not just trivial but are being planted and we need to be wary of them.

The term Khannaas is from 'Khuns' and refers to retreating discretely¹⁰ and symbolises the way the devil enters evil thoughts (waswasa) into the hearts of the human. He plants a thought and retreats, then returns to plant it again and retreats again, and keeps repeating this process until he gets his way. It is a belligerent and resilient attack wearing down the human.

We can notice this effect upon us; when an evil or ridiculous thought enters our hearts for the first time we immediately reject it. When it re enters our heart for a second and third time it begins to feel less and less strange and gains familiarity and stays within our subconscious such that its repeated reflection slowly erodes our opposition to it until eventually it seems the norm and after seriously considering it we end up acting upon it.

Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran explains the devil's tactics '...'

The one who enters whispers into the hearts of mankind

الَّذِي يُوسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ

The ahadith have informed us of when the devil strikes. As mentioned before the devil is ever present with the human, another hadith tells us that he is sitting waiting his opportunity to strike, and he gains his opportunity when the human stops the Dhikr (remembrance of Allah ﷻ) even for a moment. The Prophet ﷺ said 'The devil has his

⁶ Tafseer Kabbeer

⁷ Tafseer Mazhari

⁸ Tafseer Dhiyaa ul Quran

⁹ Tafseer Mazhari

¹⁰ Tafseer Mazhari

hand over the heart of the human, if he performs the Dhikr of Allah ﷻ he moves his hand away and if he forgets the Dhikr the Devil grips his heart¹¹. Ibn Abbaas in his tafseer says that the devil sits like a snake waiting and as soon as the human neglects the dhikr of Allah ﷻ he starts his waswasa and when the human restarts the dhikr he retreats.¹²

We thus learn that the devil becomes bolstered and strengthened when the human neglects, even momentarily, the Dhikr of Allah ﷻ, and when he remembers his Lord he weakens and retreats. ‘The Prophet ﷺ was once riding upon a donkey with a companion when the donkey tripped and the companion exclaimed ‘May the devil be destroyed’. The Prophet ﷺ on hearing this commented ‘Do not say that because the devil expands on hearing this, had you said ‘Bismillah’ he would have contracted and become the size of a fly’. In other words the devil weakens on hearing the Dhikr of Allah ﷻ.¹³

Neglecting the Dhikr of Allah ﷻ does not just mean doing something else, even staying silent gives cause for the devil to become stronger!

The Prophet ﷺ said ‘When one of you enters the mosque the devil comes up to you and tries to amuse and distract you just as someone amuses and distracts his animal. If you remain quiet he puts a nose string into your nose or a bridle into your mouth.’ Abu Hurayra added ‘You can see the one who has a nose-string in his nose, he will standing (quietly) in one place not performing the Dhikr and you can see the one with a bridle in his mouth, his mouth will be open but not in the Dhikr of Allah ﷻ.¹⁴

The ulama, in particular the sufiya, have described the devil’s tactic; he has a six stage strategy to distance the human from the straight path¹⁵:

1) Firstly he invites the human to Kufr (heresy) and Shirk (polytheism) and the enmity of Allah ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ. This is his ultimate goal for it is open rebellion, however if he cannot succeed with his he moves onto the second tactic.

2) He invites the human to Bid’ah (corruption)¹⁶. ‘The devil prefers this because unlike other sins the human here actually believes he is doing the right thing and thus does not repent from it¹⁷, meaning unlike major sins where one knows one is wrong there is always hope one may repent from doing bad. Furthermore the very fact one knows one is wrong represents a connection or acknowledgement of Allah ﷻ as the Sovereign..

Note also that Bid’ah has more to do with beliefs than deeds for it is a distortion of the deen and creed, which can only be true if it relates to beliefs rather than actions.

3) If the devil is unsuccessful in inviting the human to Bid’ah he invites him to major sins, such as murder or fornication.

¹¹ Tafseer Ibn Katheer

¹² Tafseer Ibn Katheer

¹³ Tafseer Ibn Katheer from Musnad Ahmad

¹⁴ Tafseer Ibn Katheer from Musnad Ahmad

¹⁵ Tafseer Ruh ul Biyaan

¹⁶ Literally means ‘new act or innovation’. It has been explained here as corruption as not all new acts are bad, only those that change an established practice or principle of Islam.

¹⁷ Tafseer Nur ul Irfaan

4) If he is unsuccessful with that he then returns and invites him to minor sins. Although minor sins may appear trivial, they are not and their repeated undertaking erodes the heart and character and leads to an indifference to Allah's ﷻ disobedience.

5) If the devil cannot even lure the human to minor sins he tries to involve him in Mubah acts. These are acts which are neither sinful nor regardful. Although these appear harmless they are in fact detrimental because the human is in this world for a limited amount of time (see Tafseer of Surah Al Asr) and should not waste his time in acts that do not bring him closer to Allah ﷻ, His Prophet ﷺ and Paradise. Time spent in Mubah acts is thus useless and a great tragedy for those in the know.

6) If the human is so enlightened that he is always busy in good deeds the devil then resorts to his final ploy of involving him in lesser good acts at the expense of better acts. He does this to deprive him of at least some good i.e. rather than doing a good with greater reward he convinces him to suffice with a good with lesser reward. Again as our time is limited we should aim to maximise our returns and look for acts which give the greatest reward and earn the greater pleasure of Allah ﷻ. We should try to squeeze as much reward as we can from our time.

From the whisperer who is from the jinn and the humans. .

مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ

In the fourth verse we sought Allah's refuge from the single devil, here we seek His refuge from the jinn and humans who plant waswasa's.¹⁸

This verse tells us that the devil has followers amongst the jinn and the humans who undertake his evil work for him. Thus one needs to be aware of this and seek Allah's ﷻ protection from them.¹⁹

The human plants waswasa posing as a friend and counsellor, if the listeners scalds him he runs away but if he shows the slightest interest he increases it.²⁰

Finally:

Tafseer Kabeer highlights an asymmetry; in Surah Al Falaq we mention (praise) Allah ﷻ once and seek refuge from three things, but here we mention Allah ﷻ thrice and seek protection from one evil. The difference between the two is that the praise needs to be in accordance with the significance of the want; in the first sura the want is the physical well being whilst in the second it is the safety of imaan. This asymmetry alludes that even the minutest harm to the deen is bigger and graver than the greatest of physical harms.²¹

Syeduna Uqba narrates that the Prophet ﷺ asked him 'Shall I not teach you surahs the likes of which have not been revealed in the Torah, Zabur, Injil or the Quran?!' I said 'Why not?!' The Prophet ﷺ then recited Surah Ikhlaas, Surah Falaq and Surah An Naas²²

¹⁸ Tafseer Kabeer

¹⁹ Tafseer Dhiya ul Quran

²⁰ Tafseer Kabeer of Imam Raazi

²¹ Tafseer Kabeer of Imam Raazi

²² Tafseer Mazhari from Musnad Ahmad

Abdullah bin Habeeb narrates that the Prophet ﷺ said 'In the morning and evening recite Surah Ikhl as and the Muawwizatain thrice and you will be protected from all calamities.'²³



Please note this work is draft and should not be published without permission. This work was documented for copyright purposes on 10 August 2010 in London UK at a solicitors in Canary Wharf under the name of Mohammed Sajid.

You can contact the author on sajid@trueislam.org.uk

²³ Tafseer Mazhari from Tirmidhi, Nisai and Abu Dawud