

## TWO PILLARS OF TOLERANCE IN SAID NURSĪ

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### Abstrak

Makalah ini memperkatakan tentang pemikiran Said Nursī, tokoh ilmuwan dan reformis Turki, tentang konsep toleransi, iman dan pengampunan atau kemaafan. Ia cuba menilai sejauh manakah faham-faham ini relevan dalam usaha membentuk suasana harmoni dan budaya toleransi dalam sebuah masyarakat pelbagai mazhab. Kajian ini mengemukakan antara lain definisi istilah dan konsep-konsep di atas dari perspektif Nursī, suasana persekitaran semasa pada zaman Nursī, sikapnya terhadap Sufi dan juga tentang pendekatan sederhana yang dikemukakan oleh beliau.

Said Nursī (d. 1960) is a religious philosopher who inspired a faith movement in modern Turkey, which took the shape of schools (*dershanes*) devoted to the reading of his *Risāle-i-Nūr* (*The Treatise of Light*). The *Risāle* provided the content

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for a rational discourse on faith, and the schools provided the context for social intercourse on the basis of faith.

In this essay, we deal with two pillars of tolerance, faith and forgiveness in the thought of Said Nursī, and their relevance to cultivating a culture of tolerance in a multi-*madhhab* society.

Faith is one way of developing tolerance. Obviously all groups of Muslims share this faith, but it must be broad and rational enough, to accommodate all strands of Islamic thought. Nursī belonged to this open-minded faith, which is moderate and tolerant enough to affect any conflict resolution and reconciliation. For Nursī, faith is more precious than indulging in polemical theological debates; so we should respect those who have it, and tolerate the school they belong to, even if we disagree with it.

Forgiveness is another way to develop tolerance. Nursī shows us how to develop an ethic of restraint in the face of deep disappointments and injustices incurred by fellow-Muslims. It is natural to be angry; even aggressive, towards the one who has done us wrong. However, revenge is a negative emotional reaction, and not appropriate for slight injuries to the ego. Revenge will break down sound human relations, but forgiveness will build them up.

## 1. The Definition of Terms

Nursi called for the cultivation of tolerance in a multi-*madhhab* society. The word *madhhab* normally refers to a school of Islamic jurisprudence, namely, Shāfi'ī, Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Ḥanbalī and Shi'ah. These schools differ because of *ijtihad*, independent reasoning, but they all share a common faith in Allāh and His Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h). We use the term *madhhab* in a broad sense, to connote a broad religious orientation.

By faith, we mean a mature, open-minded faith; verified by reason, and not one based on blind allegiance to *madhhabs*. This faith prevents fanaticism and conflict between the two major strands, the Salafis and the Ṣūfis. The Salafis want to return to the teaching of the early

community and to a literalist understanding of the Qur'an, and the Sūfis base their understanding of the Qur'an on the authority of the Sūfi masters. Various schools of thought—whether Sunnī or Shī'ah Shāfi'ī or Ḥanafī, Ash'arī or Mu'tazilah - will be subsumed under one of these two strands. (The Shāfi'ī and Ḥanafī schools are the main schools of Islamic jurisprudence in Turkey). A particular school can share elements from both these strands. The Deobandis share with the Sūfis the acceptance of meditation (*dhikr*), and share with the Salafis their rejection of innovation (*bid'ah*).

The pillars of faith include the belief in God, the Prophets, the angels, the revealed books and the Last Day. These are the common elements of faith, but there are different interpretations to these beliefs. For example, the classical *kalām* scholars debated about whether the Qur'an was eternal or created, but this is no longer a pressing issue of our time. Another *kalām* issue, still relevant for today, is the relationship between faith and good deeds. The Sunnis held that faith is decisive for salvation, and that major sins cannot annul it, it can only cause it to decrease.<sup>3</sup> The Kharijites, however, believed that they do annul faith. Nursī supported the Sunnī view.

## 2. Major Trends and the Spirit of the Times

The history of Islam is marked by two major trends, the intellectual and the political. The philosophers and Sūfis belonged to the intellectual trend and proposed a profound reflection of the nature of humanity and the divine. The Kharijites belonged to the political trend and they believed that by rebelling against the unjust Imam they would bring about change in the society.

Western superpowers have dominated the Muslim world by more than a century, and instead of bringing

<sup>3</sup> Norman Calder (2001), "The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy" in *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, (ed) F. Daftary, London: I.B. Tauris, p. 68.

peace, they have brought violence. They have subjugated people by military might and not by moral force. Turkey was not directly colonized, but an intolerant secular ideology was imposed from within the Republic since its creation in 1924.

The new ideology supported science as a mark of progress. Nursī was not opposed to science, but embraced its positive achievements, and wanted to recapture the 'concept of reason itself from a kind of enlightenment nominalism, but he did not use it against religion, but for religion'.<sup>4</sup> By providing better insight into the creation and the attributes of the Creator, science could help revitalize religion.

Faith for Nursī is not only a protection against secularism, but also a source of brotherhood, which in turn a protection against the unjust political or military power of the day. Nursī was sceptical about the potential for change via politics and political parties. His link with politics in the early phase of his life (The Old Said) was tenuous, and it was never for its own sake. He was involved in the Society for Muslim Unity, which was not a secular political party, but an organization, still during the Ottoman time. Nursī felt that he could bring about change through these organizations. He supported the First Parliament in 1920, which brought on board all the religious scholars. After 1924, everything became secular, and Nursī withdrew from his attenuated links with politics entirely. He lost all confidence in effecting change through political parties and political figures. So, the 'New Said' devoted the rest of his life to the writing and dissemination of the *Risāle-i-Nūr*.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean he did not have a vision for political

<sup>4</sup> Kelton Cobb (2003), "Revelation, the Disciplines of Reason, and Truth in the Works of Said Nursī and Paul Tillich" in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursī*, (ed.) I. M. Abu Rabi, Albany: SUNY Press, p. 132.

<sup>5</sup> Sukran Vahida (2003), 'Said Nursī's Interpretation of Jihad' in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursī*, (ed.) I. M. Abu Rabi, Albany: SUNY Press, pp. 98-100.

change, but he was convinced that the starting point for any social change must begin with faith, with the change of heart. He appealed to the *'awwām*, the rural populace, to carry the message of faith and morality. In the latter part of his life, he turned all his attention to true faith and sound human relations.<sup>6</sup> We turn now to the two pillars of tolerance and sound human relations.

### 3.1 The Pillar of Faith

Nursi wanted to revitalize *kalām* by responding to the challenges of the day, including that of science and secularism. He did not challenge modern science, but tried to reconcile it with religion. Nursi supported verified faith (*īmān taḥqīqī*), not imitative faith (*īmān taqlīdī*).<sup>7</sup> He employed science to demonstrate the rationality of faith, and the pattern of God in the creation.<sup>8</sup>

Respect for diversity of interpretation of belief and the practice of it, is rooted in what is quoted as a Prophetic tradition which states that 'Differences in my *ummah* is a blessing'.<sup>9</sup> This refers to minor differences, whether in matters of theology, or in matters of practical detail. In theology, secondary differences arose in matters such as whether God is transcendent or immanent, or whether the Qur'an is eternal or uncreated. Secondary issues come into play with the outward aspects of religion, such as the wearing of a beard or the length of one's garments. One cannot judge a person's faith based on these secondary issues. The confusion between the primary and secondary aspects of religion is one of the major causes of division in Muslim society.

<sup>6</sup> Ibrahim M Abu Rabi (2003), "How to Read Said Nursi" in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (ed). I. M. Abu Rabi, Albany: SUNY Press, p. 81f.

<sup>7</sup> S. Vahide (1988), *The Author of the Risāle-i-Nūr, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Sosler Publications, p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>9</sup> Not an authentic ḥadith.

Nursī is often compared with Ghazzālī. They both questioned the *madhhabs* of the time, and they both employed reason in their investigation. However, they differed in their solutions. For Ghazzālī, it lies in Sufism, and for Nursī, it lies in a revitalized *kalām*. Although they had their own preferences, they accepted the validity of both Sufism and *kalām*. This is a mark of their tolerance. Ghazzālī knew the value of *kalām*, but was also convinced of its limitations. His autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*,<sup>10</sup> provides us with clear insight into his critique of *kalām*, and the reasons for favouring Sufism. Nursī also knew the value of Sufism, but was aware of its limitations.

### 3.2 Attitude to Sufism

Nursī, did not, like Ghazzālī, insist on Sufism as the best way, but he was inspired by Ṣūfī teachings and accepted its own validity. He supported the sober Sufism, which was shaped by the teachings of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī and by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Sirhindī. Both these Shaykhs held that there was a direct correspondence between the *Sharī’ah* (The divine law) and the *Tariqah* (spiritual path), and that these two ways are not in conflict, but go hand in hand.

Nursī believed that the *Risāle* was inspired by the esoteric message of the Qur’an and also from his heart, and therefore, it was not merely a work for intellectual edification, but it was meant to appeal both to the head and the heart. To understand Nursī’s spirituality we need to look at his distinction between general sainthood (*al-wilāyah al-‘āmmah*) and special sainthood (*al-wilāyah al-khāṣṣah*). The former is applicable to all Muslims, but the latter is only for the spiritual elite. The general sainthood is concerned with the purification of the soul, and corresponds perfectly with the *Sharī’ah*, which for Nursī is better, from

<sup>10</sup> R.J. McCarthy (1980), *Freedom and Fulfilment*, an annotated translation of *al-Ghazzālī’s al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, IV, Boston: Library of Classical Arabic Literature.

the point of view of protecting the faith of the public, than the special sainthood.<sup>11</sup>

Since Nursī's concept of spirituality was shaped by Sirhindī, it is not surprising that he, like Sirhindī, was critical of the abuses within Sufism, and especially of Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This doctrine is partly based on Neoplatonic cosmology, whereby, everything in the creation is an emanation from God, through a series of intermediaries starting from the first Intellect, which he connected with the reality of Muḥammad (s.a.w). The world is therefore a reflection of God, with no independent reality.<sup>12</sup> God is absolute being, and is the sole source of all existence; in Him alone Being are one and inseparable.<sup>13</sup> Nursī disagrees with this view, and holds that the creation has its own reality.

Nursī was not a Ṣūfi, but lived like one. He lived simply and meditated constantly. He saw himself as a *hojjah* (teacher), whose message will survive him through his magnum opus, the *Risāle-i-Nūr*. The *Risāle* reads like poetry, and so musical harmony that emanates from its reading causes one to listen to it till the late hours of the night without being bored. It became a source of mental and spiritual nourishment for Turkish people.

Nursī described Sufism as fruit, and faith as bread. Bread is vital for our nourishment. It is our essential need, but fruit is not. We cannot survive without bread, but we can survive without fruit. The urgent need for all Muslims is to keep to the fundamentals of belief, and to understand their faith. Hence, there is a need to revitalize *kalām*, to defend the faith threatened by secularism. The focus on faith does not imply the exclusion of Sufism, but it does

<sup>11</sup> Abu Rabi, "How to Read Said Nursī's *Risāle-i-Nūr*", *op.cit.*, pp. 65-69.

<sup>12</sup> See Yasien Mohamed, "The Cosmology of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā", Miskawayh and al-Iṣfahānī', *Islamic Studies*, 39 (4) 2000, pp. 657-679.

<sup>13</sup> J. Arberry (1970), "Mysticism" in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 2B, pp. 622-623, eds. P.M. Holt, AKS Lambtom and B. Lewis, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

mean that there is no need to participate in the 'special sainthood'. The spirituality at the level of 'general sainthood' is what we all need. Hence, he prepared the *Jawhan-kabīr* for this purpose.

The experiences of those who reach the level of special sainthood are valid in themselves. They cannot be challenged by rational arguments, and they reveal there is another level of knowledge, apart from that derived from the senses and reason. The problem arises with fanatical followers who attribute absolute authority to the claims derived from these supra-rational experiences, and especially, when these claims challenge the authority of the Qur'an.

When the fruit of Sufism is overripe, it cannot contain its exuberance, and it overflows in ways that are not religiously or socially acceptable. Al-Ḥallāj said: 'I am the absolute truth', and he was sentenced to death for his ecstatic utterance which he made while in a state of *fanā*' (extinction in God). This exuberance is also evident among members of the Ṣūfi order, who regard *ṭarīqah* as an end in itself. There is a danger in this because then they would compromise on obligatory duties, and direct their heart towards *ṭarīqah*, and not towards the obligatory practices.

If *ṭarīqah* is taken as the aim or end in itself, then the commandments of the *Shari'ah* and the principles of the Sunnah are reduced to mere ceremonies for outward performance, with the heart turned directly towards *ṭarīqah*. That is, a man of *ṭarīqah* attaches more importance to the recitation of God's names in the circle of dervishes than to performing the daily prescribed prayers'.<sup>14</sup>

Nursī had a favourable attitude to Sufism; he was himself inspired by it, and by Ṣūfi scholars connected it, especially from the Qādarī and Naqshabandī orders. Yavuz states: "Most of Said Nursī's teachers belonged to the Khalidī Naqshabandī order, but he also read the writings of 'Abdul Qādir al-Jaylānī, the founder of the Qādarī order.

<sup>14</sup> Said Nursī (1995), *The Letters*, 2, London: Truestar, p. 286.



He benefited from the writings of Naqshabandî leaders such as Aḥmad Sirhindî in India and Aḥmad Ziyâed-dîn Gumushaneli'.<sup>15</sup>

The benefits of Sufism according to Nursî may be summarized as follows: It prescribes meditation, breaks pride and achieves sainthood; it provides consolation to the suffering; the Şūfi man is more precise about faith than the scientific man; it has cultivated brotherhood, the sacred bond in the Muslim world.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Sufism is better than secular science, or any Turkish secular ideology, because it fosters faith and brotherhood.

Nursî was, however, also critical of the abuses within Sufism, and in particular, he questioned some Şūfi claims to religious authority. He believed that they could not have a higher authority than the Qur'an. The *Risāle* is inspired by the Qur'an itself, and therefore, it has the capacity to lead the believer back to the authority of the Qur'an.

The Şūfis claim that a higher level of knowledge comes from *ma'rifah* (intuitive knowledge) and *başîrah* (spiritual insight). Nursî accepts the validity of intuitive knowledge, but the primary sources of knowledge are for him the Qur'an and the four Imams. Şūfi intuition is fine, but it does not challenge the claims of the secular ideologies. We need a verified faith (*imān taḥqîqî*), a faith that makes sense rationally. This does not make him a rationalist; he was never sceptical of super-sensuous experiences. Nursî acknowledged the supernatural, the validity of intuitive knowledge, but he was also aware of the limits to its authority.

For Nursî, the verdicts that stem from Şūfi experiences cannot be placed on par with the verdicts of the Qur'an and the four Imams. These experiences are too personal, and

<sup>15</sup> Hakan Yavuz, "Being Modern the Nurcu Way", *ISIM Newsletter*, Leiden, 6/2000, p. 7 and 14; cf. Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi (2003), "How to Read Said Nursî" in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursî*, (ed) I.M. Abu Rabi', Albany: SUNY Press, p. 65f.

<sup>16</sup> Said Nursî (1995), *The Letters*, 2, London: Truestar, pp. 279-281.

those outside it cannot judge it on the basis of rational consciousness. By making it an end in itself, the Şūfi is in danger of being hopeless in curbing pride. The meditation and the ecstasy are a means to an end, they lead to intuitive insight, but they cannot be equal or above the authority of the Qur'an. Thus, Nursī states that the Şūfi meditations are a means to an end only. No one from outside this experience should be obliged, or compelled, to conform to this experience, which has the potential for exaggerated exaggerate claims (*shatahāt*) by those intoxicated by divine love. These claims could harm the Şūfis and those who follow them. Their claims to divine inspiration are particularly dangerous when they are placed on par with 'revealed verses'.<sup>17</sup> For Nursī, the fundamental of faith and the *Sharī'ah* cannot be based on the imaginations and illusions of people. This conflicts with reason, and has no basis in Islām. 'Neither the four rightly-guided caliphs, nor the great jurists, not the righteous scholars of Islām, are reported to have made any reference to, or suggestion of, this school'.<sup>18</sup> Nursī supported a sober Sufism, such as the one represented by Shaykh 'Abdul Qādir al-Jilānī.<sup>19</sup>

Şūfi practices were banned in Turkey, but this was not the reason why he did not start a *tariqah*. Even if they were not prohibited, Nursī would still have had the same attitude to Sufism, which is based on sound reason and the principles of the faith. Instead, he opted for a reasoned faith in order to face up to the challenges of secularism. Sufism did not address this particular challenge. His *Risāle* became a metaphorical sword to defend the faith against the evil forces of secularism. This was a peaceful method of preaching faith; yet, he was put in prison. Why should he suffer this isolation for thirty years when he did not even call for a physical jihad, nor did he lead an alternative political party? Nursī was a religious man, not a politician.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 279-281.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 279-281.

<sup>19</sup> Fred A Reed (1999), *Anatolia Junction*, Talon Books, pp. 83-84

People often think that tolerance implies being in agreement at all times. Agreement could mean blind conformity and compromise on one's own convictions. The mark of tolerance is to be in disagreement with another point of view, but not to condemn the person for that point of view. Nursī's critique of Sufism in general and Ibn 'Arabī in particular, is a mark of his tolerance. He never passed a verdict of heresy on Ibn 'Arabī.<sup>20</sup>

As mentioned, we cannot pigeon-hole Nursī into a particular camp. He was a man for all seasons, and embraced all the pathways to faith. He respected the Şūfis and the jurists but did not want to duplicate their efforts, and concentrated on a verified faith as exemplified in the *Risāle*.

Nursī departed from the Şūfi organization, but not its spirit, and provided an alternative spirituality as reflected in the *Jawshan*, a manual for meditation and supplication. Moshe states: 'Through Alī, as well, is traced the chain of transmission of the *Jawshan al-kabīr* (The great armour) - a prayer decidedly from Shi'ah sources but long available in Turkish translation and in use among Sunnis'. This devotional resource, after the Qur'an, is the most precious to Nursī.<sup>21</sup> These supplications suggest an unequal relationship with God; we can demand nothing from Him, and must wait patiently for Him to answer our prayers.<sup>22</sup> The *Jawshan* provided the spiritual sustenance, and the *Risāle*, the intellectual sustenance.

<sup>20</sup> Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (representing a sober Şūfi strand) and Ibn Taymiyyah (the Salafi strand) are known for their vehement criticism of Ibn Arabi. Nursī was inspired by Sirhindī. See Hakan Yavuz, "Being Modern the Nurcu Way", *ISIM Newsletter*, Leiden, 6/2000 p. 7 and p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Lucinda Allen Mosher (2003), "The Marrow of Worship and the Moral Vision: Said Nursī and Supplication", *Islam at the Crossroads*, (ed.) I.M. Abu Rabi', Albany: SUNY Press, p. 182.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 188.

### 3.3 The Path of Moderation

We have discussed Nursī's attitude to Sufism above as an illustration of his tolerance. He felt that the need of the hour was *kalām*. He used reason as a tool for explicating Islamic belief. Both the Salafis and Šūfis were sceptical of reason, the former favoured a literal understanding of the Qur'an, and the latter, regarded intuition as another important source of religious knowledge. Nursī revitalize *kalām*, and departed from the polemics of classical theology, and adopted a more practical approach. In discussing predestination, for example, he urged Muslims to act with responsibility.

Nursī takes the middle-path between Salafism and Sufism. He wants to promote reconciliation, not polarization, between these two strands. In the *dershanes* the members of both strands were present, and no one was made to feel alienated, or forced to conform.<sup>23</sup>

The saying, 'Differences in my ummah is a blessing', does not apply to major differences such as established beliefs, such as the Oneness of God (*tawhīd*). The differences may arise in the interpretations of this Oneness. We have already illustrated how Nursī differed with Ibn 'Arabī's concept of Oneness. There is no harm in debating over these secondary issues, provided that we know that these are not fundamental aspects of Islamic beliefs. We should rather direct our energies fighting secularism that poisons our faith and morality. 'The enemy of human happiness and ethical uprightness is unbelief, irreligion'.<sup>24</sup>

Secularism is often contrasted with religious fanaticism, as if we have to choose between these two, without any middle road to follow. But if assuming we have to choose between these two ways, then surely, religious fanaticism,

<sup>23</sup> I took part in Nursī sessions in Saudi Arabia in 2000, and a member of the Tabligh Jama'at was a regular participant.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Michel (1998), "Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-Operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursī", *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risāle-i-Nūr*, International Symposium 4, Istanbul, pp. 553-554.

although grounded in blind faith, is better than godlessness. However, the true Muslims will always follow the path of moderation. Nursī states:

Fanaticism, being a violent and unreasoning devotion, is incompatible with Islam. However deep it is, a Muslim's devotion depends on knowledge and reasoning. Even if it is not, it cannot be described as fanaticism. For the deeper and firmer the Muslim's belief is, and devotion to Islām, whether based on knowledge or reasoning, the further from fanaticism a Muslim is by virtue of Islam being a 'middle way' based on peace, balance, justice and moderation.<sup>25</sup>

Rational discourse is important for Nursī, but not to the extent of wanting to produce philosophers like Ibn Sīnā, or theologians like al-Bāqillānī. It is sufficient to be a devout Muslim with a basic understanding of the faith. Sainthood is important and commendable, but we should not be compelled to follow the method of the Şūfis.

We should keep to the basics; the essentials of the faith and the revealed law. 'The fundamentals of the religion and its incontrovertible principles are never subject to dispute or alteration. Whosoever attempts to dispute or alter them becomes an apostate.'<sup>26</sup> The details of the law can change, and this depends on *ijtihād*, independent reasoning. The differences in these details should never be the basis for judging the sincerity or belief of a Muslim. These minute religious differences are the fertile grounds for testing our tolerance. These are differences in details, not fundamentals. There is nothing absolute about them. We cannot monopolize over religious opinions, otherwise we will become self-righteousness. For Nursī, there is no place for it in a multi-*madhhab* society.

<sup>25</sup> S. Nursī, *The Letters*, p. 263.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 260.

#### 4. The Pillar of Forgiveness

Another pillar of tolerance is that of forgiveness. As the 'New' Said Nursī gave more attention to faith and unity he withdrew from the fellowship of political partisanship (which causes division) and aligned himself with the fellowship of spiritual partisanship (which leads to forgiveness). This was not a sudden change from being political to being non-political. As mentioned, in the early phase of his life, Nursī was not political as such, but he did have some hope of bringing about some change through them; however, after becoming disillusioned with political parties, he lost all hope of effecting change at this level and he began to focus rather on the writing of the *Risāle*, and on bringing about unity among the believers. The key to unity is tolerance, and one of the keys to tolerance is forgiveness.

For Nursī, peace is not a mathematical formula, and cannot be worked out by mathematical equations. An eye for an eye, and taking back from what has been taken, are all Aristotelian forms of justice, upon which modern forms of human rights are based. This legal, classical Roman justice, may bring about a sophisticated administration, and some measure of order, but not peace. The community requires forgiveness which can only operate within the framework of spiritual fellowship, respect and love. Nursī realized that it was not enough to attempt reconciliation between science and religion; reconciliation should also take place between the hearts of people.

Nursī's counsels for the reconciliation of the hearts is inspired by the Qur'an, which states: 'The believers are brothers, so make peace between your brothers and be mindful of God, so that you may be given mercy (*Sūrat al-Hujurāt*, 49:10). The methodology of effecting reconciliation is also contained in the Qur'an, especially in verses *Sūrat Āli 'Imrān*, 3:103 and *Sūrat al-Anfāl*, 8:63, which refer to the reconciliation of hearts. Classical commentators have focused on the conciliatory implications of these verses, and emphasized the importance of faith and love for God and His creatures as vital elements for such reconciliation.

Nursi's understanding of these verses is in keeping with the classical interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Qualities such as forgiveness and mercy are frequently mentioned in the Qur'an. Love is less mentioned, and so we find Nursi speaks more of forgiveness than of love.

Forgiveness brings about reconciliation. It is nobler than justice. Forgiveness heals human relations, justice alienates people. We need justice to exact punishment for crimes, but the punishment need not exclude forgiveness.

Nursi responded to the local, rather than, global challenges. He was concerned with intra-communal peace and tolerance. That is why he insisted on forgiveness. Minor wrongs often cause a breakdown in human relations. There is an interesting psychology of suffering that emerges, and we could apply it in relation to non-Muslims or Muslims. The spiritual psychology of individual suffering brings into focus the lower self, *al-nafs al-ammārah*, which should be challenged. The hatred for one's brother should be directed to the dark side of one's heart. People also become angry and revengeful for petty offences, little spites and passing slights. While they are less serious than deep-seated hatreds and revenges, they dwarf the character and cramp the soul. They are due to self-importance and vanity. Frequent resentments of this nature could lead to hatred and enmity. To give up vanity is difficult, but it can be overcome by constant meditation over one's thoughts and actions.

Revenge seems sweet, but poisons the soul, and saps the healthy flow of kindness; causing a person to suffer psychologically and spiritually. He suffers the loss of love; he suffers of a wounded pride, and he suffers of a troubled mind. If he overcomes his pride and vanity, he would not be resentful, but gentle and charitable. He will tolerate the hurts even if he cannot forget them. To forgive is not to

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<sup>27</sup> Asma Afsaruddin (2004), "Taking Faith to Heart: Reconciliation and Fraternal Love in Islamic Thought" in *Bringing Faith, Meaning and Peace to Life in a Multicultural World, The Risāle-i-Nūr's Approach*, pp. 67-78, Nesil, Istanbul.

erase the wrong from memory, but it is to stop hatred for the wrongdoer.

Forgiveness is better than revenge. It requires self-mastery as it is more difficult to understand why one should forgive the one that hurt us. It uplifts the heart, and frees it of the pain of hatred. It is a divine quality, which God loves to see reflected in humans. 'Those who curb their anger and those who forgive their fellow-men. Verily God loves the doers of good' (*Sūrat Āli 'Imrān*, 3:135).

When we are faced with a wrong inflicted upon us, Nursī counsels us to heed three things. Firstly, we should first think of divine destiny<sup>28</sup> as God states, 'Does man think he will be left to roam at will, that he will be left uncontrolled' (*Sūrat al-Qiyāmah*, 75: 36). Patience in suffering is important for happiness<sup>29</sup> and for curbing pride.<sup>30</sup> This does not contradict divine mercy. Without change through life and death, how could we survive in the next world and experience the ultimate happiness. Yet, this very change that causes suffering is the same change that brings us happiness. Thus, the sorrow that we suffer is due to divine destiny, and it is aimed at bestowing upon us the ultimate happiness. We are required to respond to suffering with patience, not depression. Patience is the key to purification. 'Creatures go through many states and experience situations in which they suffer misfortunes and hardships, so purifying their lives'.<sup>31</sup> These misfortunes are a test from God.<sup>32</sup> Even a brother's wrong towards us is part of divine destiny, and a test of our character.

Secondly, we should pity the wrongdoer, who is a victim of his lower self (*nafs*).<sup>33</sup> We should not let anger

<sup>28</sup> Nursī, *The Words*, 2, Kaynak, Izmir, 1997, p. 135.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, *The Words*, 2, p. 142f; *The Words*, 1, Sösler edition, p. 477f.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131f.; Nursī, Sösler edition, p. 486.

<sup>31</sup> Nursī, *Words*, p. 144.

<sup>32</sup> Nursī, *letters*, 2, pp. 88-97.

<sup>33</sup> Nursī does not make a distinction between minor and major wrongs here; the context suggests that he is referring to minor wrongs such as little slights and insults.



control us, we should control it.<sup>34</sup>

We should pity, not fight the wrongdoer, who is subject to the weakness of his desire (*nafs*). The heart is capable of both brotherly affection (*ukhuwwah*)<sup>35</sup> and enmity (*'adāwah*). Affection will change our hatred into pity. Compassion, *al-Rahīm*, is divine quality, which man should emulate. God commands it of the believers,<sup>36</sup> and the true believers are the ones whose relationship to one another is described as *ruḥamā' baynahum* ('compassionate among themselves'). It is superior to *al-wadūd* (The Loving), which only appears in the Qur'an a few times.<sup>37</sup> Compassion is easy, but forgiveness is more difficult.<sup>38</sup>

Thirdly, God punishes you (through the wrongdoer) because of a defect in your own soul. We resent others for defects which we also have. The unpleasant past should humble us, and by taking responsibility for it, we will be less self-righteous and judgmental. We should be humbled by the thought that both we and the wrongdoer are subject to the lower soul, and to the defects that come from it.

## 5. Conclusion

We have discussed two principles leading to tolerance, faith and forgiveness. They both should be guided by reason in order to temper religious fanaticism and aggression with

<sup>34</sup> Classical philosophers like Isfahānī and Ghazzālī recommended that we control anger with reason. They give the analogy of the rider and the horse. The rider is the metaphor for reason and the horse is the metaphor for desire. The skilful rider can control his horse, but he should first control the dog, which is a metaphor for anger. See Yasien Mohamed, 'Islamic psychotherapy: Isfahānī's Treatment of Anger, Fear and Sorrow', *AFKAR*, 4, 2003, pp. 87-102.

<sup>35</sup> Nursī does not use 'love' (*'ishq*) as a contrast to enmity, but 'brotherly love' (*ukhuwwah*). Sozler edition uses 'love' which is not equivalent to the Turkish *ukhuwat*.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Lane (1984), *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1-2, Cambridge; cf. D. Gimaret (1995), '*rahma*', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New edition, vol. VIII, Leiden: E.J. Brill.

<sup>37</sup> Thanks to Mecit Yaman for this point.

<sup>38</sup> For Nursī, forgiveness for fellowmen is of primary concern. For the Sūfis, it is not an end in itself, but should lead to the love for God.

verified faith and forgiveness. These are two essential pillars of tolerance in a multi-*madhhab* society. Nursi exhorts us to reflect before we react, and to forgive before we avenge. We should have a verified faith in order to respect diversity of opinion, and we should forgive our dear ones and friends in order to preserve good family ties and good human relations. Revenge breaks human relations, and forgiveness binds them.