

The Journey of the Soul From Nafs al-Ammarah to Nafs al-Mutmainnah

Introduction

All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him, seek His help and forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and from the consequences of our wrong actions. Whomever Allah guides, none can misguide; and whomever He allows to stray, none can guide. Peace and blessings be upon our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, his family, his companions, and all those who follow his path until the Day of Judgment.

Dear brothers and sisters!

Allah did not create us merely to perform outward acts of worship. He created us to purify our hearts and refine our inner selves. Prayer, fasting, charity, and Hajj are not simply rituals. They are meant to transform our character, discipline our desires, and bring us closer to Allah. Allah says:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا ﴿٩٠﴾ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا

"Successful indeed is the one who purifies it and failed indeed is the one who corrupts it."
(Ash-Shams 91:9-10)

Many Muslims sincerely ask themselves: Why do I continue falling into the same sins? Why do I feel guilty after committing a sin, yet struggle to change? Why do some believers worship Allah with tranquility and joy, while others constantly battle their desires? The answer often lies within us. It lies in understanding the condition of our Nafs, our inner self.

The Qur'an describes three major states of the human soul:

1. Nafs al-Ammarah – the soul that commands evil.
2. Nafs al-Lawwamah (The Soul that Blames Itself)
3. Nafs al-Mutmainnah – the soul that has found peace with Allah.

Every one of us is somewhere on this journey. The purpose of Tazkiyah, the purification of the soul, is to move from the first stage to the third, until we meet Allah with a heart that is pure and a soul that is at peace.

Part One: What is the Nafs?

The Arabic word Nafs refers to the self, the ego, the inner personality, and the seat of our desires and inclinations.

Allah has created every human being with several dimensions:

- A physical body.
- An intellect ('Aql) that distinguishes right from wrong.
- A heart (Qalb), which is the center of faith and emotions.
- A Ruh (Spirit), which naturally inclines toward Allah.
- A Nafs, which inclines toward worldly desires.

The Ruh constantly calls us toward obedience, sincerity, and remembrance of Allah. The Nafs calls us toward comfort, pleasure, pride, and temptation. Between these two stands the Qalb, the heart, which becomes the battlefield. Whichever side wins the heart determines the direction of the person's life. Every day we choose which voice we will follow.

Part Two: Nafs al-Ammarah (The Soul that Commands Evil)

Allah says:

إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي

*"Indeed, the soul constantly commands evil except whom my Lord has shown mercy."
(Yusuf 12:53)*

This is the lowest state of the soul.

It becomes comfortable with sin. It justifies wrongdoing and finds obedience burdensome. It seeks immediate pleasure and dislikes discipline. Repentance is always postponed.

The Nafs al-Ammarah whispers:

- "Tomorrow I'll pray."
- "One more sin won't matter."
- "Everyone is doing it."

- "Allah is Most Forgiving."
- "I'm still young. I'll repent later."

It feeds on arrogance, jealousy, greed, anger, lust, showing off, revenge, gossip, and laziness.

A person controlled by this soul delays prayers, rushes through Salah, neglects the Qur'an, speaks harshly, constantly makes excuses, and rarely feels genuine remorse.

One of the greatest examples of transformation is Sayyiduna Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه. Before Islam, he was known for his fierce temperament and even set out intending to kill the Prophet ﷺ. Yet when faith entered his heart, the same strong personality became a source of justice, mercy, and unwavering devotion.

The personality remained strong, but the Nafs was transformed.

This teaches us that Islam does not destroy our personality. It purifies it.

Part Three: Nafs al-Lawwamah (The Soul that Blames Itself)

Allah says:

وَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ

"And I swear by the self-reproaching soul." (Al-Qiyamah 75:2)

Allah only swears by something noble and significant. This soul has awakened.

It may still fall into sin, but it no longer feels comfortable with it. After committing a wrong action, it experiences pain, regret, and sincere remorse.

It says:

- "Why did I do that?"
- "O Allah, forgive me."
- "I should have lowered my gaze."
- "I should have controlled my anger."
- "I must become better."

Its signs include:

- Better consistency in Salah.
- Greater attachment to the Qur'an.

- Frequent Istighfar.
- Decreasing sins.
- Growing humility.

This stage is perhaps the hardest because it is the stage of struggle. Some days the believer feels close to Allah, while on other days he feels weak. Some nights he weeps during du'a, while on others he becomes heedless.

This internal battle is not a sign of failure. It is evidence that faith is alive.

A beautiful example is Ka'b ibn Malik and his two companions who stayed behind from the expedition of Tabuk. Rather than lying to the Prophet ﷺ, they admitted their mistake honestly. They endured fifty difficult days of repentance until Allah accepted their repentance.

Their story teaches us that sincere repentance elevates a believer.

Part Four: Nafs al-Mutmainnah (The Soul at Peace)

Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ۖ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً ۖ فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي ۖ وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي

"O tranquil soul! Return to your Lord, pleased and pleasing. Enter among My servants. Enter My Paradise." (Al-Fajr 89:27-30)

This is the highest station.

It is not a life without hardship. Rather, it is a heart that remains peaceful because Allah is enough.

The Nafs al-Mutmainnah:

- Loves Salah.
- Finds sweetness in the Qur'an.
- Trusts Allah during every trial.
- Forgives those who wrong it.
- Controls anger.
- Loves serving others.
- Accepts Allah's decree.

- Lives with gratitude.
- Dies with peace.

The greatest example is our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

He experienced poverty, persecution, loss of loved ones, betrayal, war, and immense hardship. Yet he remained calm, patient, hopeful, and completely trusting in Allah because his heart rested with his Lord.

True peace does not come from wealth, status, or comfort. It comes from certainty in Allah.

Part Five: Which Nafs Is Leading You?

Every believer should honestly evaluate himself.

Ask yourself:

After committing a sin:

- Do I enjoy it?
- Do I regret it?
- Or do I actively avoid it?

Regarding Salah:

- Is it a burden?
- Is it improving?
- Or is it my greatest comfort?

Regarding wealth:

- Do I love this world for its own sake?
- Or do I use what Allah has given me to earn His pleasure?

These questions help us identify where we are on our journey.

Part Six: Moving from Ammarah to Lawwamah

The journey begins with awakening.

First: Yaqazah (Spiritual Awakening): Recognize your dependence upon Allah. Admit your weaknesses.

Second: Tawbah: The Prophet ﷺ said:

وَاللّٰهُ اِنِّيْ لَاسْتَغْفِرُ اللّٰهَ وَاَتُوْبُ اِلَيْهِ فِي الْيَوْمِ اَكْثَرَ مِنْ سَبْعِيْنَ مَرَّةً

*"By Allah, I seek Allah's forgiveness and repent to Him more than seventy times each day."
(Sahih al-Bukhari)*

Another narration mentions one hundred times.

If the Messenger of Allah ﷺ constantly sought forgiveness despite being free from sin, how much more do we need it?

Third: Mahasabha (Self-Accountability): At the end of every day ask yourself:

- What pleased Allah today?
- What displeased Him?
- What can I improve tomorrow?

Avoid the environment, habits, and companions that repeatedly pull you toward disobedience.

Fifth: Keep Righteous Company: The Prophet ﷺ said:

الْمَرْءُ عَلَى دِيْنِ خَلِيْلِهِ

"A person follows the religion of his close friend." (Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi)

Good friends make obedience easier.

Sixth: Seek Knowledge: Knowledge exposes the tricks of Shaytan, while ignorance strengthens them.

Seventh: Strive Against the Nafs: Allah says:

وَالَّذِيْنَ جَاهَدُوْا فِىْنَا لَنَهْدِيْهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

"Those who strive for Our sake, We will surely guide them to Our ways." (Al-'Ankabut 29:69)

Spiritual growth always requires effort.

Part Seven: Reaching Nafs al-Mutmainnah

The path is gradual but clear.

- Perform every Salah with concentration and humility.
- Read the Qur'an every day, even if it is only one page, while reflecting upon its meanings.

- Increase your morning and evening adhkar.
- Remember Allah while walking, driving, waiting, and working.
- Make Istighfar at least one hundred times daily.
- Wake up for Tahajjud, even if it is only two rak'ahs.
- Practice gratitude every day. Reflect on Allah's countless blessings.
- Stay close to righteous people who remind you of Allah.
- Serve others sincerely. Hearts that serve Allah's creation often become hearts filled with peace.

Shaikh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani رحمه الله said:

"Fight your own Nafs before you fight your enemy."