

Sources of waswaas and will the Muslim be punished for it?

I'd like to know if there is a way to distinguish the waswasa that is coming from the shaytan, and the waswasa coming from the nafs, and can we know which is coming out of which? And if it is coming out of the nafs, are we going to be punished even if we reject it?.

Praise be to Allaah.

Firstly:

The waswaas which people experience is not all of the same type or degree, either in terms of the type of sickness or in terms of its source and effect.

The kind of waswaas which tempts a person to listen to or look at haraam things or to commit immoral actions, and makes such things appear attractive to him, comes from three sources: the nafs or self which is inclined to evil (cf. Yoosuf 12:53), the devils among the jinn, and the devils among mankind.

Allaah says, describing the first source, which is the nafs (interpretation of the meaning):

“ And indeed We have created man, and We know what his ownself whispers to him. And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein (by Our Knowledge) ”

[Qaaf 50:16]

Allaah says, describing the second source, which is the devils among the jinn (interpretation of the meaning):

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“ Then Shaytaan (Satan) whispered to him, saying: ‘ O Adam! Shall I lead you to the Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that will never waste away ’ ”

[Ta-Ha 20:120]

And Allaah says, describing the third source, which is the devils among mankind (interpretation of the meaning):

“ Say: I seek refuge with (Allaah) the Lord of mankind,

2. The King of mankind —
3. The Ilaah (God) of mankind,
4. From the evil of the whisperer (devil who whispers evil in the hearts of men) who withdraws (from his whispering in one ’ s heart after one remembers Allaah).
5. Who whispers in the breasts of mankind.
6. Of jinn and men ”

[al-Naas 114:1-6]

So these waswaas may come from the jinn or from the sons of Adam (human beings).

See question no. [59931](#)

What happens to a Muslim regarding his wudoo ’ and prayer, where he does not know how many times he washed during wudoo ’ or how many rak ’ ahs he did in prayer, comes from the Shaytaan. If he seeks refuge with Allaah from the Shaytaan, Allaah will suffice him against him. But if he gives in to him and responds to the waswaas, the Shaytaan will gain power

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over him, and that waswaas will become a chronic problem. This is what is called al-waswaas al-qahri (overwhelming waswaas). This kind of waswaas – as

one of those who are specialized in this field said – “ is a sickness which befalls some people like any other kind of sickness. It refers to repeated thoughts, movements, ideas or notions which are of a loathsome nature that a

person would ordinarily reject and strive to resist. He also realizes that they are wrong and have no meaning, but there is something that is pushing

him towards them and he usually fails to resist them. The strength of these waswaas may vary, so much so that they appear – to non-specialists – to be

very strong and it seems that the sick person is doing that willingly. This kind of waswaas may also affect a person in his worship and in his worldly affairs. ”

The waswaas of the Shaytaan may be dispelled by seeking refuge with Allaah.

The waswaas that comes from one ' s own self may also be dispelled by seeking refuge with Allaah, and by strengthening the connection

between a person and his Lord by doing acts of worship and obedience and by giving up evil things.

As for al-waswaas al-qahri (overwhelming waswaas), it is a kind of sickness as stated above.

The difference between the waswaas that comes from the Shaytaan and the waswaas that comes from the nafs is subtle, as was quoted

by Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) from some of

the scholars. He said:

Abu Haazim made a

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comparison between the waswasah caused by the nafs and that caused by the

Shaytaan, and said: Whatever your nafs hates for your nafs is from the Shaytaan, so seek refuge with Allaah from it. And whatever your nafs likes for your nafs is from your nafs so forbid it to it.

Majmoo' al-Fataawa, 17/529, 530

i.e., the nafs usually whispers concerning things which are connected to its whims and desires, which people usually like.

Some of the scholars pointed out another important difference, which is that the waswas that comes from the Shaytaan makes sin

appear attractive until the Muslim falls into it; if the Shaytaan is unable to achieve that, he moves on to another sin, and if that does not work he moves on to a third, and so on. He does not care about making the Muslim fall into a particular sin, rather what he cares about is making the Muslim disobey his Lord, and it is all the same to him whether he makes him do something that is forbidden or omit something that is obligatory, for all of it is sin and disobedience. As for the waswas that comes from the nafs, it is what urges the person to commit a specific sin and repeatedly seeks to make him do it.

The Muslim will not be punished for the waswas that comes from the Shaytaan or from his own nafs, so long as he does not speak of it or act upon it. But he is commanded to resist it, and if he neglects to resist it and goes along with it, then he will be punished for that neglect.

He is commanded not to pay any attention to the waswas of the Shaytaan, and to proceed on the basis of the smaller number (of rak'ahs)

in prayer if he is not sure how many he has done. He is commanded to seek

refuge from the Shaytaan and spit drily to his left three times if the waswas of the Shaytaan comes to him whilst he is praying. He is

commanded

to keep company with good people and avoid bad people. Whoever is negligent

with regard to any of these matters will fall into the traps of his nafs which is inclined to evil, or will respond to the devils among the jinn and mankind, in which case he will be punished.

As for overwhelming waswaas, it is a kind of sickness – as mentioned above – so the Muslim will not be harmed by it and Allaah will not

punish him for it, because it is beyond his control. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“ Allaah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him ”

[al-Talaaq 65:7]

“ So keep your duty to Allaah and fear Him as much as you can ”

[al-Taghaabun 64:16]

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “ Allaah will forgive my ummah for whatever crosses their minds so long as they do not speak of it or act upon it. ” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 4968; Muslim, 127

The one who is tested with this kind of waswaas must always read Qur ' aan and recite the dhikrs prescribed in sharee ' ah, morning and evening. He must strengthen his faith by doing acts of worship and shunning evil. He must occupy himself in seeking knowledge, for although the Shaytaan may gain power over a worshipper, he cannot gain power over one who has knowledge.

The Shaytaan may come and whisper evil things to a Muslim about Allaah, or His Messenger, or His sharee'ah, things that the Muslim hates and does not approve of. The fact that he resists these waswaas and hates them is a sign of the soundness of his faith. So he should strive to control his nafs (jihād al-nafs) and not respond to the one who calls him to evil.

Ibn Katheer (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

The phrase: “ and whether you disclose what is in your own selves or conceal it, Allaah will call you to account for it ” [al-Baqarah 2:284 – interpretation of the meaning] means that even if He brings you to account and questions you, He will not punish you except for that which a

person is able to ward off. As for that which he cannot ward off, such as the waswaas of the nafs, no one is accountable for that, and hating evil waswasah is part of faith.

Tafseer Ibn Katheer, 1/343

Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azeez ibn Baaz (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked:

Waswaas and ideas may cross a person's mind, especially to do with Tawheed and faith; will the Muslim be punished for that?

He replied:

It is narrated in al-Saheehayn and elsewhere that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “ Allaah will forgive my ummah for whatever crosses their minds so long as they do not speak of it or act upon it. ” Agreed upon. And it is narrated that the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about the kinds of waswaas and thoughts referred to in the question crossing their minds. He (peace

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and blessings of Allaah be upon him) replied: “ That is a clear sign of faith. ” Narrated by Muslim. And he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “ The people will keep on wondering until it is said, ‘ This was created by Allaah, but who created Allaah? ’ Whoever experiences any of that, let him say, ‘ Aamantu Billaahi wa rusulihi (I believe in Allaah and His Messengers). ’ ” Agreed upon. According to another report: “ Let him seek refuge with Allaah and stop it. ” Narrated by Muslim in his Saheeh.

Tuhfatal-Ikhwaan bi Ajwibah Muhimmah tata ' allaq bi Arkaan al-Islam (question no. 10).

In the answer to question no. [62839](#) you will find important information on waswasah and the remedy for it.

In the answer to question no. [25778](#) we have described the remedy for one who is worried about waswaas and passing thoughts.

See the answer to question no. [12315](#) for important advice.

And Allaah knows best.