

Brief Analysis of Ne'ma (Bounty) in the Holy Qur'an

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This short text contains a detailed discussion about the meaning and context of the term "Ne'ma" (bounty/favour) as used in all the various places in the Holy Qur'an.

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ وَبِهِ تَعَالٰی نَسْتَعِیْنُ

فِي الْقُرْءَانِ الْكَرِیْمِ "النَّعْمَةُ"

Introduction

Praise be to Allah Who is Manifest before His creation because of themselves. Who is apparent to their hearts because of clear proof; Who created without meditating, since meditating does not befit except one who has thinking organs while He has no thinking organ in Himself. Praise is due to Allah whose worth cannot be described by speakers, whose bounties cannot be counted by calculators, whom the height of intellectual courage cannot appreciate. He for whose description no limit has been laid down,

no eulogy exists, no time is ordained and no duration is fixed.

Our goal in this discourse is to better understand a certain reality which we as humans as well as other creatures enjoy everyday of our lives in different ways and forms, though we may be aloof of its importance and significance. We will attempt to analyze the Arabic word **نعمة** / *Ne'mat* and its derivatives which are used frequently in the Holy Quran, so that we can better appreciate this concept and thereby give more appropriate thanks to our Lord to the best of our ability even though we will forever be indebted for His endless blessings.

There is no one word which perfectly conveys the meaning of *Ne'mat* in English, however the common words used interchangeably are bounty, blessing, favour, grace, or mercy. The general meaning of *Ne'mat* in the people's eyes is every good, enjoyment, happiness, and desired thing. *Ne'mat* can be relative since one *Ne'mat* can stand as pleasure to one person yet pain to another. Another word that is used interchangeably with the term *Ne'mat* is **فضل** / *Fadl*. It is from the divine attributes that the Almighty Creator is the **مُنْعِم** / *Mun'em* and **مُفْضِل** / *Mufdel* who generously showers His bounties, blessings, and favors upon all His creation.

Ne'mat (Bounty) versus Neqmat (Calamity)

One way to understand a word or concept is to comprehend it's opposite meaning. For example, if we'd like to understand what is light, we need to understand what darkness is. And if we desire to comprehend the meaning of heat, then we need to experience what cold is. Likewise, we can better understand the significance of *Ne'mat* by understanding what *Neqmat* / calamity is.

By definition, *Neqmat* means calamity, indignation, retaliation, or misfortune. *Neqmat* could affect us as a result of our unjust actions to ourselves or to others and the presence of *Neqmat* is equivalent to the absence of *Ne'mat*. Hence, we beseech Allah (SWT) at the end of Dua Kumail and call out to him

"يا سَابِغِ النِّعَمِ يا دَافِعِ النِّقَمِ..."

"You who perfects all bounties and who wards off all misfortunes!"

We acknowledge that Allah (SWT) is the one who blesses us with bounties and He (SWT) is also capable of preventing calamities from reaching us. In the beginning of this beautiful supplication, we seek the forgiveness of Allah (SWT) from different types of sins. Among the categories of sins that are highlighted are the sins that change or reverse the *Ne'am* (bounties). So we implore our Lord and pray,

"اللهم اغفر لي الذنوب التي تُغَيِّرُ النِّعَمَ"

Oh Allah! Forgive me those sins that change divine blessings.

Committing certain sins alter Allah's blessings for human being and replaces them with calamities and adversities. As cited in the *Commentary of Kumail Supplication* according to Imam Al Sajjad (AS), one of these sins is being ungrateful and unthankful. True happiness is to enjoy bounties without calamities and the reversal of divine favours into disfavours is in essence the existence of *Neqmat* (calamity).

It's important to note that even though a *Neqmat* which Allah (SWT) is capable of bringing forth has no limit, the mercy which He (SWT) possesses is enough to drown the most severe types of *Neqmat*, as expressed in the prayer recited on Saturdays,

"واتسعت رحمتك في شدة نِقْمَتِكَ واشتدت نِقْمَتُكَ في سعة رحمتك"

Your mercy is widespread even in the most toughest of Your calamities and Your calamities is severe in the presence of your endless mercy.

It is not the course of the Creator to change or transform the *Ne'am* (bounties) nor to hasten in bringing about the *Neqam* (calamities), as we call out Him in the Friday supplication in Saheefa Al Kamela by Imam Zainul Abideen (AS)

"يا من لا يُغَيِّرُ النِّعْمَةَ ولا يُبَادِرُ بالنِّقْمَةِ"

Oh He who changes not favours and rushes not to vengeance!

However, if the bounties we enjoy changes into *Neqmat*, it is due to our own actions and faults and that's why we pray in *Dua Kumail* to forgive those sins which changes the bounties.

Manifest (ظاهر) versus Hidden (باطن) Bounty

The bounties and blessings of Allah (SWT) can either be of the apparent / *Dhahir* type which is obvious to us, or it can be of the hidden / *Batin* type which requires contemplation and reflection on our part to identify and recognize such bounty. We often fail to realize that *Ne'am* are not only what our senses detect, what our eyes see, or what we feel. Allah (SWT) makes this distinction in the Quran when He says,

"وَأَسْبَغَ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَهُ ظَاهِرَةً وَبَاطِنَةً"

And He has completed and perfected His Graces upon you, both apparent and hidden. [31:20]

Examples of the apparent *Ne'am* that are related to our senses are what we eat and wear, our shelter, health, appearance, and lawful pleasures of this world. According to *Tafseer Bayan Al-Sa'ada fi Maqamaat Al 'Ibadah* by Al-Janabedhi, the most honorable of such bounties is one which brings forth the permanent blessings of the Hereafter, related to prophethood, the message, its acceptance by general pledge of allegiance (bay'a), the apparent invitation towards Islam, and the laws of the divine revelation. As for the hidden bounties, examples are knowledge, wisdom, guidance to doing righteous deeds, recognition, the intellect, and also the pleasures and delights of Paradise in the Hereafter.

And the most honorable of such type according to this exegesis is the divinely appointed Wali / guardian and the belief in his Wilayah / guardianship, its acceptance by giving the oath of allegiance to Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS), accepting the unseen invitation to Islam and the laws of Wilayah.

It is narrated that Imam Al-Baqir (AS) used to say, "*The apparent bounty is the Prophet (SA) and the message of Tawheed (Oneness) and Ma'refatullah (recognition of God). As for the hidden Ne'mat, it is our Wilayah (AhlulBayt) and our Mawada (love).*"

And according to Imam Al-Kadhem (AS), "*The apparent bounty is الإمام الظاهر (the manifest leader) and the unseen bounty is الإمام الغائب (occulted Imam).*" In the words of Imam Ali (AS) as cited in *Majma' Al-Bayan fi Tafseer Al Quran* by Sheikh Tabarsi, "*There are six types of bounties (Ne'am): Islam, Quran, Prophet Muhammad (SA), Satr / protection, 'Afeya / good health, and needlessness of what is in people's hands.*"

Who Are The Blessed Ones (مُنْعَمِينَ) with the Divine Bounty?

It is a known fact which no creation can deny that the Almighty Creator has blessed all His creation with bounties and sustenance. However, Allah (SWT) speaks to us in the Holy Quran about specific individuals whom He has blessed اللهُ عليهم with His bounties. He (SWT) identifies "them" to be the prophets from the progenies of Prophet Adam, Nuh, Ibraheem, and Israel (AS) and those who are guided and chosen by Him, as cited in verse 58 of Surat Maryam:

"أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ آدَمَ وَمِمَّنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْرَائِيلَ وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَاجْتَبَيْنَا..."

These are they whom Allah hath favoured, from among the prophets, of the progeny of Adam and of them whom We bare with Nuh, and of the progeny of Ibrahim and Israel, and of those whom We have guided and chosen...

This verse displays the different levels of honor which prophets have in their relation to other prophets before them. So Prophet Idrees has an honorable lineage to Adam, Nuh has an honorable lineage to Idrees, and Ibraheem has an honorable lineage to Prophet Nuh (peace be upon all of them), etc. Each prophet has a ship of salvation which its followers have great pride to have that prophet as a divine guide.

According to *Tafseer Tebyan Al-Jami' Li 'Uloom Al Quran* by Sheikh Al-Toosi, the word "من" in this verse indicates that not all prophets receive that special divine blessing from Allah (SWT); only the chosen ones who hold an exceptional high rank attain that privilege. In *Tafseer Al Safi* by Fayd Al-Kashani, he points out that the sons of daughters are included in the "progeny" just like Prophet 'Isa (AS). If this is the case, then we can surely consider Imam Hasan (AS) and Husain (AS) who are the sons of Lady Fatima (AS) the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (SA), to be from the progeny of Prophet Ibraheem (AS).

Furthermore, Seyyid Muhammad Hussain Tabatabai in his exegesis *Mizan fi Tafseer Al Quran* highlights the fact that the above verse indicates that there are *other* guided and chosen ones besides the prophets who have also attained these special blessings from Allah (SWT). They are among the truthful / sidiqueen, the martyrs / shuhadaa, and the righteous ones. Tababatai correlates this verse with verse # 7 of Surat Al Fatiha to point out that these special individuals whom Allah (SWT) has granted His special bounties have a straight path which they tread and follow,

"صراط الذين أنعمت عليهم"

The path of those whom You have favoured.

Allah (SWT) has made it incumbent on every Muslim to beseech Him in their daily obligatory prayers to guide them to this straight path which belongs to these divinely chosen guides. They are those whom Allah (SWT) blessed with His obedience. It is cited in *Tafseer Al Safi* regarding this verse that Imam Jafar Al Sadiq (AS) stated that those who have received the divine blessings (*Ne'mat*) are none other than the Seal of Messengers Prophet Muhammad (AS) and his purified progeny.

In another tradition, Ahmad Al Halbi narrates from Abi Abdillah (AS) that he recites

"إهدنا الصراط المستقيم"

Guide us to the straight path, in reference to Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS). Moreover, Sheikh Al Tabarsi explains in his Tafseer Bayan that the “straight path” mentioned in Surat Al Fatiha not only includes the laws of religions and jurisprudence, but we ask in this prayer to take as role model those whom Allah (SWT) has made their obedience (the Imams) obligatory on us.

Once it comes to our attention that Allah (SWT) has servants whom He (SWT) chose over creation and designated them as divine proofs, it is only natural for us to desire their proximity, tread their path, and seek protection from being among the misguided and those who are blinded from the right path.

In another verse, Allah (SWT) warns the sons of Adam (AS) not to follow the devil, and to follow the straight path which leads to Him,

"ألم أعهد إليكم يبنى آدم أن لا تعبدوا الشيطان إنه لكم عدو مبين. وأن
اعبدوني هذا صراط مستقيم.

Did I not enjoin upon you, O children of Adam, that you not worship Satan – indeed, he is to you a clear enemy. And that you worship Me? This is a straight path. [36:60–61]

Allah (SWT) clearly points out that the only appropriate way to worship Him is to follow that *Siraat Al Mustaqeem* which is a path that is opposite of the devilish path. It is interesting to note that He (SWT) says “هذا” (that) to indicate a specific path, or rather a special someone. Another characteristic of these divinely blessed personalities is that they are not among those who are *مغضوب عليهم* (earned your anger), nor are they from the *ضالين* (misguided).

Ali ibn Ibrahim Al Qummi states in his *Tafseer Al Quran* that those who have earned the divine anger are the *Nawaseb* – those who have shown animosity towards the Prophet's household and have neglected their Wilayah (guardianship). As for the misguided ones, they are those who doubt and do not know who their real Imam / leader is.

How Can We Join The Ranks Of Those Who Have Been Blessed With the Divine Bounty?

So if we are interested in treading the straight path (*Siraat Al Mustaqeem*) which belongs to these luminous personalities whom Allah (SWT) has blessed with *Ne'mat*, how can we accomplish that? Well, Allah (SWT) gives us the answer in the Quran when He (SWT) says,

"ومن يُطع الله والرسول فأولئك مع الذين أنعم الله عليهم من النبيين
والصديقين والشهداء والصالحين وحسن أولئك رفيقا."

And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, they will be in the company of those on whom Allah has bestowed His Grace, of the Prophets, the Sidiqeen (those followers of the Prophets who were first and foremost to believe in them), the martyrs, and the righteous. And how excellent are these as a company! [4:69]

So the key to joining these blessed individuals in their straight path is to obey Allah (SWT) and His Prophet, and the Quran verifies to us that the Prophet (SA) does not speak out of his own will or desire. Tafseer Bayan Sa'ada explains that in this verse the obedience to Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SA) is specifically in reference to the order of Wilayah to Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS). Whoever accepts the Wilayah of Ali (AS) will return and resort to him, and whoever sincerely resorts to him will be accepted by him, and whoever becomes accepted by him will attain his mercy.

Hence, the servant's pledge of allegiance and covenant with Allah (SWT) will be accepted and he will enter the domain of his Wilayah. And whomever Ali (AS) welcomes in his realm of Wilayah, they will then be in the company of those whom Allah (SWT) has bestowed His Grace. It follows that whoever reached the stage of prophethood did not reach its perfection except by the Wilayah of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS). Thus, we can understand Prophet Muhammad's proclamation in Ghadeer Khum when he declared, "*Whomsoever I am his Mawla (master/guardian), then Ali is his Mawla.*"

Here, the Prophet (SA) is telling us that anyone who takes him as his master, whether human or jinn, should also take Ali (AS) as his guardian. We know that all the other prophets and messengers consider the Seal of Messengers Prophet Muhammad (SA) to be their guardian and superior to them. Hence, they also take Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) to be their master and believe him to be superior over them, and they also believe in his Wilayah.

According to reliable sources as cited in Volume 1 of *Hayaat Al Qulub*, Abu-Sa'id narrates that he heard Prophet Muhammad (SA) say to Imam Ali, "*O 'Ali! Allah did not send any Prophet but ordered him of your love and Wilayah whether he liked it or not.*"

According to another authentic tradition, the Prophet (SA) said "*I asked Allah whom I should nominate and He revealed to me, 'Nominate your cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib, whose name I have mentioned in the previous divine Books and stated that he is your successor. I have also obtained the oath of fealty for My Lordship, your Prophethood and Imamate and Wilayah of 'Ali ibn Abi-Talib from all the creatures and Prophets.'*"

When analyzing the above verse [4:69], we will observe that Allah (SWT) states that He (SWT) granted his special divine blessings to those among the prophets, the Sidiqeen (truthful), the martyrs, and the

righteous. Interestingly in his exegesis, Ali ibn Ibrahim Al Qummi identifies the “prophets” to be in reference to Prophet Muhammad (SA), and the “sidiqeen” to be Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) as he was the first to believe in the message of Prophet Muhammad (SA).

Also, in the book of Uyoon, it is narrated that the Prophet (SA) said, “*Every Ummah has a Sideeq (truthful) and Farooq (separator), and the Sideeq of this Ummah and its Farooq is Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS).*” Furthermore, Al Qummi states that “martyrs” in this verse is in reference to Al-Hasan and Al-Husain (AS), while the “Saliheen” or the righteous ones are the Infallible Imams from the progeny of Imam Husain (AS). This verse concludes with **”وحسن أولئك رفيقا”** *And how excellent are these as a company.* Al Ayaashi in Tafseer Safi states that the “best companionship” is represented in Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS).

If we analyze the autobiography of the Prophet (SA) as well as Imam Ali (AS), we will realize the strong bond that they cherished with each other which exceeded the relation of brotherhood to the level of them representing the Nafs/self of each other.

Historians write that Ali (AS) used to always accompany the Prophet (SA) even when he would go to the desert or mountains. It was this unique relationship that Imam Ali (AS) describes in these words in *Nahjul Balagha*:

"كنت أتبعه اتباع الفصيل أثر أمه يرفع لي في كل يوم من أخلاقه علماً ويأمرني
بالاقتداء به."

"I followed him [Prophet Muhammad (SA)] step by step as a baby camel follows its mother. He used to place a fresh code of behavior before me daily and order me he to follow it."

In the same speech Imam Ali (AS) continues,

"وقد علمتم موضعي من رسول الله (ص) بالقرابة القريبة ، والمنزلة الخصيصة
، وضعني في حجره وأنا وليد ، يضمني إلى صدره ، ويكنفني في فراشه ،
ويمسني جسده ، ويشمّني عرفه وكان يمضغ الشيء ثم يلقمنيه."

You know that due to my close relationship, and my special rank I enjoyed with the Messenger of Allah (SA), I have a distinguished position with him. He took me in his lap when I was a baby. He often kept me embraced to his heart. He used to make me sleep next to him. We used to be so close to each other that I felt the warmth of his body and smelled the fragrance of his odor. When I was a baby, He fed me

from his mouth, chewing hard bits for me.”

Hence, it follows human logic that we refer to the closest personality who is the “gate of knowledge” and has inherited the teachings of the pure Islam from the city of knowledge – the Holy Prophet (SA).

Perfection (إِتْمَام) of the Ne'mat

The pleasure and joy of the recipient of divine blessings مُنْعَم reaches its peak when the blessing itself has reached the stage of perfection. As Allah (SWT) is the Absolute Perfection who brings completion to things, it is also His course of action and will to bring perfection to His bounties. The Quran speaks numerously about the perfection of *Ne'mat* (bounty), most notably in verse

"اليوم أكملت لكم دينكم وأتممت عليكم نعمتي ورضيت لكم الإسلام ديناً."

Today I have perfected for you your religion, and have completed My favour upon you, and am well-pleased with Islam as your religion. [5:3]

Most exegesis testify that this verse was revealed to the Prophet (SA) on the journey back from the Farewell Pilgrimage on the year 10 A.H. It was revealed immediately after the Prophet (SA) appointed Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) as his successor on the Islamic state at a place called Ghadeer Khum. Indeed this is one of the most critical verses of the Holy Quran as it announces the completion of the message, the perfection of **the** bounty and the divine approval and satisfaction of this religion.

Without this verse being present in the Quran, one may question whether the message has fully been conveyed, or whether Allah (SWT) is pleased with the religion as it was relayed. The above verse clearly states that the religion was completed and the bounties perfected on a specific day; history tells us that day was on the event of Ghadeer Khum on the 18th of DhulHijjah, 10th year A. H. Indeed, the final message to humanity was completed with the Imamate and successorship being a condition to its completeness. According to *Majma' Al Bayan*, when this verse was revealed the Prophet (SA) exclaimed:

"الله أكبر على إكمال الدين وإتمام النعمة برسالتي وولاية علي بن أبي طالب من بعدي. من كنت مولاه فعلي مولاه اللهم والي من ولاه وعادي من عاداه وانصر من نصره وخذل من خذله."

God is Great for the completion of religion and perfection of bounty by my message and by the Wilayah/guardianship of Ali ibn Abi Talib after me. Whomever I am his Mawla, then Ali is his Mawla. Oh God, be the friend of him who is his friend, and be the enemy of him who is his enemy. Help him who helps him and forsake him who forsakes him.

It is interesting to note that the verse mentions the *Ne'mat* in the singular form as opposed to plural to indicate that Allah (SWT) is referring to a specific bounty, and not just any bounty.

Islam is built on five pillars and the last pillar is the Wilayah and giving the pledge of allegiance for Imamate of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS). The five pillars are not completed except by completion of its parts, and the bounty (*Ne'mat*) of Islam is not completed without its 5th pillar. Al-Kafi narrates that Imam Al Baqir (AS) has said, "A *Fareeda* (obligatory action) is issued after another *Fareeda*. And the *Wilayah* is among the last obligations to be revealed."

Tafseer Safi interestingly points out that Allah (SWT) did not state that He (SWT) has completed the *Fara'ed* (obligatory deeds)

"أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ الْفَرَائِضَ";

rather Allah (SWT) declares that He has completed the religion

"أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ".

The last obligation that was revealed is the obligation of Wilayah in Ghadeer Khum which was followed by the revelation of the verse of completion of religion.

Furthermore, Allah (SWT) says in verse [5:6] which was revealed in the context of ablution and purification that He (SWT) desires to complete His bounty perhaps we may be thankful for His favour upon us.

"وَلَكِنْ يَرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ."

But He intends to purify you and complete His favor upon you that you may be grateful.

Once again, the term *Ne'mat* is used in the singular form. The exegesis of Tafseer Bayan Sa'ada reveals that the latent meaning of the *Ne'mat* mentioned in this verse is in reference to the bay'a (pledge

of allegiance) of Wilayah which is the essence of perfection of the *Ne'mat* of Islam. Perhaps after appreciating that greatest bounty from Allah (SWT) we would be sincerely thankful to Him. In another verse which mentions changing direction of Qibla towards Mecca, Allah (SWT) says:

"فلا تخشوهم واخشوني ولأتم نعمتي عليكم ولعلكم تهتدون."

So fear them not, but fear Me! And so that I may complete My Blessings on you and that you may be guided. [2: 150]

In this verse, Allah (SWT) mentions His specific *Ne'mat* in reference to Imam Ali (AS) but one may wonder what correlation exists between the bounty of Wilayah and the changing of Qibla which is the context of the above verse. If we reflect on the meaning of this verse, we'll understand that the new direction of Muslims has been changed to the Holy Kaaba. With that in mind, let us also remember that the Holy Kaaba happens to be the birthplace of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) which is a unique gift and virtue for him.

Hence, Allah (SWT) wants to lift our attention that the essence and core of our direction is to the *Wilayah* of Imam Ali (AS) which is symbolized by his birthplace in the Holy Kaaba. This change of direction towards the Kaaba by the heart is equivalent to the perfection of *Ne'mat*. Perhaps we can be guided by him who is the representation of *Siraat Al Mustaqeem* (the Straight path) as discussed earlier.

If we wanted to summarize the state of affairs between the Creator and creation in regards to bestowal of bounties, we will not find better words than the supplication of Imam Husain ibn Ali (AS) on the day of Arafah where he says:

"ثم إذ خلقتني من خير الثرى لم ترضى لي يا إلهي نعمة دون أخرى وورقتني من أنواع المعاش و صنوف الرياش بمنك العظيم الأعظم عليّ وإحسانك القديم إليّ حتى إذا أتممت عليّ جميع النعم و صرفت عني كل النقم لم يمنعك جهلي وجرأتي عليك أن دللتني إلى ما يقربني إليك ووفقتني لما يُزلفني لديك فإن دعوتك أجبتي وإن سألتك أعطيتني وإن أطعتك شكرتني وإن شكرتك زدني كل ذلك إكمالاً لإنعامك عليّ وإحسانك إليّ فسبحانك..."

"Then, since You created me from the best soil, You were not satisfied, my God, that I should have one blessing with another. You provided me with varieties of sustenance and kinds of garments and Your tremendous, most tremendous, graciousness to me and Your Eternal goodness towards me.

And finally, when You had completed for me every blessings and turned away from me all misfortunes, You were not prevented by my ignorance and audacity from guiding me towards that which would bring me nigh to You or from giving me success in that which would bring me close to You. For if I prayed to You, You answered; and if I asked of You, You gave me; if I obeyed You, You showed Your gratitude; and if I thank You, You gave me more. All of that was to perfect Your blessings upon me and Your goodness towards me. So glory be to you..."

If we briefly analyze this excerpt from the beautiful supplication of Husain (AS) on the day of Arafah which speaks volumes of the level of ma'refat / recognition and knowledge that he possesses, we can conclude the following points. From His great generosity and goodness, Allah (SWT) created us from the best material and chose to bestow a cocktail of bounties and blessings to the point of its perfection and protection from calamities and misfortunes.

But unfortunately, this perfection of bounties coupled with protection of calamities did not remove the ignorance and audacity from us and despite that, Allah (SWT) provided us lights of guidance towards His proximity. Furthermore, His absolute mercy was obvious in His response to our call, His gratitude to our obedience, and He (SWT) gave us more than that as a sign of perfection to His bounties!

Remembrance (ذِكْر) of the Ne'mat

Remembering a *Ne'mat* means that a human is conscious that it is a blessing, a favor; it is something that is conferred by the *Master*, and the *Master* has honored us with it. Allah (SWT) also emphasizes the importance of remembrance (dhikr) of His bounties. For example, He (SWT) says:

"وذكروا نعمة الله عليكم وما أنزل عليكم من الكتاب والحكمة يعظكم به."

And remember Allah's favour upon you, and that he has sent down unto you the Book and the wisdom whereby He exhorted you. [2:231]

In reference to this verse, Tafseer Bayan Sa'ada explains that the more a believer treads the path of Wilayah Mutlaqa (absolute guardianship), it becomes a *Ne'mat* to him, and when he actually reaches that stage, the *Ne'mat* is completed and perfected on him. Rather, the believer himself becomes a *Ne'mat*! Anything that is associated with Wilayah whether derived from it or refers back to it is also a *Ne'mat* due to its association to it. In another verse where Allah addresses Bani Israel, He (SWT) says,

"يا بني إسرائيل اذكروا نعمتي التي أنعمت عليكم وأوفوا بعهدي أوفى بعهدكم وإياي فارهبون."

O Children of Israel! Remember My Favour which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill (your obligations to) My Covenant (with you) and fear none but Me. [2:40].

The Jews of Medina opposed the prophethood of Muhammad (SA), betrayed him, and said that they know Muhammad (SA) is prophet and Ali (AS) is his Wasi (guardian), but they refuse to believe in either of them. Ayaashi narrates that Imam Al Sadiq (AS) explained that the above verse is in reference to fulfilling the obligation of Wilayah to Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) and that He (SWT) will grant Paradise in return for fulfillment of this divine obligation. Moreover, in his exegesis, Fayd Al Kashani asserts that the instruction of "أوفوا بعهدي" (fulfilling the covenant) is in relation to that pledge which the Prophet (SA) took on their ancestors – their prophets.

The Jews were ordered to believe in the prophethood of Muhammad (SA) – the Arab, Quraishi, Hashemi whose characteristics is clearly described in their books. They were ordered to support he who is supported by miracles and who among his signs is Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS), his brother and companion who shares the same intellect, knowledge, and clemency as him and is the supporter of the religion by his sword. In the last part of this verse "وإياي فارهبون" (And fear none but Me), Allah (SWT) is instructing to fear Him and exercise Taqwa in regards to disobeying His Prophet in what he orders them, specifically the order of the Wilayah of Imam Ali (AS).

The divine instruction to remember His bounty is emphasized once again here:

"واذكروا نعمة الله عليكم وميثاقه الذي واثقكم به إذ قلتم سمعنا وأطعنا واتقوا الله إن الله علیم بذات الصدور."

And remember Allah's Favour to you and His Covenant with which He bound you when you said: "We hear and we obey." And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is All-Knower of that which is in (secrets of your) breasts [5:7].

The Mithaaq / covenant mentioned in this verse is the covenant of successorship taken on the journey back from the Farewell pilgrimage. Al Qummi states in his exegesis that when the Prophet (SA) took the covenant of Wilayah, the people answered "We hear and we obey", but they broke their covenants afterwards. Hence, Allah (SWT) is reminding the people to beware lest they forget the *Ne'mat* and break their allegiance to Imam Ali (AS). After all, He (SWT) knows the secrets of the hearts and the thoughts of disobedience which is being entertained in the minds of some companions regarding the

successorship of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS).

Thanks (شُكْر) and Praise (حَمْد) for the Ne'mat

The remembrance (dhikr) of Allah's bounties and its acknowledgement is the first step towards expression of thanks (shokr) and praise for His bounties to us. Ameer Al-Mu'mineen (AS) starts Sermon 114 of Nahjul Balagha with these most profound words which sheds light on the correlation of praise with bounty, "*Praise be to Him Who makes praise followed by bounty and bounty with gratefulness. We praise Him on His bounties as on His trials.*"

From his eloquent words of wisdom, we come to recognize that Allah (SWT) the Almighty Creator created 'praise' and taught us its knowledge so that we can appreciate His bounties. It follows that more praise leads to more divine grace and vice versa. Not only that, but our praise to Him should not be limited or restricted to His bounties on us. As servants, we should also express thanks and gratitude for the times of trial and calamities we experience.

From the strange phenomenon which is of human nature that doesn't change with time or place is that man tends to forget, disregard, or overlook Allah's bounties and blessings to him, whether they are apparent or hidden. It is the tendency of humans, with the exception of few, that when man receives a blessing on a continuous and consistent basis he takes that bounty for granted and forgets to thank the Giver and Provider for that **عطاء** / grant. He distances himself from the Provider and becomes **غافل** / heedless and oblivious to it. Allah (SWT) describes man to be ungrateful,

"وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرِينَ."

Only very few of My servants are grateful. [34:13]

It is only when that bounty is seized from him at a moment of trial that man begins to wake up from his slumber and remember that the bounty was indeed a gift and that gift was bestowed by the Creator/Gifter. When a calamity or misfortune takes place, the person is then reminded to return to his Creator in a state of despair seeking refuge and help from Him. However, that state of return is short-lived and dies down when the bounty is restored and he returns back to his normal life of *ghaflat* / heedlessness and detachment from His Lord. This state is described in the Holy Quran as Allah (SWT) says in Surat Al-Israa:

أعرض ونأى بجانبه وإذا مسه الشر فذو دعاء عريض " وإذا أنعمنا على الإنسان

When We bestow favours on man he turns away, and gets himself remote on his side (instead of coming to Us); and when evil seizes him (he comes) full of prolonged prayer! [17:83]

It is important for us to note that trials or *Neqmat* can also act as a *Ne'mat* which we may not realize or recognize that it is. In fact, authentic narrations say that the right of Allah (SWT) during the time of trial is satisfaction and patience, while His right during the time of ease is praise and gratitude. So, if we exercise patience, submission, reliance, and gratitude to Allah (SWT) at our times of trial and difficulty, then this experience will surely strengthen our relationship with our Creator and will bring us closer to Him which is the ultimate salvation and the greatest bounty from Him.

Likewise, a *Ne'mat* (bounty) may also stand as a test and trial for us if we fail to appreciate it, recognize its benefactor, and give due thanks to Allah (SWT) to the best of our ability. In other words, if our reaction to His bounty is that of arrogance, neglect, and thanklessness to the Giver, then we have surely done injustice to ourselves as well as our Lord, and that is in essence the trial which we have failed!

Furthermore, man does not count or tally the number of bounties and blessings he enjoys from Allah (SWT), but his memory tends to be strong and he is quick to remember to how many negative events or misfortunes he encounters even if it is in the past. From the injustices that we commit against our Lord is our failure to fully recognize and appreciate every bounty that we receive and we only consider the materialistic bounties while ignoring many other blessings which may have more value and importance. Allah (SWT) has given us many *Ne'am* which cannot not be calculated or counted

وإن تعدوا نعمة الله لا تحصوها."

And if you should count the favors of Allah, you could not enumerate them. [16:81]

As cited in the exegesis of Mizan, Burhan, as well as Safi, whenever Imam Ali ibn Al Husain (AS) recited the above verse, he would reflect and say, "Glory be to Him who did not grant the knowledge of His *Ne'mat*/bounty without having awareness of *Taqseer*/neglect of its knowledge, just like He did not grant anyone the knowledge of its *Edraak*/recognition more than the knowledge that the servant cannot fully recognize Him. So he (servant) thanks the Lord for the knowledge of the gnostics regarding the deficiency of his knowledge of how to properly thank Him. So Allah (SWT) made the knowledge of their deficiency in itself an expression of *Shokr*/thanks."

So, human's awareness of his lack of knowledge or *Taqseer*/neglect and his inability to fully appreciate the bounties he receives from His Creator and his failure to properly express *Hamd*, is in itself a

Ne'mat/bounty which deserves endless thanks and praise by the servant. As beautifully expressed by Imam Zainul Abideen (AS) in his supplication of thanks, *"The most thankful of Thy servants has not the capacity to thank Thee."* These words of the Infallible Imam (AS) are in line with verse [16:81] in addressing the capacity of a servant to thank the Creator.

Moreover, every time a person expresses Hamd/praise or Shokr/thanks to Allah, our 4th Imam (AS) teaches us that our act of praise in itself deserves another thanks. In fact, there are three things which we should thank Allah (SWT) for whenever we utter or express gratitude to Him. First, we owe it to Allah (SWT) who taught us how to express thanks to Him and we should thank him for giving us that knowledge. Second, we should thank Him for giving us the ability to express thanks to Him by our tongue and providing the means and method of communication with Him. Last but not least, Allah (SWT) is most-deserving of our utmost thanks for inspiring and giving us the opportunity to remember and appreciate His bounties.

This beautiful phrase from the 'Munajaat (Whispered prayers) of Thanks' by Imam Sajjad (AS) as available in Saheefa Al Kamela nicely describes the state of wonder where a servant expresses his failed attempt to recognize and give due thanks to the Giver and Sustainer. Here, the servant who carries high level of knowledge and ma'refat/recognition of His Lord realizes that every word of praise by him deserves more thanks:

"ونعمائوك كثيرة قصر فهمي عن إدراكها فضلاً عن إستقصائها فكيف لي
بتحصيل الشكر وشكري إياك يفتقر إلى شكر ، فكلما قلت لك الحمد وَجِبَ
عليّ لذلك أن أقول لك الحمد."

*Thy favours are many – my understanding falls short of grasping them, not to speak of exhausting them!
So how can I achieve thanksgiving? For my thanking Thee requires thanksgiving. Whenever I say, 'To
Thee belongs praise!', it becomes thereby incumbent upon me to say, 'To Thee belongs praise!'*

Since we've reached the conclusion based on the analysis so far that the most important and valuable bounty given to us by Allah (SWT) is the divine guidance impersonated by His chosen Infallible Prophets and Imams, it follows logically that this gift of Wilayah deserves most thanks and praise to Him compared to any other bounty.

Moreover, it is the supplication of the prophets and righteous servants to Allah (SWT) that He gives them the ability to express thanks and gratitude for His blessings, and this supplication is cited in the Quran in their own words,

"ربي أوزعني أن أشكر نعمتك التي أنعمت عليّ وعلى والديّ وأن أعمل صالحاً
ترضاه وأصلح في ذريتي.

My Lord, direct me to appreciate the blessings You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and to do the righteous works that please You. Let my children be righteous as well. [46: 15]

According to Tafseer Bayan Sa'ada, this verse is specifically the words of Husain ibn Ali (AS) who prayed that he successfully expresses thanks for the bounty on him and his parents, Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) and Fatima daughter of Muhammad (SA). Interestingly enough, this exegesis points out that the prayer of

وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحاً تَرْضَاهُ

(and to do the righteous works that please You) is in reference to the great sacrifice which Husain (AS) presented on the day of Ashura in Karbala in the year 61 A.H.

The clue in this verse which proves that Imam Husain (AS) is the one reciting this supplication is his prayer that Allah (SWT) grants him a righteous progeny. Sure enough, after being slaughtered and sacrificing everything he had for the sake of Allah (SWT) on the plains of Karbala, Allah (SWT) rewarded him with a pure progeny who are the nine Infallible Imams from his descendants, and ending with Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance).

As a sign of gratitude, It is imperative for a servant who is blessed with God's bounty to show the effect of these divine blessings and convey them to others without bragging or boasting as Allah (SWT) states in Surat Adh-Duha:

"وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ"

And proclaim the Grace of your Lord. [93: 11]

This Surah speaks about the blessings which Allah (SWT) granted His Prophet (SA) such as giving him refuge as an orphan, guiding him, and making him self-sufficient with contentment. Interestingly, Allah (SWT) instructs the Prophet (SA) to speak about and convey His specific bounty. Tafseer Burhaan explains that what Allah (SWT) blessed His Prophet (SA) with is prayer, Zakat, fasting, Hajj, and the *Wilayah* which he is to proclaim to the people. So, the Prophet (SA) is to speak about the importance of

Wilayah and the virtues of the Wali himself (Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib) even if the people disliking hearing that discourse.

He is to focus the spotlight on his purified progeny even if they call him crazy or insane or claim that he is possessed with his cousin which is what actually happened! So Allah (SWT) hastened to his defense in Surat Al Qalam and swore that the Prophet (SA) is not crazy regarding the Ne'ma of his Lord who is none other than Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS). Nor is he fanatical about his cousin and son-in-law, as some of the companions were envious of the special and very close relationship which the Prophet (SA) cherished with Imam Ali (AS).

ن ﴿؟﴾ وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةٍ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ

“Noon. I swear by the pen and what the angels write. You are not, By the bounty of your Lord, mad (possessed) [68:2]

Although commentators of Quran do not explicitly convey this meaning, if we closely analyze this Surah we'll notice that this chapter starts and ends with the mention of جنون / insanity. Interestingly enough, Allah (SWT) mentions twice in this short chapter that the nonbelievers are claiming that the Prophet (SA) is insane and in both occasions Allah (SWT) is vindicating His Prophet from that false claim.

وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ وَإِنْ يَكَادُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ لَمَّا سَمِعُوا
الذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ لَمَجْنُونٌ

And those who disbelieve would almost smite you with their eyes when they hear the Message (the Command) and they say “Surely he is mad (possessed). And It is not but a message to the worlds. [68:51–52]

In the commentary of these verses, Tafseer Al Safi cites that according to Al Kafi, one day Imam Al Sadiq (AS) passed by the Masjid Ghadeer and turned his head to one side and pointed out the exact position where the Prophet (SA) stood and pronounced the successorship of Imam Ali (AS). Then he turned his face to the other side and pointed out the location of the tent (on that day) of such-and-such person including Salem (the freed-slave of Hudhaifah ibn Al Yaman) and Abi Ubaidah ibn Al Jarrah.

When these individuals saw the Prophet (SA) raising the hand of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS), some of them turned to the other and whispered among themselves about the Prophet (SA), 'Look at his eyes how they move around as if they are the eyes of a mad person!' At that moment, Archangel Jibrael descended with this verse

لَمَّا سَمِعُوا الذِّكْرَ

when the Prophet (SA) spoke to the audience about the virtues of Imam Ali (AS).

So Ameer Al-Mu'mineen Ali (AS) is described by Allah (SWT) to be

ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

(the dhikr/remembrance/message to the whole world) which is in essence *Wilayah Mutlaqa* / absolute guardianship. Now if we correlate verses 51-52 with verse 2 of this Surah, we will realize that the subject of "madness" is the same and that is - the Wilayah of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS)!

So, when the Prophet (SA) speaks publicly in Ghadeer about the virtues of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS), he is fulfilling the instructions of verse 93:11 to speak about **the bounty** of Allah (SWT) represented in his successor.

Actually, the act of *Tahadoth* / proclaiming the grace of Allah (SWT) is in itself a sign of Shokr (thanks). This is supported by a prophetic hadeeth which states that,

"من لم يشكر الناس لم يشكر الله ومن لم يشكر القليل لم يشكر الكثير والتحدث
بنعمة الله شكر وتركه كُفْرٌ."

Whoever is not grateful to the people is not grateful to Allah (SWT), and whoever does not thank for the little bounty will not thank for the many bounties. Asserting the favours of Allah (SWT) is considered to be gratitude while avoiding to do so is Kufr (disbelief).

This leads us to the next important subtopic in our discussion which is *Kufran Al Ne'mat*.

Denial (كُفْرَان) of the Ne'mat

In order to understand what exactly is Shokr Al *Ne'mat* (thankfulness of bounty), it important for us to understand what is it's opposite; that is, *Kufran Al Ne'mat* (denial of bounties) which is one of the topics addressed in the Holy Quran. By understanding what exactly *Kufran Al Ne'mat* entails, we can avoid falling into that sin and refrain from being among those who exhibit that negative behavior. By definition, the word "*Kufran*" which is derived from the Arabic root word "*Kufr*" means disbelief, infidelity, or

blasphemy. In simple words, to practice *Kufr* is to deny or reject and the common example used is when we refer to the disbelievers and rejecters of a religion as “*Kufaar*” (nonbelievers).

So what exactly does it mean to say “*Kufran Al Ne’mat*”? In the words of a prominent and unique scholar of his time, Allamah Rasheed Turabi, “*rejecting the divine favors or bounties, not recognizing Allah’s favors as favors, changing the basic idea of a Ne’mat, wasting a bounty, and diverting the sense and the meaning of a blessing, all fall under “Kufran Al Ne’mat”*”.

He further explains that a bounty is a favor in which the concept of a right is absent, so if a recipient claims that he had the right to a particular blessing and if he considers that favor as his due, he instantly alters the nature of that *Ne’mat* and exchanges the bounty with thanklessness by denying it. Allah (SWT) opens our eyes to this category of individuals

"ألم ترى إلى الذين بدّلوا نعمة الله كفوفاً وأحلوا قومهم دار البوار. جهنم يصلونها
وبئس القرار."

Have you not seen those who gave away the blessings of Allah in exchange for thanklessness and led their people down to the Abode of Loss (Even to) Hell? They are exposed thereto. A hapless end! [14:28]

The key word in this verse is **تبدیل** / *Tabdeel* which means to replace, alter, or change one thing with another. In the context of this verse, Allah (SWT) is telling us that there are individuals who will replace the bounty of Allah (SWT) – a particular bounty and not just any bounty – with disbelief, rejection, and neglect. Not only that, but a consequence of their action is leading the people astray.

Now, what type of blessing is this which if denied or replaced will lead to misguidance? What type of bounty is that which will lead to eternal damnation in Hell–Fire? Could it be the bounty of eating, drinking, or possession of wealth? Of course not! Logic and common sense tells us that it could not be a materialistic bounty and that Allah (SWT) must be referring to a bounty that is *much* greater in His eyes such that He (SWT) is mentioning it in the singular form!

If we research authentic traditions, we will find that it is narrated by Ali ibn Ibrahim in his commentary of Quran that Imam Al Sadiq (AS) said in reference to this verse, “*By Allah, we are Ne’matullah / the bounty of Allah which He (SWT) gave this blessing to His servants. Through us, the victorious gain their victory.*” These words of the 6th Imam is also narrated by the tongue of the 1st Imam as relayed by one of his close companions Asbagh ibn Nubata which is cited in both Tafseer Mizan and Ayaashi. So if we come to realize that the purified progeny of the Holy Prophet (SA) are essentially **the bounty** which has been replaced, it leads us to question how and why they were replaced.

Sure enough, if we reminisce the verses we discussed earlier in our discourse, we will remember the event of Ghadeer Khum in which the Prophet (SA) appointed his cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor and Wali /guardian and took the pledge of allegiance from all the Muslims present. However, history confirms to us that many turned back on their oath allegiance to Imam Ali (SA), disbelieved in it, and replaced him with another Caliph who was chosen by a group of them. Even though many companions knew the right of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) for the Caliphate which the Prophet (SA) publicly announced on the day of Ghadeer as the divine will and selection, they denied him his right after the Prophet's demise. So Allah (SWT) says about them,

"يعرفون نعمة الله ثم يُنكرونها وأكثرهم الكافرون."

They fully recognize GOD's blessings, then deny them; the majority of them are disbelievers. [16:83]

It may be understandable if a person makes a change or replacement from something that is bad to something better, or something good to something that is best. However, this situation begs the mind to question why this change and replacement from what is definitely good by divine approval to what is less good, if not worse! Hence, Allah (SWT) expresses this wonder when He (SWT) exclaims [16:71] "أفبينعمة" الله يمجدون *Will they still deny the favour of ALLAH* and in the following verse He (SWT) questions out of astonishment and wonder

"أفبالباطل يُؤمنون وبمنعمة الله يكفرون."

Should they believe in falsehood, and deny GOD's blessings! [16:72]

As indicated in this verse, one of the signs of *Kufran Al Ne'mat* (denial of favors) is to believe in batil (falsehood) and support it. Since we've concluded that Imam Ali (AS) is the one meant by *Ne'matullah* (the bounty of Allah), we can fairly conclude based on this verse that those who deny Ali (AS) his rights and disbelieve in him are categorized as "those who believe in batil/falsehood".

Now if we search and review our authentic history, we can easily pinpoint those individuals who represent "batil/falsehood" and had supporters who followed them and preferred them over the bounty of Allah, who is Imam Ali (AS).

If we reminisce for a moment on the meaning of *Shokr Al Ne'mat* (thankfulness of a bounty) and correlate it with the concept of *Kufran Al Ne'mat* (denial of a bounty), we will realize based on the verses just analyzed that *Kufran Al Ne'mat* does not only mean lack of gratitude or neglect to a bounty. In fact,

one of the most severe types of *Kufran Al Ne'mat* is to change that bounty altogether and replace it with one that does not deserve that position. Now what could be the reason or motive for this state of *Kufran* which results in replacement of the original bounty? Allah (SWT) sheds some light to us in the Quran:

"أم يحسدون الناس على ما أتاهم من فضله."

Are they jealous of the people because of that which Allah has bestowed on them of His Bounty?

[4:54]

One of the undesirable evil attributes is jealousy and envy which is detrimental to both the physical and mental health to the extent that Ameer Al-Mu'mineen (AS) said: *"One who does not suppress jealousy makes his body his own grave."* Jealousy is when a man desires that a blessing be removed from another person though he knows that this blessing is well-deserved by the recipient, while envy means to desire the blessing possessed by others and make effort to equal others.

Jealousy is a calamity for religion and Imam Sadiq (AS) has stated: *"Indeed envy and jealousy burns down Faith just as fire burns down timber."* History shows us classical examples that teach us a lesson of how jealousy leads to destruction and the wrath of God. We have an example in Iblees/devil who was the first to practice jealousy and introduce this vice to humanity. After him, Qabeel son of Adam and the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (AS) displayed and acted upon their jealousy.

Allah (SWT) intentionally mentions these stories in the Quran to lift our attentions that we must not harbor feelings of envy towards another creature that has been bestowed with blessings or bounties by God; otherwise it will lead to *Kufr*. He (SWT) gives us these examples to warn us not to repeat the same mistake with the most important bounty given to us which is our faith, religion, and the divine guides represented by the Prophets and Infallible Imams.

It is narrated by Allamah Majlisi in Volume 1 of *Hayat Al Quloob* that Allah (SWT) revealed to Prophet Adam (AS): *"Oh Adam! Raise your head and look at My empyrean."* Adam raised his head and beheld some names on it. Adam asked, *'Who are they?'* Allah (SWT) answered, *"They are from your offspring and are much better than others. I have not created the heavens, the earth, and the hell, but only out of love for these five Honorable beings. I have created you and all creatures for them. Do not be jealous of them otherwise you will be deprived of My bounties!"*

According to reliable chain of narrators as cited in the same above-mentioned source, a companion by the name of Sulayman ibn Khalid said to Imam Al-Sadiq (AS), *"May I be sacrificed for you. What was the reason that Qabeel killed Habel?"*

Imam (AS) replied, *"Because Adam had appointed Habel as his successor. Allah revealed to Adam to hand over the successorship and the Grand Name to Habel while Qabeel was the elder. When he*

knew this, he was angry and said that he was the rightful heir to successorship and bounties. Under divine instructions, Adam asked both of them to present a sacrifice to Allah. Allah accepted Habel's sacrifice and rejected Qabeel's. So he envied Habel and killed him."

From day one of creation, Allah (SWT) makes it clear to us and engraves in our minds that jealousy and envy against His chosen guides is the key to His wrath and eternal doom and leads to *Neqmat* – deprivation of His bounties.

Furthermore, Allah (SWT) tells us straightforwardly that the consequences of *Kufr*/disbelief is severe punishment,

"وَإِذ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ."

***And when your Lord declared: 'If you are grateful, I will surely bestow more favours on you; but if you are ungrateful, then know that MY punishment is severe indeed.'* [14:7]**

More specifically, if we are thankful for the bounty of Wilayah, He (SWT) will increase us in guidance. So serious and swift is the punishment of Allah (SWT) for those who disbelieve in the Wilayah that it is narrated when the Prophet (SA) ordered everyone to give their pledge of allegiance to his cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) as his legatee, a man complained and questioned the Prophet (SA) whether that order was originating from him or from Allah (SWT).

That man's feeling of jealousy and animosity caused him to doubt Ali's right for the seat of Caliphate. So he challenged the Prophet (SA) to receive swift punishment if his (Prophet's) words in this matter were truly a revelation from God. Sure enough, Allah (SWT) responded to the man's challenge and he perished immediately in front of the audience watching this historical moment, and this story is revealed in the Quran for all of mankind to bear witness and take lesson from. The first few verses in Surat Al Ma'arij describe this event:

"سئـل سائلٌ بعذابٍ واقـع (1) للـكافـرين ليس له دافع (2) من الله ذي المعارج
(3)"

A questioner asked concerning a torment about to befall (1) Upon the disbelievers, which none can avert, (2) From Allah, the Lord of the ascending steps. [70: 1-3]

The take home message here is that as soon as someone dared to openly disbelieve and question the prophet's truthfulness regarding this very important matter of successorship, Allah (SWT) intervened and

brought immediate punishment to the questioner (upon his request) which stands as a strong proof till the end of time to support the divine appointment and Wilayah of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS).

Now, if this is the punishment of *Kufrān Al Ne'mat* in the life of this world, then one can only imagine what type of severe punishment await the nonbelievers and deniers of the bounty on the Day of Judgment!

Conclusion

After briefly analyzing the word "*Ne'mat*" and its derivatives in the Holy Quran and after studying some traditions and exegesis of different scholars, we can fairly conclude with confidence and without any reasonable doubt that **the *Ne'mat* / bounty / favor/ blessing** that is mentioned in the Quran refers to none other than the Wilayah / guardianship of Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) who is the guardian, successor, and Wasi of the Holy Prophet (SA).

It was on the day of Ghadeer when Allah (SWT) announced that **اليوم** "today" He (SWT) has completed our religion and His blessings to us have reached their culmination. On that day all the favors were bestowed at the zenith of their perfection. In the words of Allamah Turabi, "*Deen is the culmination of blessings and vice versa. And the Bestower of total favors is One Who gave us our religion. He is the One who took the blessings to their culmination.*"

So great is this bounty in Allah's eyes that He (SWT) refers to the Wilayah (according to Tafseer Safi and Bayan) as

"إِنهَا لِأَحَدَى الْكُبْرِ"

***Indeed this is one of the greatest.* [74:35]**

Furthermore, He (SWT) glorifies this *Ne'mat* in Surat Al Takathor (102:8) and swears that He (SWT) will question us about this *Na'eem* " **ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ** " *Then, on that Day, you shall be asked about the bounties.* Surely, it is not from the attributes of the Generous God to question His creation about the materialistic bounties that we enjoy such as food, drink, or shelter.

Then what could be that great bounty that He (SWT) is referring to which deserves questioning and accounting by the Great Lord? Most definitely, it is the Wilayah of the household of the Prophet (SA) which Allah (SWT) will ask each one of us about! It is the "proofs of God on earth" which He (SWT)

appointed as the vicegerents and trustees of the final message to mankind! We will be questioned how we treated the family of the Prophet (SA) after his demise and whether or not we fulfilled the covenants and adhered to our pledge of allegiance to the holy progeny. We will be asked whether we displayed love and devotion (Mawada) to the Prophet's household which is clearly stated in verse [42:23] as the Ajr / reward of the message.

We will be reckoned how we treated the *Thaqalayn* (the Two Precious things) which the Prophet (SA) asserted in the well-known authenticated tradition: “*Verily, I am leaving behind two precious things (thaqalayn) among you: the Book of God and my kindred (Etrah), my household (Ahlul Bayt), for indeed, the two will never separate until they come back to me by the Pond (of Al Kawthar on the Judgement Day) so consider how you act regarding them after my departure.*”

It suffices to know that in the own words of our Master Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) in his discourse known as *Hadeeth Al Mofakhara* with his son Husain (AS), he says about himself:

"أنا عما يتسائلون عن ولايتي يوم القيامة قوله تعالى لتسئلن يومئذ عن النعيم ،
أنا نعمة الله تعالى التي أنعم الله بها على خلقه."

"I am whom they are disputing about my Wilayah on the day of Resurrection as He revealed, 'Then, on that Day, you shall be asked about the bounties', I am the Ne'mat of Allah which He (SWT) blessed His creation with." Interestingly enough, Ameer Al-Mu'mineen (AS) reveals to us that *he* is the one referred to in the first few verses of Surat Al Naba:

"عَمَّا يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (1) عَنِ النَّبَأِ الْعَظِيمِ (2) الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ (3) كَلَّا
سَيَعْلَمُونَ (4) ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ (5)"

***What are they disputing about? Concerning the Great News. About which they are in disagreement. Indeed they will find out. Most assuredly, they will find out.'* [78: 1-5]**

Here, Allah (SWT) publicizes His wonder about the dispute and disagreement which the people have over the Wilayah and successorship of Imam Ali (AS). If we analyze the history of Islam after the Prophet's demise, we will not find a more disputable case than the issue of caliphate and successorship. He (SWT) asserts that those who disbelieve in the Wilayah will eventually come to recognize the truth, if not in this life then in the Hereafter. It is important to note that Allah (SWT) did not say *كَلَّا سَيَعْرِفُونَ*; rather He (SWT) said *كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ*.

That is because they already possess the knowledge that Ali (AS) has been divinely appointed for the

successorship; however, they do not recognize his value nor the importance of Wilayah which is they cornerstone of the religion without which it is not completed or perfected.

So, if we gain the recognition (ma'refat) that the best and most precious bounty which Allah (SWT) bestowed us by His absolute generosity and mercy is the divine guidance and revelation that is impersonated by the holy luminaries – the Prophet (SA) and Infallible Imams (AS) after him, this urges us to ponder more on our inability to thank Him for this greatest bounty – the gift of WILAYAH. After all, how can we ever thank Him for this extraordinary blessing which is the key to our salvation and path towards His proximity? It is narrated that Imam Al Sadiq (AS) said:

"شُكْرُ النِّعْمَةِ إِجْتِنَابُ الْمَحَارِمِ ، وَتَمَامُ الشُّكْرِ قَوْلُ الرَّجُلِ الْحَمْدَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ
الْعَالَمِينَ."

Expression of thanks for a bounty is to avoid committing the forbidden acts, while perfection of gratitude is to say "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."

From this narration we learn that the best way of expressing gratitude is by submission and obedience to the One Lord at all times. It suffices to know that even when a servant praises his Lord, Allah (SWT) thanks him for his expression of gratitude even though He (SWT) is the one who has the upper hand and deserves praise.

"وسيجزي الله الشاكرين"

***GOD rewards those who are appreciative.* [3: 144]**

If Allah's policy is to reward His creation whenever they thank Him, we can only imagine that the more significant that bounty which is being thanked for, the greater His reward to that grateful servant and the more He (SWT) will increase in their most significant bounty!

It would take more than a lifetime and tons of books to merely scratch the surface of understanding the importance of Wilayah in our lives and the significance of this most exceptional bounty from Allah (SWT). However, it suffices to conclude this discourse by quoting the concise words of Al-Janabedhi in his exegesis of *Tafseer Bayan Sa'ada* regarding the key relation of Ne'mat and Neqmat with the Wilayah. In this excerpt, he beautifully explains the true essence and origin of *Ne'mat*, where it begins and where it leads to.

"إستتبع الولاية النبوة والرسالة وسائر النعم بها تصير نعمة ، وكلما إتصل بالولاية سواء كان بسبب البيعة الولوية أو بطلب تلك البيعة ، كان نعمة وما لم يتصل سواء كان في النعم الصورية الدينوية أو من النعم الصدرية الأخروية ومن الأذواق والوجدانات ومن العلوم والمشاهدات والمعانيات الصورية ، كان نقمة إلا إذا إتصلت بالولاية فالنقمة نعمة."

"The Wilayah has followed the prophethood and revelation, and it is only by the Wilayah that the rest of the bounties become considered a bounty. Every time a bounty becomes associated with the Wilayah whether due to giving the pledge of allegiance to Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) or by seeking to achieve that allegiance, it becomes blessing. Likewise, whatever is not associated with the Wilayah whether it is bounties of the life of this world or that of the Hereafter, and from the tastes and sentiments and from the sciences, observations, and examinations; it becomes a Neqmat (calamity or misfortune) except if it becomes associated with the Wilayah and so it changes into a Ne'mat (bounty)."

If we comprehend the meaning of this profound statement with true recognition and faith, it will bring everything into perspective and we can better and more appropriately identify, appreciate, and thank Allah (SWT) for each and every bounty that He (SWT) bestows us with. We can then understand the meaning of the attributes which we address Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (SWT) in the *Ziyarah Al Mutlaqa Lil Ameer* when we greet him in these most insightful words, "السلام على حجة الله البالغة ونعمته السابغة ونقمته" *Peace be upon the Proof of Allah and His perfect Grace and His overwhelming indignation!* Indeed, Imam Ali (AS) represents the perfection of bounties and at the same time, he is also a source of Neqmat for those who refuse to believe in his Wilayah and divine right for vicegerency!

It is our aim in this brief paper to lift our attention to the real meaning of "the **Ne'mat**" as mentioned in the Holy Quran. It is our hope that every time we think or come across the word "Ne'mat" whether in Quran, Dua, or Hadeeth, that we immediately remember and thank Allah (SWT) in any and all ways we can on a daily basis for the *most* significant bounty and grace to mankind which signifies the perfection of faith and culmination of religion – the Imamate and the Wilayah of the Prophet's divinely appointed luminary guides!

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