

Answer to Question

Defining the *Nafs* Linguistically and Technically, and What is Meant by Its Death During Sleep

To: Abi Arif

(Translated)

Question:

To the esteemed Sheikh: Sheikh Ata bin Khalil Abu al-Rashtah, Ameer of Hizb ut Tahrir, may Allah protect him.

Assalam Alaikum Wa Rahmatullah Wa Barakatuh,

Our esteemed Sheikh, our teacher, our leader, and our Ameer, whom Allah has honoured, we ask Allah (swt) that you and your noble family may always be in good health, well-being, and blessings, and under the protection and care of Allah (swt). Ameen.

Furthermore, I apologize in advance, as I would like to ask about one matter, which is as follows:

I have found in the books of the eminent scholar Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, may Allah have mercy on him, the use of the terms: Aql (intellect) and Aqliya (mentality), especially in discussions of the Islamic personality. Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani defined both terms clearly, and in fact, he defined Aql (intellect) first before defining Aqliya (mentality).

However, I did not find a definition of the *nafs* in the books of Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, especially in his discussions of the Islamic personality. Rather, I found him defining the disposition (Nafsiyyah) directly.

My question is: What is Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani's definition of the Nafs—if he has one? Or, what is your esteemed view on the definition and true nature of the Nafs? Is it correct to understand the Nafs as the vital energy?

May Allah reward you for your answer, and we ask Allah (swt) to reward you for all your good deeds with the best reward in this world and the hereafter. Ameen, O Lord of the Worlds

Wa Assalam Alaikum Wa Rahmatullah Wa Barakatuh

Your brother, Muhammad Arif Billah (Bogor, Indonesia)

I apologize, but I have another question:

Allah (swt) mentions in the Noble Quran that He takes the Nafs during sleep. What is meant by the death of the Nafs during sleep? Does this mean that the Nafs includes the mind's energy, organic needs, and instincts, which seem to be suspended or "dead" during sleep? May Allah reward you abundantly!

Answer:

Wa Alaikum Assalam Wa Rahmatullah Wa Barakatuh

Firstly: Yes, there is no specific definition of the word "Nafs" in our books because it is a shared term, and its meanings vary depending on the qareenah (contextual evidence) in which it is used. As for the "disposition," it is a technical term that has a meaning that accompanies its usage.

To clarify this regarding shared terms, it is mentioned in the section on "The Islamic Personality Volume 3" (Arabic page 164) under the chapter on Shared Meanings:

[A shared term is one where a word is assigned to two different meanings, initially insofar as they are such. A shared term is one assigned to each of two or more meanings, such as the word 'ayn' (eye) for the organ of sight, the female slave, and gold, and the word 'ruh' (spirit) for the secret of life, the perception of connection with Allah, and Jibreel, and other such shared terms... Shared terms

exist in the Arabic language. Abu al-Hasan al-Basri said: "Linguists have used the word "qur" to refer to both purity and menstruation, which are opposites, thus indicating the existence of shared terms in the language." It has also occurred in the Glorious Quran, as in the verse: ﴿ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ﴾ **"Three menstrual periods"** and the verse: ﴿وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ﴾ **"By the night when it darkens"**, meaning when it approaches and departs, thus it is shared between the approach and departure of the night. This indicates that shared terms exist in the Arabic language...

Therefore, determining the meaning of a shared term and assigning it to one of its meanings requires qareenah (contextual evidence). It must have a qareenah (contextual evidence) that clarifies the intended meaning.]

The qareenah (contextual evidence) is necessary in determining one of the meanings of the shared term. Thus, with regard to the word (Nafs), it appears with meanings according to the qareenah (contextual evidence), and among these meanings are:

First: The Hadith of Abu Hurayrah, who said: The Messenger of Allah (saw), said: **«أَلَمْ تَرَوْا الْإِنْسَانَ إِذَا مَاتَ شَخَصَ بَصَرُهُ؟ قَالُوا: بَلَى، قَالَ: فَذَلِكَ حِينَ يَتَّبِعَ بَصَرُهُ نَفْسَهُ»** **"Did you not see when the man died and his eyes were fixedly open? He (Abu Huraira) said: Yes. He (saw) said: It is due to the fact that when (the soul leaves the body) his eyesight follows the soul"**. In this Hadith, the sight follows the Nafs. The word Nafs here needs qareenah (contextual evidence) to clarify its meaning, and the qareenah (contextual evidence) is found in the Hadith of Umm Salamah, who said: The Messenger of Allah (saw) entered upon Abu Salamah and his eyes had been opened, so he closed them, then he said: **«إِنَّ الرُّوحَ إِذَا فُيِضَ تَبِعَهُ الْبَصَرُ»** **"When the Ruh (soul) is taken, the sight follows it."** In this Hadith, the sight follows the Ruh (soul), and both Hadiths were narrated by Muslim... This means that the Nafs that the sight follows at death is the Ruh (soul), as mentioned in the Hadith of Umm Salamah, that the sight follows the Ruh (soul), **meaning that the Ruh and the Nafs are one and the same.**

Secondly: In Lisan al-Arab 6/233, regarding the meaning of the Nafs:

[1- The word "Nafs" is used to refer to the entire human being, as in the expression "I have three Anfus," and as in the verse of Allah (swt) ﴿أَنْ تَقُولَ نَفْسٌ يَا حَسْرَتَا عَلَى مَا فَرَطْتُ فِي حَنْبِ اللَّهِ﴾ **"so that no 'sinful' soul will say 'on Judgment Day', 'Woe to me for neglecting 'my duties towards' Allah, while ridiculing 'the truth'"** [Az-Zumar: 56]

2- And the Nafs is blood... and Al Nafs Al Ain, Al Nafis Al Aa'in, Al Nais Al Aa'in, Al Manfoos Al Ma'yoon, Al Nufus Al iyoon, is one who sets his sights on people's wealth to seize it. Ma Anfasahu is how intense is his eye! This is according to Al-Lihyani. And it is said, "So-and-so was "Nafas" afflicted by the evil eye," and "Nafastuk bi nafs" is "I afflicted you with the evil eye," if you afflict him with the evil eye.

3-The term "Tanafasna" and "Tanafsna feeh" means: we envied each other and raced each other over it, and in the Holy Quran: ﴿وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ﴾ **"So let whoever aspires to this strive 'diligently'"** [Al-Mutaffifin: 26] That is, and in that let those who desire, follow through. And in the Hadith of Al-Mughirah, he is exhausted after competing, meaning that competition and rivalry over something made him sick.

And in the Hadith, **«...فَوَاللَّهِ لَا الْفَقْرَ أَخْشَى عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَكِنْ أَخْشَى عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْ تُبْسَطَ عَلَيْكُمُ الدُّنْيَا كَمَا بُسِطَتْ عَلَى مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ** **"By Allah, I am not afraid of your poverty but I am afraid that you will lead a life of luxury as past nations did, whereupon you will compete with each other for it, as they competed for it, and it will destroy you as it destroyed them."** It is from competition, desire for something, and exclusivity... [End of quote from Lisan al-Arab.q]

As you can see, the meaning of "Nafs" requires qareenah (contextual evidence) within the text. There are other meanings for "Nafs" and its derivatives, each of which also requires qareenah (contextual evidence)

Thus, we haven't defined the meaning of "Nafs" specifically because its meaning depends on the qareenah (contextual evidence). The meaning varies depending on the qareenah (contextual evidence) within the same text or in another text.

Secondly, regarding your question about the meaning of the verse, **«اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا** **"It is 'Allah 'Who' calls back the souls 'of people' upon their death as well as 'the souls' of the living during their sleep. Then He keeps those for whom He has ordained death, and releases the**

others until 'their' appointed time. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect" [Az-Zumar: 42] I outweigh that the meaning is that Allah, the Exalted, takes the Nafs when it dies, taking away all aspects of life. Similarly, He takes the Nafs during sleep, taking away their freedom of movement, discernment, and action, etc

For further clarification, I will mention what is stated in some books of tafseer and some books of linguistics:

1- It is stated in Al-Qurtubi's interpretation - Surah Az-Zumar (39) - Verse 42: **﴿اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾** "It is Allah 'Who' calls back the souls 'of people' upon their death as well as 'the souls' of the living during their sleep. Then He keeps those for whom He has ordained death, and releases the others until 'their' appointed time. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect" [Az-Zumar: 42].

It contains four issues: The first is the saying of Allah: **﴿اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا﴾** "It is Allah 'Who' calls back the souls 'of people' upon their death" That is, He takes them when their appointed times have expired. **﴿وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا﴾** "As well as 'the souls' of the living during their sleep". There is disagreement on this point. It has been said that He (swt) takes them away from their actions while their souls remain in their bodies. **﴿فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ﴾** "Then He keeps those for whom He has ordained death, and releases the others" And it is the one that is asleep, so He (swt) releases it to act until its appointed time of death. Ibn Isa said... And Saeed bin Jubayr said: Indeed, Allah takes the souls of the dead when they die, and the souls of the living when they sleep, and they recognize each other as much as Allah wills them to recognize each other. **﴿فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ﴾** "Then He keeps those for whom He has ordained death, and releases the others" That is, he returns it. And on the authority of the Prophet (saw), he said: **«كَمَا تَنَامُونَ فَكَذَٰلِكَ تَمُوتُونَ»** "Just as you sleep, you will die, and just as you are awakened, you will be resurrected." And Umar said: "Sleep is the brother of death." It was narrated in a Hadith (marfoo') traced back to the Prophet (saw) on the authority of Jabir ibn Abdullah, it was said: "O Messenger of Allah, do the people of Paradise sleep?" He said: **«لا، النَّوْمُ أَخُو الْمَوْتِ وَالْجَنَّةُ لَا مَوْتَ فِيهَا»** "No, sleep is the brother of death, and there is no death in Paradise." [Reported by Ad-Daraqutni...]

In conclusion:

A- We did not specify the meaning of "Nafs" because its meaning is dependent on gareenah (contextual evidence). The meaning varies depending on the gareenah (contextual evidence) within the same text or another text.

B- I find it most preponderant that the meaning of the noble verse: ﴿اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾ "It is Allah 'Who' calls back the souls 'of people' upon their death as well as 'the souls' of the living during their sleep. Then He keeps those for whom He has ordained death, and releases the others until 'their' appointed time. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect" [Az-Zumar: 42], is that Allah, the Exalted, takes the Nafs when it dies, taking away all aspects of life. Similarly, He takes the Nafs during sleep, taking away their freedom of movement, discernment, and action, etc.

This is what I see to be the most likely understanding regarding this matter, and Allah Knows Best and is Most Wise.

Your Brother,

Ata Bin Khalil Abu Al-Rashtah

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The Link to the Answer from the Ameer's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/AtaAboAlrashtah/posts/122146055043129051>