



**VIRTUE OF PAIN: NURSI'S CONTRIBUTION IN PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL
HEALING**

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Abstract

This article attempts to highlight the contributions of one of the great Muslim scholars, Said Nursi (1872-1960), in his *Risale-i Nur* Collection, his thought on remedies for those who are suffering. The conceptual analysis of this historical study focused on Nursi's conception of tribulation (*ibtıla'*) in the light of Divine mercy and justice of Allah thus, giving spiritual meaning to the concept of tribulation. Nursi in his methodology employed the Quranic guiding principles in dealing with human suffering and illness. By so doing, he developed a very rich approaches such as, reflective thinking, awareness of weaknesses and neediness, optimistic thought, control and building positive emotion and positive action. His positive outlook of life is found in modern time in the field of positive psychology, cognitive, and behavioral therapy, which is proved by scientific studies as having significant therapeutic value. Nursi also discussed about the influence of the soul on the human body. The articles concludes that according to Nursi coping with the tribulation in this life requires spiritual maturity and self-discipline. This can only be attained through self-purification as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) which are imbued in the Islamic worldview. The faithful servant of Allah Most Gracious who fully submits to Him and trusts his Divine Mercy and Wisdom in running the whole universe shall experience the gratifying taste of submission. Acceptance of tribulation is the source of inner strength that leads to psycho-spiritual growth and balance.

Keywords: *Risala-i Nur*, reflective thinking, optimistic thought, positive emotion.

Introduction

In secular approaches to psychology, one of the most significant flaws is that humans are considered as being independent of their Creator, while the spiritual parts are completely ignored. There are risks because these man-made beliefs have the potential to divert a person's attention away from the straight road that leads to spiritual purity. Muslim psychologists have the ability to revitalize the diseased materialistic behaviourism of modern psychology by infusing it with spiritual vigour. In Islamic psychology, the study of the soul, as well as its consequences for a person's behavioural, emotional, and mental processes, is included since the soul is the fundamental element of existence that drives a person's behaviour, emotions, and mental processes. "...the soul requires a spiritual connection to its source, the Creator, just as the body requires food and water to survive. Without this vital nourishment, the soul will suffer anxiety, depression and despair. Many humans who currently experience mental health problems are suffering from ailments of the soul, not the mind".¹

In Islamic worldview Islam is submission to the will of Allah. A mere declaration or display of belief by a person who submits is not sufficient for the attainment of felicity, as his /her heart and soul will surely be put to test. Humankind do not come to this world to live in ease and pleasure rather they will be tested in their lives and work for the life in this world and the eternal life (hereafter). Tribulations varies in nature and degree according to Allah's plan for every soul. The concept of trial and test in Islam includes the dimension of trials and tests (good and bad), temptation, turmoil, oppression and situation warranting self-examination.

In regard to Islamic submission many lay Muslims, immediately think that the *mu'min* suffers in this world in order to be rewarded in the Hereafter. Only few of them appreciate the great rewards God bestows upon the believers in this world (*dunya*) through their submission to Him. Living in this world is beset with unlimited suffering and problems which plague man from his cradle to his grave, irrespective of whether he is a Muslim or an atheist. The faithful servant of God who fully submits to Him and trusts his Divine mercy and wisdom in running these human affairs is the only person in this world who really experiences the gratifying taste of submission. In this light, we attempt to explore Nursi's views on the concept of tribulation (*ibtala'*) as virtue that originates the source of inner strength that leads to psycho-spiritual growth. Hence, this paper tries to outline reasons and justifications namely, virtues according to Nursi's perspectives regarding why people should submit to the divine *qadar* or destiny as illustrated below.

Tribulation as Divine Mercy and Justice of Allah.

Man's existence in this world is a test. Man is morally free but physically determined. It is the world of determination. It is crucial to mention that this issue must be understood with the mental and spiritual image that we hold for our Merciful-Justice Allah, the Lord of the universe. When things are decided by Allah for us, such as where we were born, from whom and what genes we have, we must feel deep down

¹ Aisha, 20-21.

in our hearts that this Divine choice is the best for us according to His infinite knowledge about us and our nature (6):12, (7):156, (25): 70, (5):39). In other word we have to perceive all the circumstances that were decided or determined for us in the dimension of Merciful-Justice of Allah.

According to Islamic perspective, accepting the Divine destiny (*qadar*) is one of the pillars of *iman*. Sickness, suffering and difficulties of life are parts of Divine destiny. Nursi provides three reasons why Muslims are ordained to be patience and need to accept what has been destined for them in the form of suffering, disasters or illness requital², as outlined below:

1. God created the whole universe through His mercy. The whole creations are the manifestation of God's names and attributes. The Lord of All Dominion has disposal over His dominion as He wishes.

2. Disasters and sicknesses make life refined, perfected, strengthened and advanced; that it yields results, attains perfection and fulfils its own purpose. Otherwise, life will be monotonous.

3. This worldly realm is the field of testing: it is the abode of service and place of worship, sicknesses and misfortunes. It is not the place of pleasure, reward, and requital. Allah says: And that He may test the believers with a fair trial (8:17).

God creates the universe out of His love and mercy so that human being will know Him. Nursi perceives that human's tribulation (*ibtila'* and *mihnah*) befalls in the light of Divine mercy and justice of Allah based on his contemplation on the nature of the Creator of the universe. He argues that human beings tend to forget God when they are prosperous and only remember Him when they are afflicted with suffering. Therefore, God afflicts them with trials and tribulations so that they may turn to Him and seek His grace. God causes bad things to happen to good people, in order that a greater good come to them in the end.

Suffering is beneficial if we are aware and know its redemptive significance and its transcendental objective. Nursi believes that pain and sufferings instruct us so that we will be able to see a higher view of life. Suffering as virtue enables us to contemplate that God alone suffices and that we need to submit ourselves to the providence of God, in perfect trust, contentment, gratitude, and obedience³. Furthermore, it is through the pain of confronting and resolving problems that we grow strong, sturdy, and mature—thus we learn to face life in its multi-dimensional challenges. Nursi asserts that truly wise people do not dread pain and suffering; they welcome them, learn from them, pour courage on them, find wisdom in them, and allow them to place their reliance on the benevolent God, thus suffering makes a person unwavering and spiritually mature.

It is only through sufferings and difficulties that one can attain mastery in life and living. Life is characterized by the alternating movements of conflict and peace, peace and conflict and so forth; God designs this dynamic movement for the moral, mental, and psycho-spiritual development of humans. As stated in the Holy Qur'an: "Lo with hardship comes ease, hardship is followed with ease; and ease with hardship, so when you are relieved, still toil and strive to please your Lord" (94:5-8).

² Vahide, 2009: 18.

³ Vahide, 2009: 18.

Illness is Equal to the Act of Worship

God made people to adore him. Nursi asserts that in addition to the religious practices required by Islam, such as fasting and prayer (*solat*), worship can also be expressed through pain and suffering, either physically or emotionally. So, according to Nursi, those who are unwell, whether they have an organic or inorganic illness, should profoundly feel their inherent weakness and impotence. They should feel so weak and dependent that they should seek solace in their All-Compassionate Creator. According to the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), "the periods of believers passing through illness are counted as worship, provided they do not grumble about God"⁴. Another story claims that according to saints' spiritual experiences, a minute of disease for certain patients who practiced persistence with gratitude is equivalent to an hour of worship, and a minute of illness for some spiritually elevated people is equivalent to an hour of worship. Therefore, sane people will be grateful to God for the sickness, which increases the likelihood of living a long life and makes one minute of life equal to a thousand minutes.

Through the lens of faith in Allah a *Mu'min* perceives illness as one who is afflicted is not a loss rather it is more likely to be a gain, a psychological and spiritual gain. For, the life is lengthening through illness as the saying goes "The time of disaster is very long; the time of enjoyment is very short"⁵.

A believer who has acquired a high level of spirituality may occasionally even develop a pleasant and spiritually joyful experience, in addition to being able to accept and tolerate even the most difficult circumstances in life. Thus, Nursi adds, man is moved to say, "Thanks and praise be to God!" because of the long-lasting spiritual joy that results from the removal of transient sufferings. Nursi continues by saying that persons with spiritual understanding ought to be grateful rather than merely patient. They understand the prize that comes from misfortune, the punishment they will receive in the afterlife, and they are grateful that their short life will be considered a long life as a result of their misfortune.⁶

Nursi teaches us to seek protection from physical diseases in a humble and supplicating manner rather than in a protesting and whiny manner. According to Nursi, if we accept God as our Lord and Sustainer, we must also embrace all else He offers us as the universe's Lord. Sighing and grumbling in a way that suggests opposition to divine decree and determination is a form of criticism of divine determination and an allegation made against God's mercy⁷

Furthermore, a sincere Muslim won't passively avoid dealing with challenging life circumstances under the false belief that he may trust God by giving him his troubles without making an effort to deal with them when he can. As a form of *tawakul*, which the Prophet has vehemently opposed, this would be. One should first try to find solutions, and if they are not possible—as is the case with many unavoidable events in life, such as the passing of loved ones or being diagnosed with an incurable disease—then one should deliberately seek to enter a state of submission

⁴ Vahide, 2009: 17.

⁵ Vahide, 2009: 17.

⁶ Vahide, 2009: 21

⁷ <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203>

that will not only help him to get through his suffering but also ensure his enjoyment of his loving God's pleasure and His rewards in the hereafter⁸.

Illness as Valuable Divine Gift

According to Nursi, suffering from a disease is a significant and priceless Divine gift for those who think about and remember God. Since death can occur at any time, if it catches a person off guard, makes them consider their afterlife, reminds them of death, and helps them get ready for the hereafter. Nursi used his two good friends, whom he believed to be the sincerest in their ibadah, as an example. They were afflicted with a serious sickness. They nonetheless perform the required worship with a strong trust on God, guided by the disease. He therefore thinks that the gain made by these two was comparable to the gain made through piety and righteousness (*taqwa*)⁹. Therefore, since there are benefits in illness, man should not complain about it but bear it with patience reliance on God with gratitude to Him and confidence in His Mercy.

With his spiritual worldview, Nursi sees illness as a mercy gift from God given to some individuals. In contrast to those who have not experienced illness at their age, who are typically careless due to the typical intoxication of youth and forget the reality of the world to come, young people who visit him have in fact become spiritually motivated and have started to think of the Hereafter throughout his experience¹⁰.

Illness as Advisor and Admonisher

People differ with regard to their level of *iman*. Some of them need to be reminded strongly about the reality of death and the *akhirah*. Nursi advises them that all those who come to this world inevitably depart, the young grow old, and the world is turning to destruction and separation. This fact testifies that humankind is not in this world for enjoyment and pleasure. In addition, although Allah created humankind as the perfect living beings, but due to dwelling on past pleasures, they lead a grievous and troublesome life. These phenomena shows that humankind do not come in this world to live in ease and pleasure rather their life to be tested and work on the eternal life (hereafter). A Muslim who chooses to ascend the ladder of Islamic spirituality should be above the issue of doing what is good and avoiding what is bad; he should think about what is the best that he can do for his religion.

According to Nursi, if life is free from disease and suffering and is always characterized by health and ease, it will portray the world as pleasant and cause people to lose sight of Allah and the Hereafter. Furthermore, since good health and ease keep them from considering death and the hereafter, they become unappreciative and waste their lives. The realization that the body is mortal and belongs to Allah may be brought on through illness. Nursi says that we should act rationally, let go of our arrogance, remember the One who created us, be aware that we will die, and make the required preparations. In this way, disease serves as a

⁸ Abdullah, 2011: 97.

⁹ Nursi, 2012: 67.

¹⁰ Thomas, 2019: 53.

counsellor and admonishing teacher. Therefore, instead of whining about illness, man should thank Allah for it and exercise patience if it causes him a lot of hardship or discomfort. In fact, going through hardships helps people remember God and develop a greater bond with Him. According to Nursi, it is in fact through disease that a person learns the name of the All-Healing. There are glimmers of wisdom and rays of Mercy that shine within pain and disasters because they make the decisions and actions of certain of His Names evident¹¹.

According to Nursi, there are many apparent misfortunes that are divine warnings and admonitions, others that serve as the punishment for sin, and still others that dissolve man's state of neglect by serving as a reminder of his human frailty and helplessness and granting him a measure of tranquilly. As for the particular type of tragedy known as disease, as has already been said, it is neither a misfortune nor a way of purification but rather a favour from God. There is a tradition which says: "As a tree drops its ripe fruit when shaken, so do sins fall away through the shaking of fever"¹².

Positive Way of Looking at Death

Death is a discharge from the duties of life; it is a rest, a change of residence, a transformation of existence; it is an invitation to eternal life, a beginning, the introduction to an immortal life. Just as life comes into the world through an act of creation and is appointed and determined.

Fear of death according to some Muslim scholars is only the fear of not knowing the reality and nature of death itself. Some people do not know where their bodies and souls will go to, or they fear that their bodies and souls separated and deteriorate in the grave. Some of them even think about the world continuing without them and that other people will enjoy their worldly things when they are no longer in existence. According to HAMKA some even believe that death is the worst sickness. They do not consider the fact that every sickness has a cure, except death, because death is not an illness. Others fear death for the punishments of their past sins will come after death¹³.

Additionally, Nursi contends that individuals are afraid and distressed since illness can occasionally result in death. Because death is a terrifying thought, so too is the possibility of a fatal sickness. It is crucial to understand and firmly accept that death will occur and that it will not change. Second, despite appearances, death is not frightening. Nursi underlines that death provides a release from the burden of this life's obligations in light of the Quranic perspective. It is sometimes referred to as a break from worship, in which this world is seen as a venue for practice and competition. Death also serves as a means of reunion with loved ones who have already migrated to the other side. The Prophet has also said that "Death is a bridge which unites friend to friend," and "The world is a paradise for infidels, but a prison for the faithful"¹⁴.

Nursi shared the good news that death is also seen as a gateway to the true homeland and eternal bliss, an invitation from the paradise world, and the moment

¹¹ Vahide, 2009: 32.

¹² Vahide, 2009: 32.

¹³ HAMKA, 1962: 150

¹⁴(<http://www.erasale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203>).

when people are paid for their contributions to the world. Since this is the fact of death, man should instead consider it as an opportunity for mercy and happiness rather than as something to be feared. Death is the gateway to Divine Mercy for those who believe in it, but the pit of agony for people with misguidance¹⁵.

The gnostic, on the other hand, is continually reminded of death since, to him, it represents the reunion with his Beloved, and a lover never forgets the precise moment when he will see his beloved. Typically, a person like this thinks death will take a while to arrive and will be content when it does so since he will be freed from the company of sinners and carried into the presence of the Lord of the Worlds¹⁶.

The Power of Patience

Grounded in Islamic traditions Nursi believes in the power of patience that could transform human behavior. Character strength relies on the ability to control the inner thought that generates human action and external behaviour. The role of the inner faculty is not to agree with the destructive thoughts of the negative emotion but always to work for the transformation of it into a positive state¹⁷.

Character strength is attained through learning to exercise patience which is one of the important strategies that can overcome challenges. Like all of the other characteristics, patience emerges only through a true understanding of faith: a higher level of *tawhid*, because to believe is to understand that there is no deity but Allah, that He encompasses all things in His knowledge, that only Allah has the power to determine one's destiny, and that nobody can enjoy gain or suffer loss without His willing it. One reason why the believers can show patience is because their faith enables them to appreciate Allah's might and glory. Those who know that Allah has boundless wisdom and boundless knowledge know only He can determine what will be the finest life for them. They know that Allah possesses all knowledge about all creatures and events in the past, present, and future, whereas people have only a limited intelligence that is prone to making mistakes in determining what is good and what is bad.

According to Nursi, patience has a tremendous strength in that it can withstand any adversity if it is not clouded by unwarranted concerns. This belief stems from the idea that God Almighty gave man the capacity for endurance. However, if illusion rules, man would overlook reality and mistakenly believe that this fleeting life is permanent. As a result, he will lose the ability to endure in the present and the future¹⁸.

Spiritual Vision (*Basirah*)

Nursi reveals that those who are sick and afflicted with cataracts if they knew what is a light and spiritual seeing there is beneath cataracts that may cover a believer's eyes, they may exclaim "A hundred thousand thanks to my All-Compassionate Lord"¹⁹. In line with their degree, a believer who loses their sight and

¹⁵ <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203>.

¹⁶ <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203>.

¹⁷ Badri, 2000: 74

¹⁸ Vahide, 2009: 33.

¹⁹ Vahide, 2009: 33.

dies blind may look out into the world to a much larger extent than the other corpses. Similar to how we see things in this world that blind believers do not, they will see more in the afterlife if they remain believers than other people²⁰.

Illness Arouses Allah' Mercy

According to Nursi, when a person is suffering or having problems in this world, it will move even the coldest hearts to compassion and kindness, and it will undoubtedly move God to show that person mercy. He showers the planet with gifts with only one glint of His presence and one act of His Mercy. Furthermore, Paradise – the home of eternal happiness – is just one example of His Mercy in all of its grandeur. Therefore, a person's relationship with Him through believing, acknowledgment of Him and pleading with Him through the voice of helplessness found in their disease and the isolation of exile will undoubtedly draw His Mercy towards them. As stated in the Qur'an, God says:

“We shower Our Mercy upon whomever We will, and We never fail to recompense the righteous. Additionally, the reward in the Hereafter is even better for those who believe and lead a righteous life.” (Qur'an 12:56-57)

A believer must never despair of God's Mercy; he should not think that God will not get him out of this furrow. For despair is from Satan. Satan despaired of God's Mercy, and thereupon began his hedonistic lifestyle. Likewise, when calamity strikes some people, they resort to booze and other sinful devices to ebb their pain. But the believers do not fall into despair, but rather they turn to God in worship.

Illness Brings Respect, Mercy and Sincerity and Good Works

According to Nursi, disease fosters respect and compassion, two qualities that are essential and beneficial to human social life. In fact, this protects people against arrogant notions of their own sufficiency. The bad directing soul, feeling secure in their health and well-being, does not give any thought to the reasons that merit fraternity. Furthermore, they lack empathy for those who are suffering and deserve our warmth and compassion.

Additionally, anytime they are sick, they become conscious of their own inherent helplessness and impotence. They also experience human kindness, which begins with low emotions and sympathy, especially when someone is unwell or suffering. People have a tendency to empathise with those that care about them and try their best to assist them. They should at the very least offer prayers for them and, as is suggested by Islam, pay them a consoling visit. Universal values such as respect and compassion generally, renders to sincerity. Indeed, according to Nursi illness is a crucial means of continuously gaining rewards for the sick person and for those who are looking after them for the sake of God. Definitely, there is significant rewards for believers who look after the sick. It is the *sunnah* and it is highly recommended by Prophet to visit the ill. Said Nursi emphasizes that if the relatives or specifically the parents, look after their ill ones, it is regarded as form of worship which yields significant rewards²¹.

When someone is ill, there is a lot of happiness and joy, which comes from the warmth, sympathy, and compassion of those who are close to the sick person. This uplifting energy can ease the discomfort and perhaps even heal the condition. It is

²⁰ <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203>

²¹ Thomas, 2019: 54.

very important that the sick's prayers are accepted. Said Nursi discusses his own experience with lumbago. He requested Allah to take away the anguish in his regular prayers. Even though he had prayed for healing for 30 years and it appeared that his petition had not been heard, it never occurred to him to stop praying. He had a high sense of optimism due of his strong confidence in Allah, which led him to think that even if prayer was offered because of his condition, being healed was not the intended result²².

Illness as Self-purification

Sickness washes away the dirt of sins and cleanses in which Nursi made a metaphor using a soap. Authenticated hadith had emphasized that illness is expiation for sins. One of the hadith said "as ripe fruits fall from the tree when it is shaken, so the sins of a believer fall away with the shaking during illness".²³

In the afterlife, sins are an incurable sickness. In our worldly life, they are also a chronic sickness of the heart, conscience, and spirit. People can be rescued from a variety of chronic illnesses if they endure and do not complain throughout that transient illness. However, if people do not worry about their sins, do not understand the afterlife, or do not acknowledge God, they will experience a disease that is a million times worse than what they are currently experiencing. Particularly because humanity lacks knowledge of the hereafter and views death as an external extinction, it is as if they had a body riddled with countless wounds and diseases. As a result, individuals must start by looking for a belief that may heal both their physical and spiritual illnesses. The creed needs to be mended, and the greatest way to do that is to acknowledge the Creator's Power and Mercy through our inherent Weaknesses and Impotence²⁴.

Illness can erase the evil power. Serious illness will save people from the domination of the carnal soul. Illness, loneliness and suffering will bring the bounties of God. If it is perceived with spiritual vision illness and suffering will provide a means of closer relationship with God.

The bad power can be removed through illness. People will be saved from the control of the carnal soul by serious disease. Suffering, loneliness, and illness will bring about God's blessings. A closer relationship with God can be achieved via illness and suffering if they are viewed through a spiritual lens.

According to Nursi, if human spiritual visions are revealed, people will be able to see that disease has been invited to inhabit a man's body. So much so that it will do a variety of tasks, including cleansing the precious life, enhancing and developing it, causing other bodily parts and faculties to turn toward the sick part of the person, and showing the imprints of various Names of the All-Wise Maker²⁵.

Distress and Anxiety as the Roots of Sickness of the Soul

Fear and anxiety are the roots of many other harmful psychological states and illnesses of the soul. Just as fear and anxiety, are caused by the expectation of a future thread. While sadness and depression are caused by the loss of something the person

²² <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203>

²³ Nursi, 2012: 90.

²⁴ Nursi, 2012: 90.

²⁵ Nursi, 2012: 90.

loves or is attached to. Worry could be described as a rehearsal of what might go wrong and how to deal with it. If preoccupation becomes chronic, as in the case of repetitive worries, the recurring negative thoughts may end up not only causing anxiety, but also bodily harm. As this symptom intensifies, the sickened soul will make the person feel that an event distant in space and time is about to happen. When fear sets in, the mind starts obsessing about how to handle the situation and ignoring anything else for the time being. In cases like that, people find themselves unable to use their mental faculties to deal with anything else. The unimagined, eminent danger gets in the way of the enjoyment of the goodness at hand. When this happens, people fail to reconnect with others and other aspects of life²⁶. Their negative thoughts take over and become the focal point of their attention, which often times produces a psycho-physiological short-circuit manifested in anger, sadness or fear²⁷.

In this way, Nursi sees two types of illness in his reflection. The first kind is actual, whereas the second is made up. Regarding the genuine one, Allah had a cure for every disease in stock at His powerful earthly pharmacy. How can those treatments be known if there is no illness? Islam mandates the use of medicine in healing, but people must understand that Allah Almighty is the source of both the treatment's effects and its cure. Indeed, He is the one who delivers the remedy and who supplies the medication.

When suffering from disease, people should not worry excessively because concern makes the illness worse, advises Nursi. Therefore, individuals should exercise self-control to avoid overdoing the worry if they want their condition to be less severe. Because worry is normal, but if it becomes excessive, it turns into phobia, which is an unhealthy form of neurotic behaviour. Nursi therefore counsels considering the advantages of the sickness, i.e., the spiritual gains it gives.

Indeed, worrying will increase the toll of physical illness by causing the immaterial illness of the heart, which is what fuels and perpetuates physical illness. Nursi emphasizes the connection between the body and the soul by claiming that one of the sources of anxiety will be cut off if it goes away via surrender, resignation, and reflection on the underlying wisdom of the condition. Sometimes anxieties and apprehension might magnify a small health condition. Ninety percent of the sickness goes away when fears and anxiety are under control. If one's health-related phobias persist for a long time, they could become genuine²⁸.

According to Nursi, one should not hate misfortune but embrace it since it causes the fleeting life of the past to be reckoned as an eternal and blessed life. He further stated that it is insane to fantasize about past suffering and then lose some of one's patience. Similar to this, worrying about future calamities and illnesses while currently experiencing them, showing impatience, and oppressing oneself voluntarily is not reasonable and no longer merits empathy and compassion. Actually, complaining about God is extremely unwarranted and shows a lack of patience²⁹.

Every human being is created out of nothing. It is a wonderful blessing from Allah that we are here. The majority of the time, we are in good health and given many rewards. In spite of this, we still whine and act impatiently because we feel

²⁶ Badri, 2002: 75.

²⁷ Oaron, 1980: 122.

²⁸ <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203>

²⁹ <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203>

unworthy of some blessings because of our shortcomings, because we lose them as a result of poor decisions, or because we are unable to attain them. So, complaining exacerbates disease. The prudent individual will therefore practice patience in obedience to God Almighty so that disease can fulfil its purpose and go³⁰.

Pleasure of Allah, and Protection From the Temptation of this Worldly Life

Nursi asserts that Muslims must adhere to two principles in order to win Allah's favour and pleasure, avoid being drawn into the temptations of this life, and find eternal happiness. The awareness of death is the first fundamental. They strive for eternal existence by considering this world to be ephemeral and realise they are temporary visitors with many responsibilities. The second principle states that in order to be protected from the perils of the carnal, evil-commanding soul, and blind passions, one must domesticate and subdue the evil-commanding soul by frugality, *mujahadah*, and asceticism³¹.

Zuhd is generally defined as detachment from this worldly life. Sufyan ibn Uyainah, one the great past scholars, described the *zahid* as the one whoever Allah bestowed a bounty on and then he is thankful and then when he is under trial, he is patient. In the connection, al Razi explained that the higher level of pleasure in this world is achieved through internalizing the attitude of *qanaah*, i.e., feeling sufficient which is attainable through the proper practice of *zuhd*. With respect to this world is only when a person puts more trust in Allah *tawakkul*, more than what was in his own hands. If he is afflicted with calamity by losing something of this world, he is more hopeful for its reward and what is in store for him in the Hereafter than if it was to have remained with him³².

The significance of *zuhud* can be seen when a person suddenly loses his wealth or is in the state of feeling of grief, frustration, anxiousness, and pain. A contented man can bear any affliction and hardship for they are not an unbearable burden for him because he knows that all things are in Allah's hands. That makes him not only humble but more submissive to Allah. By being *zahid*, a person is not depressed by what he has lost or intoxicated by his success. On the contrary, devoid of the attitude *being zahid*, he will never have peace of mind and he may continue to live in anxiety which can lead to mental disturbances³³.

One must be happy and pleased with what they have in order to prevent tension, stress, and unease. One of them is to show endurance in accepting suffering and afflictions, patience in bearing suffering, and gratitude for Allah's blessings when they come to pass³⁴.

Nursi asserts that those believers who are going through emotional or physical pain should have patience because they have been given access to these two principles, which are the key to happiness. In this way, the body will continue to alert the individual to the passing nature of the world and the fact that they are mortal. Therefore, a believer will understand terrible affliction like paralysis and other

³⁰ <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203>

³¹ Vahide, 2003, 34.

³² Ibn Hanbal, 1983: 294.

³³ Badri, 2000: 75.

³⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_disorder > (accessed November 11, 2011).

terminal diseases via trust in, submission to, and reliance on God. As a result, a condition that is so terrible is exchanged for such a small benefit.

Nursi emphasizes that it is crucial to contemplate and be content on the inner meaning and not limit our perception merely on the outward aspect of illness. If the meaning was not good, Allah would not have given illness to His servant. The most afflicted with suffering and hardship are the best of people, the most perfect of them. However, very few Muslims who diligently refine themselves to a higher state of spiritual status through the states of submission will eventually reach the esteemed *maqam* of *mahabatullah* or love of Allah. Fear of Allah and hope in His forgiveness will, after this exalted state, become great fear from losing the beautiful status of total submission and Divine Love³⁵. Such saints enjoy Allah's spiritual bounties to the extent that one of them once said "If people in Paradise are given the same kind of pleasure and happiness that I sometimes get from Allah, then they are indeed extremely happy people"³⁶. In this state of submission patience and thankfulness to Allah would also take a different sublime dimension. They love Allah so much that the pains of life and its problems are enjoyable to them since their beloved has sent them down. These seemingly painful experiences are not troubling because they know fully well that good things may come disguised in suffering and agonies. They are also not too pleased with what normal people consider as good things. Sometimes a person may like things that are bad to him and he may hate things that are eventually good to him³⁷. The holy Qur'an states this very clearly. "You may hate something that is really good to you and you may like something which brings you evil. Allah Knows best and you do not know", (*al-Baqarah* (2): 216 and *al-Nisa'* (4): 19).

All prophets, saints and righteous man regarded the illness as sincere worship and it is a kind of gifts from Allah. They have offered thanks in patience. Indeed, there are some illnesses which, if they lead to death, are like sort of martyrdom. The illness causes someone to receive certain degree of sainthood. As an example, women who died during the birth, those who die from pains in the abdomen, by drowning, burning, plague, all are considered as martyrs. Furthermore, since to the believer illness lessens the love of the world and attachment of it, it lightens the pains of parting from the world, which is extremely grievous for people who are so much attached to this worldly life.

Conclusion

Being granted with the Divine inspiration (*ilham*) Nursi views the concept of tribulation from the light Divine mercy and justice of Allah. By so doing, he actually sustains the spiritual meaning to it. There are virtues in pain and suffering. One requires spiritual maturity and self-discipline to attain this level thereby can cope with the tribulation in this life. The faithful servant of Allah the Most Gracious who fully submits to Him and trust his Divine mercy and wisdom in running the whole universe shall experience the gratifying taste of submission. Thus, acceptance of tribulation as virtue of pain is the source of inner strength that leads to psycho-spiritual growth and balance. The positive outlook of life and significant therapeutic value based on Nursi's reflection is shared by positive psychology and cognitive therapy in modern time. The

³⁵ Ibn 'Ata' al-Sakandari, n.d. vol. 1: 138.

³⁶ Ibn Taimiyyah, n.d. vol. 10: 647.

³⁷ Al-Muhasibi, 1986: 305.

spiritually and psychologically mature person who can control himself/herself to delay immediate gratification for a postponement to a higher level of spiritual, intellectual or even physical gratification. On the contrary, those who are heedless about the divine admonition allowing the lower soul dominating they will suffer bodily, emotionally and spiritually. Purification of the soul as perceived by Nursi is not possible without the application of the ethic of *tawhid* and the Prophetic education (*tarbiyyah* and *tazkiyyah*) which are imbued in the Islamic worldview. Total submission to Allah through patience and gratitude- the activities of the soul are indeed the source of inner strength that leads to psycho-spiritual growth.

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