

The Human Self in the Holy Qur'an: A Semantic and Intentionality Study of Its Rhetorical Forms and Purposes

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Abstract:

This research addresses Qur'anic discourse directed at the human self from semantic and objectives-oriented perspectives. The study aims to reveal the objectives of this discourse and the rhetorical strategies employed by the Qur'an to guide, reform and elevate the self. The study begins with the Qur'an's diverse usage of the concept of the nafs (self) and its varying meanings in different contexts. It then examines the relationship between the concepts of spirit, heart, and intellect, taking into account the distinction between the semantic meanings established by the Qur'anic text itself and the definitional/technical categorisations that emerged in some Islamic sciences.

The study examines a selection of rhetorical methods used by the Qur'an to address the self, focusing primarily on Qur'anic narratives (qisas), encouragement and warning (targhīb wa tarhīb), and striking parables (amthāl). Finally, it considers how the discourse varies according to the addressees' conditions, particularly those of the believer, disbeliever and hypocrite.

Methodologically, the study adopts an inductive approach to collect textual evidence and a semantic-analytic approach to analyse words and their contexts. It also employs a purposes-oriented inferential approach to extract underlying aims and purposes. The study concludes that the Qur'anic discourse on the self is not merely descriptive, but also reformative and constructive. Its goal is to guide individuals from perceiving the truth to believing in it and from belief to purifying the self and acting in accordance with guidance. Furthermore, the diversity of Qur'anic rhetorical styles reflects a precise attention to the differences in the conditions and needs of the self.

Keywords: Self , Qur'anic discourse, purification, encouragement and warning , Qur'anic narratives, Qur'anic parables, purposes spirit , natural disposition

Introduction:

The Holy Qur'an places human beings at the forefront, describing them as accountable, rational and free-thinking creatures. In their composition, the bodily, spiritual, emotional and ethical dimensions intersect. Thus, it unites the material and spiritual realms. Through their souls, humans share in the exaltation and purity of the heavens, while through their bodies, they inhabit the earth and engage in actions akin to other living creatures. Humans have also been granted the

distinction of vicegerency on earth. Since this distinction is significant, reason has been placed within them so that they can discern and make choices. Accordingly, when dealing with the human being, the Qur'anic discourse does not merely state external rulings; it also engages with the inner structure of the person. It reveals their drives and feelings, highlights their strengths and weaknesses, and directs their wills towards what will bring them rectitude in this world and the next.

In this context, the self (nafs) is one of the most frequently discussed concepts among researchers and thinkers across different eras. It is the subject of much inquiry and investigation because it is an essential element in the Qur'anic conception of the human being. The Qur'an uses the term 'nafs' in various contexts to denote the self, the person, the human being, or the inner dimension to which volition, inclination, and accountability attach.

Studying 'Qur'anic Discourse on the Self' is important because Qur'anic discourse does not merely describe the self for the sake of description; it also reveals its conditions as a preliminary step towards reform. It presents exemplars of uprightness and deviation, links actions to their outcomes, evokes fear and hope, and uses narrative, parable, imagery, and admonition to address each group according to its circumstances. Therefore, the diversity of rhetorical styles is functional and connected to the overarching purpose of guidance and purification.

This study requires the collection of Qur'anic verses related to the self for contemplation in an integrative manner. The verses' semantic significances and purposes are then derived according to established scientific controls, rather than limiting oneself to fragmented evidence.

Based on the foregoing, the research problem is defined by the following question: What are the purposes of Qur'anic discourse directed to the human self, and how have its semantic and educational modes varied in accordance with differences in the self's conditions and the conditions of the addressees?

The following questions arise from this problem:

- What is the semantic importance of the word 'self' in Qur'anic usage, and how is it related to the concepts of spirit, heart, and intellect?
- What are the most prominent rhetorical strategies adopted by the Qur'an in addressing and refining the self?
- How do encouragement, warnings, narratives and parables perform their functions in reforming the self?
- How does the discourse differ according to whether the person is a believer, disbeliever or hypocrite?
- What is the unifying purpose behind these methods, and how is it connected to purifying and reforming the self?

In order to address these issues and answer these questions, a set of methodological approaches must be employed: first, an inductive method must be used to trace the relevant verses; second, an analytic method must be used to elucidate the meanings of words and their contexts; and

finally, the foundational works of Qur'anic interpretation must be consulted. Finally, the maqāṣid-oriented inferential method is employed to extract the general aims.

A precise plan was followed to carry out this study. The research was divided into sections, each addressing a group of topics. These include clarifying the significations of words and moving on to rhetorical strategies. After deriving the purposes, the study proceeds accordingly.

Chapter One: The Human Soul and Its Significance in Qur'anic Discourse

Section One: The Philosophical and Linguistic Significance of the Concept of the Soul

The concept of the soul has multiple meanings among philosophers. One such philosopher was Democritus¹, who believed that the soul was the cause of life and movement; when it left the body, death occurred². Others regard it as independent of the body. They believed that life was an attribute separate from the body, a detachable essence incapable of being bound to the body, such that the existence of one was not contingent upon the other. Some hold that the soul is a point of connection between two worlds: the world of Forms and the world of sense-experience³. The Brethren of Purity stated that the soul is a celestial⁴, spiritual, luminous essence that lives independently and is signified in potency. It is naturally active and capable of receiving teachings, and it is employed by bodies⁵.

Linguists have mentioned different meanings for it, ranging from the self to the spirit to the person to inward reality, depending on the context. Al-Raghib al-Asfahani⁶, for example, cited uses of the word in the Qur'an indicating that it may refer to the person themselves or to that which sustains life. Its meaning may also vary depending on context. This lexical richness confirms that the meaning of 'soul' in the Qur'an cannot be determined by imposing a single technical definition on all occurrences, but rather by returning to the context.

Section Two: The Qur'anic Significance of the Nature of the Soul

The human soul is a topic of particular interest in the Holy Qur'an. Its ultimate purpose is to reform and purify the soul, enabling a person to attain true humanity. This is achieved through divine guidance and religious teachings, which enable a person to find happiness in this world and the next. However, if the soul is neglected and a person follows their desires, inclinations and instincts, they will suffer and lose their way. For this reason, the Holy Qur'an devotes great

¹- Democritus of Abdera in Thrace: 460 B.C., a Greek philosopher who spent five years with the Egyptian engineers. He lived in Athens and founded a school. Among his works are *On Hades*, *On Virtue*, *On the Heavens*, and others. (See: *Concise Philosophical Encyclopedia*, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 555).

²- Muwaffaq Hashim Saqr Al-Halabi, 2nd ed., 2000, p. 20.

³- Hamu Qasim, 3rd ed., n.d., p. 20.

⁴- The Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al-Safa): They were a group bound together by bonds of friendship. This intellectual group had a political and religious character and was mainly based in Basra during the tenth century CE. Their writings constituted an encyclopedia consisting of 51 epistles covering the sciences of their time. Their epistles played a major role in Islamic mysticism (Sufism). (Shadel Helou et al., 1st ed., 1412 AH/1992 CE, Vols. 1–2).

⁵- Hanna Al-Fakhoury / Khalil Al-Jarr, 3rd ed., 1993, Vol. 1, p. 270.

⁶- Al-Raghib Al-Isfahani, n.d., p. 812.

attention to the human soul, and its references to it are characterised by comprehensive and integrated dimensions that reach a level of miraculous eloquence.

A careful examination of the term *nafs* (soul/self) in the Holy Qur'an reveals that it appears in various forms according to its position within the Qur'anic context and linguistic structure. Examples include: *نفس*, *نفسا*, *نفسك*, *نفسه*, *النفوس*, *الانفس*, *نفسى*, *أنفسهم*, and other derivatives. The term also carries different meanings depending on the Qur'anic context. At times, it refers to the Divine Essence, while at others it refers to particular individuals, such as the prophets. It also denotes the meaning of life in the verse: 'Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul'⁷. It may also refer to human beings as living creatures. Many Qur'anic verses contain the term *nafs* and encourage human beings to reflect and contemplate. Allah, the Exalted, asks: 'Will you not then see?'⁸ He also swears by the soul in the verse: 'And by the soul and Him who proportioned it.'⁹ Here, the term signifies the human being as a whole, encompassing the signs of creation and evidence of divine power.

In the verse 'Every soul will taste death'¹⁰, the term '*nafs*' refers to the living, accountable human being. In 'And do not kill yourselves'¹¹, the meaning of *nafs* encompasses both the human self and the sanctity of human life, incorporating a legislative and legal dimension simultaneously.

The term also appears in contexts dealing with the inner aspect of the human being responsible for choice and behaviour, as in the verse: 'Indeed, the soul is surely inclined to evil, except those upon whom my Lord has mercy,¹²' and: 'And I do not swear by the self-reproaching soul'¹³, as well as: 'O reassured soul'¹⁴. Here, the meaning refers to the inner dimension of the human being, which fluctuates between an inclination towards evil, self-reproach and tranquillity.

Thus, the semantic field of *nafs* in the Qur'an encompasses the human self and its inner reality and various states. Therefore, it is not appropriate to draw a sharp distinction between these meanings without considering the context. This conclusion is significant because it means that studying the discourse of the *nafs* is studying discourse about the human being as a whole, while focusing on the inner world that directs human actions.

⁷- Ezzat Abdel-Azim Al-Tawil, 3rd ed., 1999, p. 40.

⁸- Surah Al-Ma'idah, verse 32.

⁹- Surah Al-Dhariyat, verse 21.

¹⁰- Surah Al-Imran, verse 185.

¹¹- Surah Al-Nisa, verse 29.

¹²- Surah Yusuf, verse 53.

¹³- Surah Al-Qiyamah, verse 2.

¹⁴- Surah Al-Fajr, verse 27.

This semantic interpretation aligns with major works of Qur'anic exegesis¹⁵, notably those of al-Tabari, al-Razi, and Ibn Ashur. Their differing contextual interpretations reveal that the meaning of a term is determined by the context of the textual composition and the intended meaning.

The Qur'an's ultimate objective is to cultivate and refine humanity, purifying the self and its spiritual and moral dimensions to enable people to attain the highest goals and purposes.

Third subsection: The Nafs, the Spirit, the Heart and the Intellect

Studying the nafs requires clarifying its relationship to closely associated concepts¹⁶. The heart is the source of the spirit, which is a subtle, cohesive entity that penetrates dense matter¹⁷. It does not resemble light and is under the command of God. It constitutes the principle of life and resides in the heart. The intellect turns towards things, perceives them according to their true nature and infers what lies beyond appearances from their outward manifestations, thereby arriving at knowledge of God Almighty. The heart follows the intellect, loving that which the intellect has established to be good, and vice versa. Without the intellect, the impulses of the nafs would become intermingled with the heart's emotions and pulsations; without the heart, the virtues would remain merely abstract forms. Thus, the intellect is the discerning faculty, the heart is the motivating faculty and the nafs represents the animalistic urges that oppose the rational faculties¹⁸.

When we turn to the Noble Qur'an, we find that it uses the term 'ruh' (spirit) in various contexts, including the words of the Exalted: 'And they ask you about the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is of the command of my Lord, and you have been given of knowledge only a little'¹⁹.' The Qur'an also uses the term qalb (heart) in contexts relating to inner perception, faith, illness and tranquillity. The intellect is generally represented in the Qur'an through verbs denoting reasoning, reflection, contemplation and consideration rather than the abstract noun itself, which occurs relatively infrequently.

The nafs is closely connected with choice, inclination, accountability and moral refinement. Accordingly, the discourse addressed to it covers its various states, such as commanding, self-reproaching and reassurance, as well as other related concepts of guidance and deviation. This does not mean that these concepts are materially separate parts or independent entities, but rather that they constitute complementary semantic domains that together portray the human being.

Thus, it becomes evident that the Qur'anic discourse on the nafs does not isolate the self from other dimensions of human existence. Instead, it addresses the human being in their entirety, calling upon the intellect to reason, the heart to humble itself, the nafs to resist its inclinations

¹⁵- See the commentaries of the Qur'an, including those of Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, Al-Razi, and others. This observation concerning the diversity of the term nafs (self/soul) and its meanings was derived through an examination of Qur'anic exegesis literature.

¹⁶- Hanna Al-Fakhoury / Khalil Al-Jarr, 3rd ed., 1993, Vol. 2, p. 295.

¹⁷- Muhammad Wafa Al-Amiri, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 238.

¹⁸- Al-Buti, Muhammad Sa'id, n.d., p. 96.

¹⁹- Surah Al-Isra, verse 85.

and the spiritual dimension to respond to that which leads the human being towards God. This unity gives Qur'anic discourse the capacity to combine argumentation, influence and spiritual and moral purification.

Second Section: The Qur'an's Methods of Addressing and Refining the Nafs

First Subsection: Qur'anic narratives and the cultivation of the nafs

Among the methods that profoundly affect the nafs, reveal subtle and hidden meanings, and vividly depict occasions for admonition and reflection are Qur'anic narratives. This is because Qur'anic stories present incidents and events in a living, dynamic way. Perceiving something through the senses has a deeper effect and a more powerful impact than abstract words and idealised advice.

The Qur'anic narratives constitute accounts of the conditions of past nations, previous prophets, and events that took place²⁰. They also include accounts of countries and settlements, as well as the tracing of the remnants and heritage of peoples. They are distinguished by their ability to transform an abstract meaning into a dynamic model. The Qur'an does not merely state that patience is praiseworthy or that arrogance is blameworthy; rather, it presents models in which these meanings are embodied. Hence, Qur'anic narratives constitute a rhetorical means of addressing the intellect, emotions, and imagination simultaneously.

This function is evident in the words of Allah: 'Indeed, in their stories is a lesson for those who have understanding²¹.' The lesson here is not just historical knowledge, but also the transition from event to significance, model to reflection and reflection to attitude modification.

The narrative method in the Noble Qur'an is comprehensive and integrated. It analyses the human self and portrays it in various states, including confusion, anxiety, helplessness, hypocrisy, fear and terror. These are contrasted with images of a purified, tranquil, rational and conscious self that is naturally disposed towards fear of God and love of goodness. This allows the reader to visualise, describe and embody these states. All of this is grounded in the wise and effective Qur'anic style, which portrays various psychological states and emotions, including love and hatred, joy and pain, gratitude and denial, astonishment and surprise, anger and contentment, fear and sadness, and hope. In the story of the Prophet Joseph, peace be upon him, for instance, a succession of complex psychological and social states unfold, providing a basis for analysing the human self in relation to family, authority, adversity, and forgiveness²².

The Qur'an presents the stories of Moses and Abraham, peace be upon them, in contexts of fear, supplication and victory, reflection, argumentation and certainty, and steadfastness upon principle, respectively. Similarly, the story of Qarun is presented in the context of being deceived

²⁰- Musa Ibrahim Al-Ibrahimi, n.d., p. 156.

²¹- Surah Yusuf, verse 111.

²²- See: Abd Al-Salam Ahmad Al-Raghib, 1st ed., 1425 AH/2005 CE, p. 92.

by wealth. These stories are not intended to entertain, but rather to cultivate an awareness that enables the reader to recognise their own self and identify its strengths and weaknesses²³.

The purpose of Qur'anic narratives in addressing the nafs is therefore to construct moral insight and reshape one's attitude. In this way, history becomes a moral mirror through which people can see the potential within themselves and the consequences of their choices.

Second subsection: Encouragement, Warning and the Construction of Psychological Balance

One of the characteristics of the Qur'anic methodology is that it corresponds to the human psyche, which is constantly seeking a sense of happiness that encompasses both body and spirit. By nature, human beings progress when they are encouraged in life and motivated towards goodness, while avoiding what causes them harm²⁴. This is because the instinct of self-love drives a person to pursue their interests without restraint. Therefore, encouragement and warning are among the most prominent methods employed by the Qur'an to guide the nafs. Encouragement opens up a horizon of goodness to the addressee by mentioning reward, divine pleasure, bliss and a positive outcome, whereas warning cautions against an evil outcome, punishment and a negative result. These methods should not be understood as independent ends in themselves, but rather as two means of directing choice.

Encouragement: This is a promise of something desirable or pure pleasure in return for performing a righteous deed or refraining from a harmful pleasure or evil action, thereby seeking the pleasure of God Almighty.

A warning is a threat of punishment for committing a sin or wrongdoing that God has prohibited, or for neglecting an obligation that God has commanded. It also involves demonstrating divine power and majesty, to keep people constantly on their guard against sin.

Motivation: It stimulates the various inclinations within the self, directing them towards taking an interest in the different forms of goodness presented to it. Something becomes desirable when it fulfils one of the self's needs or natural desires because it constitutes a motivating factor.

The characteristics of Qur'anic discourse are therefore clear: whenever encouragement is presented, it is accompanied by a warning in what precedes or follows it, because human nature generally seeks outcomes and consequences. If the outcome is good, then it is good; if it is evil, then it is evil. Therefore, the original purpose of the Sharī'ah in addressing people was to combine encouragement and warning²⁵. God Almighty says, 'Inform My servants that I am indeed the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful, and that My punishment is painful.'²⁶ Combining the names indicating mercy with the warning of punishment presents the self with two

²³- See: Tahir Ibn Ashur, 1st ed., 1443 AH/2021 CE.

²⁴- Muhammad Al-Sayyid Yusuf, 1st ed., 1412 AH/2002 CE, p. 447.

²⁵- Idris Ouhanna, 1st ed., 1426 AH/2005 CE, p. 134.

²⁶- Surah Al-Hijr, verses 49–50.

possibilities: hope, which motivates it to return, and fear, which prevents it from persisting in error.

One of the most important forms of encouragement and warning comes in the form of Paradise and Hell, and what God has prepared for His servants therein. They are frequently used in the Noble Qur'an because most people do not prepare themselves for meeting God Almighty. Therefore, depictions of reward and punishment are presented to awaken feelings of fear and desire, and to stimulate human thought. In this way, they refine instincts and restrain excessive desires²⁷.

Semantically, mentioning Paradise and Hell combines lexical meaning with Qur'anic imagery because it does more than present information about the unseen; it constructs awareness of one's ultimate destiny. Consequently, descriptions of recompense appear in various contexts alongside exhortations to piety, patience, generosity, justice and repentance. Thus, the image of the final outcome becomes a driving force for behaviour.

Another characteristic is that one of the two aspects may sometimes predominate over the other, depending on the situation. Fear may be emphasised and expanded upon while accompanied by hope, and vice versa. As fear and hope are two remedies for treating the heart, their relative merit depends on the particular affliction present. If the predominant ailment of the heart is a lack of faith in God's plan, then fear is preferable; but if the predominant emotion is despair and a lack of faith in God's mercy, then hope is preferable²⁸.

This balance also serves a purpose in that the human self can be affected by excessive security or despair and hopelessness. Therefore, neither method is equally appropriate in all circumstances. Scholars of spiritual discipline and Qur'anic exegesis have established that fear and hope are balanced according to the state of the heart. This principle can be applied when reading the rhetorical structure of the verses, without turning it into a rigid rule.

The effects of encouragement and warning are also evident when behaviour is linked to its ultimate outcome. The Qur'an does not ask human beings to perform good deeds in isolation; rather, it reveals the consequences of their actions. Similarly, it does not merely prohibit evil, but also explains its consequences. This achieves both cognitive and ethical objectives: first, recognising the value of an action and then motivating oneself to perform it.

Third subsection: Parables as a Method for Reforming the Nafs

The parable occupies an important position in Qur'anic expression because it transforms abstract concepts into tangible or imaginable images. God Almighty says, 'We present these parables to people so that they may reflect²⁹.' Thus, the parable is connected with reflection; the image is not an end in itself, but a means of generating intellectual and emotional movement. Since parables possess this quality and are closer to the nafs in representing meanings and persons, as well as

²⁷- Muhammad Al-Ghazali, n.d., p. 152.

²⁸- Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, n.d., Vol. 4, p. 147.

²⁹- Surah Al-Hashr, verse 21.

having a powerful impact on the heart, addressing the human being in his entirety — his being, spirit and faculties — the Noble Qur'an adopted a particular method of presenting parables in order to nourish the spiritual dimension of the human being without neglecting the nafs.

The use of parables in the Noble Qur'an serves several purposes, including reminding, admonishing, encouraging, deterring, teaching lessons, establishing matters and conveying meaning to the intellect through tangible representation. They also clarify differences in reward, praise, blame, and punishment, and magnify or belittle matters, establishing or invalidating them³⁰. Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi says the following about parables in his work *Al-Amthal fi al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah*:³¹ 'People need parables whenever things are hidden from them. Thus, God presents them with a parable within themselves, not from Himself, so that they may perceive what is hidden from them. As for the One from whom nothing on earth or in heaven is hidden, He has no need of parables.' He also said: 'Parables are mirrors of the self.'

Among the Qur'anic parables is the saying of the Exalted: 'Those who spend their wealth in the way of God are like a grain that produces seven ears...'³² Here, the value of spending shifts from an ethical imperative to an image of growth and multiplication. This makes the idea easier to grasp and connects the action to an envisaged outcome.

Another example is the Exalted's saying concerning the condition of worldly life: 'The example of the life of this world is only like water that We send down from the sky...'³³ This parable illustrates a rapid cycle of growth and decline, readjusting the relationship between the self and worldly life. The intention is not to deny the enjoyment of life, but rather to free the self from being deceived by it.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that parables in the Noble Qur'an operate on three levels: bringing meaning closer, stimulating reflection and redirecting attitude. This function explains why there are so many parables in the Qur'an relating to faith, ethics, spending, worldly life, falsehood and truth.

Through this analysis of the various methods employed to refine the self, we can see that the Qur'an addresses the self within a threefold framework of faith, disbelief and hypocrisy. Within this triad, selves vary according to their degree.

Third Section: The Variation of the Discourse of the Nafs According to the Condition of the Addressee

First Subsection: The Objectives of Addressing the Believer

The Noble Qur'an makes faith clear and manifest to the believer. It is a relationship between the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of all existence, Glorified and Exalted is He, and the human being—a relationship that connects the human being to God Almighty. True faith gives a person a new

³⁰- Al-Zarkashi, Badr Al-Din, 1408 AH/1988 CE, p. 572.

³¹- Al-Hakim Al-Tirmidhi, 2nd ed., 1407 AH/1987 CE, p. 13.

³²- Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 261.

³³- Surah Yunus, verse 24.

birth and enables him to live a righteous and sound life. It therefore reshapes the human being's entire existence and calls for moderation, neither giving preference to spirituality over the body nor to materiality over spirituality³⁴.

The believer in the Noble Qur'an is a clear role model, representing a harmonious relationship with himself, his Lord and his society. The Qur'an provides him with an image that is fitting for a believer who maintains a connection with God. This connection never ceases, but rather develops within the believer, elevating his feelings and raising him spiritually. This allows him to experience various forms of comfort, reassurance, confidence, certainty, tranquility and serenity. Consequently, his personality appears sound, balanced, pure and pious, with his inner and outer selves in harmony.

Having faith does not mean becoming detached from one's own impulses. The believer has faith while remaining human, and their impulses vary according to their circumstances. Human nature becomes more evident in times of hardship and adversity. Therefore, faith means steadfastness after panic, reassurance after fear and joy after sadness³⁵. When a person sins, they repent because the purpose of repentance is to reform what has become corrupt and prevent further corruption. Self-reproach and regret are important in shaping and correcting a person's personality. Psychologists refer to this as the 'superego' or 'conscience'³⁶. This protects a person from psychological disorders that may originate from anxiety and dissatisfaction with what they have done, leading to unconscious repression. Therefore, a believer's remembrance of their sins, acknowledgement of them, seeking forgiveness and repentance serve to protect them from psychological disorders.

Thus, the Qur'an provides a revealing analysis of the psychology of believers in situations of contentment, anger, hardship, joy and fear. Faith therefore impacts the formation of these psychological states and the behaviour that stems from them.

Accordingly, the discourse addressed to believers in the Qur'an appears as one of affirmation, purification and continuous self-improvement. Rather than ending the internal struggle, faith places the self on a new path of striving, self-examination and repentance. The Qur'an therefore addresses the believer through commands and prohibitions, promises and warnings, and reminders and reproaches, as well as by presenting models of steadfastness and weakness.

One of the most important characteristics of this discourse is that it treats the believer as capable of spiritual elevation. As God Almighty says, "Successful indeed is the one who purifies it, and disappointed indeed is the one who corrupts it."³⁷ This verse links success to purification, making the reform of the inner self a prerequisite for success. This confirms that the nafs discourse is part of a broader Qur'anic project aimed at developing the human being.

³⁴- See: Muhammad Al-Ghazali, 1420 AH/1999 CE, pp. 75–77.

³⁵- Abd Al-Karim Ghallab, 4th ed., 1425 AH/2004 CE, p. 97.

³⁶- Abdullah Al-Ansari Al-Harawi, 1408 AH/1988 CE, p. 13.

³⁷- Surah Al-Shams, verses 9–10.

The Qur'an does not present the believer as emotionless; rather, it portrays their fear, sadness and weakness, and then directs them accordingly. Affirmation and reassurance come in times of hardship; repentance comes following sin; gratitude comes in times of blessing; and reliance upon God comes in times of fear. Thus, Qur'anic cultivation is not based on denying human nature, but rather on refining it.

The objective of addressing the believer is therefore defined as maintaining a connection with God, strengthening faith, correcting behaviour, cultivating a conscience and establishing a balance between hope and fear, as well as between the needs of the body and the demands of the spirit.

Second subsection: The Objectives of Addressing the Disbeliever

A considerable portion of the verses dealing with the call to faith and the conflict between supporters and opponents are addressed to the disbeliever. The disbeliever is a representation of a person engaged in a struggle with the truth. Consequently, the Qur'anic discourse addressed to the disbeliever varies according to the situation and context. It may establish proof, remind the reader of the signs of God, demonstrate the contradiction inherent in a particular position or warn against the consequences of denial.

Through various examples, the Qur'an reveals the causes of deviation, including arrogance, blind imitation, being deceived by worldly life, following desires and closing the avenues of reflection. God Almighty asks: 'Do they not then reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon their hearts?'³⁸ Here, the image goes beyond outward rejection to describe an internal obstacle that prevents reflection. Among its effects on the nafs are:³⁹

- Extinguishing the light of the innate disposition (fitrah).
- Eliminating the higher aspirations of the nafs.
- Destroying the dignity of the self, causing its possessor to fall into humiliating servitude.
- Fragmenting the unity of the human self.

Accordingly, the Qur'anic discourse addressed to the disbeliever is not merely a classification of the other, but an analysis of the human being's position towards truth. The Qur'an presents the causes of denial and its consequences so that the recipient may recognise the psychological mechanisms that may lead to deviation.

The objectives here become apparent: to expose the contradiction between fitrah and misguided choice; to provide proof; and to call upon human beings to reconsider their position before it is too late. The Qur'an employs various methods, such as dialogue, argumentation, questioning, the presentation of parables and the depiction of ultimate destiny, to make the discourse gradual in addressing the causes of rejection.

Another Qur'anic objective is the analysis of the psychology of the disbeliever to reveal their condition. In its discourse, the Qur'an addresses the fitrah to awaken it, enabling it to perceive

³⁸- Surah Muhammad, verse 24.

³⁹- Muhammad Qutb, 1st ed., 1417 AH/1997 CE, p. 143.

the reality of existence and recognise God Almighty. However, those who deviate from this path fall into one of four categories:

- A. A person whose intellect is closed.
- B. A person who is deceived by worldly life and deluded by their limited knowledge, believing that they have mastered the means to attain everything.
- C. A weak person driven by their desires and controlled by someone stronger than themselves.
- D. A person who becomes heedless when prosperous and forgets the Creator⁴⁰.

The Noble Qur'an employs a wise method whereby it separates the disbelievers from the Islamic community, isolating them and planting despair in their hearts. It confirms the reality of the unaware human being: conscious reason disappears, and he is led astray by his emotions. He does not believe whether he is warned or not; a veil has become manifest over him.

Third subsection: The Objectives of Addressing the Hypocrite

Hypocrisy is a human disposition that becomes evident when a person is caught between two conflicting forces, each pulling them in a different direction, and they lack the courage to make a choice or distinction between them. This condition is characterised by instability and a lack of clarity. It is a moral and behavioural characteristic rather than an intellectual one.

Hypocrisy is a disease of the heart for which there is hardly any remedy. Therefore, the Qur'an describes hypocrites as being afflicted in their hearts, minds and selves. The Qur'an presents hypocrisy as a state of separation between the outward and the inward; hence its description as a disease of the heart: 'In their hearts is a disease, so Allah has increased their disease⁴¹.' This reveals that the problem is not just a difference of opinion, but a disturbance of will and inner sincerity⁴².

The most prominent characteristics of the hypocrite, as portrayed in the Noble Qur'an, are hesitation and cowardice. These are his defining traits, as demonstrated by the verses. Cowardice pervades every aspect of their life, thought, behaviour and dealings. He evades commitment and responsibility until this becomes an ingrained trait. Furthermore, he knows he is in the wrong yet persists in causing corruption. This is followed by evasiveness and vacillation, as seen in Surahs al-Baqarah, al-Nisa', al-Tawbah and al-Munafiqun. The purpose of this discourse is to expose the hypocrite's true nature, as he may present an outward image that contradicts his inner self. The Qur'anic discourse therefore aims to remove the mask and reveal the contradiction⁴³.

The hypocrite is characterised by his veiling himself from the truth, even from himself, despite his awareness of his own hypocrisy. The Qur'an's portrayal of him is filled with irony. It seeks to expose the psychological deviation that opposes faith. The Qur'an also seeks to exclude the

⁴⁰- See: Al-Fandi Jamal Al-Din, 1st ed., 1968, pp. 14–15.

⁴¹- Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 10.

⁴²- Muhammad Lutfi Jum'ah, 1411 AH/1991 CE, p. 57.

⁴³- See: Ahmad Muhammad Faris, 2nd ed., 1409 AH/1989 CE, p. 73.

hypocrite from the community of believers, defeating them psychologically by exposing the disease within their hearts.

It is clear, therefore, that the Qur'an's address to the hypocrite differs from its address to the believer in that it is a discourse of exposure, warning and correction. It also differs from the discourse addressed to the disbeliever because the hypocrite operates within the social sphere of believers while maintaining an opposing inner stance. Therefore, the Qur'an's treatment of hypocrisy focuses more on exposing contradiction, aiming to protect the community from its effects and alert individuals that corruption of the inner self is not a private matter, but is reflected in speech, action and relationships. Thus, the treatment of hypocrisy is connected with the simultaneous objectives of purifying the individual and reforming society.

Fourth Section: The Levels of the Nafs and the Objective of Purification

The Noble Qur'an has referred to the human nafs on numerous occasions and has shed upon it numerous flashes of light. It classifies it into various categories, the purpose of which is to clarify the different degrees and states of the nafs. These include: the reassured nafs, the purified nafs, the self-reproaching nafs, the striving nafs, the commanding nafs, the inquisitive nafs, the whispering nafs, and the losing nafs.

First Subsection: Classifications of the Nafs in the Noble Qur'an

One of the most prominent indications of the diversity of the states of the nafs in the Qur'an is its description as commanding, self-reproaching and reassured. These descriptions do not have to be understood as three separate entities, but rather as states or levels along the course of the nafs.

God Almighty says, through the words of Joseph, peace be upon him: 'Indeed, the nafs is surely inclined to evil, except when my Lord has mercy.' This verse reveals the strength of the nafs⁴⁴, inclination towards evil, which requires both the mercy of God and human effort. Next comes the self-reproaching nafs in the words of the Exalted: 'And I swear by the self-reproaching nafs⁴⁵.' This represents a different psychological state, in which awareness of error, self-examination and self-reproach become evident.

The reassured nafs appears in a context of honour and commendation: 'O reassured nafs, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him]⁴⁶.' This transition opens the way for understanding the nafs as capable of transformation rather than being confined to a single, fixed state.

It becomes clear here that the Qur'anic discourse on the nafs implicitly contains a gradual educational process: first, exposing the inclination; second, awakening the conscience; and finally, attaining tranquility. This is one of the most important aspects of the Qur'an's objective of purification⁴⁷.

⁴⁴- Surah Yusuf, verse 53.

⁴⁵- Surah Al-Qiyamah, verse 2.

⁴⁶- Surah Al-Fajr, verses 27–28.

⁴⁷- Abu Adel Abdullah ibn Muhammad Al-Yusuf, 1st ed., 1417 AH/.

Second subsection: The Position of Tazkiyah in the Qur'anic Discourse

The various methods analysed above all aim to achieve the same comprehensive objective: the purification (tazkiyah) of human beings. In its original sense, 'tazkiyah' encompasses the concepts of purification, growth, and righteousness, rendering it more than just the elimination of negative traits. Rather, it constitutes reform and growth simultaneously. God Almighty says, 'Successful indeed is the one who purifies it'⁴⁸. Thus, success is connected to the purification of the nafs. He also says, 'It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His verses, purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom'⁴⁹. This verse reveals the integration between knowledge and reform by bringing together recitation, teaching, and purification.

Accordingly, targhib and tarhib can be understood as mechanisms for directing the will, the narrative as a mechanism for constructing moral lessons and models, the parable as a mechanism for clarifying meaning and stimulating reflection, and the discourse addressed to different groups as an adaptation of the discourse according to the addressee's condition. All of these converge towards the objective of reform and purification.

Tazkiyah is not confined to the individual dimension. The Qur'an links the purity of the nafs to social conduct, including justice, truthfulness, generosity, respect for parents, and kindness, as well as prohibiting injustice and transgression. Thus, the discourse of the nafs moves from the inward to the outward: it begins with correcting belief and then bears fruit in action and conduct⁵⁰.

Third subsection: The Objective of Faith and Action in the Qur'anic Discourse

A careful examination of the Noble Verses reveals that the ultimate purpose of the discourse is to seek and act in accordance with the truth. Knowledge of the truth encompasses faith and, subsequently, the cultivation of the human nafs. The Qur'anic discourse addresses the fitrah, calling it to faith in that which is embedded within it from the outset, with the ultimate objective being tawhid (monotheism). The general structure of the Qur'anic discourse reveals a gradual progression: first, introducing the human being to the truth; then, establishing proof; next, activating the will; and finally, directing conduct. Knowledge alone is insufficient if it does not develop into a commitment, just as a commitment alone is insufficient if it does not translate into action.

For this reason, the Qur'an frequently combines reflection and action, associating faith with righteous deeds. This duality is why the nafs discourse is not limited to rational proofs: the human being is a creature who wills, is influenced and makes choices. Accordingly, the discourse takes the form of argument, exhortation, narrative, parable, promise, warning and reminder.

⁴⁸- Surah Al-Shams, verse 9.

⁴⁹- Surah Al-Jumu'ah, verse 2.

⁵⁰- Abdullah Shehata, 1983, p. 14.

The value of this integration is evident in the fact that the Qur'an does not address the human being from a single perspective. If the obstacle is intellectual, proof is the appropriate response; if the obstacle is psychological, reminders, encouragement and warnings are the appropriate responses; and if conduct has deviated, rulings and guidance are the appropriate responses. Therefore, it can be said that the diversity of the discourse addressed to the nafs reflects a corresponding diversity in identifying deficiencies.

Conclusion:

The discourse of the nafs in the Noble Qur'an reveals the nature of the nafs and its fluctuations through an integrated structure. It presents the various manifestations of its strength and weakness, and then guides it through a sound methodology in which the objectives are integrated. The ultimate aim is to guide and purify human beings, reforming their conduct and building individuals who know the truth, respond to it and strive against their nafs for its sake. This leads them towards higher degrees of knowledge, faith, ethics and action, so they may attain the rank of tazkiya.

Results:

- The concept of the nafs in the Noble Qur'an is characterised by semantic multiplicity and cannot be confined to a single technical meaning, as its intended meaning varies according to context.
- The nafs discourse in the Noble Qur'an is reformatory, revealing the states of the nafs to guide it rather than merely describing it.
- Qur'anic narratives have an educational and semantic function because they transform values and meanings into human models that can be reflected on and considered.
- Targhib and tarhib direct the will and connect conduct with its ultimate outcome while maintaining a balance between the two.
- Qur'anic parables bring meanings closer, stimulate reflection and reconstruct the human stance.
- The Qur'anic discourse varies according to the addressee's condition. That addressed to the believer is oriented towards purification (tazkiya); that addressed to the disbeliever is based on providing proof and exposing the causes of denial; and that addressed to the hypocrite seeks to highlight contradiction and warn against its consequences.
- These various methods converge towards a comprehensive objective: the purification and reform of the individual, who progresses from knowledge to faith and from faith to action.
- This study recommends further specialised research into Qur'anic discourse concerning the nafs from pragmatic, linguistic, and rhetorical perspectives, distinguishing between Qur'anic concepts and subsequent technical conceptualisations. Further applied studies are also recommended on terms related to the human being, such as the heart, spirit, inner

heart, chest, intellect and body. These studies should reveal the network of concepts that converge in shaping the Qur'anic conception of the human being.

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