

FAITH AND REVOLUTION: THE CASE OF ISLAMIC RESURGENCE BY SAID NURSI IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi dedicated his life to the safeguarding and strengthening of faith in God, which for him was the most important issue of the time and was at the heart of religion and the societal system. He believed religious conviction faced severe and combined attacks and was being weakened by unreligious ideologies. Nursi sought to strengthen belief by transforming it from imitation to certainty. He maintained that to be occupied with the fundamentals of belief over and above everything was an absolute necessity and compelling need. This definition of the problem gave direction to his discourse, and in all his writings Nursi pursued the renewal, revival and strengthening of the truths of creed, rather than trying to rebuild Islamic political authority and Islamic institutions or expounding Islamic Shariah rules. This is the most important single issue that distinguishes Nursi from his contemporaries. This paper, in this backdrop, anticipates to discuss the significance of Nursi's thoughts, teachings and also explain the importance of Nursi in the formation of ideology that helped the society of Turkey to neutralize anti-religious systems. The aim of this research paper is to explain Nursi's contributions that proved him to be a faith revivalist and whose works are one of the most ubiquitous read materials in Turkey. This essay is primarily a theoretical one and the methodology adopted for this paper is analytical-historical and descriptive.

Keywords: Iman, Islam, Nurju, Nursi, Risale-i Nur

INTRODUCTION

Said Nursi (1876-1960) was a profound Kurdish Sunni Muslim thinker and revivalist, whose teachings and ideology are still being followed today in modern Turkey. His life was full of enthusiasm and energy. During his lifetime, he encountered problems similar to those faced by other Muslim scholars and thinkers in other parts of the Islamic world in the 20th century. He lived a life of struggle and harassment but never acted aggressively and never allowed his students to respond with bellicosity. The strong opposition of the government to religion as opposed to Nursi's firm stand against any unreligiousness certainly made him a symbol of faithfulness in Turkey. He sacrificed his whole life for the cause of Islam

and fought against the corruption of society caused by enemies like atheism, materialism and colonialism through his writings collectively known as *Risale-i Nur*, whose teachings form the basis of one of the largest and rather influential religious movement.

Nursi contributed greatly to the spiritual development and maturation of the society, which prepared the intellectual grounds for the Islamic revival. Nursi filled a gap left by the Kemalist Republican regime which neglected and suppressed the importance of religion in the everyday life of the people. He provided his followers with a map that directed them in their daily lives by reviving a religious idiom (Mardin 1989: 227). Nursi took the initiative to resuscitate the extinguished faith at a time when many of the

religious scholars and leaders had failed to escort the society. Nursi wanted to fill this spiritual void of republican secularism by founding, not a Sufi order, but rather a text-based movement that people would join by studying his writings. Nursi's unifying goal was to provide a Qur'an answer to the materialist challenge as he gave more emphasis on faith matters. His spirit of struggling for Islamic revival remained live throughout his life. His views on society, humanity, nature, and the destiny of the world, and his interpretations of Qur'an verses in the light of modern science, powerfully impress his disciples in particular.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many books, thesis, research papers and articles have been written on the derivative topics, and in fact, I have referred to many such works. Although, however, it seems that there is need of a summarized work that could illuminate his contribution in resuscitating and retaining the faith in people in the secular state of Turkey, for example, the Islamic current that developed into the most tenacious challenger of Kemalism is analyzed in Serif Mardin's (1989) *Religion and social change in modern Turkey: the case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (New York: State University of New York Press) which is rich in new insights once one gets past the sociological jargon of the first chapter. Shukran Vahide's (2005) *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press) is a daunting work comprising of more than four hundred pages. It mainly covers Nursi's life and thoughts. Though it is a classic on Nursi studies, but it does not deal comprehensively with the faith revolution brought by Nursi.

Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc's (2009) *Said Nursi: Makers of Islamic Civilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press) covers the life and thoughts of Said Nursi very briefly but also giving many references for further reading. It majorly focuses on the summary of six central themes in *Risale-i Nur*. Ian S. Markham and

Suendam Birinci Pirim's (2011) *An Introduction to Said Nursi* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited) gives a description of the life of Nursi in the first chapter. In other parts of the book, Markham portrays Nursi as a theologian and an exegete. Ihsan Qasim Saleh's (2014) *Mukhtasar Sawaneh Hayat: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (New Delhi: Barla Publications) provides a description of Nursi's life in Arabic language and has been recently translated into Urdu by Hafiz Muhammad Ahmad Nadvi and Dr. Naseem Akhtar Nadvi. Only few pages have been attributed to theme of *Risale*. Fred Reed's (1999) *Anatolia Junction: A Realistic Portrait of the Current Situation in Turkey* (Burnaby: Talon Books) is another book that focuses on the life of Nursi. However, the book lacks impartial scholarly content, coming across more as a light read instilled with the socio-political state of Turkey. It also lacks critical analysis, drawing a portrait of Nursi that is very biased.

RESEARCH METHOD

This essay is primarily a theoretical one and the methodology adopted for this paper is analytical-historical and descriptive. For the realization of this research, I have visited Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture, Turkey, spent almost three months in a Nur Study Centre (Dershane) in New Delhi, India, and collected and studied the relevant material therein.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ideological Transition in Nursi

Nursi witnessed the overthrow and transition of the Ottoman *Devlet* to secular republic of Turkey, which is equated with the defeat of Islam since the Ottomans were the owners of the Caliphate, foreign occupation, the turmoil of long-lasting wars, the increase of nationalism, and materialist, rationalist, positivist thought, which contributed to the formation of his thoughts and position as a Muslim revivalist (Abu Rabi 2003: 10). He concentrated all his resources on the question of faith as taught by the Qur'an,

and its revitalization and strengthening through new methods. The Republican Government had formed their base in Ankara instead of Istanbul. After the capital was occupied by Allied troops on 16 March 1920, the nationalists announced the formation of a government in Ankara on 23 April. They claimed, with much justification, that the sultan was a 'prisoner' of the Allies and was therefore no longer capable of acting on behalf of the Turkish people. When he became aware of the radically anti-Islamic plans that the new Republican leaders had intended to implement, he took a train from Ankara to Van as a result of discouragement by Kemalists and later referred to this as the 'transitional journey' from the Old Said to the New Said (Yavuz 2003: 154). This new method (method of teaching and disseminating *Risale-i Nur*) was also to be derived from the Quran, and brings together its truths and scientific facts, as well as satisfactorily refuting such bases of materialist philosophy as nature and causality. In this connection, he wrote a pamphlet, *Nature: Cause or Effect*, which he believed to be a strong wall against the waves of agnosticism and puts this disastrous natural atheism to death (Nursi 2007: 232). In the face of the laxity and 'current of atheism' that he found, Nursi also wrote a work in Arabic called *Zeylul-Zeyl* disproving atheism, and another called *Hubab* (Vahide 2005: 169), which he later appended in his masterwork *Mesneviye Nuriye*. The new goal of Nursi during this period was that of defending the Islamic faith:

"As opposed to the earlier period of his life, he had no desire at this point to deal with political questions or activities, but sought instead to strengthen the religious feelings and Islamic identity of the people" (Abu Rabi 2003: 319)

Faith Revolutions by Nursi

The method of Nursi is that of reflective thought on or observation of the phenomenal world by which beings are considered for the meanings they express, rather than for themselves i.e. a person should look upon the created world as it is, and not as he wishes it to be (Turner 2013: 9).

Nursi insisted his concern was not with founding a new Sufi Order but with strengthening faith, the sole path to paradise. Nursi was ambivalent about the role of the Sufi Orders in revitalizing Islam and disapproved of the rigid relationship between the Sufi *shaykh* and his disciples, his way of thinking and method of argumentation, nonetheless was influenced by the *tasawwuf* of Anatolia in his youth and the cultural dominance of the Naqshbandi order in his milieu had a significant impact on him throughout his life which is certainly reflected in his writings (Nursi 2010: 507-527). But conversely, his writings on *tasawwuf* had a tremendous impact on the Sufis who recommend Nursi's writings to their disciples for the spiritual upliftment. He did not emphasize on anything more than faith as he believed that many people shall enter paradise without practicing Tasawwuf (and without getting involved in politics)¹ but no one can enter it without having faith (Nursi 2010: 39). He said,

"Tasawwuf is fruit and belief is bread; a person can live without fruit but cannot live without bread" (Nursi 2010: 39).

"If luminaries such as Shaykh Jilani and Shaykh Sirhindi and Shah Naqshband were alive today, they would expend all their efforts in strengthening the truths of belief and tenets of Islam for they are means to eternal happiness. If there is deficiency in them, it results in eternal misery. A person without belief may not enter paradise, but very many have gone to paradise without Sufism" (Nursi 2010: 39).

Hence, he wanted people to protect their faith, and for the advocacy of faith he wrote *Risale* which influenced even those (Sufis and their followers) whose aura had vastly spread in the fabric of Turkish society. What he was interested

¹ It seems imperative to mention here that the Republican People's Party (CHP) never formed a Single Party Government after the coup d'état of Democrats but, inversely, Nursi and his *Risale* possess enough charisma to enamor millions of people across the globe that too not by the means of politics but through text-based/faith-based plan. In fact, he and his students always avoided political involvement. Nursi coined a very famous statement in this regard which became a principle for his students.

in was the perpetuation and enhancement of the message of faith which he offered to his followers that included even those who had a Sufi bent of mind.

Also, he tried to save people from nationalism too, which he believed is ‘nourished through devouring others; its mark is collision and completely against the foundations of religion’ (Nursi 2013: 119) and consequently corrupts the faith. Even when the Ottoman *Devlet* was abolished, Nursi refused to overplay his Kurdish card (Abu Rabi 2003: 62). For Nursi, nationalism of any kind was a secular political phenomenon which would break the Islamic bond between Muslims (Turner and Horkuc 2009: 97). He averred his unshakeable belief that to be a Muslim was infinitely more important than to be Turkish, Kurdish or any other nationality. For him, the true nationality among others of Turks and Arabs was Islam (Mardin 1989: 100).

Nursi even opposed some of the policies of The Great Sultan Abdul Hamid II on the grounds that these were, in his opinion, in direct contravention of religious teachings. Besides apparent conflicts, Nursi regards Sultan Abdul Hamid II among the *Awliya* of his times (Akgunduz and Ozturk 2011: 348). Nursi was highly concerned for the faith of Muslims because he sees the lack of faith as the source of many conflicts and wars and, he was of the opinion that if Muslims abandon their religion they become irreligious, their characters are corrupted, and they become more harmful for the country and nation (Nursi 2011: 21). If belief in the Hereafter overwhelms everything and is given precedence over everything then true respect, earnest compassion, disinterested love, mutual assistance, honest service and social relations, sincere charity, virtue, modest greatness, and excellence will all start to develop (Nursi 2011: 46). He vehemently asserted that belief in God and the Hereafter dispels the darkness like the sun (Nursi 2011: 55) and belief in God proves belief in the prophets and sacred scriptures (Nursi 2011: 57). He was of the strong conviction that the religion is the only medium which brings life to our lives (Saleh 2014: 27), He said,

“that is to say, true, pain free pleasure is found only in belief in God, and is possible only through belief” (Nursi 2011: 19).

Conversely, unbelief is the seed of the tree of Zaqqum, for the unfortunate who bears it in his heart shall be offered the fruit of this tree (Nursi 2011: 50), while as the seed of faith whose roots are firmly fixed and grows so much so that its branches reach to the sky which becomes the path for human spiritual elevation (Nursi 2013: 319).

He extended this concept of tension to the societal level, where the absence of God in public space is the source of man’s complications. His goal, therefore, was to bring God back to the public space. This required a response to the overriding positivist epistemology that had become the order of the day. Nursi regards faith as the only most important thing in this world and the most important intention in the wake of the writing of *Risale* is the following consideration for the peril of skepticism,

“in former times compared with the present there was very little absolute disbelief, misguidance arising from science, or the disbelief arising from perverse obstinacy. The instruction of the Islamic scholars of those times and their arguments were therefore sufficient, quickly dispelling any unbelief arising from doubts. Belief in God was general and they could persuade most people to give up their misguidance and wrongdoing through teaching about God and reminding them of Hellfire. But now there are a hundred absolute disbelievers in one small town instead of perhaps one in a whole country. Those who lose their Faith due to science and learning and obstinately oppose the truths of belief have increased a hundredfold in relation to former times. With pride like that of the pharaoh and their terrible misguidance, these obdurate deniers oppose the truths of belief. A sacred truth is therefore much needed that will completely destroy the bases of their disbelief in this world, like an atom bomb, and will halt their aggression and bring some of them to belief” (Nursi 2002: 643).

And, if man himself and the world in which he finds himself are not illumined by belief and the meaning and purpose it imparts to them, he remains in the darkness of purposeless transience and frustration. Thus, Nursi promoted the strengthening of individual’s morality within

a framework of faith set out in the Qu'ran. As mentioned above, he was not interested in establishing a Sufi Order but in cultivating an Islamic cultural community through a 'return to the Qu'ran movement'. His writings reveal an interpretation of the Qur'an which he hoped would serve as a guide for the personal (faith) development of his followers (Atasoy 2005: 79).

Further, the issues related to faith in eschatological evidences and other aspects related to belief have been explained so beautifully that a person gets dumb and affirms to the veracity and higher intellectual exposition of Nursi in *Risale*. Nursi makes understand the matters of faith by comparisons, similes, metaphors, etc. which facilitates the understanding of subtle issues like, while explaining the Hereafter Nursi says,

'Is it at all possible that errant doubts, no stronger than the wing of a fly, could close the path to the hereafter and the gate to Paradise that have been definitively opened by the Most Noble Messenger, with all of his might, relying upon the power of his thousand certified miracles as well as the thousands of decisive verses of the All-Wise Qur'an, a book miraculous in forty different ways—that Messenger whose words are affirmed by all of the other prophets, relying upon their own miracles, whose claim is affirmed by all of the saints, relying upon their visionary and charismatic experiences, and to whose veracity all of the purified scholars bear witness, relying upon their investigations of truth?' (Nursi 2013: 101).

'If a person is told that "you can have a million years of life and rule over the world, but in the end you shall become nothing," it will react with sorrow instead of pleasure, unless deceived by vain fancy and the interference of the soul. The greatest of transient things cannot, then, satisfy the smallest faculty of man. It is, then, this disposition of man—his desires extending to eternity, his thoughts that embrace all of creation and his wishes that embrace the different varieties of eternal bliss—that demonstrates he has been created for eternity and will indeed proceed to eternity. This world is like a hospice for him, a waiting-room for the hereafter'(Nursi 2013: 101).

***Risale* as a Lawyer of Faith**

The challenge for Nursi is belief. He is aware of how the twin threats of modernity and

secularism are undermining belief. The fear of Islamic practice (a recovery of explicitly Islamic governance in Turkey) had led to a denial of the resurrection, the authority of the Quran, and even skepticism about God. For that reason, in *Risale*, Nursi has proved the truths of faith with evidences which are so powerful that they cannot be refuted, and it has strengthened the faith of believers while at the same time silencing the obstinate deniers. Since *Risale* discovers, declares and manifests the secret meanings of the Quran based on the definitions of tafsir, it has become the leading lawyer of faith at this time (Nursi 2002: 224).

Risale carries very powerful and eloquent messages regarding faith and religion; therefore, it has successfully attracted younger generations (Rippin 2008: 401). Nursi characterizes *Risale* as a true and powerful commentary (Nursi 2002: 399), a type of commentary that expounds, proves and elucidates with powerful arguments, the Quran's truths related to belief (Nursi 2002: 512). It speaks in terms that are relevant to the 21st century man who's both heart and mind should get satisfied. By and large, *Risale* is a response to the common intellect which is whirled by modern theories. It also addresses and redresses the doubts raised in the minds like objections about the repetition of the Quranic verses (Nursi 2013: 465-476), skepticism, etc. He himself also wrote that his *Risale*, as a commentary on the Quran, was preventing destructive and anarchist currents and hence was in the service of the nation and the public order (Azak 2010: 125).

Topics reflecting the particular concerns and circumstances of the author, distantly if at all related to that supreme goal, also occur in its pages with great frequency. In Nursi's lifetime, the *Risale* remained largely unknown outside Turkey, partly for reasons of linguistic inaccessibility, and even within the country its circulation was hindered by the sporadic prosecution—not to say persecution—of its author in the name of preserving secularism. Matters have, of course, long since changed within Turkey: The *Risale* is now freely available,

and the movement to which it gave rise is now divided into several competing branches, each with a somewhat different agenda. Much effort has also been invested in recent years in making the *Risale* known to a broader international audience, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Nursi's books were his refuge, and they have become an avenue to fulfillment for soul-searching Turks (Yavuz 2003: 160) and his writings is a vehicle to translate Islamic forms and practices into the rhythms of everyday convention (Yavuz 2003: 161).

In his writings, Nursi developed new applications for classic Islamic principles in order to provide timely explanations and solutions for the challenges the Muslim community faced. In the light of the Qur'an, he explained a wide range of topics such as the existence of God, Hereafter, Prophethood, Jihad, and Angels. Nursi authored the *Risale* in order to neutralize the negative effects of Western Civilization in the Islamic world; to silence the atheists who were aggressively criticizing the religion; to refresh the loyalty of Muslims towards the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and to revive the religious life of the people. As the materialistic perceptions of the West progressed throughout the Islamic world in the twentieth century, a profound political, economic and cultural devastation was observed in the Muslim communities.

The *Risale* integrates science, tradition and *tasawwuf*, and appeals especially to technically educated people and to a less well-educated public that is nonetheless familiar with Western scientific ideas (Lapidus 2002: 508). The purpose of the *Risale* is to repair the vast damage caused by the intellectual assaults of the modern times by determined to cure with the medicines of the Qur'an. In his writings, Nursi answered hundreds of questions and elaborated on themes such as theology, *Tasawwuf*, reconciliation between science and religion, Islamic law, questions about his personal life (e.g. why did not he marry, why did not he grow beard), and other multifarious socio-political issues (Rippin 2008: 399). In his writings, Nursi avoided detailing the views of his

opponents because he thought that by thoroughly explaining a negative idea he might negatively affect the pure minds of people (Rippin 2008: 400). Nursi asserts,

"The *Risale-i Nur* is not only repairing some minor damage or some small house; it is repairing vast damage and the all-embracing citadel which contains Islam, the stones of which are the size of mountains. And it is not striving to reform only a private heart and an individual conscience; it is striving to cure with the medicines of the Qur'an and belief and the Qur'an's miraculousness the collective heart and generally-held ideas, which have been breached in awesome fashion by the tools of corruption prepared and stored up over a thousand years, and the general conscience, which is facing corruption through the destruction of the foundations, currents, and marks of Islam which are the refuge of all and particularly the mass of believers."

"Certainly, for such universal breaches and awesome wounds, proofs and equipment of the utmost certitude and the strength of mountains, and well-proven medicines and numberless drugs of the effectiveness of a thousand remedies are necessary. Emerging at this time from the miraculousness of the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition, the *Risale-i Nur* performs this function, and is also the means of advancing and progressing through the infinite degrees of belief" (Nursi 2007: 200).

Thus, the '*Risale-i Nur* are the instruments which have been used to blast the foundations of the secular state' (Mardin 1989: 200).

Nursi's Strongest Tool

Nursi wished to strengthen the faith of his Muslim brethren by transforming it from pure imitation into belief based on investigation and conviction, i.e., a believer must be always concerned to save and improve his faith like those of the Prophets' companions and the great *Awliya*. Belief must be based on investigation and introspection, on deliberation and contemplation: without knowledge, belief cannot be obtained and without belief, submission is of little value (Turner and Horkuc 2009: 76).

The knowledge of the *Risale* is the outcome of the powerful faith which Nursi was aiming to gain for people, which he calls certain affirmative

belief or belief by investigation (*Tahqiqi Iman*). *Tahqiqi Iman* implies to incessantly acquiring the knowledge of God to an extent that a person will come to know Him and, further and inculcate the knowledge of God so much so that he seemingly realizes Him or, even sees Him as has been mentioned in *Hadith-i Jibrael*. As a conscious agreement and verification, it is opposite of a belief by emulation (*Taqlidi Iman*) which Nursi felt could be easily nullified by skepticism unleashed by the scientific theories of this age. He argued that by replacing faith through imitation with faith by inquiry, Muslims would be able to resist the forces of modern positivism, namely materialism and atheism (Yavuz 2003: 158). This intuitive understanding of Nursi is affirmed by both Qur'an and Prophetic traditions; Allaah says,

O Believers! Believe in Allaah and His Apostle (Qur'an, IV: 136),

and therefore, Allaah exhorts the believers to confirm their belief repeatedly as human beings' personalities are tinged by forgetfulness. In the same way in the Prophetic traditions, Prophet command his companions to renew their faith-*Jaddidu Imanakum* (Nursi 26th Letter 2010: 383) by making a habit of saying There is no god but God (*Laa ilaaha illallaah*), which connotes that they should reflect and contemplate (*Tafakkur*) on this magnificent article besides its continual remembrance. Nursi suggests that a Muslim must inquire why he or she is created and how one comes to exist (Nursi 2013: 706-707). While valuing faith Nursi says,

"Through the light of belief, man rises to the highest of the high and acquires a value worthy of Paradise. And through the darkness of disbelief, he descends to the lowest of the low and falls to a position fit for Hell" (Nursi 2013: 319).

Nursi also argued that Turkish Muslims could not maintain their faith by mimicking their forefathers or Europe but only through critical and deliberative analysis (Nursi 2007: 160-163). For Nursi, knowledge based on Iman is the basis and most important aim of guidance.

He uses knowledge as the catalyst of his renewal project. According to Achikgenç, in Nursi's understanding, renewal is the re-statement of the truths of revelation without their being changed, on the level of and in the style of the sciences of the century in question. Achikgenç says,

"That is to say, 'renewal' is not 'change' or 'substitution'; it is merely expression of the truth in conformity with the understanding of the age (Achikgenç 1995: 111).

According to Nursi, man came to this world to be perfected by means of knowledge and supplication based on belief. He states,

"Humanity becomes humanity through belief. When animals come into the world, they come complete in all points in accordance with their abilities as though having been perfected in another world; that is, they are sent. However, human being has been sent to this world to recognize his God and to be perfected through learning and progress by acquiring knowledge..." (Nursi 2013: 324).

As discussed above, belief in God has dimensions of Tafakkur, knowledge, and worship, which affect behavior and action. Belief in God requires reflection on the creation, knowledge of God and worship of God and results in truthful acts and harmonious behavior. The behavioral dimension of belief is central as a guide to all man's actions (Barghuth 2000: 24). It seeks self-control and harmony within man's life and corrects man's actions. In social life, this will influence the production of a moral society. Nursi emphasizes the importance of knowledge for perfecting actions. He describes how man acquires value through belief by manifesting the Divine Names; how belief illuminates both man and the universe, and the past and future; how belief affords man strength; and how belief makes man a true man, making his essential duty belief and supplication (Nursi 2013: 219).

Although it is not peculiar to Nursi, in the idea of perfect man, Nursi uses Iman as the catalyst to achieve the highest of the high. This idea of perfect man in Sufi tradition is traced back to Shaykh Hussain bin Mansur al Hallaj

(d. 922 C.E.) and eventually found its place in the theory that came to be known in the writings of 'The Greatest Shaykh' Ibn Arabi (Affifi 1999: 415). However, it was revitalized and idealized in the 20th century in Nursi's writings and became apparent with Iman-centered conceptualization. For Nursi, man in general, and the Prophet in particular, is the perfect man. In a particular sense, the Prophet Muhammad was the par excellence of perfection. Every human being has the capacity to be unique and to be perfect by the level of his/her faith. However, man as the microcosm, and the universe as the macro-Anthropos have similarities, according to Nursi, and the connection point is Iman. All of the Divine Names manifested in the macro-Anthropos that is the universe, being also manifested in the microcosm that is man get their true meanings by the levels of each individual's Iman. This is where Nursi differs from the above, mentioned Sufis with his fundamental emphases on the sensibility of all these with Iman (Affifi 1999: 415-416).

In Nursi's understanding, a connection between man, universe and God is necessary. Without it, the mystery of the creation cannot be solved. The connection makes life meaningful. Hence, belief in the existence of God and following religion solves the mystery of life and world. He points out that our view of the world is determined by faith, or lack of it (Nursi 2013: 45-46). In this view, according to Yusuf, belief in God leads to personal integration, contentment, confidence, peace and security (Yusuf 1998: 155). The believer, conscious of God, chooses the good and moral way. Strengthening belief assures personal integrity, composure and being at peace with oneself. Belief establishes a lot more than a mere life-long relationship between God and his creation (Yusuf 1998: 343-346).

By making belief based knowledge central to all man's actions and behaviors, Nursi establishes knowledge as the guide in all actions (Nursi 2013: 559). Belief based knowledge is a chief element of renewal and its vitality, and of the vicegerency and its effectuality. Man's mission is to link knowledge and the vicegerency (Barghuth

2000: 24). According to Barghuth, in Nursi's thought, deposited in man's inner self are the truths, values, and means of renewal, change, and transformation. He also states that, within him are the keys of consciousness, progress, and civilization (Barghuth 2000: 33). Belief also strengthens personal relations, is beneficial and looks to society. Man in belief, according to Nursi, will not exploit his relationships for the worthless matters of this world, with its petty hatreds and interests. He uses belief as social security (Nursi 2013: 245). Belief instils in its members' sincere respect, love, and compassion for each other, loyalty and disregard for each other's faults, not because of their relations, closeness, kindness, and love, but for their continuation in the realm of the hereafter. Their good manners and morals increase accordingly. With belief, the happiness of true humanity starts to unfold in the family (Nursi 2013: 246).

Belief shows its favorable effects in every group, particular and universal, and illuminates them. The sociologists and moralists, who are concerned with the social life of mankind, should take special note (Nursi 2013: 242).

It must be mentioned however, that according to Nursi religion does not consist only of belief; its second half is righteous action based on belief. Nursi believed that unbelief makes people anarchists and makes society an area of terror. A man who sees the graveyard as a door for non-existence can do all the crimes in the world. Nursi believed that he served the country with his writings. Interfering with the public service provided by the *Risale*, he thought, may thus open up the way to anarchy (Nursi 2013: 378). Nursi states,

Is fear of imprisonment or being seen by a government detective sufficient to deter those who commit numerous grievous sins which poison society, like murder, adultery, theft, gambling, and drinking? If that was so, there would have to be a policeman or detective stationed permanently in every house, or at everyone's side even, so that obdurate souls would restrain themselves from those filthy acts (Nursi 2013: 310 & 242).

Nursi thought that only belief can solve this dilemma. The formation of the individual or society through worship, spiritual matters and knowledge produced by belief in God is, for Nursi, a fundamental and necessary way to become the Divine vicegerent. Worship is necessary for man's life, particularly in distressing or difficult times. The knowledge dimension of belief is also necessary to discover his limits, aims and goals, to observe the world, and to seek out the right and the good. The behavioral dimension of belief is the way for man to uphold the trust given to the Divine vicegerent. Nursi argues that belief in God provides security, closing off the way to anarchy. Through belief, people become harmless and beneficial to the nation.

Hence, Nursi being a realist knew that faith of the masses in the divinity was vulnerable and thus basing his case on the verses of Holy scriptures would be ineffective. Besides, people were highly inclined towards mundane comfort and pleasures, and asking people to give up the assured of the present for the possible of the upcoming would fall in deaf ears. Therefore, there was only one thing to do, and that was to counter reason-based disbelief with reason-based belief, and to validate that the pristine, premier and the perpetual lasting pleasures even in this world lie in belief and in leading a virtuous life. Thus, *Tahqiqi Iman* is a transformative learning which is experienced by thousands of people.

Cultivating Faith through Jihad (*Maneyi*)

Nursi tried to link the idea of an internal jihad to an external one. The term 'Jihad' (external) has been derived from Arabic *Jahada* which means to strive, to struggle. To strive? To struggle? for what? To defend Islam, to promote and propagate Islam, to protect Islam and to deliver justice to all irrespective of caste, colour, creed, language, religion, sex, etc. It has been used voraciously and is the term in vogue, but unluckily it has been misrepresented and interpolated by both

Muslims, Orientalists and media alike. Internal jihad involves the development of a moral self through knowledge of the Qur'an, and the practice of Islamic morality in everyday life. The concept of external jihad refers to the collective struggle of Muslims against the domination of morally corrupt values from the West. For Nursi, internal and external jihads were interrelated; both are essential for the integration of self and society (Atasoy 2005: 82).

Nursi was an all-round performer who fought for the independence of Turkey, struggled for the sustenance of Islam and only wanted to see the faith of Turkey in security as secularists, Leftists and Masons wanted to cease the faith and implant the seeds of atheism in the conscience and spirit of Muslims (Jameelah 2006: 197). Nursi called on believers to shield their inner self from the oppressive reforms of the Republic. Since the Kemalists' ultimate objective was to transform the consciousness of the new Republic's citizens by constructing a 'secular and national' identity that was as devoid as possible of links to the Ottoman-Islamic past. In response to this project, Nursi struggled to create an alternative inner religious community, articulated in the household and formed through head to head relationships without requiring potentially hazardous outward demonstrations in the political sphere. To a large degree, this shift corresponded to the one Nursi underwent himself, from outward activism to withdrawal into the inner sanctum of a contemplative Islam. By stressing religious consciousness, which need not be manifested outwardly, Nursi sought to preserve an inner spiritual sphere free from the depredations of state policy.

Responding to the penetrating impact of positivism in the Turkish educational system and the total collapse of the Islamic educational system, Nursi tried to demonstrate the compatibility of science and religion; freedom and faith; and modernity and tradition. Nursi, unlike other Islamists, treated scientific discoveries as an attempt to 'further deepen understanding

of the Qur'an' (Nursi 2007: 14), particularly his exposition in his treatises *Muhakemat*, *The Supreme Sign* (Nursi 2002: 123-198) and *Nature: Cause or Effect* (Nursi 2007: 232-353), etc. For Nursi, human knowledge expands in nonreligious areas, so does our understanding of Qur'an revelation. By linking a better understanding of the Qur'an with scientific discoveries, Nursi sought to open a new and radical reading of the Qur'an for the strengthening of faith.

Nursi stressed the importance of education, both as a way to fully grasp the universal meaning of the sacred books and as a means to acquire the science and technology of the 20th century. The prominence of education in Nursi's life and thought, it could be argued, is one of the most defining factors of the development of *Nurju* movement. Nursi asserted that "Islam is the master and guide of the sciences, and the chief and father of all true knowledge" (Vahide 2005: 45). He came to the conclusion that, "the classical arguments which he had encountered to refute the doubts of unbelievers (i.e. the Westernized *Tanzimat* intellectuals) were worthless and that a study of secular sciences (*funun*) was necessary to refurbish these arguments" (Mardin 1989: 76-77).

Nursi's taking the Challenge of Working at Grass Root Level

Nursi, unlike his contemporaries like Maududi, Qutb, or Banna, did not seek a political collective movement to control the state. He stressed on the formation of an individual consciousness by the virtue of faith as a precondition for a just society. He wanted to offer a new conceptual ground to Muslims to defend their inner world against the expanding ideologies of the West. In the post-colonial (post World War I) Turkey, secularism, atheism, and communism emerged as the major challenges to Islamic faith and practice and therefore these became the primary threats that Nursi (Apolitical 'New Said') confronted in his works with befitting explanations and arguments. Nursi preferred not

to challenge the authority of the state and engage in direct politics, rather, he preferred to work on Muslim personal transformation and made it the goal of his movement (Hermansen 2007: 6). The secularizing reform movements of the Ottoman *Devlet*, and later the Turkish republic, had served to create a disconnected society. Educational reforms neglected rural communities, in which for centuries Islam had occupied a central place. Such conditions presented Nursi with a golden opportunity in which to develop his discourse and aim to reconstruct society on the foundations of true belief in the Qur'an. The secular primary education in the republican educational system, which recognized no place for religion, and which was based on a positivistic world view, was totally at odds with the moral universe of Islam, and that Nursi was provided with fertile ground on which to sow his ideas concerning the total involvement of the individual in Islam (Mardin 1989: 169).

After the language revolution on 1st of November, 1928 in which the new Turkish alphabet was introduced to Turkish society, Muslims no longer had access to their Islamic sources and it took years for the society to learn the new alphabet. Literally, a whole society became devoid of religious literature overnight. This gap was filled by Nur study-centers (*Dershaneler*) in which people still were able to utilize the old language as the *Risale*'s original language is Ottoman Turkish, which was written in Arabic script. It is also noteworthy to mention that most of Nursi's students did not have had any formal education but knew how to read and interpret Nursi's writings.

In accordance with the certain Prophetic Traditions, Nursi believed implicitly in co-operating even with the Christians against the threat of unbelief (Turner and Horkuc 2009: 31), because for Nursi, the most important objective of his endeavors was the safeguarding and strengthening of belief in God, which for him was the beating heart of religion and the cement which holds human society together. According to Nursi, there is a pressing need to explain to modern man the basic tenets of the Quran in such a way

that both heart and intellect are satisfied. Nursi specified 'three great and universal things which make known' God to human beings; the Universe, the Prophet, and the Quran (Nursi 2013: 243). On one account he adds a fourth, namely conscience (Markham and Pirim 2011: 25).

Key of Gnosis as per Nursi

For Nursi, it is only by pondering the countless divine names made manifest in the created realm, with their seemingly numberless versions and gradations that man, using his own receptivity to the attributes of perfection, is able to reach the truths of belief and fulfil his true destiny, which is to act as a conscious mirror for the reflection of his Creator. For Nursi, the key to belief consists, *inter alia*, of deciphering the signs which exist in the self and on the horizons (Quran, LIX: 53) observing the Divine works in order to unlock the talisman of creation as, the contemplation on creation leads a believer to gnosis, and leads a pagan into the fold of belief and thus, reveals the true worth of man, which is his original position as the vicegerent of God and the holder of a Divine trust i.e., The Glorious Qur'an.

Preparing Nur Group (*Jamaat*) for Nursi's Faith Revival Schema

In Ottoman territories, no other Islamic movement of comparable influence emerged until that of Nursi, which began to spread its wings in the hostile climate of the early Turkish republic (Findley 2010: 71). His writings constantly tried to build a pious and modern Muslim personality, one that is tolerant but from about the core virtues of Islam. Nursi adopted a different and highly original path in comparison to other religious authorities and charismatic renewers of the Islamic faith in his time. He did not think that the state could address effectively the many problems confronting Muslim countries at the time; rather, the focus should be at the level of the individual and the society. He brought textual or print-based discourse to the forefront and laid

out the framework for others to follow, stressing the importance of interpretation, tolerance, and open discussion. All of these activities of Nursi were none other than to focus on flowering of society with faith.

One also must consider how the meanings of Nursi's writings are reproduced and read across the ethnic, social, and economic spectrum. With the textual characteristics of Nur movement, new possibilities got created for those who had moved from rural areas to urban centers and desired to reconstruct their conception of Islam in a prevailing age of skepticism and secularism. Within the movement itself a discourse regarding social concerns exists and that the movement is willing to take on some of the larger issues in the lives of people around them, attempting not simply to help, but to actually solve the problems. The Nur students express four types of threats which the movement helps to guard against: temptation to sinful behavior, depression, attacks on their beliefs by others and the risk of falling away from their faith. Meeting together acts in both a preventative and a pro-active way to keep the students from sin, defensively closing the paths to sin and offensively building up the individual's faith and thereby his ability to better battle with sin (Wuthrich 2007: 49). Nursi's Islam is personal, with the goal of constructing micro level morality by raising religious consciousness.

Dershaneler function as a cradle for a new class of intellectual entrepreneurs possessing a diverse cultural capital vis-a-vis secular intellectuals. The number of these reading groups, which meet once or twice a week in different apartments and neighborhoods, is increasing. These reading groups are based on interpersonal trust and reciprocity. These informal networks are meant to be an instrument for building a religiously based Muslim society by raising spiritual consciousness. These *Dershaneler* are vital elements of Turkish civil society, disseminating the faith by means of *Risale*.

CONCLUSION

It was the determination of Nursi that the rejuvenation of Islamic consciousness had to be carried out not at the state level but at the level of individuals. He no longer believed in societal transformation through political involvement, saying that it was necessary to develop an intellectually able group to create a counter discourse of Islamic identity and morality. The goal, thus, became the construction of an Islamic consciousness and a new map of meaning to guide everyday life.

Nursi's main struggle was not with modernity but rather with the positivist epistemology that sought to uproot human beings from their sacred origins. Thus, Nursi's project offered a new map of meaning for Muslims to guide their conduct. He did not offer an Islamic constitution or an Islamic order but rather a mode of thinking about reconnecting with God. Nursi imagined a gradual transformation, beginning with the process of (a) raising individual Muslim consciousness, continuing to (b) the implementation of faith in everyday life, and then to (c) the restoration of the Shariah, only after its restoration in an individual's life. He defined faith as understanding human life from birth to death in terms of Qur'an concepts. Hence, Nursi contrasted the social, political, and cultural implications of living in a faithful versus a faithless society.

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