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# Purification of Nafs

## Lesson 5

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I had discontinued posting these weekly lessons in the end of December 2004 for a lack of feedback from the readers. I was not sure if this work was serving the purpose it was meant for - to provide education.

In the past six months, I have received a number of requests to continue these lessons.

So, with faith in Allah (ﷻ), I am re-commencing these lessons. I will continue with the 'Purification of Nafs' series; however, new lessons will not be posted weekly, but as and when they are ready.

I invite the readers to continue to give me their feedback and feel free to ask questions if something is not clear.

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In the second last lesson in this series, I had explained the two basic components of Nafs – in Freudian terminology ID and EGOTISM.

I had also mentioned that these two components need to be strictly disciplined, failing which one would suffer from personality, character, emotional, and social-psychological disorders.

Beginning with this lesson, Insha-Allah, we will continue to explore how an undisciplined and uncontrolled nafs gives rise to different disorders.

It is important that you follow these lessons in proper order to maintain continuity and progressive understanding of the topic.

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Look at the following verses from the holy Qur'an

وَمَا أُبْرِئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

And I free not myself (from blame). Verily the Nafs is inclined to evil except when my Lord bestows mercy. Verily my Lord is most Forgiving and Merciful (12:53)

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا ه فَالْهَمَّهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا ه قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا ه وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا ه

By the Nafs, and the proportion and order given to it; And its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right; Truly he succeeds that purifies it; And he fails that corrupts it. (91:7-10)

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The first verse is from Surah Yusuf. When Zulaikha, attempted to seduce Yusuf (عليه السلام), Allah (سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَبِحَمْدِهِ) protected him from becoming involved with her. And, Yusuf (عليه السلام) admitted that he could not claim to be totally free of blame, because even his Nafs had become inclined towards her.

The noteworthy thing here is that even the most pious, and none could be more pious and God-fearing than the prophets, are not free from the baser desires and temptations of the Nafs.

It always does and would continue to demand its own way, it likes and dislikes, and to be free of all restrictions, responsibilities, and accountability.

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The second set of verses are from Surah As-Shams, wherein Allah (ﷻ) has informed us that the nafs does possess the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. But, that it needs to be purified in order to live a successful life here and in the hereafter. Allowing its wrong side to rule would lead to failure in both lives.

These verses from the holy Qur'an in themselves are sufficient to understand how an undisciplined and uncontrolled nafs would lead to many character, personality, socio-psychological and emotional disorders.

Let's look at some symptoms of various disorders mentioned in the DSM IV.

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## Diagnostic criteria for 301.7 Antisocial Personality Disorder

A. There is a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others occurring since age 15 years, as indicated by three (or more) of the following:

(1) failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest

(2) deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure

(3) impulsivity or failure to plan ahead

(4) irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults

(5) reckless disregard for safety of self or others

(6) consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial obligations

(7) lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another

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## Diagnostic criteria for 301.50 Histrionic Personality Disorder

A pervasive pattern of excessive emotionality and attention seeking, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

- (1) is uncomfortable in situations in which he or she is not the center of attention
  - (2) interaction with others is often characterized by inappropriate sexually seductive or provocative behavior
  - (3) displays rapidly shifting and shallow expression of emotions
  - (4) consistently uses physical appearance to draw attention to self
  - (5) has a style of speech that is excessively impressionistic and lacking in detail
  - (6) shows self-dramatization, theatricality, and exaggerated expression of emotion
  - (7) is suggestible, i.e., easily influenced by others or circumstances
  - (8) considers relationships to be more intimate than they actually are
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## Diagnostic criteria for 301.81 Narcissistic Personality Disorder

A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

- (1) has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)
- (2) is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love
- (3) believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
- (4) requires excessive admiration
- (5) has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
- (6) is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
- (7) lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
- (8) is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her
- (9) shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes

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Personality Disorders are not generally diagnosed until a person has reached late teens, but the seeds of these disorders are sown from childhood.

These disorders, therefore, may also be called Character Disorders as they necessarily reflect character deficiencies which gradually develop since the childhood.

In Freudian terminology, if an effective Superego does not develop, a person would end up with these character disorders.

From an Islamic perspective, if the nafs is not disciplined and controlled, the same types of character disorders are likely to develop.

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If you recall the two components of nafs from Lesson #2 of this series, you will notice the striking similarities between them and the symptoms of these disorders listed in DSM IV.

Read the symptoms listed under the DSM IV criteria for the three personality disorders, then read the baser nature of the nafs in Lesson #2, can you see how an undisciplined and unrestricted nafs could lead to those symptoms?

Insha-Allah, in the next lesson, we will look at the contribution of this baser nafs in socio-psychological and interpersonal problems – parent-child relationship, marital relationships, friendships, etc.

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