**RETURNING EVIL WITH GOOD**



3.104. There must be among you a community calling to good, and enjoining and actively promoting what is right, and forbidding and trying to prevent evil (in appropriate ways). They are those who are the prosperous.(1)

43:36

43.36. Whoever willfully ignores the remembrance of the All-Merciful (and lives as if He did not exist always watching him), We assign to him a devil, who becomes his closest comrade.(2)

41:35

41.35. And none are ever enabled to attain to it (such great virtue) save those who are patient (in adversities and against the temptations of their souls and Satan), and none are ever enabled to attain to it save those who have a great part in human perfections and virtues.(3)

41:35

41.36. And if a prompting from Satan should stir in you (when carrying out your mission or during worship or in your daily life), seek refuge in God immediately. He is the One Who is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.(4)

**HADITH**

106. Abu Said al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, say, ‘Whoever of you sees something wrong should change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart, and that is the weakest form of belief.’” (Sahih Muslim, Iman, 78).(5)

110. Abu Said al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Beware of sitting in the roadways.” They said, “O Messenger of Allah. we must have places where we can sit and talk together.” The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “If you must sit there, then give the roadway its rights.” They asked, “What are the rights of the roadway, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “Lowering the eye, refraining from causing annoyance, returning the greeting, commanding the right and forbidding the wrong.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Mazalim, 22; Sahih Muslim, Libas 114).(6)

**RETURNING EVIL WITH GOOD**

Wickedness is weak, even when it seems to be victori- ous. In fact wickedness cannot escape the destiny of its ultimate destruction. Goodness, honesty, and righteousness are the conquerors of the heart, and they are powerful in and of themselves. When good and evil truly come head to head with one another, there are very few people who will not respect good and despise evil. This clearly demonstrates that goodness and evil cannot be one.

It is goodness to forgive a wrong. But  to  return  evil  with good on top of forgiveness is to win over the heart of the one who was against you.

And none are ever enabled to attain it (such great virtue) save those who are patient (in adversities and against the temptations of their souls and Satan), and none are ever enabled to attain it save those who have a great part in human perfections and vir- tues. And if a prompting from Satan should stir in you (when carrying out your mission or during worship or in your daily life), seek refuge in God immediately. He is the One Who is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. (Fussilat 41:35–36)

In terms of the struggle between good and evil, Satan is griev- ously disappointed when believers respond to evil with good. For he wants the believers to do something wrong, even some small reaction, so that he can use it to create doubts in the believers. In fact, if the believers show even the tiniest bit of excess in their re- sponse to those who attack them, some might say that “they were influenced by Satan’s whispers.” This will cause the believers to lose a large part of their power. By reacting they cast a small shad- ow over their righteousness, even if they were completely in the right, and those who see this shadow will have, to some extent, an excuse. The following hadith provides a very useful commentary on the verse above:

One day a man came up to Abu Bakr and began to heap in- sults on him. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, was also there. As the man insulted him, Abu Bakr listened but gave no reply. The Prophet was smiling. Finally Abu Bakr could no longer stand it and gave a harsh retort. The Prophet’s countenance changed and he left. Abu Bakr followed him out to ask him why he left. He answered, “When you were quiet, there was an angel answering on your behalf. But when you opened your mouth, Satan showed up. I cannot stay in the same place as Satan.”23

In relation to this issue of repelling falsehood with truth and responding with what is the best in conduct, the Qur’an says,

(But whatever they may say or do,) repel the evil (done to you and committed against your mission) with the best  (of what you can do). We know best all that they falsely attribute to Us. And say, “My Lord! I seek refuge in You from the promptings and provocations of the satans (of the jinn and humankind especially in my relations with people, while I am performing my mission). I seek refuge in You, my Lord, lest they be present with me.” (Mu’minun 23:96–98)

Just as one must refuse to heed slights and wrongs, it is also important to respond to wrongs with the best possible positive action.

Adopt the way of forbearance and tolerance, and enjoin what is good and right, and withdraw from the ignorant ones (do not care what they say and do). And if a  prompting  from Satan should cause you hurt (as you carry out your mission or during worship or in your everyday life), seek refuge in God. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (A’raf 7:199–200)

A believer is commanded to take refuge in God when  they hear any whispers from within themselves that urge them to take an  action  that  is  against  God’s  commands  and  which  will  not please God. In every situation when a person is subject to such whispers regarding the essentials of faith, worship, prohibitions, or how to treat people— in short, any aspect of life—they must turn to God and seek His protection. On the surface, the verse above seems to be addressed to the Prophet, but it is in fact intended for all people.

Those who keep from disobedience to God in  reverence  for Him and piety: when a suggestion from Satan touches them— they are alert and remember God, and then they have clear dis- cernment. Whereas their brothers (the brothers of the satans in the form of human beings)—satans draw them deeper into error and do not relax in their efforts. (A’raf 7:201–202)

Those who refrain from setting themselves against God never feel completely secure that they will do no wrong. Satan also tries to influence them. He can cloud their vision and they are poten- tially susceptible to the images and ideas he puts in their heads. But before long they will perceive the  truth,  remembering  that they must seek refuge in God; their understanding will become clear and thus they will be saved from doing wrong.

Consider the promise of reward announced by our Prophet for the person who avoids an argument, even if they are in the right: “For the person who avoids an argument, even when they are in the right, I guarantee a mansion in the corner of Heaven. And for the one who never lies, even in jest, there is a mansion in the center of Heaven. And for the person of good morals, I guar- antee a mansion at the highest level of Heaven.”24 (7)

# How Should We React to the Evil Thoughts and Desires Whispered by Satan?

Involuntary evil thoughts, fancies, or associations of ideas usually are the result of Satan’s interference. Just as a battery has two poles, there are two central points to our hearts. These two poles work like the two poles of a battery; one receives angelic inspirations, while the other is susceptible to the suggestions of Satan.

Satan attacks those believers who are trying to increase their belief and devotion. If such believers are scrupulous and sincere in their feelings, then Satan attacks them from all directions. When dealing with disbelievers, who follow Satan voluntarily in the indulgences of their whims and desires, he whispers to them strange and abnormal ideas. In this way, he encourages their disbelief and learns new ways to struggle against the true religion and to waylay all believers.

**Satan attacks us from all directions:**

When Satan was cursed by God for his disobedience, Satan asked for respite until the Day of Judgment, also desiring permission to try to lead human beings astray in the meantime. God granted this request, and Satan then replied: Then I shall come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right and from their left, and you will not find most of them grateful (7:17).

Satan does everything he can to mislead us. As God manifests all of His Names on us in this testing world, we are very complex beings. We have been sent here to be trained and developed into a mirror of God, and in this way to earn eternal happiness. In order to do this, we must train and develop all of our God-given feelings, skills, and abilities. If we do not bring all of these under control (e.g., our intellect, temper, greed, obstinacy, and lust) nor direct them towards lofty goals, but rather allow these feelings to be abused for disagreeable purposes, our present and future life will endangered. This is also true if we do not bring our natural animal desires under control by satisfying them in ways acceptable to God.

Approaching us from our left, Satan employs our animal instincts and faculties to tempt us into sin. When he approaches us from the front, he drives us to despair over the future, he whispers that the Day of Judgment will never come, that whatever religions say about the Hereafter is no more than mere fiction, and that religion belongs to the past and therefore is irrelevant to our present and future. When he comes upon us from behind, he tries to make us deny the Prophethood, the existence of God and His Unity, the Divine Scriptures, angels, and other fundamental matters of belief. Through such whispers and suggestions, Satan tries to sever our connections with religion and steer us toward sin.

Satan cannot use these means to seduce believers who are devout and believing. Rather, he approaches such believers from the right side and encourages them to be ostentatious and proud, to take pride in their virtues and their good deeds. He whispers to them that they are the best of believers, until feelings of conceit and desire for praise take over in the person. When such a point is reached, these believers begin their journey on the road to perdition. For example, if a believer prays the superrogatory prayer at night and then boasts that he/she has done so in the hopes that others will praise him/her, or if a believer begins to take credit for his/her accomplishments and good deeds while criticizing others behind their backs, then such a person has fallen under the influence of Satan. We must do our best to resist Satan when he comes upon us from this direction.

Another of Satan’s ruses is to make trivial things seem important and vice versa. If believers dispute with each other over trivial matters (e.g., using prayer beads when glorifying God after the daily prescribed prayers), ignoring the fact that their children are being dragged along the road of disbelief and materialism, or that their children are drowning in the swamp of immorality, this is an indication that Satan has successfully seduced them.

**Satan suggests disagreeable thoughts and desires:**

When Satan fails to seduce devout believers he then whispers disagreeable thoughts and desires to them. For example, through the association of ideas, he pushes believers toward developing negative concepts of the Divine Being or of contemplating disbelief or disobedience. When a believer dwells on such thoughts, Satan then will pester he/she until doubt springs up about his/her beliefs or until he/ she despairs of living a virtuous life.

Another ruse Satan employs is to cause good, devout believers to suspect the correctness or validity of their religious acts. For example a believer may ask him/herself: Did I pray correctly? Did I wash my face and hands thoroughly while making my wudu’? Have I washed the correct parts of my body the correct number of times? Believers who are pestered by such involuntary thoughts, whims, and doubts should know that their hearts play no role in these questions. Just like thieves who attempt to rob the wealthy and strong countries that try to control resource-rich countries, so Satan makes a last-ditch attempt to seduce believers by troubling their hearts.

We can compare such an attack to a person who has high temperature. We know that the antibodies that are formed in the blood of an ill person inhibit or destroy harmful bacteria or germs. This is what causes the temperature of the body to rise. Similarly, a heart troubled by Satan’s evil suggestions defends itself by struggling against them. Thus, it is not the heart that generates such thoughts, nor does the heart approve of these thoughts, nor adopt them. A reflection of something unclean is not itself unclean, and it cannot make others unclean. In the same way, thinking about disbelief is not the same thing as actual disbelief.

We might even say that Satan’s evil suggestions are actually of benefit to believers, for they cause us to remain alert, to struggle against our carnal selves and against Satan, and to progress toward ever-higher spiritual ranks.

**How to Keep Free of Satanic Suggestions**

In fact, the guile of Satan is not great (4:76). It is like a cobweb that appears in your path—it cannot prevent you from progressing, and you should not attach any great importance to it. Satan only suggests or whispers, he dresses up sinful acts as something desirable, presenting them in cheap, shiny paper. Believers must never accept his invitation. When Satan resorts to whispering, we should realize that he is using his least powerful weapon and ignore him. If we pay attention to these distractions, we may be defeated. Like a commander whose fear causes him to hallucinate and dispatch his soldiers to the front, leaving the flanks exposed, believers who listen to Satan weaken their ability to resist not only him, but their carnal selves. In the end, these are the believers who are defeated.

Believers who want to avoid this trap should distance themselves from sins, all of which Satan tries to make attractive. Heedlessness and the neglect of one’s worship open the way to Satan’s “arrows”: If anyone withdraws himself (or herself) from remembrance of the All-Merciful, We assign unto him (or her) a devil as a comrade (43:36).

In order to protect ourselves from Satan’s attacks we should remember the All-Merciful, think about holy and blessed events, and try to live a pious life. If you hear Satan whispering to you, then seek refuge in God. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. Those who fear God and ward off (evil) when a passing notion from Satan troubles them, they remember, and behold, they see (7:200–1).

The Messenger advised: “If you become angry while standing, sit down; if you are sitting, lie down or stand up and make wudu’.” Once while returning from a military expedition, the Prophet called for a halt in a certain place. His companions were so tired that they slept through the dawn prayer. When everyone awoke, the Prophet said that they should leave immediately, for “Satan rules here”. The Prophet also said that Satan flees when the call to prayer is heard.

Satan also uses indecent thoughts and events to lead believers astray. He torments us by enticing us with illicit pleasures. On such occasions, we must remind ourselves that indulging in any such pleasure will engender remorse and may endanger both our present and future lives. We must never forget that life in this world is no more than a passing toy, a comforting illusion, and that the real or true life is that of the Hereafter. When some Companions hesitated to take part in the summer expedition to Tabuk because of the scorching heat, God warned them: The heat of Hell is much more intense, if they would but understand (9:81).

When Satan whispers evil thoughts, believers should realize that he is at his weakest and that he can be ignored. Dwelling on such thoughts only exaggerates and aggravates our weakness and susceptibilities. We also must avoid being careless and be sure that we do not neglect any aspect of our worship; such oversights attract the attention of Satan. If we remember the All-Merciful, focus on holy and blessed events and live a pious life, then will we be able to resist Satan’s call. **(8)**

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