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## Automatic Negative Thoughts ANT and the role of Satan

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***Abstract:** In this paper the aim is to analyse the concept of automatic negative thoughts from the perspective of satan whispers in Islam. Satan whispers are called waswasa in the Quran referring to the repeating silent whispers that satan blows into the minds of all humans, in order to misguide them.*

*This paper analyses how the psychological perspective of automatic negative thoughts (ANTs) coincides with the Islamic notion of waswasas. This is done from three standpoints. The **first** section details the conceptual framework for satan whispers according to Islam. Rest of the sections are analysed from the lens of section one. This section will further be divided into five subparts. These are the Islamic explanation of Satan with respect to his 1) essence 2) his works 3) his motivations 4) human necessity for protection and 5) treatment.*

*Section **two** provides the scientific understanding of ANTs with respect to their 1) nature 2) etiology and 3) effects. Section **three** focuses on the kinds of ANTs that have been widely accepted and studied in psychology. For this three frameworks were adopted; firstly Daniel Amens explanation, Steven Philipsons theory on intrusive thoughts and lastly the position Positive Psychology tends to hold with respect to ANTs and what kinds exist. While detailing the kinds of ANTs from each framework, the paper will simultaneously analyse how these approaches overlap or stand against our original conceptual framework of Islam. Finally the **last** section is about treatment of ANTs in the psychological field and their comparison with the Islamic framework.*

*Hypothesis: that ANTs are the result of intentional thought processes of satan, rather than random associations in the brain.*

*Keywords: Negative Thoughts, ANT, role of Satan*

## **Section 2: Conceptual Framework: Islamic perspective on Satan**

The conceptual framework through which we will understand the independent agent responsible for generating automatic negative thoughts in humans (i.e. Satan) will be that of Islam. We will look into how Islam explains Iblees i.e. Satan with respect to his essence, his works, his motivations as well as the dire human need of protection against his influence.

### **2.1 His Essence: Who is Satan?**

#### **I. Open Enemy**

Allah very directly informs mankind in Quran that (2:168) “O people! Eat of the lawful and pure things in the earth and follow not in the footsteps of Satan. **For surely he is your open enemy**” Some scholars believe one of the wisdom behind sending Adam and Eve to live in a Garden before entering Earth was to introduce mankind to its greatest enemy and to familiarize him with the ways in which he can attack them: whispers of deception and false promises.

His first attack was on the first humans Adam and Eve, which the Quran mentions briefly in chapter 7 verse 19-20 when Allah addressed them saying:

*“(7:19) Oh Adam! Live you and your spouse in the Garden and both of you eat from it wherever you will, but never approach the tree or you shall become wrongdoers.”(7:20) But Satan made an evil suggestion to both of them that he might reveal to them their shame that had remained hidden from them. He said: ‘Your Lord has forbidden you to approach this tree only to prevent you from becoming angels or immortals. (7:21) And he swore to them both: ‘Surely I am your sincere adviser. (7:22) Thus Satan brought about their fall by deceit. And when they tasted of the tree, their shame became visible to them, and both began to cover themselves with leaves from the Garden. Then their Lord called out to them: ‘Did I not forbid you from that tree, and did I not warn you that Satan ‘is your declared enemy?’”*

**Reflection:**

From this one narration in the Quran we can understand Satan much better. We see that he first gave them an “evil suggestion” – something this paper will go in great lengths about in coming chapters. The purpose of this suggestion was to “reveal to them their shame”. The second thing we discover here is the motive this enemy brings. He wants to make our shame visible to others. He wants to bring out those inner aspects of ourselves, whose exhibition we know will cause us to feel shame. Today when we think about “satanic acts” or “satanic industries” the first thing that pops in ones mind is the shameless industries of porn and promiscuity. No doubt removing people, or stripping people off of their shame is Satans favourite act. The bizzare thing is, people are openly obeying such norms and trends. They know the taboos that come attached to promiscuous behaviours, however it seems some parts of the world have accepted this open enemy’s wishes, very openly. Even though these same people at one point in time saw these same behaviours as repulsive or disgusting.

This shame had “remained hidden from” adam and Eve, therefore the work of satan is to bring out the hidden evils from within us. Islam tells us that every human is born with the ability of evil. According to modern epigenetics children are born with the risky as well as resilient genes of their parents (Scanberg, 2018). However whether the gene imprint in an infant will express itself depends on its interaction with the environment. This current day finding is what we witness in our forefathers’ story. Even though Adam and Eve knew very clearly that eating from the tree will make them wrongdoers, they were still swindled by Satans evil suggestion. Satan was in their environment and interaction with him caused them to sin, which revealed to them their shame. Similarly Satan lures mankind today towards situations that we despite being aware of the risks, put ourselves in, only to let the worst of our inner selves be revealed. When satan OPENLY suggests people to take the so-called easy routes of drugs, alchohol, gambling, meaningless sex, atheism etc, I cant help but wonder about two things.

Firstly, that it is such environmental settings that bring out the worst in us. One of the reasons why scholars suggest that alchohol is forbidden in

Islam is because it makes it easy for those inner evils of ours to manifest that we try so hard to keep hidden or dormant. Islam is a religion that guides us into living in ways that prevent our evils from gaining power to emerge and let our inner light shine. Imam Ghazali explains in his book “patience and thankfulness” the concept of religious impulse versus the desire impulse. Man is in a constant spiritual battle between the two impulses that fight within ourselves. By listening to Satan we feed the desire impulse and by following the guidance of God we strengthen the religious impulse.

Secondly, this satanic plot is in direct contrast to what most believers go through. The most honorable and devoted believers of Allah have gone through the harshest of tests in their lifetimes ranging from Prophets, to their companions and even to the believers of today. On the face of it, such believers go through hard times, however such times are what bring out the hidden good in these people. For such testing times Allah says in Surah Imran that **“these are (only) vicissitudes which We cause to follow on another for mankind, to the end that Allah may know those who believe and may choose witnesses from among you”** (Quran ch3:v140). This phenomena has also been identified by Positive Psychology and discussed at great length under the topic of “Signature Strengths”. Strengths are defined as those moral traits that humans exhibit with **conscious volition** and thus are not the same as talents, which are not related to morality and can be innate. Strengths can be built on frail foundations unlike talent, and this is what Islam wants us to endeavor towards. Examples of some strengths are valor, kindness, integrity and originality. The interesting point of focus is the finding that a person's strengths are usually lying dormant until he faces a challenging situation, which then enables him to make use of his “hidden good” and bring the strength to light.

Thus, Satan compels us into easy looking and fun settings only to bring out our inner “moral weaknesses” (aka hidden evils) where as Allah puts us willingly into challenging situations so our “moral strengths” can be rooted out. Satan is our open enemy who aims to unearth our closed weaknesses, only so we can be punished for them.

## 2. Deceitful

When Satan first went to Adam, he tried to convince him of a reality that none of them were aware of. Satan lied to him about why Allah has prohibited the eating of a tree. He said “Your Lord has forbidden you to approach this tree only to prevent you from becoming angels or immortals.” (Quran 7:20). Even to this day, we do not know why Allah prescribed that particular tree. Some speculate that it was merely a test for Adams obedience or a prepping ground for Adam to the Satan’s methods of lying and deceit. Allah knows best. However “...ascrib[ing] to Allah the things concerning which you have no knowledge” (Quran 2:I69) is one of Satans favourite traps to lead us in and this is what he has been doing since time of Adam. Even today Satan brings people to their fall by false promises and deceit. He makes people see a future or reality that is not true, convinces them into shameless acts until it becomes too difficult for such people to come out of such situations.

### **3. (In)sincere Advisor**

The satan not only tempts us with false ideas, he also promises us that he is our well-wisher. Surah Araaf records his deceit to Adam as (7:21) “And he swore to them both: 'Surely I am your sincere adviser.” Unfortunately on the Day of Judgment, this very friend upon whom most mankind relies, will abandon his followers. He will tell them that he could only whisper to them his machinations, but adhering to them was well within their own hands. Allah records his response in very precise details as in surah Ibrahim as:

*“(14:22) After the matter has been finally decided Satan will say: "Surely whatever Allah promised you was true; as for me, I went back on the promise I made to you. I had no power over you except that I called you to my way and you responded to me. So, do not blame me but blame yourselves. Here, neither I can come to your rescue, nor can you come to mine. I disavow your former act of associating me in the past with Allah. A grievous chastisement inevitably lies ahead for such wrong-doers.”*

Sometimes we tend to conjure up explanations and rationalizations in order to justify our disobedient acts. After reading the above verse, one is compelled to think whether his reasons are actually self initiated logical reasons or just “sincere advices from his false friend”? Are they the

suggestions designed to hurt your afterlife after all? Perhaps further research in religion or psychology can focus on this.

**Reflection:**

This verse uncovers some more traits of satan. Firstly he is one to break promises as he will openly say on the Day of Judgement that “, *I went back on the promise I made to you*” – however at that time it will be too late for any human to do anything with this information. Thus Allah informs us **now** of what to expect of this friend that we will label “insincere” later on.

Secondly, he “calls us” to his ways. That is all he does. And then it is we ourselves who respond to his calls. Are we sheep that just respond to any call made at us or do we owe it to our brains to use it once in a while to make intelligent decisions?

Thirdly, he will not blame himself, but blame **us** on that Day. Therefore, any person or entity that deludes you that they can take your blame on the Day, is nothing more than an insincere advisor. Do we also act in this satanic behavior of blaming others? If you get a fraudulent call requesting your pin and card number so they can transfer reward money to you for something you never applied for; would you go forward with it or just block the number? Or would you listen, respond and think about taking that advice every time the caller calls? If you do take the advice on the 30<sup>th</sup> call, did you act wisely? If not, then why do we not do the same with satan and block his constant calls?

Lastly this verse also tells us how Satan hides the truth from us today. He will tell people on Judgement Day that “*A grievous chastisement inevitably lies ahead for such wrong-doers.*” But on earth he lets people think that any of their heedless actions can go unaccounted. YOLO (you only live once). There will be no consequences for the little things you do to feed your desires. This is the reality he wishes you to believe, and unfortunately this is the belief that some people are blindly following today. That is: following their desires because nothing awaits for such wrong doers. Not only this, as discussed before, satan also wants us to remain oblivious of the hidden good we bring with ourselves as well. He just wants to acquaint us to the dormant evils we carry in ourselves. Hence he will never want you to embark on a journey that can get you the greatest of the rewards in this life and the next.

## **2.2 Work of Satan: How he works/attacks**

### **I. Whispers**

The way in which Satan suggests us his evil ideas is through whispering. It is these whispers to which modern psychologists refer to as negative thoughts, therefore in this paper the consistent, recurring and influencing whispers of Satan will be labeled as Satanic Whispers as Thoughts (SWATs). Every human experiences the SWATs, however with the help of Quranic protection, a believer can protect himself from being influenced by them.

The concept of whispering holds a rather negative connotation in the Islamic tradition. Whispering can be defined as that which lies between staying silent and speaking something out loud. The act of whispering is discouraged because Allah is All-Knowing. Mostly people find themselves whispering when engaging in sins like back-biting, gossiping or disparaging someone, which is why this action is reflected negatively through the Islamic lens on human behaviour (Larsson, 2012).

Another aspect attached to whispers is the devil i.e. Satan. Whispering is his fundamental tool for reaching humans and coercing them into doing what he wants them to do i.e. acts of disobedience to God. “Whispering” is to be seen as a part of Satan’s overall verbal approach to humans’ (Rippin 2006, in Larsson, 2012). It was Satan who whispered false ideas to Adam and Even and caused them to eat from the forbidden tree. According to Quranic and Hadith literature it becomes clear that satan is nothing more than an evil whisperer, whose main aim is to instill evil thoughts into mankind’s heart and then lead them away from God.

#### **What does he whisper?**

Now the natural question becomes that what do the whispers of our open arch enemy entail? What do they want us to do or think? For this, God tells us in the Quran that **“(2:169) he only commands you to do evil and commit acts of indecency and to ascribe to Allah the things concerning which you have no knowledge”**

#### **Reflection on the ayah:**

Is it not true that we tend to worry and do actions because of things we have no knowledge of? Atheists strictly adhere to the belief that there is no God, when science (their God), never rejected Gods existence, instead it pointed more towards the oneness of an absolute creator. Even among the religious people, they commonly hold beliefs and wishes to their own liking and ascribe them to God. For instance, it is very common for believers to think that they will be absolved from hellfire only on account of their belief. This however again is something they have no knowledge of. Contrary to this the Quran mentions belief coupled with good deeds as a prerequisite for a chance of salvation.

Three things this ayah informs us that satan commands us towards. Firstly to do evil. This is self explanatory as it involves all those actions that God has prohibited such as killing, raping or stealing.

Then secondly satan commands us towards indecent acts. Since the aim of all these acts is to eventually plummet man down the deep pit of shamelessness in the form of adultery or fornication, he wont whisper to us the ultimate bad deed initially. You will not find a criminal who lived a righteous life all along and then one fine day he decided to rape a child. There are a series of related and less intense acts that such people regularly indulge in. its like Satan keeps convincing them to have a little more until the limit of evil that a man once had becomes so far away that he barely sees it. its like building tolerance towards indecent acts. There is a reason why porn industry is the biggest and most harmful industries, yet at the same time we find countless irrational and inhumane arguments IN FAVOUR of not only porn but even practices like prostitution. A simple Google search on legalization of prostitution can get you many results.

Further more, the third direction that satan makes you take is ascribing things to Allah without knowledge. This is indeed the worst kind of sin man can commit. Mostly this is done out of arrogance as one is not humble enough to accept his fault or defeat. Since time we have seen civilizations rationalizing atrocities in the name of religion and God, when in reality, they had nothing to do with it. The most recent and relevant example from todays time is the terrorism done under the banner of Islam. These terrorists are the classic example of Satan followers, who were led into



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believing lies and ignoring countless prohibitions directly by Allah and His Messenger (pbuh) against such atrocities.

Then when man has already fallen pray to the satans traps, then what can he do? He can surely repent to God and mend his ways, however unfortunately he does something else. He rationalizes his irrational behavior that Allah refers to in the following verse:

**“(2:170) And when they are told: “Follow what Allah has revealed,” they say: “No, we shall follow what we found our forefathers adhering to.” What! Even if their forefathers were devoid of understanding and right guidance?”**

### **Reflection on the ayah:**

There are a lot of points worth paying attention to in this one ayah (170). Firstly Allah is informing us that when man is asked to follow Allah i.e to Obey Him, man refuses out rightly. This was the instinctual reaction of Iblees when Prophet Adam was first created. Allah ordered all of them to bow down to him, as a gesture to humble themselves to mankind's superiority, however Iblees immediately rejected to do so.

Secondly, Allah informs us of the reason man uses to immediately reject the truth, which is the tendency to follow what he found his forefathers adhering to. This is also part of human nature to easily succumb to status quo, not question social norms no matter how ridiculous they may seem as well as the human tendency to highly revere their ancestral practices. Although such a sheep-like behavior we today can rule as irrational or even outrageous, however it is not something that is still not practiced today. For instance, the tortures of women in the name of witchcraft in 16 century, punishing the victims of child abuse rather than the priest, labelling homosexuals as abnormal (and now normal) or killing people based on their religious identification, are all examples of actions that today we can judge with confidence as barbaric, insane or completely “out of line”. However in the time these acts were committed, such punishments or beliefs were rather normal and even recommended. And this is what Allah is asking us at the end of this ayah when we put forth to Him, silly reasons like social proof or family rules, that “what? Even if you're society or ancestors were devoid of reason and any guidance/morality, you would still be following them?” What

convinced man to follow such an erroneous path if it was not for his own arrogance (a key characteristic of satan) or naiveness to satans attack?

My question to you is that are you sure that the values you hold through your parents and society are actually the right and truthful values? Would 50 years later your wrongs be considered rights?

### **Comparing the Divine Revelation and Auditory Methodology for SWAT**

The word of God was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) orally. The literal meaning of Arabic word Quran is “reading” or “reciting”. Therefore there is no surprise that Muslim or even non-Muslim experts have highlighted the significance of the oral aspect of Quran. Even in the mandatory five daily prayers, Muslims are required to “recite” memorized verses from the Quran. Larsson (2012) explains, through a study on sounds, the positive impact of revelation on mankind as well as the negative impact of the contrary sound of satan (Larsson, 2012). This brilliant research makes it clear that indeed Islam is a religion that encourages us, through sound of revelation, to openly speak the truth without fear. While on the other hand, the whispers of satan, lure us towards falsehood and a life of delusions and cowardice. Even satans method of beguiling mankind towards darkness is in paradoxical opposition to the method Allah chose for guiding them to the light. Revelation is loud, clear and direct while the SWATs are whispers – that lie in the midst of being silent or speaking aloud. The metaphor/parable is remarkably on point since in Islam engaging in the in-between (whispers) is discouraged because they aid in sins like gossiping, plotting or backbiting.

Fortunately for mankind in general, their Creator sent down the last revelation and miracle also in the form of a recited book; Quran. Its verses are the shield that we need to aid against the SWATs. The words of Allah protect us from the damaging whispers of our greatest enemy. This seems to be the ideal way of protecting oneself from straying into Satan’s traps, however humans can and have devised several other methods<sup>1</sup>, which also include speech, in order to counter SWATs. The Prophet of Islam (pbuh) never discouraged humans from progressing and innovating in treatment strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> Discussed in section 5 on treatment.

### **2.3 Why He does what he does? Reasons and Aims**

Those who have studied the history of satan are aware that the major reason for satan to be our open enemy till the end of time began at the inception of the first human; Prophet Adam. Allah endowed Adam with the gift of knowledge and articulation as well as of free will, and as a result he ordered all other creation, including the angels to bow down to humankind in servitude. Everyone obeyed except Iblees. He was the one who got jealous and refused. When Allah questioned his reasons, the argument Iblees gave was rooted in arrogance as he claimed to be higher in stature than a creation made of clay, when he himself was made of fire. Ofcourse this argument was faulty as he was consciously ignoring all the other traits and capacities that God gave man that actually made them more worthier than djinns (satans original specie). However even satans behavior from before our onset shows that when somebody commits arrogantly to a decision, no matter how disobedient or illogical it is, they can provide all kinds of arguments and proofs to sustain their choice. Something psychologists refer to as “raitonalisation” today that people do to justify their illogical behaviours.

We also have terms like “cognitive dissonance” which is defined as an uncanny feeling humans experience when there is a conflict between their belief and actions. Because of this dissonance they are motivated to either change their beliefs or rationalize their actions. I would argue that this dissonance is one of the qualities that God bestowed man with, which made him superior to all other creations. It is because of this dissonance that man keeps changing his faulty beliefs or adhering to good actions. It is a sign of what we label today as “conscience” or “morality”. However, unfortunately, today satan has also managed to distort this system of ours when we see people using false arguments to justify their wrong actions, and feel less guilt. Any system can be disrupted or hacked, and for us falsehood does the trick. Man has been given this system, now whether he uses his conscience and becomes good or quiets it down with faulty beliefs, is in his hands. It is this choice to choose to be good or bad is what puts humanity on such a high and risky pedestal.

Thus Iblees was a jinn (not an angel), who had been raised to the ranks of angels because of his devout worship. However inside, he was cultivating seeds of arrogance, which is one of the cardinal sins in the sight of

Allah. The creation of man and Gods command to serve him, brought out his inner brewing sense of superiority, which unfortunately turned into out right disobedience, to not just any creation, but to God Himself.

### **Man vs Satan**

Further more, we see in our history that Adam and Eve were first placed in a kind of paradise, where they also made the mistake of believing satans words. However, unlike Iblees, when God pointed out to them their mistake, they were immediately remorseful and turned back to God in repentance. Iblees on the other hand argued with God, blamed God for his disobedience and then also challenged God that he would misguide man to hell, that too if God gave him respite till the day of judgement.

For both, God accepted their pleas. Adam and Eve were granted forgiveness while satan was granted life till the end of time so he could complete his challenge. Thus it is since then that satan is on a mission to misguide all mankind towards hell, just so he can prove to God that man is not worthy of paradise or Gods forgiveness. In conclusion, we know the reason for satans animosity towards us is simply jealousy, while the aim he conjures for us is absolute damnation in hell with him.

## **2.4 Protection from Satan**

### **Need for Protection from SWATs**

Prophet Adam was the first man to be made, and it is since then that satan has committed himself into hating and misguiding humans away from God and into the path of destruction<sup>2</sup>. It needs to be pointed out here that Iblees has been out against humans since their inception. He still exists today thanks to the respite granted to him as mentioned in the Quran as:

**(7:I4-I5) "Satan replied: 'Give me respite till the Day they shall be raised.' Allah said: 'You are granted respite.'"**

Therefore he is not oblivious of the best methods of attacking you. He is probably better versed in your own personal psychology than any human alive. This, I expect, is because of his existence since the dawn of time coupled with the intense resolve to lead mankind astray. With an enemy as old, knowledgeable and dedicated as Iblees, it is nothing less than imperative

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<sup>2</sup> Section 2.3 discusses further why that is the case.

for humans to protect themselves from him. This is because his attacks are not just geared to cause us harm in this world, but instead his main purpose is to lead us into hellfire, which is an eternal abode. Thus Iblees is actually **the most** dangerous enemy to us.

### **Satan's Trick on You**

Biggest trick satan has pulled on the nihilistic mankind, is that he convinced them of his non-existence. This move is evidence of how intelligent this negative being is. On one hand, Allah has warned humanity clearly in the Quran that 'do not take satan as your friend, he is your OPEN ENEMY'- where God is informing us that he is not just any, but an OPEN enemy to each and every one of you. No matter how nice or non-conflicting person you are, know that you will always have one very open enemy and that is satan. While on the other hand satan made you disbelieve in not just his intentions but his existence overall.

how fortunate it would be for an enemy, to make himself invisible to his enemies eyes? But our enemy went a step further, he also convinced you that he does not exist. How can now a person or nation, prepare against someone who they don't even acknowledge as real? That is the ultimate position of vulnerability one can put himself in, against his open arch-enemy. Not just any small enemy. This enemy is out to destroy your eternal life. The same life, that God wants you to have in a blissful manner. The satan can promise and provide you with worldly riches and fulfil your desires, as we know all this is possible through illicit means, but what do you get in return for these temporary satisfactions? Eternal damnation! Is this really a bargain a rational man would make?

The worst kind of a human relationship is the one that is based on hypocrisy. Where one side considers the other a friend, and the "friend" actually intends to deceive the innocent party for his personal gains. In some cases, they also harm the other party. Such people are never looked at with a positive attitude. Spies do this professionally but people engage in hypocrisy all the time. Allah warns us that do not take him as a friend, instead he is your enemy. Even at an international level, people who show more loyalty to another state than ones own are considered "guilty of treason" and then

punished with death. Why? Because they showed to be the states friend but in essence they acted otherwise.

### Section 3: Scientific Explanation for Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs).

#### 3.1 Nature

It is important here to make clear what this paper means by automatic negative thoughts. These are all those kinds of thoughts that are self-defeating, intrusive and distorted. Before going forward it is important to discuss the basic understanding of negative thoughts in clinical psychology. Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS) become troublesome when they are given undue attention and they affect the subject. The common terms used for such thoughts are “Negative Automatic Thoughts” (coined by cognitive psychologist, Aaron Beck), “intrusive thoughts”, “Repetitive Negative Thinking” (RNT) or “Automatic Negative Thoughts” – this paper will be using the latter name in general, and more specifically will refer to the acronym ANTs, coined by famous psychiatrist and brain disorder specialist, Daniel Amen.

The term ANTs according to Amen depicts precisely how these thoughts work. In an ant infestation, one ant is subsequently followed by a huge wave of ants, which then becomes so big that anti-infestation sprays are required for their clearance. Similarly, the mental ANTs work the same way. If one self-defeating thought occurs in your mind, and you let it go unchallenged, or worse off, you believe it, then the same thought will keep coming back and in a matter of time be followed by a cluster of ANTs. Once the more dangerous ANTs have infested your brain, you cant easily get rid of them unless you seek professional help. And you will need help because such infestations can lead to a plethora of mental illnesses out of which depression, suicide ideation, OCD and anxiety are the most common. The five most salient features of ANTs are that they are:

- I. **Automatic:** such thoughts are recurring and automatic. They emerge on their own and keep coming back in the persons mind. Sometimes these thoughts are completely baseless and sometimes they are the constant replay of a

negative event, or comment, which leads one into ruminating over this disproportionately.

2. **Negative:** as mentioned above, such thoughts tend to cause feelings of hurt and discomfort to the person. Therefore it becomes important to deal with them.

3. **Lies:** one thing that all therapists advise their patients is to not take everything they think or feel as true, because some thoughts lie to us. This is why questioning them or not believing them is an important part of treatment programs. Section four explains in detail the kinds of lying thoughts one may have.

4. **Harmful:** ANTS can also become harmful to other people when they become increasingly intrusive. The three most common themes of intrusive thoughts are about violence, sex and religion. By believing such constant thoughts one is susceptible to various kinds of harmful illnesses such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

5. **Common:** According to the American Psychological Association (APA), having faulty and inaccurate thoughts is a “normal psychological process that can occur in all people to a greater or lesser extent.” Therefore it’s not a condition like depression or anxiety that strikes only some people. Everyone experiences such thoughts, however, its hold and impact on the person can vary. Research further tells us that even nonclinical individuals experience instructive thoughts that are similar to the ones that clinical individuals experience. Therefore, it is safe to deduce that all humans are subject to the intrusion of negative thoughts.

### **3.2 Etiology**

Where do ANTs generate from is something that science is rather silent on. The brain region responsible for generating such vicious and significant thoughts is yet to be discovered, and thus treated. Some thoughts are the constant replaying of something the subject heard, however the source of thoughts that have no association with the environment is yet to be identified.

Psychologists like Steven Philipson assert that these thoughts function similarly to commands of a computer. For example, when we press “x”, this action fires a command to the computer, because of which we see the letter “x” typed on the screen. Just like this the negative thoughts are also commands that are launched at our brain, which then “we” must decide to either accept or reject. Philipson calls them “creative associations” and assumes the neural firing of negative thoughts is “independently generated”. I believe these thoughts are definitely not the result of random neuron generation out of thin air, they are fired by our greatest enemy; Satan. He is the one sitting behind the CPU of our brain and firing these self-defeating commands. Unlike the computer, we humans have the ability to reject these commands by building firewalls against the attacks in the first place.

Psychology may have helped humanity in effectively rejecting the effect of these negative thoughts, however, its still a fledgling when it comes to helping us build firewalls against it. Islam teaches us how to do exactly that, which is discussed in the treatment section.

### 3.3 Effects of ANTs: What is their end goal?

There is a ton of data out there to explore the harmful impacts ANTs can have on ones mental wellbeing. One of the basic consequences of ANTs is that it leads to what Aaron Beck calls “cognitive distortions”. These are the result of negative thoughts forming a larger pattern. The American Psychological Association defines cognitive distortion as the “faulty or inaccurate thinking, perception, or belief.” Mostly cognitive distortions hijack the cognitive triad, in which one holds negative and untrue beliefs about oneself, the world and the future.

Some most common consequences of automatic negative thoughts manifest in the form of:

#### I. Depression:

There is enough data that confirms the strong association between ANTs and depression (Glashouwer and de Jong, in press). In fact studies suggest that people who engage in prolonged ANTS, such as in rumination,



they are more likely to get depressed (Law & Tucker, 2018). On the contrary, It is surprising to see that APA defines cognitive distortions as a 'normal psychological process' that occurs in different extents in people, where as its common correlates are clinical disorders like depression, OCD, chronic pain, anxiety and suicide ideation.

Recent research has demonstrated that people with repetitive intrusive thoughts are at a greater risk of developing depression and anxiety. APA tells us that every human is susceptible to such thoughts. The problem is which person will ruminate over these thoughts and let them impact his mood for the worse and which humans have a stronger skin against such self defeating constant thoughts? A recent study conducted in Oman identified ANTs as the direct cause of depression among students (Aldahadha & Sulaiman, 2012). Despite such horrible impacts of these thoughts, psychologists still have not launched a definitive mechanism for protection against them, but rather a curative approach of welcoming these thoughts and then taking action to curb their impact. Along with this, no human is safe from the negative thoughts, which are also repetitive, intrusive and self-defeating.

Previous research "could find no support for the view that dysphoria (depression) mediates an increase in intrusive cognitions." (Parkinson & Rachman, 1986, p. 118). I believe that it is not depression that mediates these thoughts, it's an independent agent called Satan. Making the human species function below their expected performance is something Satan is very much aiming for, and therefore the very reason for us to counter his wishes.

## **2. Anxiety:**

Studies depict a strong correlation between anxiety and ANTs (Glashouwer et al., 2010; Paloş & Vişcu, 2014). We know that people under stressful situations are likely to have five times more intrusive thoughts than those in normal situations (Parkinson & Rachman, 1986). The mediating factors are unclear, however the correlation exists.

The relationship between anxiety and ANTs seems two fold. Not only do ANTs lead to anxiety as its most common outcome, but they are also increased when a person feels anxiety. Based on these findings some researchers suggest that exercises such as relaxation and meditation that reduce anxiety can also reduce intrusive thoughts.

### 3. Suicidal ideation/ suicide.

The riskiest outcome of entertaining ANTs is suicide ideation, risk and eventually attempt. One of the expected outcome of ANTs is leading to the creation of negative self beliefs, which then lead to suicide risk (Becker and Grilo 2007, Cox et al. 2004) and ideation (Evans et al. 2004; De Man and Gutiérrez 2002; Glashouwer et al., 2010).

According to Islam, performing suicide leads to eternal damnation in hell. As mentioned above, this is the ultimate goal that satan has for all of us. Therefore it comes as no surprise to discover that ANTs about the self are strongly related to suicide ideation and suicide attempts (Glashouwer et al., 2010). Satan knows very well how and where to strike an individual such that it causes him to take his own God given life.

However not all ANTs are directed towards creating a negative self-image in a person, in fact some serve other harmful purposes, such as doing something bizarre or horrific. The study by Glashouwer (2010) found that indeed ANTs are able to predict spontaneous and unexpected behavior, such as self-harm.

#### **Section 4: Understanding ANTS: what types of ANTs does psychology recognise?**

##### **Understanding ANTs**

ANTs have been defined as those negative thoughts that rob us of our joy and steal our happiness. Speaking from an evolutionary perspective, such thoughts hold no such developmental value for the human species, yet the more we develop as a species the more we become caught up in these ANTs. This section will go through three understandings of ANTs within the field of psychology. Firstly, the ANTs described by Daniel Amen will be discussed, followed by the most common types of ANTs explained by Steven Phillipson, and then finally the ANTs in positive psychology.

##### **4.1. Daniel Amen: ANTS**

Some ANTs were labelled as “Red Ants” by Daniel Amen because they are particularly more harmful and dangerous, and require more caution against.

**ANT #1: All or Nothing:** This is when we think something is either all good or all bad and there is no grey in between. Such ANTs will show up in the form of words like “never”, “always” “every time” “every one” etc. It is true that there are very few absolute established facts in this world that we are 100% sure of, therefore whenever we find ourselves “absolutely sure” of something (that’s especially hurtful), we must learn to recognise it as an ANT. In other words, as the satans whisper. He is the ANT who wants to make you believe that your spouse NEVER cares for you, and once we *believe* this ‘all or nothing ant’ then we *act* on it, which leads to further problems in our relationships, health, peace etc. Doctor Amen explains this with college tests in which we are not supposed to choose answers that suggest that “the result is ALWAYS abc if xyz happens” because nothing is really absolute. For example “he is always yelling at me” or when your favourite player strikes out, he becomes “the worst player ever”.

**ANT #2: All Bad (Red Ant):** This whisper is the one in which satan makes you focus solely on the negative. We can find ourselves escalating that one negative event and excluding all the positives. “In order to keep your mind healthy it is very important to focus on the good parts of your life more than you do the bad parts” (Amen, 2015, p114). An example of this is comparing one kid who is very happy with one piece of cake with a kid who is very upset and angry because he has a full cake with one slice missing. The second kid is victim of the all-bad ants.

Another way all bad ants/whispers can raid your mind is that you keep replaying a very negative event in your head, and then experiencing the same emotion over and over again. One person may have said a mean comment to you ONCE. That person hurt you ONCE, while you hurt yourself SEVERAL times by allowing the all-bad whispers to keep playing in loop. This is also one of the patterns that cause people to remain traumatized with something negative that once happened in their lives.

Thus, as psychologists and Islam both suggest, it is imperative to question these whispers. As research and Islam both inform us that these thoughts are not always true, therefore questioning them and not letting them distort our perceptions and behaviours becomes a significant duty we owe to

our selves. Clinical psychologist Steven Phillipson advises that mostly these absurd thoughts are actually the opposite of who we are as a person. However their occurrence makes us question ourselves and then see ourselves as very horrible people.

**ANT #3: Mind Reading (Red Ant):** This is when the ANTs make you believe that you know what someone else is thinking, despite their not having told you anything. A very common practice we observe in collectivist cultures, where most relationships fall apart only because someone “mind reads” the other and then acts accordingly.

Please bear in mind the emphasis on 1) believing the thought and then 2) acting on it. Having an ANT is not the major issue. From Islamic perspective, its not even yours; its an attack from your arch enemy. Thus there are no moral implications to having an ANT. But problems arise when we believe the whisper, and then we act on it. Believing will make us either think in a self harming way or it will make us act in a way that effects our relationship with the environment negatively. So next time “you think” you know why your partner made that face last night, ask yourself “since when am I a mind reader?” especially if you know that acting on that thought will lead to chaos.

**ANT #4: Fortune Telling (Red Ant):** This whisper of the ANT makes you predict the worst possible outcome to a situation. The first negative setback puts you in a downward spiral of hopelessness and the strong belief that everything will go wrong. For example you trip on your way to the exam and hurt your knee, then you get late and now you think that even your exam will go bad, even though you have ample time and good preparation.

**ANT#5: Thinking with your feelings:** these whispers begin with phrases like “ I feel”. For example “I feel like I’m a failure” or “I feel you don’t love me”. Such thoughts are only based on feelings for which there is no evidence.

In todays era people are increasingly being encouraged to trust their feelings, however cognitive psychologists and psychiatrists like dr. Amen all advice us that feelings can be complex and “they sometimes lie to you” (Amen, 2015,

p.115). The same advice is from major religions that repeatedly suggest us to not fall pray to the whispers of Satan as well as our desires. Following your desires, or “feelings” is what can detract one from the right path of wisdom and morality, into a path of foolishness and disobedience to God.

**ANT #6: Guilt Beatings:** these thoughts are characterised by the use of words such as “should” “must” “ought”. For example “ I should help my mother” – the use of such words make even good deeds seem like a duty. As humans when an action feels like a “I must do it”, we tend to not want to do it. Thus, a good advice by Amen is to replace the “I should” “I Must” with “ I want to”. This is an effective strategy for countering the false guilt such whispers can arise in us. Guilt is not a helpful emotion. Since guilt can coerce us into doing things, when we attach guilt to inherently good deeds like speaking the truth, we end up avoiding them. This seems like a very clever trick of satan to keep people from doing good.

This ANT is particularly interesting to me because it is distinct from all other ANTs in the way that while other ANTs ask us to do something negative, this ANT actually orders us to do something good, but in a way that makes us dislike and discontinue it.

**ANT #7: Labelling:** these whispers label someone or you as something negative. By labelling someone we are doing two things. firstly, we prevent ourselves from clearly gauging the situation. For example, if a person thinks all engineers are boring, he would probably not accept any date with an engineer as he has labelled them as boring. This sole label can prevent him from meeting a life long friend or partner. Secondly, as per dr. Amen, by labelling others we lump them into a pool of all the other people across our life, with the same label. This action will then make it difficult to see the person/self/world in a reasonable way. For example by labelling all homosexuals as bad Muslims we are placing any homosexual with murderers, rapists or thieves. We must stay away from negative labels for others as well as ourselves.

This advice has been asserted several times in the Quran as well. Allah says in Surah Hujuraat “And do not taunt one another, nor revile one another by **labels**. It is an evil thing to gain notoriety for ungodliness after belief.

Those who do not repent are indeed the wrong-doers” (Quraan, ch49; v11). Therefore we see that for such a doing, not only is God holding you accountable, He is also attaching repentance on the act of labeling others.

**ANT #8: Blaming** (Red Ant): Amen warns us of this ANT to be the most dangerous one. This is when the ANTs make you think your problem was someone else’s fault, and as a result, you end up blaming others for your problems. If one believes these whispers, they will find themselves saying things like “it wasn’t my fault” “how could I have known?” etc. The biggest problem with blaming others is that it renders one powerless to change anything. It gives the control of ones fate to another being. Since the only thing we can change and have control over is our actions, and ourselves by blaming others for our failures, we are prepping ourselves to live life as a reaction to the environment rather than an intended action.

Studies have also shown that people who refrain from blaming others tend to be more successful than those who blame the environment for their problems (Mali, 2013)

**Adding more ANTs to the list based on conceptual framework..**

**SAW #9: Ostentation:** for this the Prophet (pbuh) said “that it is more inconspicuous than the creeping of ants” (Abdul-Rahman & Parrott, 2019). It could be labeled as THE most dangerous kind of SWAT or ANT that we could experience as it gives Satan direct control over our dark side. Identification of such a SWAT can be when one is content with his current state thinking that he is a good individual. This is because “being a truly good person is never possible without strong, active and sustained effort” (Abdul-Rahman & Parrott, 2019, p. 5) Example of such ANTs can be “I am better than them”.

**SAW #10: Pride ANTs:** such ANTs are those thoughts that turn into high beliefs about ourselves. Whispers like “I know I am right” “I don’t need to care what others think”. Sometimes being sure of the self is important for confidence, however when it becomes too over done, then it can lead a person into feeling arrogance and insensitivity to others. Such thoughts make you feel so highly of yourself in terms of looks, knowledge, skill etc that you end

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up crediting nobody but your ownself for your qualities. The effect of believing such thoughts can lead to:

- Overestimating ones own abilities
- Arrogance and insensitivity towards others
- Intolerance towards the truth
- Indifference – as humility becomes lower.

The pride ANT can become totally destructive if one starts thinking highly of oneself especially in the matters of deen (religion). Since the basic premise of religion is humility and submission, aiding a self-boasting image of the self with respect to ones religion can only lead to destruction. We are also informed of this ANT quite explicitly when Quran explains the arrogance of Iblees against Adam. Therefore, it is no surprise to see that pride and arrogance are considered major sins in most world religions.

An example of such SWATs that we see daily are through people sharing posts on social media platforms like “you know you are right” “if they don’t support you, you don’t need them” etc. Such programing has led many people to adopt extreme behaviours towards the people who care about them. Clinical psychologist, Jordan Peterson, stresses in his book and talks that make ‘friends with people who want the best for you’, (Peterson, 2018) which also includes not supporting you in your bad decisions. However such SWATs are making people increasingly less tolerant towards each other. People are more willing to cut off ties with such friends and family, and form more stronger bonds with those friends who support them in every way, shape or form, whether harmful or not. Such extreme reactions are only expected as cutting off ties with fellow beings, especially believers, is considered a heinous thing in the eyes of Allah. On the other hand, keeping ties with people is something so loved by Allah that He promises longer life to those who make effort to improve their relationship bonds. So it comes as no supprise why satan would want someone to tread on this path.

**SAW #11: Happiness trap:** such thoughts are characterized by words like “as long as I am happy”. These thoughts justify any action as long as it 1) does not hurt anyone and 2) makes you happy. Besides not being outwardly

hurtful to someone, any action that makes one happy stands eligible to be carried out.

Since satan has already convinced most people that this life is the only life thus empirical evidence is the only evidence, hence people find it unnecessary to pay attention to how they may be hurting others and themselves spiritually, morally or religiously. All this is because these dimensions are not currently observable by science. At the same time, such whispers fool these people into taking something intangible in essence, like happiness, as also the criteria for action. What a paradox.

This is also a dangerous ANT because not only can it compromise ones eternal salvation, it can and has led to the widespread acceptance of self-harm. Countries like Belgium allow citizens to euthanize themselves if they find themselves unhappy with their lives. Recently a young American woman willfully poured drain cleaner in her eyes to get blind, with the help of a “sympathetic” psychologist and repeatedly claimed that she was happy with her decision as the justification (Adams, 2023).

Running after desires is one of the favourite things satan could want from us. while having control over our desires is considered the biggest struggle in the way of God. The best way to do this is by knowing why something is right and wrong. “The Prophet (pbuh) said, “The one who wages *jihad* is he who wages *jihad* against himself.” ‘Umar ibn Abdul Aziz said, “The best *jihad* is the *jihad* against desires.” And Sufyan al-Thawri said, “The most courageous of people are the strictest in controlling their desires.” The most important fight in this world is not against other people, but against our own desires and the devils who manipulate them.” (Abdul-Rahman & Parrott, 2019, p. 7).

**SAW #12: Foolish Trap:** Ascribing to God that which you have no knowledge of. The biggest sin man can commit is that of “shirk” which means associating partners with the one true God. As we saw in section two, that God clearly warns us of Satan’s machinations: “he only commands you to do evil and commit acts of indecency and to ascribe to Allah the things concerning which you have no knowledge” (Quran 2:169). Thus Satan ‘commands’ you as an automatic negative thought to ascribe to Allah anything that you have no source for or no authority for. This can be in the form of believing false ideas about a God, or even about believing God



forgives, loves or hates certain things when there is no evidence of it in scriptures. For e.g. some people engage in extreme kinds of fasts or complete celibacy, in the name of pleasing God. However, God has not ordained such a thing. Even doing this is ascribing something to what God likes or not. Therefore, we must be careful in what we are associating with Allah, whether desirable or undesirable to us.

#### **4.2. Steven Phillipson: Intrusive Thoughts**

According to the OCD expert Steven Phillipson, the three most common intrusive thoughts that people have are disturbing thoughts about:

**1. Violence:** For e.g. a very peace-loving father can one day have a thought that tells him to choke his two year old daughter and drown her in the bath tub. Of course, such a thought can be very disturbing for someone who loves his daughter. However, the major problem occurs when the subject believes these thoughts to be their own and correct. This acceptance causes them emotional distress, which later translates into mental illnesses like OCD.

**2. Sex:** a taboo topic that is also highly condemned by God in major world religions. Thus it is no surprise that inappropriate sexual thoughts are most common among people. Dr. Phillipson explains that thoughts about pedophilia are also very common, which makes sense as the more heinous the act, the more desirable it is for Satan. Some people might start believing themselves to be pedophiles, homosexuals, rapists or even incestuous just because of the frequent occurrence of such thoughts. Once a person realizes that these thoughts are not their own and definitely not reflective of their personality, as Dr. Phillipson also urges, then one can find it easy to cancel or ignore such thoughts from taking over.

Further, the impact can be greater in dealing with such thoughts when a person also realizes that these thoughts are actually designed by their biggest enemy with the sole purpose of destroying his soul. This realization can motivate one to dismiss it and take action against it as well.

**3. Religion:** such intrusive thoughts commonly involve thinking blasphemous things. Luckily, for us, God has relieved mankind from being questioned on their thoughts. Thus whatever thought a person gets, he will only be held accountable if he acts on it. If a person gets an evil thought, and he does not go forth to perform that act, then that person will actually be rewarded from

God in the afterlife as he did not let satan sway his actions.

#### 4.3. Positive Psychology (PP): Thinking Traps

Thinking traps (TT) are defined as the overly rigid ways of thinking that we can carry to any situation. Their presence in a difficult situation can hinder our problem solving and ability to bounce back (resilience). Therefore TT can really get in the way of ones well-being and resilience. PP teaches us that mostly it is not the event that causes us distress, but rather our “thoughts” about the situation that transform the subsequent emotions into something positive or negative.

There are five kinds of thinking traps.

1. **Mind Reading:** This is similar to the mind reading ANT, in this two things can happen. One might be assuming he knows exactly what the other is thinking, or he expects the other person to know exactly what he is thinking. Therefore, expecting to know anothers mind, or for them to know what goes on in your mind is a TT. As soon as you see yourself falling into it, one must jujitsu himself out of it. This kind of TT will block communication as one is sure he knows the other persons thoughts, leading to further miscommunication.

2. **Me Trap:** This is when one blames him/herself entirely for all problems and negative events. E.g. I am not smart enough. The blame on the self is not partly, but solely and disproportionate. This causes the person to feel more guilt and sadness. Over indulgence in the Me Trap can cause one to over experience negative emotions compared to the positive emotions.

3. **Them-Trap:** This is the flip side of ME trap, in which others are labeled as the sole cause of any set backs. This kind of TT strips the person of any sense of control over the environment. This can result to the person feeling more anger and helpless than others.

4. **Catastrophising:** As the name suggests, this TT involves ruminating on the worst-case outcomes of a situation, which are usually irrational. One over estimates the threat and underestimates the resources he has to cope with the event. For example: “I failed in math, thus I will never be able to become a math teacher”. This is similar to the Fortune Telling ANT, with more focus on the negative and self defeating aspect of the fortune.

5. **Helplessness:** This TT involves holding a ‘global’ view on a specific

issue rather than 'local'. This is when you think the negative event that happened affects all areas of your life. Then this is not only global, but also "stable" implying that it will remain like this forever. For example "I had a fight with my husband so I will never be a good wife, hence I'm also a bad mother, sister, daughter. Nobody would ever like to have me." The effect of this TT is lack of energy and passivity. One finds himself being withdrawn and gives up easily.

### **Section 5: Treatment of ANTs**

#### **5.1 Islamic Perspective on treating ANTs**

##### **5.1.1 Interpretation of Islamic treatment of ANTs**

The two commonly memorized and recited surahs of the Quran are its last two chapters labeled "Al-Falaq" (The Daybreak) and "Al-Naas" (The people). They were specifically revealed for the purpose of protection against attacks of SWATs. (discussed below). In this section we will narrow down the ways of protection against SWATs only through these two surah's (chapters).

##### *Surah Falaq And Naas*

The verses of these two surah's are designed to protect humans from SWATs in two ways. Surah Falaq focuses on the external harms that satanic activity can have on an individual. These are also the kinds of harms that one has no control over. For example the surah involves seeking Allah's protection against the evils of 1) all created things 2) of the night 3) of those who plan in secret against us and 4) of the jealous person. Satan can attack us by provoking other situations and human agents against us as well, and therefore, in order to protect oneself from that kind of unseen harm, Allah gave us surah Falaq.

Surah Nas is directed more towards the internal harm SWATs can have on us. Thus these verses help us seek God's protection from the attack of Satan on our hearts and then, on our belief. Losing one's *iman* (belief) is the biggest loss for a believer, and that is why scholars suggest that in three out of the six verses, we only call out to our Creator in this surah. Some scholars have described the human dependency on these surah's for protection as more binding than the dependency we have on food, water and air for survival. Deprivation of the latter can only lead to physical harm and eventually death,

but lack of spiritual protection can lead to eternal loss, that is of iman leading to damnation in hell.

### 5.1.2 Nature of SWAT according to Surah Nas

In order to understand the nature of SWATs let us analyse Surah Nas

Interpretation:

#### Surah Naas

(114:1) Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind

(114:2) the King of mankind

(114:3) the True God of mankind

(114:4) from the mischief of the whispering, elusive prompter who returns again and again

(114:5) who whispers in the hearts of people;

(114:6) whether he be from the jinn or humans."<sup>3</sup>

The verse of interest for us here is number four.

*(114:4) Minn sharil waswasil khannas.*

**Translation: "from the mischief of the whispering, elusive prompter who returns again and again"**

**Also translated as "from the evil of the retreating whisperer"**

Here the last word *khannas* is used to describe the whisperer. There are many different ways this has been translated, however the underlying theme is same i.e. the whisperer who keeps returning. He is, as psychologist would say, "automatic" – he comes back repeatedly. When? That is up to him.

Verse four also says "from the evil of", which is an indication that such whispers are not good. They are what psychologists also call "negative". Since psychologists do not assert an intention to the automatic thoughts a person has, they label them as negative rather than evil. However if they somehow figure out that the "independently thinking brain"<sup>3</sup> which generates these automatic thoughts is actually not the brain, but an independent thinking being with a clear intention, then surely psychologist would have no reservation in labeling the thoughts as "evil" or "mischievous".

Dr. Steven Phillipson very authentically portrays the right kind of attitude we must adopt towards our brain. In his explanation of Intrusive

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<sup>3</sup> The way Steven Philipson puts it.

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Thoughts, he focuses a great deal on the patients' mistake of labeling those thoughts as "my thoughts". He urges patients to identify these negative thoughts as "creative associations" of the brain, which are generated "independently". This is because holding a grudging feeling towards one own brain can indeed be destructive to ones health. Dr. Phillipson has hit the bulls eye in recognizing some very important facets about the whispers of satan, that Islam also teaches us such as:

- Don't hate the brain. It does not want to hurt you. (Hate the devil). Islam expects us to honor and respect every part of our body.
- The thoughts are generated NOT by you, but by someone else. Muslims believe by the satan, Phillipson blames the brain. He compares the firing of neurons in the brain to the firing of commands in a computer. However, he assumes that the brain does so independently, while computer neurons are not independent as they are ordered by someone else i.e. humans. Muslims don't believe these negative brain neurons fire independently, but they are indeed fired through the input of SWATS.
- Don't try to control the thoughts. Dr Phillipson requests patients to not think that they can somehow control these intrusive thoughts. Rather he suggests them to accept their coming, thank them and let them not impact their emotional state. Surah Nas also teaches us that we indeed need to seek refuge and surrender our control, however we do it to "the Lord of Mankind, the King of Mankind" – Where Psychology advices us to relinquish this control (as it can cause further obsessive thoughts), Islam guides us further to whome the control actually belongs: our Creator to whome we must surrender this control to as it is only He who can truly protect us.
- The thoughts do not reflect your personality. In fact in most cases, he suggests, that these thoughts are actually the opposite of who one really is. This comes as no surprise to the Islamic perspective as we are aware of the machinations and ill intentions satan holds against every human being.
- Dark in nature. Dr. Philipson calls these thoughts to be very dark and brutal. They are false and not to be trusted. Just like the Satan.

The last verse of the ayah declares that these **whispers can be from the djinns as well as the humans**. Therefore, Islam warns us that we may actually harbor negative thoughts in us that are transmitted from people around us. Therefore, being aware of what we hear, store and repeat to ourselves can also have a big impact on our being. There is tons of research in many fields about the impact negative talk can have on a person however that lies beyond the scope of this paper. Islam in just one verse informs us that these thoughts can come from either humans or djinns. Luckily psychology has studied in depth about the human input of negative thoughts, however it still needs to accept and dwell into the jinn oriented negative thoughts.

In conclusion when we try to categorize the characteristics of Satan's whispers according to Surah Nas, they are not so different from the scientifically identified traits of ANTs<sup>4</sup>:

1. **Repetitive** - automatic
2. **Evil** - lies, false, Negative
3. **Independently** generated from intentional beings
4. Impact the heart
5. **Harmful**: thus strict protection is required against them
6. **Common**: since the surah is directed to all humanity, as its name suggests, thus it can be firmly inferred that the attacks are also geared towards all humanity.

Just like surah Falaq teaches us to seek Gods help against the kind of visible evils we know we can not guard ourselves against, just like that surah Nas could also be pointing us to the fact that indeed these attacks are not something you can control on your own or stop. They are made by powerful beings and thus you need to relinquish control onto someone more powerful than them.

### 5.1.3 How to Protect Against SWAT?

Thankfully, psychology has led us to the point where we recognize the need to abandon control or the illusion of being able to control those thoughts. Psychology has also advised us to welcome these thoughts but not get affected by it. Contrariwise Islam gives us the tool of surah Falaq and

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<sup>4</sup> As discussed in section three

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surah Naas' recitation that shields our hearts from being touched by these whispers in the first place. This is because Islam recognizes that no matter what labels we give to these whispers, they are inherently meant to hurt us emotionally, spiritually and even physically. They are attacks by intelligent, ill meaning forces. Thus, Islam differs here in the sense that it teaches us how to prep against such enemies rather than let them in. The invocation to God against SWATs or ANTs is the weapon we have against the invocations Satan makes through our hearts, in to our minds.

### **Difference:**

There is however one important difference that needs to be highlighted between SWATs and ANTs. The careful study of the last two surahs of Quran reveals that indeed protection of God is something that is crucial and one must invoke it intentionally, whether it be against physical or spiritual harm.

Just like we take vaccines or medicine to protect against the harms of lingering diseases around us, similarly we need the daily invocation of these surahs to protect against many kinds of harms, out of which one is ANTs and their consequences. Therefore, if one remains oblivious of reciting these surah's, he is denying himself access to the most powerful protective measures God has given him against ANTs and SWATs. The current advice in psychology is to let the automatic negative thoughts come as they do, as exerting control proves futile or destructive, however Islam does two things differently.

Firstly, Islam has informed us of the etiology of these ANTs and highlighted for mankind the dire need for protection against them.

Secondly, Islam equips us with simple yet very powerful tools that prevent the ANTs from coming into our consciousness primarily. Where psychology advices us to stop and question the thought, Islam advices us to make use of its tools to create a shield around them that prevents the attacks from reaching you in the first place. **Therefore, the Islamic treatment is more preventive while the worldly treatment is more curative in nature.**<sup>5</sup>

### **The Problem of Evil**

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<sup>5</sup> Please note this does not eliminate the presence of curative measures in Islam, that are not discussed in this paper.

Evil is defined as “profoundly immoral and wicked” in dictionaries. There are many different philosophies regarding whether evil is a creation of God, an absence of goodness or something else. The philosophers still have a long way to go before consensus is reached. However as per the dictionary in Apple inc. evil entails being “immoral and wicked”, which indicates that it entails an element of intention. An animal murdering another animal will not be considered evil as his action does not represent immorality and wickedness.

When Allah mentions in the Quran, Surah Falaq “from the evil of all created things” (verse 2), He is also educating us of a universal reality i.e. every created thing can be evil. Therefore, the narrative of this paper will assume that every creation has the capacity to perform evil. For instance when we invoke Allah for protection against evil of all creation, it also includes from the evil of water. Water is a fundamental requirement to sustain life however, too much of it can drown and kill us. Therefore, anything like water, knife, car etc holds the capacity to hurt us with its evil.

The question thus arises then about intentionality. Since humans and djinns are the only creations that were granted free will, according to this papers framework, they are the only two creations who can ‘do evil’. Any other creation may perform an act that is inherently evil, but their action will not be evil. A knife that cuts your throat certainly performs an evil, but the act is not of the knife but of the person who used it. Thus a differentiation between evil and “doing evil” is essential.

The **first** conclusion about the problem of evil that we assume in this paper is that although every creation can be harmful, the act of evil is only restricted to intentional beings, as without intention an action is not considered evil. This is similar to the idea like a baby kid accidentally setting the house on fire as not evil, but the same act by a sensible act is certainly evil.

Another problem about evil is its origin or creation. Debating about its essence is beyond the philosophy of this paper, however a simple key frame will be mentioned from the light of Islam. As Islam recognises people as being good and bad both, it does not link it to inheritance. Every man is born with the tendency to perform evil and good deeds. These are then manifested through a culmination of a persons life experiences, decisions, beliefs and most importantly actions. Therefore no man is free from the



touch of evil and no man is prevented from reaching great heights of goodness.

In conclusion, for the sake of this paper, two conditions are met for evil. Firstly evil is associated with action of intentional beings and secondly it is present as a tendency in all humans.

#### **5.1.4 How to treat ANTs using Nas and Falaq?**

Because whispers of the satan are so powerful in influencing a persons behaviors, the Quran gives clear verses that are to be recited in order to protect oneself from the evil impact of satans whispers as well as his plannings against us. Dr. Jamaal Badi writes in his commentary on Imam Nawawi's 40 hadiths that "Since this [envy] is a harmful act, Muslims are asked to recite certain Qur'anic verses such as Surah al- Falaq, Surah an-Nsas, and Surah al-Ikhlās to protect from envious people" (Badi, 2002, p. 173) It is important to mention here that the devil is very adamant on not leaving any human behind; therefore no person is free from being subjected to his evil whispers and schemes. Moreover this highly motivated enemy of ours is also roaming the earth since the creation of man, therefore his information and understanding of our weaknesses and desires outweighs the knowledge we have of ourselves till date. As some scholars suggest, he has done a PHD on you! So it goes without saying that an enemy so old, experienced, cunning and obstinate for our downfall is bound to be taken seriously.

One way of utilizing the protective shields of these surahs is to recite them once after every prayer but thrice after Maghrib and Fajr prayer. <sup>6</sup> "According to the Muslim scholars, it would be preferable to recite them after the five prayers along with Ayat-ul- Kursi."(Badi, 2002, p. 173). The Prophet pbuh is reported to have advised his companions during a storm to start reciting the surahs in order to come in Allah's protection against it. Hence these surahs can also protect us from natural calamities we find ourselves in.

Prophets (pbuh) wife Aisha (RA) reported to us that when their relatives got sick, the Prophet (pbuh) would recite and blow over them these two surahs.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Sunan al-Tirmidhī 2903

<sup>7</sup> Source: Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2192

Thus these two surah's also hold curative properties.

According to the Prophet's (pbuh) advice to a companion, these two surahs are the **best sources** of seeking refuge for those people who tend to seek it.<sup>8</sup>

The power of these surahs is not to just protect us from ANTs or mental sicknesses, they can also protect us from physical and more harmful calamities and sicknesses over which we have no control.

## 5.2 Psychological Perspective on treating ANTS

### 5.2.1 ANT Therapy

In his famous book "Change Your Brain Change Your Life" dr. Amen recommends a simple method. This entails simply recognizing that one has experienced a negative thought, and then writing it down. Once the thought is written, the person can talk back to it. By doing that, according to Amen, one can take away the power of ANTs and then regain control over their moods.

### 5.2.2 The Work in 4 Questions

This technique was developed by Byron Katie as a method of inquiry that helps people to question their thoughts. First we must write down any negative thought that could be bothering us, or any thought that makes us judge people. After that we ask four questions to counter the thought. The final step is the "turnaround" question in which we counter the thought completely to its opposite.

1. Write down the disturbing thought.

2. Ask four questions:

a. **Is it true?**

Example: Is it true that "my husband *never* listens to me?"

b. **Can I absolutely know its true?**

Example: Is there any evidence that my husband *did* listen to me? How absolutely true is my thought?

c. **How do I react when I believe that thought**

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<sup>8</sup> Source: Sunan al-Nasa'i 5432

- d. Who would I be without the thought? Or how would I feel if I didn't have the thought?
3. Turn the original thought around to the opposite – and then ask yourself whether this new version of the negative thought is true? Or even truer than the original thought. For example if one original thought was that “no one would ever want to marry a divorced woman in my society”, the opposite could be “Someone would want to marry a divorced woman in my society”.

*Reflection:*

This method has helped many people deal with the self-defeating thoughts and take charge of their lives in positive manner. Katie herself was suffering from suicidal depression as a result of her defeating thoughts. What is most interesting in this approach is the act of actually questioning the thought. It is as if this treatment is already telling us that the thought is not yours, which is why you must talk back to it. Who do we generally talk back to; a conscious being, not an inanimate object. The treatment methods themselves pave the way for decoding the existence of satan.

Secondly we are supposed to question the authenticity of the thought by asking if it is true. Again it is as if this therapy inherently communicates to us that these thoughts are “not your friend” or in other words “deceitful”. If the thoughts actually had a positive purpose, it would have been evident. But just like the satans intentions are made clear to us in Quran, these thoughts also make clear that they serve only the negative purpose to bring man down from being his highest self. As mentioned in earlier sections the most common effect of ANTs is depression and suicide ideation; two things Satan knows will lower man from performing up to his capabilities.

And finally the brilliance of this therapy is that it makes us imagine a life that would be otherwise. In other words, by flipping the thought and imagining how I would feel with an opposite thought, this therapy teaches us to look into the reality that satan is trying hard to distract us from. Therefore, by employing this strategy not only can one hold off a potential satan attack, he/she can also flip the thought and divert attention to the real phenomenon that satan doesn't want us to go towards. Such a

brilliant method Katie has devised and left at our disposal. For example, when I just feel propelled to prove myself right, then I should stop and ask my self, what would I believe if my opinion was wrong? How is that other view impacting my life and why am I so aversive to it?

### *5.2.3 Gratitude and Appreciation*

Studies show that by directing attention to gratitude, the brain can function more effectively. It is more likely to make good decisions, process information more quickly and get one out of difficult situations. Daniel Amen writes “Negative Thought Patterns change the brain in a negative way, but conversely practicing gratitude literally helps you have a brain to be grateful for” (Amen, 2015, p.122).

**Exercise:** write down five things, everyday, for which you are grateful for. Continuing this for over a period of 6 weeks can also help in alleviating depression symptoms, along with creating a stronger hold against ANTs.

### *Satans Strategy Revealed as an ANT in Quran*

We are told in surah Araaf, about satans plots when he said to God “Then I will come upon them from the front and from the rear, and from their right and from their left. And You will not find most of them thankful” (Quran 7:17). The way satan comes at us is in the form of suggestions i.e Whispers i.e. Automatic Negative Thoughts (as is evident from the subsequent and other verses of Quran), and in this verse he very much explains his attack the way Daniel Amen explains ANTs: as an infestation. Just like in an ANT infestation, they come from all sides and directions, similarly that’s exactly how satan gave away his trick, which thankfully Allah has informed us about.

It seems important to point out that here the realization that the magnitude of SWAT’s influence on us is as also as immense as that of an ant’s. The ultimate control is in our own hands and will. If we pay no heed or combat his misguiding and self-defeating ideas, he cannot harm us. The worth of his attack is no bigger than an ANT. Very fitting acronym dr.Amen has coincidentally assigned to satans whispers.

Further satan also informed us with confidence when revealing his plan is that

“you will not find most of them thankful” – indicating that creating thankless humans is his goal. This also indicates the opposite; those who are thankful to God, will actually be saved from the ANTs. If his attacks will make humans thankless, then thankfulness can make humans fight these whispers. It come as no surprise to discover that even Dr Amen recommends adopting gratitude as an effective treatment for ANTs.

The research on the positive impact of gratitude is tremendous, especially regarding interpersonal relationships. This is not surprising considering that creating discord between a husband and wife is satans favourite task. A contemporary study found that expressing gratitude between a married couple had a positive impact on nearly all marital outcomes. The positive relationship outcomes “appear to be associated not only with being appreciative and possessing gratitude *for* one’s partner (Algoe et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2012 in Barton et al, 2015) but also...feeling appreciated and perceiving gratitude *from* one’s partner.” (Barton et al., 2015, p. 11). Not only this, the presence of ample gratitude can act as a buffer for couples against external and internal stressors (such as ANTs). And thus not decrease marital quality.

Therefore advice from current scientific research, Dr Amen as well as the 1450 year old verse all also point to the fact that an ungrateful person is more susceptible to the harmful effects of SWATs a.k.a ANTs. Furthermore Allah reminds us in Quran about the benefits of gratitude “remember when your Lord Proclaimed “If you are Grateful, I will surely increase you; but if you deny, then indeed my punishment is severe.” (Quran 14:7). Allah promises to increase us and leaves the “in what” open, as Gods favour has no limitation. One thing science has discovered that being grateful surely increases our tolerance to a grumpy partner.

### ***5.2.4 Real Time Response (RTR) Strategies***

According to Positive Psychology, responding to the thoughts in real time is like mental judo, in which the destructive thought is challenged at the very moment. Whenever one finds themselves falling pray to ANTs they can use the following three real time responses to challenge them:

1. **Evidence:**  
Use data to prove to yourself why the ANT is not true. You can question the authenticity of a thought based on what evidence do you have for it to be true? “My husband never loved me.” “My marriage is bound to fail” – ask yourself if there is evidence against such thoughts? Chances are very much that you will find more evidence that shows your husbands love and chance of success for marriage, and absolutely no, or very less evidence, in favour of the ANT. By collecting evidence *against* the ANT one can easily counter it in that very moment and avoid getting invaded by the thoughts.
2. **Reframe:**  
Use optimism to see the situation from a different perspective. You can begin the counter thought with “a more helpful way to see this is...” – for example by reframing one can convert a problem into a challenge.
3. **Plan**  
This RTR strategy works best when the brain is invaded by fortune telling ANTs that are predicting the worst possible outcome such as “the presentation will go horribly wrong” “You will make a fool of yourself” - With thoughts like this, you can create a contingency plan that could go something like this: “If x happens then I will (do) Y” . By doing this you are creating a backup plan as soon as a thought tries to attack you. By having a plan, we feel more in control and anxiety tends to decrease.

All of the above-mentioned strategies are advised to be used right at the moment one is having a negative thought, as it blocks us from further dwelling into the abyss of negative thoughts.

### ***5.2.5 Social Therapy***

Social therapy is about surrounding ourselves with positive people and keeping ourselves within a far reach from people who transfer their ANTs onto us. We do not want our ANTs to intermingle as this can make things worse for us.

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This therapy requires us to look at our lives and see what kind of people do we surround ourselves with? Do they believe in you and make you feel good about yourself or are they always putting you down and cancelling your ideas, dreams and hopes?

Exercise:

- List down 10 people who you spend most time with.
- Analyse and note down how supportive they are to you?
- Note down ways in which you would like to be supported

After this one is expected to actively seek out and create bonds with people who uplift you. One reasoning why this approach helps in treating or preventing ANT infestation is the simple rule of obstacles. The lesser obstacles you have to feeling good (doubts, comments, cynicism etc of others), the lesser energy one has to expend on overcoming them to reach their goal or become happy. On the other hand, supportive peers can elevate and fasten the path towards your dreams and goals through emotional, moral or material support.

We create bonds with people we spend most time with. However, the behaviour and thoughts of those people can have a direct impact on our limbic system functioning. Other people's attitudes tend to be highly contagious and can influence us, therefore it is imperative to carefully devise the kinds of people one surrounds himself with. For example you realise after a couple of dates that you always feel bad about yourself when you have dinner with this specific person. This realisation is rather the limbic system being affected by the other persons behaviour, not just your imagination. Choosing to distance oneself from such people does not imply we should blame them, it simply means we have the liberty to chose a better life for ourselves (Amen, 2015).

This approach acknowledges one part of the last verse from Surah Naas, where it says "whether from among the Jinn or Mankind." Allah informs us here that the SWATs can come from unseen jinns or even from people. Therefore social therapy is a classical example of taking this advice into practice when it advices us to stay away from the people who cast negative influence upon us through their negative talk. If you notice further, this approach is also more avoidant than curative. It advices us that it is better

to avoid bad influences, rather than accept them and then try to cure your way out of it.

There is an exercise in Positive Psychology in which you are requested to present visually the people who you feel closest to. Then in another drawing you show the people who you spend most time of your day and life with. Usually it seems there is a discrepancy between the two. Thus, people who we take to feel most emotionally connected to are generally people we spend very less time with. Similarly, the people who lie on the outermost circle of significance in our lives, could be people who we come in daily contact with such as co-workers and thus with them do we spend most of our valuable and limited time with. Visually seeing such a discrepancy in the relationship time spent can really motivate and guide us into scheduling our life in a manner that facilitates our mental, emotional and physical health.

Similarly Islam also encourages us right in the beginning paragraphs of the Quran to not sever our blood ties, as those are something that God ordained to be joined. Cutting ties with people we are innately related to is something not only Quran condemns strongly, but it is also something that Prophet Muhammad pbuh gave us great motivation against. He told us that if one wants to increase his **life** and **wealth**, then let him join relations with his kith and kin. Although this advice comes from 1450 years ago, positive psychology today confirms that indeed people who have stronger family and social ties tend to live longer and happier lives. Even World Health Organisation confirms this saying of Muhammad pbuh as it marks social relationships as an important determinant of health in an individual's life (WHO, 2002). Moreover, we can also see that incidence of homelessness is much higher in United states compared to Italy, Spain and Portugal, even though the former is more economically dynamic with higher living standards and lower unemployment's levels. Researchers believe poorer family structures that add to lack of social cohesion cause such homelessness even in countries like United States (Reher, 1998).

### *5.2.6 Dialectic Behaviour Therapy*

Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is about merging of our behaviour change and with the acceptance of the fact that "it is what it is". This therapy occurs more in a dialectic manner in which the goal is to help patients come



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out of their 'fight or flight' mode of thinking, occurring at the primordial part of the brain, to the more rational and decision making frontal cortex part of the brain. All of this at the moment when the person is experiencing a situation (and hence negative thoughts).

There are many techniques till date that are advised under DBT, however one of the most popular ones is mindfulness. As soon as one realises the attack of ANTs is imminent, he/she must try to bring all their awareness to the present moment. As we have seen before, most ANTs are either catastrophizing the future or replaying a dirty past, therefore bringing ones attention to the present is a good way of warding ANT attack. Secondly, this mindfulness includes the element of no judgement. If one is in the present and becoming aware of a situation, they are taught to do so in a manner that does not judge. This is also a good method because we have seen that most ANTs that are catered for present force us to judge or "mind read" others in a way that is neither true nor nice. For example Melinda feels uncomfortable because someone is looking at her, because she assumes they are thinking some kind of negative things about her. Through DBT techniques she can accept that yes someone is looking at her, however she can also accept that she has no idea why someone looks at her.

Some other techniques include self soothing with five senses under one minute, distress tolerance, interpersonal effectiveness with better communication, distractions etc. Research suggests that DBT is effective in curbing ANTs and self harm in patients of Borderline Personality Disorder as well (Esfahani et al., 2021).

**Conclusion**

**Discussion**

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Section I

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