

Bismillah, Alhamdulillah, wa Salaatu wa Salaamu alaa Rasoolillah.

The Oxford dictionary defines fear as:

• **noun 1** *an unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm. 2 the likelihood of something unwelcome happening.*

• **verb 1** *be afraid of. 2 (fear for) be anxious about. 3 archaic regard (God) with reverence and awe*

We have a few words to describe this emotion in English such as: scared, anxiety, terror, panic, and bewilderment. All of these words carry the same meaning and are nearly synonymous to one another. Arabic, on the other hand, has a considerable amount of words to describe fear; each with a different detail and connotation. The Qur'an alone has more than **10** words for fear!

Here is a brief analysis of some of the words used in the Qur'an for fear:

Khawf خوف

Khawf is a perceived danger and a fear of something that is physical. Khawf is the type of fear you'd feel if a dog began to chase you.

Allah ta'ala says:

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ

“But as for him who feared (*khawf*) standing before his Lord, and restrained himself from impure evil desires and lusts.” (79:40)

The Believer has a fear of something that is manifest and real, which is captured in this ayah by the use of khawf. Allah azza wa jal did not say in this ayah that the person fears their Lord, but fears the *standing* before his Lord, and as a result of this fear, he protected himself from lusts and desires.

On the other hand, Allah says about the disbelievers:

لَا يَخَافُونَ الْآخِرَةَ

“They do not fear (*khawf*) the hereafter.” (74:53)

In another ayah, Allah describes His blessings upon the Quraysh:

الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ

“(He) Who has fed them against hunger, and has made them safe from fear (*kbhanf*).” (106:4)

While most of tribes of Arabia worried about being invaded or of a war, Allah ta’ala protected the Quraysh from this danger and granted them safety in Makkah.

خشية Khashyah

Khashyah is a fear as a result of knowledge and leads to action. It is when you know the greatness and magnitude of what you fear, and as a result, have an awe and reverence of it.

Allah ta’ala tells the Prophet sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam:

إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الذِّكْرَ وَخَشِيَ الرَّحْمَنَ الْغَيْبِ

You can only warn him who follows the Reminder, and fears (*kbashyah*) the Most Merciful unseen.(36:11)

Allah ta’ala describes the one who will benefit from the Qur’an: he has khashyah of Ar-Rahmaan. By using the Name of Allah, Ar-Rahmaan, it shows the level of their khashyah. We fear Al Jabbaar (The Compellor) and Al Azeez (The All Mighty), but to fear Ar-Rahmaan, The Most Merciful, is the height of true fear of Allah. These people have khashyah of Allah *bil ghayb*, in the unseen can be interpreted two ways: they fear Allah and have an awe of Him when they are alone and they fear Allah and have an awe of Him even though they do not see Him azza wa jal.

In the famous ayah that most of us know, Allah ta’ala says:

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

“It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allah.” (35:28)

Imam ibn Katheer rahimahullah states with regards to this ayah, “only those who have knowledge truly fear Him as He should be feared, because the more they know about the Almighty, All-Powerful, All-Knowing Who has the most perfect Attributes and is described with the most beautiful Names, the more they will fear Him.”

Khushoo' خشوع

Khushoo' is a fear that is manifested not only in your heart but it is shown on your face and limbs. Khushoo' literally means to bend down and to become still. Khushoo' is used for the submissiveness of the heart which is reflected on the limbs.

Allah ta'ala states,

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ

“Successful indeed are the believers,” (23:1)

And the first quality of these successful believers:

الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ

“Those who offer their Salat (prayers) with all solemnity and full submissiveness.” (23:2)

This is the kind of fear that we should have in salah; this fear should be present on our faces and not just in our hearts. If the heart has khushoo', the body will have khushoo'. So khushoo' is not just a state of the heart, it is a state of the heart which is visible on a person's actions, in their posture, and in their movements.

In this dunya, the believers have this khushoo', but in the aakhirah Allah states about the Disbelievers:

أَبْصَارُهُمْ خَاشِعَةٌ

“Their eyes will be downcast.” (79:9)

These eyes that did not humble themselves to Allah in the dunya, will have fear in the aakhirah. This fear will be apparent on their faces; faces that are full of shame, humiliation and abasement.

Taqwa تقوى

Taqwa is the most common word used for fear. It comes from the root wiqayah which means to protect and is used for a shield. Taqwa is to protect yourself from the consequences of your own actions. It is to protect yourself in two ways: to abandon sinning and adorn yourself with good deeds because you fear the punishment of Allah.

Allah ta'ala says in the ayaat of Hajj,

وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ

“And take a provision (with you) for the journey, but the best provision is At-Taqwa”
(2:197)

This ayah is beautiful because Allah ta'ala commands us to take provisions during Hajj, that is true reliance upon Allah, but He also advises us to take the provision of the hereafter which is taqwa.

During Hajj, you are tested with many things and you must also keep away from certain actions that are otherwise halaal for you to do. The only way one can restrain themselves and be patient during Hajj is to have taqwa of Allah.

حذر Hadthr

Hadthr is to escape something out of fear and cautiousness because you are in proximity of it. Allah azza wa jal uses this type of fear to describe the hypocrites in many ayaat. He says:

يَحْذَرُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ أَنْ تَنْزَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُورَةٌ تُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ

“The hypocrites fear (*hadthr*) lest a Surah should be revealed about them, showing them what is in their hearts.” (9:64)

راع Raa'a

Rau' is to startle someone, or to show up out of nowhere and so the person becomes alarmed. It is also defined as to respect combined with fear. This word only appears once in the Qur'an to describe the panic that Ibrahim alayhi salaam felt panic when the Angels refused the food that he offered them:

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبَ عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الرَّوْعُ وَجَاءَتْهُ الْبُشْرَىٰ يُجَادِلُنَا فِي قَوْمِ لُوطٍ

Then when the fear (*rau'*) had gone away from Ibrahim, and the glad tidings had reached him, he began to plead with Us (Our messengers) for the people of Lut.” (11:74)

وجس Wajas

Wajas is a fear when you hear news that scared you. It also means to hide your fear within you so that you don't let the person or thing scaring you know that you are scared.

Ibrahim was scared of the angels but he did not let them see his fear:

فَلَمَّا رَأَىٰ أَيْدِيَهُمْ لَا تَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ نَكِرَهُمْ وَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً

“But when he saw their hands went not towards it (the meal), he mistrusted them, and conceived a fear (*wajas*) of them.” (11:70)

Musa alayhi salaam also felt this hidden fear after he saw what the magicians could do with their staffs:

فَأَوْجَسَ فِي نَفْسِهِ خِيفَةً مُّوسَىٰ

So Musa conceived fear (*wajas*) in himself. (20:67)

Wajl وجل

Wajl is to have a fear that penetrates deep in your heart. It is a fear in which a person trembles and shivers. The word “mawjil”, from the same root, is a depressed ground for a large deep hole. When you come upon a huge hole in the ground out of nowhere, you are immediately shaken with fear.

This is how Allah ta’ala describes the hearts of the believers; they are immediately awe-struck and the fear of Him penetrates deep into their hearts:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَّتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ

“The believers are only those who, when Allah is mentioned, feel a fear (*wajl*) in their hearts.” (8:2)

Rahb رهب

Rahb is that kind of a fear that makes you very alert, very careful and does not let you relax. This is the type of fear that students feel during exam time: restless, careful, and concern for passing. It is also fear that you are afraid that you will disappoint the one you love.

Allah azza wa jal commands us to have this fear of Him:

إِنَّمَا هُوَ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَا فِرْعَوْنَ

Verily, He is (the) only One Deity. Then, fear Me much. (16:51)

The believers call upon Allah while fearing (*rabbah*) Him, and hoping (*raghbah*) in Him. Who knows which dua these two words are mentioned from the sunnah? Post in the comments inshaAllah if you know!

Rahb is also defined as a fear that one has in which he is concerned about saving himself. Allah ta'ala described the hypocrites as being more concerned about saving themselves from the Muslims instead of saving themselves from Allah:

لَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ رَهْبَةً فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ

“Verily, you are more fearful (*rabbah*) in their breasts than Allah. That is because they are a people who comprehend not.” (59:13)

رعب Ru'b

Ru'b is to be overwhelmed with fear and terror that makes you lose your reason.

Allah ta'ala placed this fear in the hearts of the mushriks of Makkah during the battle of Badr:

إِذْ يُوحِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَنِّي مَعَكُمْ فَثَبَّتُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا سَأُلْقِي فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الرُّعْبَ

“(Remember) when your Lord revealed to the angels, “Verily, I am with you, so keep firm those who have believed. I will cast terror (*ru'b*) into the hearts of those who have disbelieved.” (8:12)

Ru'b is also used to describe the reaction of a person if they entered upon the Companions of the Cave:

لَوْ اظَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِرَارًا وَلَمُلِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُعبًا

Had you looked at them, you would certainly have turned back from them in flight, and would certainly have been filled with awe (*ru'b*) of them. (18:18)

Allah made the cave so that no person would be able to remain there, such as a passerby, because the atmosphere was made that the person would feel fright so they would not be able to stay, but rather run in terror.

شفق Shafaq

Shafaq has many meanings in its different forms. Ashfaqa is that fear that some harm will come to a person you love, it is a fear that is mixed with love, such as the love of a mother for her children; she is fearful out of love for them.

The Believers will reminisce in Jannah:

قَالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا قَبْلُ فِي أَهْلِنَا مُشْفِقِينَ

“Saying: “Aforetime, we were afraid (*shafaq*) in the midst of our families.” (52:26)

This ayah can be interpreted in two ways: Firstly, the believers, even amongst their families, feared Allah and secondly, they had this shafaq for their families, they were afraid for the akhirah of their families.

While the believers were mushfiqeen in the dunya, the disbelievers will be mushfiqeen in the akhirah.

تَرَى الظَّالِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا وَهُمْ وَاقِعٌ بِهِمْ

“You will see the wrong-doers fearful (*shafaq*) of that which they have earned, and it (the punishment) will surely befall them.” (42:22)

When this word is followed by من, min, such as this ayah, it does not mean love at all but rather a fear in the heart such as apprehension, anxiety, concern and worry. Try and imagine the fear and worry they will feel knowing that Hell-Fire awaits them. Either you are mushfiq now, or will be mushfiq later.

وجف Wajf

Wajf is a fear mixed with discomfort. It is when your heart pounds and palpitates so hard out of fear. It is to be agitated in a disturbed condition. *Anjastul Khayl* means ‘I made my horse race forward by making its heart race.’

Allah azza wa jal depicts for us the Day of Judgment:

قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ

“Hearts that day will be full of terror.” (79:8)

By not putting an “al” (alif-laam, ﺍﻝ) on quloob, it shows that only some hearts will have this fear on that Day. Some hearts that day will be beating out of their chests. Also the sentence structure illustrates that these hearts are not scared at the moment, right now they have peace, but on that Day they will experience wajf. Furthermore in the above ayah, *waajifab* is an ism faa’il (someone who does an act), so their hearts will be start pounding and it will not come to rest. The terror will not subside.

...Another lesson as to why translations will never do justice to the Qur’an, and is a small taste of the intricacies of the Arabic language.