

Surah 113. Al-Falaq

113.1 SAY: "I seek refuge with the Sustainer of the rising dawn,"¹

113.2 "from the evil of aught that He has created,

113.3 "and from the evil of the black darkness whenever it descends,"²

113.4 "and from the evil of all human beings bent on occult endeavours."³

113.5 "and from the evil of the envious when he envies."⁴

Author Comments

1 - The term al-falaq ("the light of dawn" or "the rising dawn") is often used tropically to describe "the emergence of the truth after [a period of] uncertainty" (Taj al-'Arus): hence, the appellation "Sustainer of the rising dawn" implies that God is the source of all cognition of truth, and that one's "seeking refuge" with Him is synonymous with striving after truth.

2 - I.e., the darkness of despair, or of approaching death. In all these four verses ({2-5}), the term "evil" (sharr) has not only an objective but also a subjective connotation - namely, fear of evil.

3 - Lit., "of those that blow (an-naffathat) upon knots": an idiomatic phrase current in pre-Islamic Arabia and, hence, employed in classical Arabic to designate all supposedly occult endeavours; it was probably derived from the practice of "witches" and "sorcerers" who used to tie a string into a number of knots while blowing upon them and murmuring magic incantations. The feminine gender of naffathat does not, as Zamakhshari and Razi point out, necessarily indicate "women", but may well relate to "human beings" (anfus, sing. nafs, a noun that is grammatically feminine). In his explanation of the above verse, Zamakhshari categorically rejects all belief in the reality and effectiveness of such practices, as well as of the concept of "magic" as such. Similar views have been expressed - albeit in a much more elaborate manner, on the basis of established psychological findings - by Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida' (see Manar I, 398 ff.). The reason why the believer is enjoined to "seek refuge with God" from such practices despite their palpable irrationality is - according to Zamakhshari - to be found in the inherent sinfulness of such endeavours (see surah {2}, note [84]), and in the mental danger in which they may involve their

author.

4 - I.e., from the effects - moral and social - which another person's envy may have on one's life, as well as from succumbing oneself to the evil of envy. In this connection, Zamakhshari quotes a saying of the Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (called "the Second 'Umar" on account of his piety and integrity): "I cannot think of any wrongdoer (zalim) who is more likely to be the wronged one (mazlum) than he who envies another."

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