

Observations on the concept of *Nazar* (نظر), the 'evil eye'

by Zahid Aziz

1. Belief in the 'Evil Eye' has existed from the most ancient times. It is found in the Greek and Roman civilisations, as well as among the Jews and Hindus, all long before Islam.

An academic journal defines it as follows:

“The evil eye belief is a widespread superstition according to which people can cause harm by a mere envious glance at coveted objects or their owners. In other words, it is a belief in the supernatural destructive force of envy projected through the eyes of the envier. Deeply ingrained in certain societies and transmitted through centuries, the evil eye belief is still actively present around the world.” ([see link](#))

The Culture section of the website of the BBC tells us that the Evil Eye is “the belief that someone who achieves great success or recognition also attracts the envy of those around them. That envy in turn manifests itself as a curse that will undo their good fortune” and that “The earliest version of eye amulets goes back to 3,300 BC”. It also mentions a folk tale from an eastern European country “that tells of a man whose gaze was such a potent carrier of the curse that he resorted to cutting out his own eyes rather than continuing to spread misfortune to his loved ones.” ([see link](#))

2. Belief in *nazar* (نظر) or the 'evil eye', which was widespread before Islam, is so deeply-entrenched among Muslims that one has to be careful in contradicting it due to the risk of causing offence.
3. There are many persons in the world whose very profession and occupation is to display their beauty or physical prowess to the world; for example, those working in show business or those in sports. Thousands of people go to attend venues to see these entertainers perform in person in front of them, and they gaze upon their bodies with admiration and envy (even without saying *mashallah*). Do we ever hear that a Hollywood or Bollywood celebrity, model, Olympic athlete, cricketer, etc. has been struck by the *nazar* of the people who had gone to see him or her, and lost their good and desirable physical attributes?
4. There are powerful and rich countries in the world which Muslims regard as being against them; for example, countries of the West and the state of Israel. Muslims look upon the power and wealth of these countries with great envy, wishing that they could be deprived of them. Has the *nazar* of billions of Muslims ever struck any of these countries and taken away their power or wealth?
5. In Muslim countries, for example Pakistan, many corrupt politicians, feudal landlords, industrialists etc. have acquired fabulous wealth and houses by fraudulent means. People see their palaces and other possessions with their own eyes. Has any of

these crooked leaders ever been struck with *nazar* and lost his property as a result?

6. A story has been mentioned above, from a non-Muslim culture, of the man who blinded himself so that he would not be able to affect his loved ones by his *nazar*. Whether it is true or fiction, it shows that it is believed about *nazar* that it can only be cast by the looker's **actual** human eye glancing towards someone who is **present in person** within reach of the looker's sight.

Now, since a blind person is also able to express envy, desire and admiration towards someone else, the question arises: Why can't his mental vision cast a *nazar* on someone in his mind?

Another related question is: If someone is not present before you in person, and you are only looking at him in a photo or video, can your *nazar* still affect that person?

When a concept is baseless, it leads to absurd questions like these!

7. When people tell you that someone has been struck by *nazar*, it is always some entirely innocent person, often a child, who had done nothing wrong. The victim of *nazar* is never a bad or wicked person. There is no calamity which afflicts only the good and never the bad. For example, illness, death, grief, loss of property, etc. afflict both the good and the bad. Is *nazar* an exception to this rule, and strikes only the innocent?

8. If a person causes harm to your body or property, even unintentionally, he is charged with the offence and punished by the authorities. If a person is thought to have caused harm to someone by *nazar*, I don't think there is any Muslim country in which the victim of *nazar* reports this to the police, and it is investigated, and if proved in court then that person is punished.

Comments from the Islamic point of view

9. When people say that a person has been affected by *nazar*, it is always because of some physical or material loss that he or she has suffered. But that loss does not reduce that person's value and worth in Allah's eyes at all, but only in the eyes of the world. Should a person be worried that if loses his good looks or wealth or health due to effect of *nazar*, then Allah will judge him badly?
10. Regarding material loss, Allah teaches Muslims: "And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient" (2: 156). Allah gives you good news if you are patient under loss, but we say it's bad news and blame the *nazar* of people.
11. Allah says to the Holy Prophet Muhammad in the Quran: "And do not strain your eyes at what We have provided different classes of them with — the splendour of this world's life — that We may try them by means of it." (20:131), and: "Do not strain your eyes at

what We have given certain classes of them to enjoy, nor grieve for them” (15:88).

If the concept of *nazar* were true, the Quran should be saying, **Do** strain your eyes at what We have given them, because they will be afflicted with your *nazar* and will lose everything!

The Quran indicates here that it is **the looker** who harms himself by looking at the possessions of others, and not the person he is looking at. This is **opposite** to the concept of *nazar*.

12. The Quran contains the command for Muslim men and women: “Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze ... And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze” (24:30, 31).

The reason for lowering your gaze is **not** in order to prevent your *nazar* from afflicting their beauty. It is for the looker’s own moral purity.

13. Upholders of *nazar* says that *nazar* is mentioned in the Quran in the story of Joseph (Hazrat Yusuf). The ten brothers, who had previously abandoned Joseph in a well, were now going to Egypt taking with them with the 11th brother Benjamin, to get their provisions from the Egyptian authorities. Jacob (Hazrat Yaqub) advised them: “My sons, do not enter by one gate but enter by different gates” (12:67).

It is claimed that Jacob was protecting them from people's *nazar* because if they entered the city all together, by one gate, people would marvel at their handsome looks and they would be affected by people's *nazar*.

This interpretation means that Jacob is trying to protect these ten sinful, lying sons from *nazar*, but he never taught the righteous son Joseph any method of avoiding the *nazar* of these very sons!

The beginning of the story of Joseph clearly states that Jacob was worried that these ten sons would plot something against Joseph out of jealousy (12:5) and he knew that they were jealous of Joseph being the beloved of his father (12:8–9). Jacob took **rational steps**: he told Joseph not to relate his dream about being chosen by Allah to his brothers, and he tried to stop the brothers from taking Joseph with them in the wilderness. But Jacob did not teach Joseph any method of avoiding their *nazar*.

14. In Turkey, Kemal Ataturk tried to remove the religion of Islam from his country. He was quite successful and many Turks abandoned the beliefs and practices of Islam. However, they continue to believe very strongly in the concept of *nazar*. Should Muslims breathe a sigh of relief that although many Turks don't believe in Allah, the Quran, the Holy Prophet Muhammad or Islam, but (thank God) they continue to believe in *nazar*!

15. In Turkey “blue eyes” made of stone or plastic are widely sold, which people buy to install in their homes to ward off *nazar* and anyone with evil intent. Muslim tourists to Turkey bring these back with them. A real eye is an organ of the human or animal body. Therefore this stone or plastic eye is part of an idol of a human or animal. Are Muslims allowed to take parts of an idol (but not a full idol itself) to use as protection to ward off evil? What is the difference between pre-Islamic Arabs believing that their idols could protect them and Muslims today believing that the eye of an idol can protect them?

Once someone told me that they had installed a blue eye on the front wall of their house to keep evil out. I said I know a better way. Cut out the eye from its enclosure and replace it with a camera lens. This will deter any intruder! But it also occurred to me that while such people are anxious to stop evil from entering the house, they show no concern for the devil intruding into their souls. The Quran says about the devil: “He surely sees you, he as well as his company, from where you do not see them” (7:27). We are worrying about which person is looking at us, whose *nazar* will harm us, while all the time the devil and all his kind are looking at us without our knowledge.

16. To conclude, belief in *nazar* is based upon our fear of loss of our worldly possessions and attributes. We perceive threats and

jealousy from others who may not have any such intention in their minds. We think that any such loss will reduce our worth, value and status.

17. At the end, on a lighter note and for the amusement of readers, I refer to a well-known song of the 1960s, sung by the famous Indian film playback singer Muhammad Rafi. In it, a male lover praises his female beloved in the following repeated lines:

تیری پیاری پیاری صورت کو، کسی کی نظر نہ لگے، چشم بد دور

Teri pyaari surat ko, Kisi ki nazar na lage, chashm-e-baddoor

This translates as:

“May no one afflict your beautiful countenance with *nazar*, May the Evil Eye be warded off.”

So concerned is he that he advises her:

مکھڑے کو چھپا لو آنچل میں، کہیں میری نظر نہ لگے

Mukhde ko chhupa lo aanchal mein, kahin meri nazar na lage

meaning:

“Hide your face behind a veil, so that my *nazar* doesn't afflict you.”

Another advice he gives her is:

دیکھا نہ کرو تم آئینہ، کہیں خُد کی نظر نہ لگے

Dekha na karo tum aa'ina, Kahin khud ki nazar na lage

meaning:

“Avoid looking in the mirror, so that your own *nazar* doesn't afflict you.”

Of course, this is only a song and the lover does not mean that his advice should be taken seriously, but it is the logical conclusion of the concept of *nazar*. Anyone acting on this advice would not be able to lead a normal life, and would in fact be suffering from a behavioural disorder.

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