

Fast 28: Does the Quran mention the concept of the “evil eye” (*nazar-i bad*)?

- Consider the following two, similar verses:

“Do not strain your eyes at what We have given certain classes of them to enjoy, nor grieve for them, and make yourself (O Prophet) gentle to the believers.” (15:88)

لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا
مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَاخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ
لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾

“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. And the sustenance of your Lord is better and more lasting.” (20:131)

وَلَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ
أَزْوَاجًا مِّنْهُمْ زَهْرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا
لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ ۗ وَرِزْقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ
﴿١٣١﴾

Under 15:88 Maulana Muhammad Ali writes: “The straining of the eyes signifies looking desirously.” Similarly, under 20:131 Maulana Abul Ala Maudoodi writes that it means: “It does not behove you and your companions to be envious of the riches of the wicked people who are amassing wealth by unlawful means.”

The Holy Prophet Muhammad and in fact Muslims in general are told here not to look with envy or desire at the material wealth and prosperity of their opponents. The attainment of these things is not the aim of life, nor is wealth an indication that God has granted it to its possessors as a reward. It is in fact a trial for them to see if they are misled by it to reject the truth of spiritual realities and moral values, or if they can see the possession of wealth in its true perspective, as merely a support for physical life while “the sustenance of your Lord”, meaning the spiritual life, is better.

The concept of the “evil eye” (or *nazar-i bad*) was prevalent long before Islam among many nations. Most Muslims accept it as well. Under that concept, if you look with envy and desire at someone else’s wealth, possessions, beauty or other desirable physical attributes, it may result in the “evil eye” befalling that person and he would suffer the misfortune of losing what he possessed. The looker may be a good or bad person, and it may or may not be his intention to cause any harm.

It can be seen how sublime and rational is the teaching of the Quran as compared to the “evil eye” concept. The Quran says that **it is the looker who suffers**, rather than the person he looks at. It is the looker who will start to think that his object in life also should be to gain material possessions. He will become demoralised at his failure to possess what the other possesses. It is the looker who burns in his heart with envy.

If the “evil eye” concept were correct, then Allah should have given the **opposite command** and told the Holy Prophet and the Muslims to definitely look with desire at the possessions and wealth of the unbelievers so that the “evil eye” may befall them and they lose all these things!

- Why, for example, should Muslims fight the battle of Badr, when all they need do is **to look with envy** at the approaching well-armed, far more numerous force of the Quraish, and suddenly the “evil eye” strikes the Quraish army? Today the nations of the unbelievers have power, might, wealth and prosperity far beyond what Muslim nations as a whole possess. In science and technology, they are far superior. And no doubt Muslims look upon this enviously, wishing they had the same, or that unbelievers in Islam should be deprived of all these things. But this envious looking has, so far, not resulted in the “evil eye” damaging any unbelieving nation!
- The loss or harm which people say they suffered due to someone’s “evil eye” is always stated to be material, physical and worldly only. Typically, it is said that it brings about loss of good health, beauty, or some other material attribute. You never hear that a person who was honest, upright, observant of religion, and whom people looked up to with admiration, lost these qualities because of the “evil eye” of those who praised him.

If a Muslim suffers material loss, whatever the cause may be, it clearly does not reduce his status near Allah. In fact, it may raise his status if he shows resignation to Allah’s will and acceptance of loss, and patience. The Quran says that Muslims will suffer material losses of the most severe kind and it gives “good news to the patient” under those circumstances (2:155). A Muslim should never fear worldly and material loss. Yet they go to extraordinary lengths to safeguard themselves from the “evil eye” by means of amulets, incantations, “Turkish blue eyes”, and formulae of various kinds.

- Film stars and models are envied for their beauty, bodies and wealth. Millions of people cast their eyes upon them in minute detail every day, and desperately envy them. But these objects of desire are never struck by the “evil eye” of their viewers.
- Misfortunes, illnesses, losses, etc. befall every kind of person, whether he is good or bad. It is curious that the “evil eye” only befalls the good and the innocent. One never hears, for example, that a dictator in a Muslim country, who amassed vast wealth at the expense of his people and lived in great luxury, was struck by the “evil eye” of the millions of people whom he robbed.

- Everything in the world can be used both to benefit people and to harm them; for example, fire or water. A knife can be used to kill a person, or a surgeon may use it to operate on a patient. Substances which are poisonous to humans, such as arsenic, can also be used to their advantage, even as treatments. So if the “evil eye” concept were true, it would not only harm people, but there would also be ways of using it for good purposes. However, one never hears of any such use.
- It is well known that the Quran instructs Muslim men “to lower their gaze” so as not to stare at women’s beauty in a sexual way (24:30), and likewise it instructs Muslim women “to lower their gaze” so as not to stare at men with a sexual connotation (24:31). This is said to be for the moral purity of the looker. It is not because the looker’s gaze will cast an “evil eye” and destroy the beauty or attractiveness of the one he is staring at. It is because the one who stares might be tempted to indulge in sexual misbehaviour.
- As can be seen, the teachings of the Quran are always rational, sensible, practical and based on facts. The “evil eye” concept does not have any of these attributes.