

TAFSĪR AL-QUR'ĀN:

MINDSETS part 1

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PLEASE NOTE

This is an initial draft of notes, compiled by one of the students, summarising the current '*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān: Mindset*' lessons. In progressive weeks new class notes will be added InshāAllāh. It is hoped that in due time a complete version will be available. The class is taught by Ustādh Abū 'Ubayd.

“Verily, there has come to you baṣā’ir [insights]
from your Rabb, so whosoever grasps and
appreciates them, the benefit, then, is for none
other than his own self ...” (6:104)

Introduction

The Qur'ān is inclusive of every aspect of the human being. Its advice and counsel reverberates through his soul, heart, mind and limbs. It addresses him as an individual, as a member of a family, as a member of a community and as part of a generation. It speaks to him as a son of Ādam and as one from whom stems a lineage. It appreciates him as a person possible of the greatest and noblest deeds, and as one who is susceptible to harm (evil).

This particular tafsīr places a huge emphasis on the Qur'ān's reciprocating relationship with the human mind. It highlights many mindsets eternally instilled in the Qur'ān. This tafsīr is a unique discourse on the Qur'ān, and is in stark contrast to the conventional exegesis.

The purpose of this tafsīr is to foster a particular mindset, an attitude that determines how we interpret and respond to situations and circumstances. It serves to broaden our understandings, thoughts and their processes, to make them sensitive of subtleties, perceptive of eventualities, and constructive and pragmatic when formulating answers and responses.

The first half of this document briefly explains the isti'āzah and the second half lists a series of mindsets emanating from it.

Taking refuge with Allāh against the shayṭān

Allāh –subḥānahu wa ta'ālā– revealed a share of His Names and Attributes, and gave instruction in praising and exhorting Him with them. This is partly because the creation through them observes how their Creator and Master recognises their needs.

The creation is in need of direction and guidance and so He –taqaddasa ismuhu– revealed His Name Al-Hādī (The Guide) and guides them. They are in need of sustenance and so He revealed His Name Ar-Razzāq (The Oft-Provider) and provides for them constantly. They are in need of protection, and so He revealed His Name Al-Ḥāfiẓ (The Protector) and protects them.

The creation is in need of protection against the devil and so He instructed them with the isti'āzah. The qāri' (reciter of the Qur'ān), for example, begins his recitation by exhorting Allāh –'azza wa jalla–:

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

“I take refuge with Allāh against the expelled devil.”

This exhortation is referred to as al-isti'āzah. Al-isti'āzah is the protection against the devil and his scheming, and it is a protection against all other harms. Allāh cautioned mankind against the devil and instructed them:

فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

“So when you recite the Qur'ān, [first] seek refuge with Allāh against the expelled devil.” (16:98)

The status and requirement of the isti'āzah

The isti'āzah is not a verse of the Qur'ān according to scholarly consensus.

The scholars differed over the requirement of the isti'āzah at the onset of reciting the Qur'ān (both in the prayer and outside of it). The majority deemed it a recommendation.

A brief explanation of the isti'āzah

﴿أَعُوذُ﴾ means 'I take refuge'. There are two possible base meanings with regards to this verb. The first is *satr* (concealment or protection) and the second is *luzūm al-mujāwarah* (firmly gripping onto a neighbouring object).

Both of these meanings are simultaneously plausible because taking refuge insists on both meanings. The one taking refuge seeks protection and cover against his enemy (*satr*) and grips firmly to the thing or being that provides that protection (*luzūm al-mujāwarah*).

What's more, this verb *أَعُوذُ* was used by the Arabs against a harm or fear that is great and one that is not necessarily seen but is sensed or anticipated.

﴿بِاللَّهِ﴾ means 'with Allāh' i.e., The one whose refuge is sought is Allah's – 'azza wa jalla–. The meanings of *satr* and *luzūm al-mujāwarah* are actively sought from Him.

﴿مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ﴾ means 'against the expelled devil'. *شَيْطَان* has two possible base verbs. The first is *شَطَرَ* which denotes remoteness and distance. The second is *شَاطَ* which implies burning and the engulfment in flames. Though both are plausible, the first meaning is more probable according to Sibawayh (the renowned linguist). A devil is called *shayṭān* because it is remote and far from Allāh and from righteousness. It is an evil and foul creature. The word *shayṭān* can be understood as a generic noun and therefore the isti'āzah is a refuge against all types of *shayāṭīn*¹.

The isti'āzah depicts the dominating might and inescapable control, authority and power of Allāh over all things. This exhortation is a heart-pounding recognition that Allāh is *Al-Qawiyy Al-Matīn Al-Qadīr Al-Muta'al*. It means that He is Creator and I am creation; He is Powerful and I am weak; He is Sovereign and I am slave; He is Self-Sufficient and I am utterly dependent.

The isti'āzah combines strength which includes power and ability; goodwill which includes immense goodness, kindness and mercy (because He grants refuge); and praise which subsumes complete magnificence and utmost

¹ Plural of *shayṭān*.

generosity (because He is the most hospitable host and most excellent source of refuge).

This combination exhibits His flawless majesty. When the mu'min is mindful of Allāh in such a manner and knows Him to be this way, it fills his heart with appreciative feelings and thoughts about Allāh, and causes him to stand in awe at the sublime being of Allāh. Thus, he turns to His Mawlā (Guardian) -'azza wa jalla- and does everything that would cause Allāh to love him and avoids everything that attains His wrath, and this, in fact, is the objective and essence of submission and worship.²

The affect of taking refuge takes root in the heart and then manifests upon the limbs. These base meanings³ only serve as examples to create a picture of the implications of the isti'āzah. The heart when it takes refuge with its Mawlā displays its state of neediness, submission and humility, and expresses its hope and confidence in Him, and throws itself before Him and holds fast to Him.

Such a person is like a child. The child is technically 'poor' because he has no real ownership (over property). His parents, however, are wealthy and so he is regarded as being wealthy because he is under their care. Similarly, the one taking refuge with Allāh Al-Mawlā is under His Care. And who after entering His Care can be considered exposed and defenceless? In fact, if 'harm' does reach such a person then he will only experience of it that which benefits him or else it will not touch him. Such is the protection of Allāh -jalla wa 'alā.

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِكَافٍ عَبْدَهُ

“Is not Allāh sufficient for His slave?” (39:36)

² Adapted from 'A Pilgrim's Journey'.

³ See explanation of اَعُوذُ on pg. 5.

Mindsets embodied in the isti'āzah

1. The **belief** that Allāh wants iḥsān from his slaves in every good & noble deed, even in repelling harm⁴. The **mindset** to repel harm in the utmost perfect manner⁵.
2. The **belief** that Allāh wants to protect mankind and jinn from every harm, including those harms that are subtle or yet to be known⁶. The **mindset** to plan against all seriously harmful eventualities⁷.
3. The **mindset** that priority is given to repelling the harm when planning and preparing⁸.

⁴ The command to make isti'āzah came in two great acts of worship; recitation of Qur'ān and ṣalāh. He –subḥānahu– loves that these acts reach the level of iḥsān (excellence/perfection). When the mu'min prays, he faces two chief adversaries; the evil-commanding self (al-nafs al-ammārah) and the shayṭān. The first adversary is overcome when he engages in the worship, which in this case is the prayer. The second will then seek to corrupt that act of worship. The isti'āzah was revealed as a protection against the latter in order to achieve iḥsān.

Allāh –jalla wa 'alā– wants iḥsān from his slaves because He wants to reward them with iḥsān i.e., with the best reward –one that is most pleasing and perfect. “[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best and most perfect in deed.” (67:1)

⁵ This belief then results in a mindset, which is that even when one wills and prepares to repel, or is in the midst of repelling harm, he is encouraged to repel it in the utmost perfect manner; inwardly and outwardly, individually and collectively.

⁶ Allāh –subḥānahu– protects against harms that are not only apparent and known but also from those harms that are subtle and hidden or yet to be known. Would we be cognisant of shayṭān if it were not that He –jalla jalāluhu– informed us of him? More so, He informs us of his intentions and how to defend ourselves against him, and how to combat and even humiliate him, and how to recover from a harm afflicted by him! He protects us from falling into actions that bring pain and ruin; actions, the consequences of which are disastrous to our lives in one or both worlds. The protection of Allāh comes in many forms. Of them is legislation. Every prohibition, for example, is a protection against one or more harms. Our ignorance of the harm does not negate its presence.

⁷ This belief then results in a mindset, which is to include in one's plans and strategies the measures necessary to repel serious harms and be protected from them even if those harms have not yet actualized.

⁸ Allāh –subḥānahu– protects against potential harms that can occur in 'ibādāt (acts of worship). For example, one of the greatest harms during tilāwah (recitation) is the

4. The **mindset** that every evil can be repelled by a variety of means except the evil of shayṭān. The evil of shayṭān is only repelled by taking refuge with Allāh first and foremost and then taking the necessary means which He –‘azza wa jalla- legislated.
5. The **belief** that all occurrences –good and bad– are from Allāh. The good precedes the evil. It is perpetual whilst evil is temporary⁹. The **mindset** that every evil can be overcome¹⁰.
6. The **belief** that all evil is created. The **mindset** that because it is a creation, it can be repelled even if it is many in number. This is because Allāh is with the khayr (good) even if it is few and little¹¹.
7. The **mindset** of seeking assistance with Allāh even if you are strong and ‘able’ because victory and success are from Allāh. He is the creator of them¹².

deceit and influence of shayṭān. His influence can come in the form of heedlessness of the verses, or misreading them or a misunderstanding of them. The deception and influence of shayṭān is the single greatest harm in that specific situation. Accordingly Allāh legislated the isti‘āzah.

⁹ The nature of evil is that it disappears: “And say, Truth has come, and falsehood has perished. Indeed falsehood, [by nature], is ever bound to perish.” (17:81) It is from Allāh and it was destined to be short-lived.

¹⁰ This belief then results in a mindset, which is that every harm (evil) can be repelled. So long as one meets it accordingly, he has no reason to fear it.

¹¹ Therefore, when confronted by evil, the mu’min does not give in to it. Instead, because of this mindset, he knows it can be overcome and so he rises to the challenge and begins the search for the appropriate means in order to triumph over it.

Allāh gives victory to the khayr even if it is tiny - He brings out a people from the hellfire because of a mustard seed’s weight of īmān.

¹² The mu’min always adopts this mindset even if he is strong and able, “... so much so that even if a shoe-lace is torn, he should pray to Allāh to provide him with another shoe-lace, and if he needs salt, he should beseech Allāh to send it to him.” (Tirmidhī) This is especially true for protection against the devil, because it is a creature that seeks our complete ruin.

Allāh commanded the Prophet to take refuge with Him against the devil while he –ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam– is the most able of creation against it. Then how much more so should we be taking refuge with Allāh against the devil?

8. The **mindset** that you must repel the harm as an individual, as a group or organisation, and as a community¹³.
9. The **mindset** that behind all evil is shayṭān. Attribution of blame is assigned to it first and foremost!¹⁴
10. The **mindset** of seeking out the means to strengthen one's weaknesses and improving one's strengths¹⁵.
11. The **mindset** of repelling an actual harm is given precedence over attaining the benefit of a similar parallel.
12. The **belief** that Allāh is the granter of tawfīq¹⁶. He alone facilitates the simultaneous repelling of harm and the attainment of any benefit in that

¹³ How was this mindset derived? Allāh –subḥānahu– did not leave us to be harmed. Rather, He gave instruction in repelling the harm. Therefore, wherever the Muslim is, he must repel the harm. If the repelling requires collective effort, then gather and be within a group of people and/or organisation specifically setup to repel that particular grievous harm(s). If it requires a community to repel, then encourage and incite the community to repel it.

¹⁴ The role of shayṭān in conflicts and strife –whether domestic or otherwise– must never be downplayed. How many are the fingers that blame? And how many are pointing at shayṭān?

A plethora of narrations have come instructing us to take refuge with Allāh against it in so many different circumstances. Upon reflection you will notice how shayṭān works against man. He is the enemy from within and without. Until and unless we acknowledge this we will not take the issue of taking refuge seriously.

¹⁵ Allāh and His Prophet –ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam– supplemented the isti'āzah with the adhān, the mu'awwidhatayn, the closing of windows and doors and the covering of food with the Name of Allāh (basmalah), the preventing of the young from going out at Maghrib as (part of an assembly of) means against the shayṭān. Each means strengthens the shield against the devil and its soldiers.

¹⁶ “And my tawfīq is only from Allāh.” (11:88) Tawfīq comes from a trilateral root (wāw qāf fā') which means reconciliation or agreement. Tawfīq is the coming together of all factors that enable a person to attain their goals and hopes and achieve the good therein. The essential factors of tawfīq are ability, opportunity and will. All three are necessary for tawfīq.

harm¹⁷. The **mindset**, then, is to take the due means whilst the heart is always seeking assistance with Allāh.

13. The **belief** and **mindset** that al-isti'āzah (taking refuge) is with Allāh's Essence before His Names and Attributes. Only then is the heart always within the refuge of Allāh, and always seeking His eternal refuge. This then has a natural consequence on his surroundings. The people around him are influenced and inspired in this regard, adopting the same belief and mindset.
14. The **mindset** of taking refuge with Allāh against the things which you fear at present and which are to occur in the future.
15. The **mindset** of repelling a real fear is given precedence over repelling a presumed fear¹⁸.
16. The **mindset** of repelling the fear is given precedence over attaining security and safety because security and safety are either conditionally or necessarily contingent on the repelling of fear.

¹⁷ The ability to repel a harm and then attain its benefit (i.e., new insight, experience, moral, function, etc.) is of the greatest tawfīq. When you have this mindset you will never surrender regardless of what challenges you face. You as an individual, or a family or a community will rise up to the challenge, raising your standards in the process. Why? Because you are certain that every harm can be repelled. And in the odd occasion where you can't repel it, you surely can capitalize on it!

This mindset leaves no room for defeatism. "Allāh burdens not a person beyond his scope" (2:286) can never be an excuse for inaction or a justification for hopelessness, apathy and lethargy.

Defeatism is a dangerous attitude. It takes away your objectivity and composure. It leaves you unable to respond to events in an effective manner. It robs you of the perseverance you need to succeed. You give up at the first sign of trouble. Thus the very harm you fear becomes a reality. Defeatism is a subconscious campaign of self-sabotage to ensure we never triumph. It is the antithesis of tawfīq.

¹⁸ Fear comes in many shades. Some are real whilst others supposed. Some are present whilst others are absent or yet to pass. Precedence is given to the fears that are real over those that are supposed, to the present over a fear that is absent.

The command to take refuge against shayṭān was given precedence over any other harm in the contexts of recitation and prayer because the harm of shayṭān in these two acts of worship is real and recurrent i.e., it is the single most frequent harm.

17. The **mindset** of attaining a real security is given precedence over attaining a presumed security¹⁹.
18. The **mindset** of identifying the root cause of the harm or fear and identifying how to counter it²⁰.
19. The **mindset** of identifying the most dangerous of the harms or fears and identifying how to counter it²¹.
20. The **belief** and **mindset** that for every disease and illness there is a cure (except death). Therefore, one does their utmost to find their cures. In this context shayṭān is the disease and the cure is al-isti'āzah.
21. The **mindset** of optimism even if we are in the midst of a relentless, violent danger²².
22. The **mindset** of identifying where our deeds are susceptible to the attacks of shayṭān, and strategizing accordingly against him.

¹⁹ Many leaders are deceived by the false promise of a deferred security by their enemies. The security that is tangible and immediate is given precedence over the security that is impalpable and delayed.

²⁰ Identifying the root cause(s) of harms and fears is necessary in order to completely repel the harm or fear. It is possible that the root cause may be petty or minor whilst its symptoms and consequences are enormous. A comprehensive solution cannot be presented except by taking into consideration the root cause.

And simply identifying the cause is not the mindset. But in identifying how to reduce and neutralize it, and even counter it, is the mindset!

²¹ This mindset is different from the previous mindset. The harm that is mutually most imminent and serious must be repelled first even if that requires a delay in addressing the root cause. For example, let us assume a man is intent on harming another individual. In this case, the ḥasad (envy) over the individual may be the root cause, however, the consequence of that ḥasad is the imminent physical harm of that individual after 'Aṣr today. Here, the most dangerous harm is the physical harm of that individual because of its immediacy and seriousness.

²² Shayṭān is the most dangerous enemy to the son of Ādam. Despite this there is hope and means against him. If there is hope and means against the most lethal of adversaries then it is more befitting for there to be hope and means against lesser foes.

23. The **mindset** of including in our strategies the overcoming of genuine obstacles and challenges whether apparent or subtle²³.
24. The **mindset** that purification precedes beautification (At-Takhliyah qabl at-tahliyah). Thus removing impurities and negatives first before beautifying oneself and others.
25. The **mindset** of taking refuge with Allāh against any and every harm²⁴.
26. The **mindset** that the protection of man against shayṭān or any other harm may not suffice with only a correct creed of them. He may have to supplement that with the appropriately legislated and principled means²⁵.
27. The **mindset** that the tongue is a limb of nobility. Guidance, reward and protection are contingent on it²⁶.
28. The **mindset** that every plot of all the shayāṭīn is weak. Their entire assembly of plots are feeble when confronted by a few words of Allāh²⁷.
29. A few words of Allāh suffice against false and foul²⁸ speech. It completely destroys them.

²³ This includes taking into consideration jinn, evil eye, siḥr and illnesses, informants, traitors and hypocrites, financial instability, poor time management and lack of resolve, etc.

²⁴ Taking refuge is general ('ām) and unrestricted (muṭlaq) because harm can come from where and when and by whom we know not. The isti'āzah is inclusive of all types of shayāṭīn and is not restricted to time or place.

²⁵ For instance, the belief that shayṭān can harm and that Allāh can protect against that harm may not be enough. A person will have to carry out other legislated actions in order to achieve that protection like actually uttering and saying the isti'āzah prior to reciting the Qur'ān. Therefore, īmān and yaqīn are not enough. Tawakkul is not complete without the 'something more' *i.e. means* that are commanded in the Waḥy.

^{26,26} The testimony of faith, adhkār (words of remembrance), recitation of the Qur'ān, etc. are actions of the tongue due to which Allāh –jalla dhikruhu– forgives and becomes pleased and rewards.

²⁷ If this is the result of a few words, then what will be the outcome of His entire Speech?

30. A few words of Allāh are intrinsically and forever powerful. The effectiveness of these words corresponds to the strength of your bond with Allāh.
31. Creating a bond with Allāh is easy and simple. It requires no more than a few words²⁹.
32. The bond with Allāh –subḥānahu– is forged by:
- a. a pure heart, and
 - b. the implementation and establishment of His Wahy.

والحمد لله رب العالمين
وصلى الله وسلم على نبينا محمد

²⁸ An example of foul speech is siḥr.

²⁹ Sins are forgiven, bonds are established, and rewards are awarded by the utterance of a few words. Consider the testimony of faith. It reinstates Allāh's Pleasure and Love after His Anger. It earns His Forgiveness thus completely obliterating a man's past transgressions and then replaces them with its share in good deeds. The isti'āzah, for example, is only a few words. It, however, is sufficient to pierce the heavens, invoking Allāh Al-Qawiyy Al-'Azīz as your refuge.