

Core Curriculum

2 Foundations of Islam - Theology

2.9 **The Islamic Concept of the Nafs: Battling the Human Ego**

In this lesson, we discuss the part of the nafs that commands to evil which is otherwise known as nafs al-ammārah in Arabic. According to Islam, the inner dimension of person is divided into two camps, the first is the spiritual self - commonly known as the fitrah - and the lower or base self which commands us to evil, commonly known as the nafs. The nafs that commands to evil is the realm that produces delusion and attachment to mental illusions. It is the center of our unruly desires, base thoughts and heedlessness.

The nafs is the prime target of Shaytān who whispers in the human self and tries to compel it to do evil. The way one protects himself of herself from Shaytān is developing self-control, that is, controlling the nafs.

So there is a battle between the fitrah and the nafs. Whichever side wins the battle depends on which one we feed the most. If we read Qur'an, abstain from sins, associate with good people, our fitrah will become stronger. If we continually submit to our wrong desires, associate with bad people, sin etc. then we are making the evil nafs stronger. In short, whichever side wins depends on our habits.