

## **THE SOUL (AL-NAFS) IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research discusses *nafs* or lust is often interpreted as something that always invites ugliness, toxicity and tyranny. *Nafs* are also always used as scapegoats in every oversight committed by mankind, even lust is also considered a friend of the sheikh. The quality of lust can go down and can go up depending on the behavior of the owner of the lust itself. If the *nafs* are often sanctified with *mujahadah* and *riyadlah*, then the *nafs* will invite to good, but if the *nafs* are never sanctified, then the *nafs* will decrease in quality and tend to invite to ugliness. The focus in this study is how is the essence of *nafs* (soul)? What is the concept of *nafs* according to the Qur'an?. The method used in this research is a type of literature research with a historical approach. The result of this study is that *Nafs* in the context of the Quranic talk about man points to the inner side of man who has good and bad potential, and can encourage him to be able to do good and bad. It must be remembered, however, that the Qur'an in talking about the inner side of man also uses other terms, such as *al-aql*, *al-qalb*, *al-ruh*, and *al-fitrah*.

**Keywords:** *al-nafs*, Thought, Islam

### **INTRODUCTION**

Man is a very complex physical-spiritual being, composed of body, soul, and spirit. God makes man different from other beings by bestowing His created spirit which He has not bestowed upon anyone but man, even angels. In addition to having a body, humans also have a soul. The Qur'an calls the soul with the word *nafs*. The word *nafs* in Scripture also sometimes means encouragement of the soul or *shahwat*. Thus, man has such great potential that he can achieve perfection beyond other beings. To complete man's perfection, God equips him with various instruments so that he can and easily live his life in this world. Instruments that help human life include the five senses consisting of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch or taste.

Allah swt created man in two dimensions of the soul, by having the same character, potential, orientation and tendency to do positive and negative things, thus it is that specific characteristic that makes man different from other beings, so that man is said to be an alternative being. This means that man is biased to be good and high before God or vice versa, he is biased to be evil and fall mired in a low and bad position like animals even lower and worse than animals (Azra, 2002).

The man created by Allah swt consists of two elements, namely the physical element and the spiritual element. Physical elements are body shapes that appear in the form of bones, skin, flesh, hair, eyes, nails, and several other body organs. While the spiritual element is in the form of something invisible in the form of reason, spirit, lust and *qalb* / heart which

in the term of Sufism these three things (reason, spirit and qalb) are known as the soul. Nafs or lust is often interpreted as something that always invites ugliness, toxicity and tyranny. Nafs are also always used as scapegoats in every oversight committed by mankind, even lust is also considered a friend of the sheikh. The quality of lust can go down and can go up depending on the behavior of the owner of the lust itself. If the nafs are often sanctified with mujahadah and riyadlah, then the nafs will invite good, but if the nafs are never sanctified, then the nafs will decrease in quality and tend to invite to ugliness (Hasyim, 2015).

The study of the soul (al-nafs) is an important part of the nature of man, because man is a being capable of placing himself as a subject or object at once. This is interesting, because the study of humans continues to develop, both pure science and applied science. Among sufism experts, nafs is defined as something that gives birth to a despicable nature (Kusnadi, 2006). The study of the soul (al-nafs) is an important part of the nature of man, because man is a being capable of placing himself as a subject or object at once.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The method used in this research is a type of literature research with a normative approach. Literature research is research that seeks literature from Islamic books, books relevant to this research, as well as sources from journals, the internet and other mass media. With this normative approach, we want to know how the study of the soul (al-nafs) is an important part of the nature of man, because man is a being capable of placing himself as a subject or object at once. Data analysts can be drawn conclusions through data sources obtained from the literature used as reference material in this study.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **A. Understanding Nafs (Soul)**

Nafs is defined in two senses: first, nafs which means lust. This word in Indonesian, nafs means lust that tempts humans which is often referred to as lust, which is an impulse of lust that tends to be low / negative. The second sense, nafs which means soul. Nafs in this sense there is reason, spirit and heart. The definition of nafs according to the second meaning is as an inner component in man as a gift of God to function as Caliph (Hasyim, 2015).

The term soul in Arabic is called nafsun or nafs which can linguistically be translated into soul or self. In English it is soul or spirit. In terminology the word soul can refer to some of the opinions of muslim scholars and philosophers. Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi, al-Kindi, Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali agreed that nafs were "the initial perfection for a physicality that is natural, mechanistic and has an energetic life". The meaning or meaning of the above definition is as follows;

1. The meaning of 'initial perfection for the physical of a natural nature' is that a new human being is said to be a perfect human being when the human being becomes an acting being. Because the soul is the first part of perfection for the natural physical and not for the material physical.

2. The meaning of the word 'mechanistic' is that the human body or physique performs its functions through the intermediary of tools, such as hands, feet, hearing, and others that are part of the human limb.
3. The meaning of 'having an energetic life' is that within him is contained the readiness of life and the preparation to receive the soul (Fairuz, 2007).

Nafs in classical Arabic verse terms, is used to refer to oneself or someone, while ruh means breath. The Qur'an defines nafs with soul, and spirit is defined as angels and gifts of Allah. In later developments spirit and nafs were used interchangeably and both were used on the souls of man, angels and jinns (Ikbal, 2020).

Al-nafs (soul) which is an important part of human nature. Sufis divide this notion of al-nafs into three senses. First, al-nafs is a substance that distinguishes human qualities from other beings. Second, al-nafs is the cause of human beings becoming creative and dynamic, through the process of inspiration and tafakur. Therefore, the level of quality of people's nafs varies. In Sufism literature, these nafs can be transformed from the closest tendency to bad action to the degree of closeness to divine tenderness. Third, nafs are the impulses of anger and shah, as well as the impulses of all despicable qualities, and mental maxiates (Burlan, 2013).

#### B. The concept of Nafs in the Quran

The terms in the Qur'an have rich meanings and diverse contexts, including terms used to denote human psychic instruments. Al Nafs as one of the human psychic instruments has a meaning that varies according to the object and context of the verse, including meaning: life, lust, self and the nature of the human self and soul. Functionally al-nafs is also prepared to be able to accommodate and encourage human beings to do good and bad deeds. In some verses explained to al-nafs has been inspired the way of good and the way of bad.

In the Qur'an explaining the meaning of al-nafs Ibn Manzur (630-711H) cites various opinions, among which is the opinion of Ibn Ishaq (85-151 H) who said that the word al-nafs contains two meanings; first breath or life. As in the sentence has come out nafs a person means his life. Secondly, it means the self or the essence of oneself, as in the phrase "a person has killed his passions", means that he has killed the whole person or the essence of himself (Misri, 1997). According to Ibn Abd Bar (d 463 H), nafs can mean ruh and can also mean something that distinguishes it from others. Meanwhile, according to Ibn Abbas (d.68 H), in every human being there are two elements of nafs, namely nafs 'aqliyyah which can distinguish things, and nafs ruhiyyah which is an element of Life (Wilber, 1998).

According to M.Quraish Shihab, nafs in the context of the Quranic talk about man point to the inner side of man who has good and bad potential, and can encourage him to be able to do good and bad. It must be remembered, however, that the Qur'an in talking about the inner side of man also uses other terms, such as al-aql, al-qalb, al-ruh, and al-fitrah (Shihab, 1996). Each of those terms has an emphasis on meaning that describes a particular side of that human soul. At the same time, the terms are a proportional arrangement in the human psychic stratification system. In this connection, al-nafs which is the subject of study in this paper is in the sense of aspects

and psychic dimensions of human beings, which include lust, soul, self or the nature of the self and the motivating forces to do good and bad. Hierarchically, according to Baharuddin, al-nafs in the system of soul organization occupies a basic element that can accommodate and accommodate other dimensions of the soul. Whereas in proportion, al-nafs is a dimension of the soul that occupies a position between spirit and jism. (Baharuddin, 2007) Ruh because it comes from God, so it invites al-nafs to God, while jism comes from things (matter), so it tends to direct nafs to enjoy the enjoyment of the material nature (Zulfatmi, 202).

In the Qur'an, the word al-nafs is used in various forms and various meanings. The word al-nafs is found 297 times, each in the form of mufrad (singular) 140 times. While in the plural there are two versions, namely, nufus 2 times, and anfus 153 times, and in fi'il there are two times (Baqi, 1996). The word al-nafs in the Qur'an has a variety of meanings, sentence structures, classifications, and objects of verses. (Sapuri, 2009) . The word al-nafs is used to denote the "self of God" as in the following verse: (QS. al-An'am/6:12),

قُلْ لِمَنْ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ قُلْ لِلّٰهِ كَتَبَ عَلٰى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةُ لِيَجْمَعَكُمْ اِلٰى يَوْمِ الْقِيَمَةِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيْهِ الَّذِيْنَ خَسِرُوْا اَنْفُسَهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُوْنَ ١٢

"Say (Prophet Muhammad), "Who does that belong to in heaven and on earth?" Say, "God's." He has established (the nature of) affection in Himself. Really, He will definitely gather you on the Doomsday that there is no doubt on him. People who harm him, they have no faith".

Most other verses use the term al-nafs to designate the human self. In designating human beings, the term al-nafs also has various meanings. Once devoted to the totality of man, as in (QS. al-Ma'idah/5: 32),

مِنْ اَجْلِ ذٰلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلٰى بَنِيْ اِسْرٰءِيْلَ اَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ اَوْ فَسَادٍ فِى الْاَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ اَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا اَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا بِالْبَيِّنٰتِ ثُمَّ لَئِنْ كَثُرُوْا مِنْهُمْ بَعْدَ ذٰلِكَ فِى الْاَرْضِ لَمُسْرِفُوْنَ ٣٢

"Therefore, We established (a law) for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a person not because (the murdered person) has killed another person or because he has done mischief on earth, then it is as if he had killed all men. On the contrary, who preserves the life of a human being, he seems to have preserved the life of all human beings. Truly, Our apostles have actually come to them with (bringing) clear particulars. Then, indeed, many of them afterwards went beyond the limits on earth".

The word al-nafs in the verse denotes the totality of man physically and psychically. Other times the word al-nafs refers to what is in man that produces behavior, such as QS.al-Ra'd/13:11.

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَتٌ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ ۝ ١١

“For him (man) there are (angels) accompanying him in turn from his front and back guarding him at the behest of God. Indeed, God does not change the circumstances of a people until they change what is in them. When God desires ugliness against a people, no one can resist it, and there is no protector for them but Him”.

The phrase *ma bi'anfusihim* (what is in them) indicates that there is something in *al-nafs* that can change which in turn will generate a change in behavior (Shihab, 1996). In general it can be said that *al-nafs* in the context of talking about man points to the inner side of man. The Qur'an in using the word *al-nafs* to designate the inner side of man, there are at least 4 meanings that can be obtained. First, that *al-nafs* relates to lust; second, *al-nafs* relates to the breath of life; Third, *al-Nafs* relates to the soul; and the four *al-nafs* relate to the human self (Baharuddin, 2007). In the sense of lust, as in QS. Joseph/12:53. Means:

﴿ وَمَا أُبْرِئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ٥٣ ﴾

“I do not (declare) myself free (from error) because indeed lust always pushes to evil, except (lust) which is given mercy by my Lord. Verily my Lord is all-forgiving again all-merciful.”

In the sense of breath or life of life, as in QS. Ali Imran/3:185,  
كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّقُونَ أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ فَمَنْ زُحْزِحَ عَنِ النَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ ١٨٥

“Every animate will feel dead. Only on the Day of Judgment will your reply be perfectly given. Whoever is kept out of hell and put into heaven, truly he gains victory. The life of the world is just a deceptive pleasure”.

On the meaning of *al-nafs* in the above verse, interpreters differ in opinion. Sayyid Qutub (1324-1386H) says that this verse deals with *nafs* experiencing life and death (Qutub, 1967). While al-Razi (543-606 H) explains that death is only related to the body, because the soul does not experience death, and since the statement in the verse *nafs* is related to death, then *nafs* here are *nafs* related to the body (al-Razi, 1985). However, unfortunately al-Razi did not explain in more detail how *nafs* are related to the soul. Such difficulties, in fact, can be solved by the understanding that what is meant by *nafs* in the verse is the breath of life, so the understanding of the verse is that every one who breathes or who lives is bound to die. Not in the sense of the soul, because the soul does not experience death, the soul is immortal. This kind of opinion is an opinion supported by philosophers, among whom are Ibn Sina (370-429 H) and Al-Kindi (185-256 H) (Sapuri, 2009). While *al-nafs* in a personal sense can be seen in the following verse: QS: al-An'am/6:93.



وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ قَالَ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ وَلَمْ يُوحَ إِلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ وَمَنْ قَالَ سَأُنْزِلُ مِثْلَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي غَمَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَاسِطُوا أَيْدِيهِمْ أَخْرَجُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ الْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ وَكُنْتُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهِ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ٩٣

“Who is more despotic than those who make up lies against God or who say, “It has been revealed to me, when nothing has been revealed to him and one who says, “I will bring as God has sent down.” If only you had seen at the time when the zalim (were) in sacratulumatic pain, while the angels were beating with their hands (saying), “Take out your life!” On this day you will be retaliated with a very insulting doom because you speak against God (words) that are not true and (because) you brag against His verses”.

Such are the various meanings of the word al-nafs used by the Quran, all of which are valuable information for obtaining clarity al nafs. All of these meanings are the meanings of lust, breath or life, and the self unites to form a complete understanding of the human soul. Functionally al-nafs is also prepared to be able to accommodate and encourage human beings to do good and bad deeds. In one verse explained to al-nafs has been inspired the way of good and the way of bad. The word alhamaha (to give inspiration) in a broad sense means to give potential.

On the other hand, the Quran also hints at the diversity of nafs in terms of levels. These levels are al-nafs al'ammara, al-nafs al-lawwama, and al-nafs al-mutmainna. Based on the phrasing in the verse that mentions the term al-nafs al'ammara, it can be understood that there are two possibilities that occur in nafs. The first possibility that nafs encourage low deeds and the second possibility that nafs get grace. The first possibility is that nafs encourage this low deed called lust, and secondly nafs there are those who get grace, this is called sufi with nafs marhamah (Al-Ghazali, 2003). Based on that, then al-nafs al-ammara can be understood as lust. Regarding this lust, the Qur'an also uses another term, namely, *hawa*, or *ahwa* which means desire (desire), lust (lust), and a person's tendency to be inclination. Another term that denotes the meaning of lust is *shahwah*, which is worldly pleasure, such as the tendency to be happy with the opposite sex, the same sex, the accumulation of wealth, and others (Shadily, 2002). From this it follows that al-nafs al-ammara is a biological lust that drives man to perform the gratification of his biological needs. In this aspect, humans are exactly like animals, so al-nafs al-ammara is also called al-nafs al-hayawaniyyah.

## CONCLUSION

Nafs is defined in two senses: first, nafs which means lust. This word in Indonesian, nafs means lust that tempts humans which is often referred to as lust, which is an impulse of lust that tends to be low / negative. The second sense, nafs which means soul. Nafs in this sense there is reason, spirit and heart. The definition of nafs according to the second meaning is as an inner component in man as a gift of God to function as Caliph.

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