

(Ni'mah (Bounty) Always Refers to Wilayah (Guardianship)

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This is an excerpt from the book **Shining Sun: In Memory of Allamah Tabataba'i**; page **127-131**. The book was written by a close friend of Allamah Tabatabaee as a tribute to him. The style of the book is a bit distinct, in the sense that part of it is the various transcriptions of conversations and discussions Allamah had with the author or other students. Below is a passage from the book where Allamah Tabatabaee explains the relationship between the word .ni'mah and wilayah; text written in red were additions by me

ALLAMAH. The term ni'mah (bounty) occurs in several places in the Noble Qur'an. It is deduced from these verses that this term refers to guardianship (walayah and wilayah), by which is meant the wilayah of the Household of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt). And that is to follow the path they followed to reach the Threshold of their Lord, the Supreme Allah, which is the path of sheer servitude (al-ubudiyyat al-mahdah).

The above verse is one of those verses (referring to 14:28-29). It describes the change of Allah's bounty to ingratitude, and thus entry into the hellfire. Thus ni'mah is in fact the straight path (al-sirat al-mustaqim) and the shortest distance that a servant can take toward his God, whereby he attains the status of absolute and sheer servitude. To exchange this ni'mah with kufr is to abandon the straight path for distorted routes which diverge from the destination, and therefore thrust the traveler into hell.

Perhaps a more expressive and explicit verse is in Chapter 102 (al-Takathur): 'Then, on that day, you will surely be asked about the great bounty.' This chapter refutes all pluralities (katharat) in a strange and astonishing – yet clear and lucid – style. It calls everyone to the Realm of Unity ('alam al-wahdah). It questions man and holds him accountable for na'im (great bounty), which is the selfsame wilayah (guardianship):

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate. Rivalry in worldly increase distracted you. Until you visited the graves. No indeed; you will come to know. Again no indeed; you will come to know. No indeed; if you know with knowledge of certitude. You would [or will] surely see the hell. Then you will surely see it with vision of certitude. Then, on that day, you will surely be asked about the great bounty. (102:1-8)

Commenting on this chapter, Imam Sadiq said that na'im (great bounty) is not things like bread and cheese so to speak, but it refers to the high stages of servitude and sincerity in the path of

tawhid (monotheism) and wilayah (guardianship). Once, when he encountered Abu Hanifah, Imam Sadiq asked him about this verse and the meaning of na'im for which the people will be questioned and held accountable. Abu Hanifah replied, 'It refers to these [everyday] bounties that Allah has bestowed on the people, such as foods, fruits and their likes.' Then the Imam told him:

Is it really like a munificent host to provide his guests with all these boons and bounties that cover them from head to toe, so that they may eat and drink and satiate all their needs, but then have an agent who interrogates them upon exiting [from the feast], 'What did you eat and drink?' Would they be held accountable for that, so that they would reply, 'We had, say, bread and dates and so on'? That is not the case. Rather, na'im denotes the guardianship of us Ahl al-Bayt.

So people will be asked, 'On your way toward Allah, to what extent did you follow the approach, practice, and way of your Imams? And to what extent did you achieve the status of absolute and sheer servitude?' And the Garden of Great Bounty (jannat al-na'im) that is mentioned [several places] in the Qur'an refers to the same idea. It means the paradise of guardianship, which is the selfsame paradise of the chosen and intimate friends of Allah (mukhlasin and muqarrabin). It is the paradise of those who attained the station of God's Unity of Essence, those who were annihilated in the realms of the Divine Attributes of Beauty and Majesty, and those who entirely renounced every facet of their existence and submitted them all to the Truth .((al-Haqq, i.e. Allah

Ni'mah and na'im mean wilayah

'ALLAMAH. Thus, one can infer from the verses of the Qur'an and the traditions that bounty (ni'mah) is an allusion to guardianship (wilayah). Though it appears that ni'mah means bounty and blessing in the general sense, in these cases it refers to the bounty of wilayah in particular. But let us try to not base our interpretation on the narrations. Instead, let us see if we can infer this from the Qur'an alone.

Note that first, the chapter considers rivalry in pluralities (takathur) as something distracting. And one who attains the knowledge and the vision of certitude ('ilm al-yaqin and 'ayn al-yaqin) will see this distraction as hell and burning fire. Then the Noble Qur'an contrasts this rivalry in pluralities with na'im. Here, the Qur'an identifies na'im as the biggest asset which is worthy of one's being held accountable for and questioned about. So na'im is the Station of Unity (maqam al-tawhid), which manifests in a servant and is referred to as sheer servitude (al-'ubudiyyat almahdah). Therefore one should detest and reject takathur, which is the view of

plurality and multiplicity, and instead return to na'im, which is the approach of unity. From the verses alone, one can deduce that na'im is something truly prized and valuable. In fact, it should have been the most valuable end and objective of the creation. And as the Imam said, it is seemingly very unlikely for Allah to question one's reality and essence, of all the bounties that he has seen and benefited from in his life, from beginning to end. This means that throughout life, amidst all the bounties that Allah has bestowed upon human beings, they must diligently and vigorously strive for and acquire that one real and genuine bounty: guardianship, which is the bond between the created world and God, between the created and the Creator, between the originated (hadith) and the Primordial (qadim), between the contingent (mumkin al-wujud) and the Necessary (wajib al-wujud). Guidance is to acquire that bounty, and everything else is misguidance. Everyone in the world lives, communicates, marries, eats, rests, and sleeps. They all do the same careers of trading, manufacturing, gardening, and farming. However, some of them only see the outer side of these matters and miss out on the interior; they are the ones 'Who exchanged the bounty of Allah with ingratitude.' And some others seek that single reality within .(these numerous and multiple matters; and that is the great bounty (na'im