

The Significance of the Concept of Mercy and Its Value in One's Life, According to Imam Bediuzzaman Said Nursi

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Abstract

This work investigates the approach used by Imam Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in interpreting the Qur'anic verses on Allah being Merciful and Compassionate and attempts to understand his lively scriptural approach to the value of mercy, which makes life meaningful and purposeful. This work aims to highlight distinctive aspects and features of his approach and methodology of Qur'anic exegesis. It discusses the background, reason, and the purpose behind Imam Bediuzzaman's approach to the issue at hand. It is also important to note that this work is not merely an intellectual enterprise but living answers to problems he personally experienced. The article presents a textual analysis to answer the research questions and address the main problem. It concludes that it is necessary to situate Nursi's work within the context of *Tawhid* (Divine Unity), which constitutes the background of his entire system of thought. Through the insight of *Tawhid*, all that happens in this universe is the product of universal mercy and under the direct control of Merciful Lord. From the perspective of *Tawhid* too, the order in this universe is the manifestation of the Compassionate Creator's practices. Indeed, Imam Bediuzzaman's approach provides a framework for a profound understanding and interpretation of the concept of mercy and its impact on one's life and social fabric.

1.1 Introduction

Before discussing Imam Bediuzzaman's approach to the impact and value of mercy in detail, it is important to understand his relation to the Qur'an as this is the basis of his thought. Imam Bediuzzaman has made the Qur'an the ultimate source of all discussion in his writings.² According to the Qur'an, signs or *ayaat* of Allah are given in the form of Qur'anic verses as well as in things and events. Allah's words are delivered to humankind through both Qur'anic signs and cosmic

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² See Ian Markham, *Engaging With Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Model of Interfaith Dialogue* (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), p. 12.

signs. Just as the Qur'an is Allah's speech through words, the cosmos is Allah's speech through acts. This led Imam Bediuzzaman to define the Qur'an as "the eternal translator of the mighty book of the universe and the interpreter of various tongues reciting the verses of creations."³ He explains that, from one point of view, the Qur'anic signs translate the cosmic signs according to our understanding and make them speak. The meaning of Qur'an thus unfolds in the signs of universe. The Qur'an actually explains how every being or event is a sign pointing to the existence of Allah and making Him known with all His names and attributes of perfection. Imam Bediuzzaman emphasizes that each Qur'anic verse encompasses all other verses and contains all aims of the Qur'an because it is the word of One Who Encompasses all.⁴ In His infinite mercy, Allah has included the whole in the

³ See Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words* (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2008), pp. 376-77.

⁴ Ibid., Imam Bediuzzaman answers the questions of what is the Qur'an and how is it defined as follows: The Qur'an is the pre-eternal translator of the mighty Book of the Universe; the post-eternal interpreter of the various tongues reciting the verses of creation; the commentator of the book of the Worlds of the Seen and the Unseen; the revealer of the treasures of the Divine Names hidden in the heavens and on the earth; the key to the truths concealed beneath the lines of events; the tongue of the Unseen World in the Manifest World; the treasury of the post-eternal favours of the Most Merciful and of the pre-eternal addresses of the Most Holy, which come from the World of the Unseen beyond the veil of this Manifest World; it is the sun, foundation, and plan of the spiritual world of Islam; the sacred map of the worlds of the hereafter; the expounding word, lucid exposition, decisive proof, and clear interpreter of the Divine Essence, attributes, Names, and functions; it is the instructor of the world of humanity; the light and water of Islam, the macroanthropos; the true wisdom of mankind; and the true guide and leader urging humanity to prosperity and happiness; it is a both a book of law, and a book of prayer, and a book of wisdom, and a book of worship, and a book of command and summons, and a book of invocation, and a book of thought, and a unique, comprehensive sacred book comprising many books to which recourse may be had for all the needs of all mankind; it is a revealed scripture resembling a sacred library which offers treatises suitable for all the various ways and different paths of the all the saints and the voracious ones and the wise and the learned, which is appropriate for the illuminations of each way and enlightens it, and is suitable for the course of each path and depicts it.

SECOND PART and complement to the definition: As is explained and proved in the Twelfth Word, since THE QUR'AN has come from the Sublime Throne and the Greatest Name, and from the highest degree of each Name, it is God's Word in regard to His being Sustainer of All The Worlds; it is a Divine decree through His title of God of All Beings; it is an address in the name of the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth; it is a conversation in respect of absolute dominicality; it is a pre-eternal discourse on account of universal Divine sovereignty; it is a notebook of the favours of the Most Merciful from the point of view of all-embracing, all-encompassing Divine mercy; it is a collection of addresses at the start of which are certain ciphers in respect of the tremendousness of Divine majesty; and through its descent from the comprehensiveness of the Greatest Name, it is a holy scripture full of wisdom which looks to and inspects all sides of the Sublime Throne. It is because of this mystery that with complete fitness the title of the Word of God has been given to the Qur'an, and is always given. After the Qur'an comes the level of the books and scriptures of the other prophets. However, those other innumerable Divine Words are each in the form of inspiration made manifest through a special regard, a partial title, a particular manifestation, a particular Name, a special dominicality, a particular sovereignty, a special mercy. The inspirations of the angels and man and the animals vary greatly with regard to universality and particularity.

THIRD PART: THE QUR'AN is a revealed scripture which contains in summary the books of all the prophets, whose times were all different, the writings of all the saints, whose paths are all different, and the works of all the purified scholars, whose ways are all different. Its six aspects are all brilliant and refined of the darkness of doubts and scepticism; its point of support is certain heavenly revelation and the pre-

parts, so that humans with their limited capacity may grasp and understand the meaning of the whole Qur'an in each of its parts. Accordingly, although humans cannot comprehend the whole, they can reach universal understanding by focusing on universal particulars.

In many verses the Qur'an invites humans to observe the universe and reflect on the Divine activity within it. Following these verses, Imam Bediuzzaman likens the universe to a book that should be read for its meaning, learn about the Divine Names and attributes and other truths of the faith. The book's purpose is to describe its Author and Maker; beings become evidence and signs of the Creator. From one point of view, his writings are an account of the human condition. They combine argument and emotion, which gives them liveliness and strength. They are the outcomes of Imam Bediuzzaman's life experience in which his most hidden feelings are reflected.

I will now examine how Imam Bediuzzaman interprets the verses that contain the Divine Names of Gracious, Compassionate, and Merciful, which have direct influence in the life of common people in general and believers in particular, for the main purpose of his commentary is to conserve and strengthen people's belief in Allah. Their createdness, weakness, and dependence on others show that they are not owners of anything they appear to possess; no doubt they are in need of the Provider, the Besought One. The people who are not aware of this, who live at a distance from the spiritual and moral values of the Qur'an live in ignorance of this great reality created by Allah. For example, the soul that Allah causes us to feel is "ours"; it belongs to Allah. The feeling of possessing the soul, as if it were one's own, that Allah creates as a manifestation of the infinite nature of His creation is just one of the beauties and marvels of the test for someone who realizes the true nature of His creation.

1.2 Definition of Rahmah/Mercy

Imam Bediuzzaman defines the term of mercy when he explains the verse:

eternal Word; its aim and goal is self-evidently eternal happiness; its inner aspect is clearly pure guidance; its upper aspect is necessarily the lights of belief; its lower aspect is undeniably evidence and proof; its right aspect is evidently the surrender of the heart and conscience; its left aspect is manifestly the subjugation of the reason and intellect; its fruit is indisputably the mercy of the Most Merciful and the realm of Paradise; and its rank and desirability are assuredly accepted by the angels and man and the jinn. Each of the attributes in these Three Parts concerning the Qur'an's definition have been proved decisively in other places, or they will be proved. Our claims are not isolated; each may be proved with clear proofs.

(بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ) “Bismillaahirrahmaanirrahiim/ In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.” The divine name of All-Merciful is manifested throughout the universe and is apparent in the innumerable manifestations of God’s absolute dominion over the earth. Similarly, its complete manifestation is also apparent in a small measure in the human being’s comprehensive form, the same as on the faces of the earth and universe.⁵ There is a *hadith* that says: “God created man in the form of the most Merciful.”⁶

1.2.1 Imam Bediuzzaman’s Approach

Imam Bediuzzaman stresses the theme of mercy in his writings. He exposes how divine mercy is shown in the harmonious ordering of the universe that fulfills the needs of all creatures, especially human beings. With His mercy, Allah nurtures all living beings in this world with utmost order and regularity, with particular senses for various uses and benefits. He also inspires them to fulfill their needs. This demonstrates that their Compassionate Maker knows them, sees them, and hears them.⁷ Allah provides humans with all kinds of gifts, and they are endowed with appetites, needs, feelings, and senses so that they can derive pleasure from Allah’s gifts. Universal law can be seen everywhere. The existence of the tiny fruit also shows the mercy and generosity of Allah, how He makes the earth revolve, causes the seasons and thus brings the fruits of the season that are enjoyed by humans.⁸

Everything created in this universe is due to His mercy and for special purposes, nothing happens by chance and nothing is meaningless. Even the creation of evil, the feeling of fear, death, and other undesirable things and events are good in their results. In reality, apparent harms, disasters, and calamities are not misfortunes. They are created for many everlasting and beneficial purposes. They are created to be means of purification and spiritual progress or atonement for sin, warnings, and favors of the Merciful Lord to prevent humans from falling into dissipation, to remind them of his human helplessness and to prepare them for eternal life.⁹ With respect to this, Allah says:

وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا

⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, p. 24.

⁶ *Sahih Bukhari*, vi, p. 160; viii, p. 62; ix, p. 88; *Muslim*, iv, p. 1283; viii, pp. 82, 366.

⁷ Nursi, *The Rays*, (Istanbul: Sozler, 2004) pp. 18, 192-93, *The Words*, p. 695.

⁸ Nursi, *The Rays*, p. 197.

⁹ Nursi, *The Flashes* (Istanbul: Sozler, 2004), pp. 26, 28, 334-36, *The Words*, pp. 49, 185-90, *The Letters* (Istanbul: Sozler, 2004), pp. 64-65. Based on Qur’an all that happens created by Allah.

تَعْلَمُونَ

*It may well be that you hate a thing the while it is good for you, and it may well be that you love a thing the while it is bad for you, and Allah knows whereas you do not know.*¹⁰

فَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا

*It may well be that you dislike something which Allah might yet make a source of abundant good.*¹¹

وَنَبَلُوكُمْ بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ

*And We test you all through the bad and the good by way of trial; and unto Us you shall be brought back.*¹²

It is because of narrow-minded thinking that considers only the outer aspect of things, that people judge anything that does not serve their purposes to be bad and evil. This is one of the characteristics of unbelief that condemns beings to meaninglessness and denies the perfection of the Divine Beautiful Names that are reflected in the mirror of all beings, which lead to the refusal to submit to the Compassionate One.

1.2.2 Analysis of the Value of Mercy according to Imam Bediuzzaman

To examine how Imam Bediuzzaman analyses the value of mercy, I will write some examples given by him in this matter.

1.2.2.1 Creation of Human's Feeling of Fear

Fear is a kind of feeling that bothers people, but this feeling, if it is turned towards Allah, becomes a path to His compassionate mercy and love. The real feeling of fear should be directed only to Allah. To fear Allah means to seek refuge in Allah's mercy, strength, justice, and power against all fears that humans have in worldly matters by accepting their weakness and poverty. This draws Allah's mercy and compassion to His servants. Together with the unexpected disasters and all kinds of undesired evils, people are made to realize their impotence, and helplessness. They are certain that every created thing needs Allah. Nothing and no one has any strength apart from His Will. Again, Allah shows His mercy by

¹⁰ The Qur'an, Al Baqarah (2):216.

¹¹ The Qur'an, Al Nisa (4):19.

¹² The Qur'an, Al Anbiyaa (21):35.

providing them opportunities to recognize these truths by expressing their weakness and submission to Him through prayer. Allah says:

قُلْ مَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّي لَوْلَا دُعَاؤُكُمْ

Say (O Muhammad) My Sustainer would not concern Himself with you but for your supplication.¹³

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

If My servants ask you (O Muhammad about Me, I am indeed near. I respond to the invocations of the supplications of the supplicant when he calls on Me. They should therefore obey Me and believe in Me so that they may be rightly guided.¹⁴

The Almighty also says:

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ

Call on Me and I will answer you.¹⁵

Because of this, believers know that Allah will answer their prayers, for He is very close to them and knows their needs. Those who experience such comfort and hope will gain His mercy by not being hopeless when encountering difficulties. Bediuzzaman explains this deep submission and says:

The most important aspect, the most beautiful aim, the sweetest fruit of this is; The one who offers the supplications knows that there is Someone Who hears the wishes of his heart. Whose hand can reach all things, who can bring about each of his desires, Who takes pity on his impotence, and answer his poverty. And so O impotent needy man! Do not neglect a means like supplication, which is the key to the treasury of mercy and to an inexhaustible strength. Cling to it! Rise to the highest peaks of humanity! Include in your supplications those of all the universe, like a king! Say, "From You alone do we seek help"¹⁶like a servant and deputy representing all the universe! Be on the Most Excellent Pattern of creation.¹⁷

1.2.2.2 Creation of Death

Imam Bediuzzaman did not see death as merely external dissolution, non-existence, decay, the extinction of life, and the annihilation of pleasures. In the

¹³ The Qur'an, Al Furqan (25):77.

¹⁴ The Qur'an, Al Baqarah (2):186.

¹⁵ The Qur'an, Al Mu'min (40):60.

¹⁶ The Qur'an, Al Fatihah (1):4.

¹⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, pp. 326-27.

20th Letter, when explaining the phrase: *wa yumiit ...* the Seventh Phrase: “And deals death” he says:

He is the one who causes death. He discharged you from the duty of life, changes your abode from this transitory world, and releases you from the labor of service. That is, He takes you from a transient life to an immortal one. This phrase then shouts out the following to ephemeral jinn and man:

Here is a good news for you! Death is not destruction, or nothingness, or annihilation; it is not cessation or extinction; it is not eternal separation, or non existence, or a chance , it is not authorless obliteration. Rather, it is to be discharged by the Author who is All- Wise and All-Compassionate; it is a change of abode. It is to be dispatched to eternal bliss, to your true home. It is the door of union to the Intermediate Realm, which is where you will meet with ninety nine percent of your friends.¹⁸

For him, death is mercy and a bounty. It is not contradictory to the two names of God, namely “The Compassionate” (*al-Rahman*) and the “Giver of Life” (*al-Muhyi*). Death is a matter of moving in which the grave should not be seen as a dark well but as a door to enlightened worlds. Imam Bediuzzaman describes death as discharge from service; it is a rest, a change of residence and location,¹⁹ a change of existence, an alteration of the body, a time of real meeting with one’s loved ones and the prelude to everlasting life and eternal happiness,²⁰ rather than an eternal separation as presumed by the people of misguidance.²¹

Death is also evidence of the unity (*Tawhid*) of God and His eternity as stated in Qur’an:

وَلَا تَدْعُ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ لَهُ الْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

Do not call, besides God, upon any other god. There is no god but He. Everything will perish save His Face. His is the Judgment, and unto Him you shall all be returned.²²

With this Qur’anic verse, Imam Bediuzzaman aims to prove the existence and the unity (*Tawhid*) of God. There it is stated that death is necessary for God’s *Tawhid* to be manifested, and resurrection is necessary for His Justice and Mercy to be demonstrated.²³

Just as earth is the heart of this realm, the soil is the heart of earth. The closest way to the purpose of a human being who is going to God is through modesty and

¹⁸ Nursi, *The Letters*, p. 268.

¹⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, p. 220.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 664.

²² Al Qasas (28):88.

²³ Tubanur Yesilhark, *Eschatology and the Importance of Hope in the Light of Jürgen Moltmann and Said Nursi*, p. 45.

humility, represented by soil. Hence he said:

Oh Friend, do not be afraid of the soil and of altering to soil, of the grave and of lying in it!²⁴

He later explains how the death that is outwardly dissolution, decay, the extinction of life, the annihilator of pleasure can be a bounty. Pointing to the verse that says:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ

"He Who created death and life so as to test you as to whoever of you is fairer in action. He is the All-Mighty, the All-Forgiving."²⁴ Imam Bediuzzaman said that just as life is created and determined, death and departure from this life proceeds via creation and is determined through a wise and purposeful direction.

Imam Bediuzzaman says the following about death:

Death is a discharge from the duties of life; it is rest, a change of residence, a change of existence; it is an invitation to an eternal life, a beginning, the introduction to an immortal life. Just as life comes into the world through an act of creation and a determining, so too departure from the world is through a creation and determining, through a wise and purposeful direction. For the death of the plant life, the simplest level of life, shows that it is a more orderly work of art than life. For although the death of fruits, seeds, and grains appears to occur through decay and dissolution, their death is in fact a kneading which comprises an exceedingly well-ordered chemical reaction and well balanced combining of elements and wise formation of particles; this unseen, orderly and wise death appears through the life of the new shoot. That is to say, the death of the seed is the start of life of the shoot; indeed, since it is like life itself, this death is created in the human stomach is the beginning of their rising to the level of human life; it may therefore be said 'such a death is more orderly and created than their own life.' Thus, if death of plant life, the lowest level of life, is thus created, wise, and ordered, so also must be the death that befalls human life, the most elevated level of life. And like a seed sown in the ground becomes a tree in the world of the air, so a man who is laid in the earth will surely produce the shoots of an everlasting life in the Intermediate Realm.²⁵

In this regard, Imam Bediuzzaman used the method of allegorical comparison/القياس التمثيلي; he uses the example from the process of the germination of a seed. The seed apparently decays and turns into a new shoot. The death of this seed is the beginning of the new life of the shoot. If the death of plant life, which is, according to him, the lowest level of life, is thus created, wise, and ordered, so the

²⁴ Al Mulk (67):1.

²⁵ Nursi, *The Letters*, p. 24.

death that befalls human life, the most elevated level of life, must also be.²⁶

This shows that this death is as ordered and deliberate as life is. Just as it is Allah who gives life and causes life to continue by means of sustenance, so it is also He who causes death by creating different kinds and various means and ways. He discharges humankind from heavy duties, labor of service, and the responsibilities of earthly life, and takes him to an immortal life. Imam Bediuzzaman argues that all this constitutes sufficient proof that death is not merely destruction, extinction, cessation, eternal separation, nor is it a haphazard event. It is indeed one of Allah's well-planned and well-established realities of this life.²⁷

He explains the reason for death as mercy in several places in his writings. The mercy of Allah SWT is also examined more through the resurrection of the dead. He does this mostly in the form of *tafakkur* or reflective thought on the natural world and close observation of it from the Qur'anic viewpoint, i.e. viewing beings as signs of their Maker, and as letters and words describing Him as alluding to such truths.

He makes the discussion comprehensible later when he points to the verse that says:

فَانظُرْ إِلَى آثَارِ رَحْمَتِ اللَّهِ كَيْفَ يُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ لَمُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى وَهُوَ عَلَى
كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

Behold, then the marks of Allah's Mercy, how He revives the earth after it was dead. He, indeed, is the One who revives the dead and has power over everything."²⁸ Here Allah shows readers that the resurrection of creation on this earth is the result of His mercy, and that His finite, directly revealed and real Mercy is not experienced in its fullness on this earth but in the hereafter.²⁹ The resurrection is seen by Imam Bediuzzaman as the final act and the wise climax of God's creation.³⁰ Imam Bediuzzaman addresses the Creator regarding this matter as follows:

Through Your activity in the atmosphere, Your power, which continuously displays examples of the resurrection of the dead and Great Gathering and transforms the summer into winter and winter into summer and similar acts, gives the sign that it will transform this world into the hereafter and there display its everlasting acts.³¹

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 268.

²⁸ The Qur'an, Al-Ruum (30): 50.

²⁹ See Nursi, *The Words*, p. 59.

³⁰ Thomas Michel, S.J., *The Resurrection of the Dead and Final Judgment in the Thought of Said Nursi*, published in *Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought: The Case of Said Nursi*, edited by Ibrahim Abu Rabi (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 37.

³¹ Nursi, *The Rays*, p. 56.

To him, death is also a bounty for four reasons:³²

Death frees man from the duties and obligations of life.

Death releases one from the narrow and turbulent prison of this world and unites one with the mercy of the Eternally Beloved One.

Death releases one from burdens of being old.

Death is a mercy and relief from worldly disaster.

Furthermore, Bediuzzaman explains that death is not contradictory to Allah's attributes as The Compassionate, The Merciful (*Arrahmaan, Arrahiim*) and The Giver of Life (*Al Muhyii*) as mentioned above. Apparently, this seems to contradict – indeed, it does not seem to be right all – the following verse of Qur'an: *وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ* "...and My Mercy encompasses all things..."³³ This world has two faces that can be observed. Allah turns humans' eyes to the second face to prepare them for death. With the coming of old age, Allah shows the decline of all beautiful things in this world in order to create the desire in humans' hearts for living in a permanent beloved place. Furthermore, the longing to see loved ones who have already passed away awakens in them a feeling of joy for the coming of death. Humans are also made to realize that their weakness and impotence lead them to the wish to rest and depart to another world. Imam Bediuzzaman likens this universe to the book of the Eternally Besought One: every creature in this universe does not point to itself. They belong to the One Who is manifest in them with His attributes and Divine Names. Imam Bediuzzaman asks us to read this book with intent, with the aim to love its Maker and to cease the attachment that is doomed to be broken and perish.³⁴

From the examples above, Imam Bediuzzaman reminds the readers about their real existence, purpose of this life, and what do they have to do to prepare for the hereafter. He says:

Since this world is transitory, and since life is short, and since the truly essential duties are many, and since eternal life will be gained here, and since the world is not without an owner, and since this guest house of the world has a most Wise and Generous director, and since neither good nor bad will remain without recompense, and since according to the verse, "**On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear.**"³⁵ There is no obligation that cannot be borne, and since a safe way is preferable to a harmful way, and since worldly friends and ranks last only till the door of the grave,

³² Nursi, *The Letters*, pp. 24-25.

³³ The Qur'an, Al-A'raf (7):156.

³⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, pp. 220-21.

³⁵ The Qur'an, Al Baqarah (2): 286 *لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا*.

then surely that the most fortunate is he who does not forget the hereafter for this world, and does not sacrifice the hereafter for this world, and does not destroy the life of hereafter for worldly life, and does not waste his life on trivial things, but considers himself to be a guest and acts in accordance with the commands of the guest house's Owner, then opens the door of the grave in confidence and enters upon eternal happiness.³⁶

According to Imam Bediuzzaman, humans have been provided and blessed with an overpowering desire for immortality and love of existence so they can find the Eternally Existent One. In fact, the happiness of their immortality lies in the eternity of their Sustainer and in relying on His mercy because their essential being is nothing but a shadow of a Divine Name that is eternal. By realizing this, they should not misuse that infinite love for their own selves, for that will lead them to eternal sorrows. Therefore, they must form a relationship with Him and make peace with Him, as it has been said in Qur'an:

أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

... for verily in the remembrance of Allah, (people's) hearts find their rest.³⁷

1.2.2.3 The Creation of Misfortunes, Calamities, and Disaster

From Imam Bediuzzaman's point of view, the real and true calamities of Muslims are those that have affected religion. When this happens, we consider this to be a misfortune that one should ask Allah to prevent from happening. The apparent misfortunes are given for several reasons:

- as divine warnings and admonishment
- they are sent as the punishment for sin
- they get rid of people's state of neglect
- they remind people of their human helplessness and weakness
- afford people a form of tranquility.

They can be seen in terms of a favor from God and a means of purification, especially the disaster that relates to the sickness, as Prophet Muhammad said "*Just as a tree drops its ripe fruit when shaken, so too do sins fall away through the shaking of fever.*"³⁸

Disasters, calamities, and sicknesses strengthen one's life; they refine, purify, perfect, and advance it. When people are afflicted with any type of misfortune or

³⁶ Nursi, *The Letters*, p. 94.

³⁷ The Qur'an, Al Ra'd (13):28.

³⁸ Sahih Bukhari, Mardha 3, 13, 16, Sahih Muslim, Birr 45.

sickness that they do not know how to deal with they realize their impotence, weakness, and helplessness, and thus turn to Almighty Allah to seek refuge in Him, meditate upon Him, and offer a pure form of worship with no hypocrisy. They are led to realize that this world is the field of testing and the abode of service. If they know that Allah's mercy lies behind each calamity, they should offer thanks to Allah instead of complaining. They should remember that these momentary pains will result in everlasting spiritual happiness. They should also think of the reward that results from misfortune and the requital that awaits them in the Hereafter – not only that they should be patient but also be thankful as well. In this regard, Imam Bediuzzaman suggested some advice on how to face misfortune:

Never complain, for indeed complaining will do nothing but increase misfortune and remove all occasion for compassion. Instead, one should offer gratitude for it increases Divine bounty. The supplication offered by Prophet Ayyub (Job) when he was struck with illness,

وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَى رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

("O my Sustainer! Indeed harm has afflicted me, and You are the most Merciful of the Merciful,")³⁹ was due to his worries that he would not be able to remember Allah and offer worship anymore because his illness had spread to his heart and tongue. He did not pray in his supplication for the comfort of his own soul but rather sought a cure for the purpose of worship. Allah accepted this pure and sincere supplication in the best way. Prophet Ayyub was then granted perfect good health.⁴⁰

Offer supplication in a right way. One should seek refuge humbly, not in a protesting and plaintive way, sighing in a fashion that implies objection and criticism of the Divine Determining and the Divine Merciful. One should not blame God's mercy, for then it will be taken away from him. Imam Bediuzzaman compares this type of person to the broken hand that exacts revenge: there will be nothing but further damage to the hand.

One should not consider any misfortune that occurs to be big. Physical misfortunes grow when they are viewed as large and shrink when they are viewed as small. Nursi composed the following verses to describe this truth:

Cry not out of misfortune, O wretch, come trust in God! For know that crying out compounds the misfortune and is a great error. Find misfortune's Sender, and know it is gift within gift and pleasure. So leaving crying out and offer thanks, like the nightingale, smile through your tears! If you find Him not, know the world is all pain within pain, transience and loss. So why lament at a small misfortune while upon you is a world full

³⁹ Qur'an, Al Anbiyaa' (21):83.

⁴⁰ Nursi, *The Flashes*, p. 21.

of woe. Come, trust in God. Trust in God! Laugh in misfortune's face; it too will laugh. As it laughs it will diminish; it will be changed and transformed.⁴¹

1.2.2.4 Creation of Impotence and Poverty

According to Imam Bediuzzaman, infinite impotence, weakness, poverty, and need are essential to human nature, as he says:

... the essence of humanity has been kneaded with infinite impotence, weakness, poverty, and need, while the essence of the Necessarily Existent One is infinitely omnipotent, powerful, self-sufficient, and without need.⁴²

One of the innate duties of humankind is to recognize this and proclaim it before the Most Merciful One by seeking his needs.⁴³ To do so is, in his words, "to fly the high station of worship of God and servitude to Him on the wings of impotence and poverty."⁴⁴ He says:

It is to beseech and supplicate the Provider of Needs through the tongue of impotence and poverty; it is to seek from Him. It is to fly to the high station of worship and servitude to God on the wings of impotence and poverty.⁴⁵

He also says:

Thus, this great wealth in faculties and abundant capital was certainly not given for procuring this temporary worldly life. Rather, man's fundamental duty is to perform his duties, which look to innumerable aims; and proclaim his impotence, poverty, and faults in the form of worship; and observing the glorifications of beings with a universal eye, to bear witness to them; and seeing the instances of the assistance of the Most Merciful One, to offer thanks; and gazing on the miracles of dominical power in beings, to contemplate on them as objects from which lessons may be drawn.⁴⁶

This is the path of prophethood, inspired by divine revelation, which is the origin of pure worship. It teaches "that the aim of humanity and duty of human being is ... knowing their impotence to seek refuge in divine power, by seeing their weakness to rely on divine strength, by realizing their poverty to trust in divine

⁴¹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, p. 27.

⁴² Nursi, *The Words*, p. 564.

⁴³ See Shukran Vahide, "A Survey of the Main Spiritual Themes of the Risale-i Nur," published in *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur*, edited and with an introduction by Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), pp. 9-10.

⁴⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, p. 326.

⁴⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, p. 324.

⁴⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, p. 334.

mercy."⁴⁷ Because of this, after faith, primary innate duty of humans is supplication, and that is the basis of worship of God and servitude to Him.⁴⁸ The reason the Most Merciful One made humans infinitely weak and impotent was so that "he would perpetually seek refuge at the divine court and beseech and supplicate."⁴⁹

In Imam Bediuzzaman's system of thought, the two basic concepts are: human powerlessness and weakness before God, and his want and neediness. He describes impotence as being a path that leads to winning God's love by way of worship, but is safer. Poverty leads to the divine name of All-Merciful. He says:

While all true ways are taken from the Qur'an, some are shorter, safer, and more general than others. Of these ways taken from the Qur'an is that of impotence, poverty, compassion, and reflection, from which, with my defective understanding, I have benefited. Indeed, like ecstatic love, impotence is a path which, by way of worship, leads to winning God's love; but it is safer. Poverty too leads to the Divine Name of All-Merciful. And, like ecstatic love, compassion leads to the Name of All-Compassionate, but is a swifter and broader path. Also like ecstatic love, reflection leads to the Name of All-Wise, but it is a richer, broader, and more brilliant path.⁵⁰

According to Imam Bediuzzaman, human poverty and impotence have the reverse function of allowing a person to act as mirror to the innumerable manifestations of the All-Powerful and Compassionate One Whose power is infinite, the All-Generous and Rich One whose wealth is boundless.⁵¹ In this regard he says:

Through its impotence, weakness, poverty, and need, my life acts as a mirror to the power, strength, wealth, and mercy of the Creator of life. Yes, just as the pleasure of food is known in proportion to the degree of hunger, and the degrees of light through the degrees of darkness, and the degrees of heat through the degrees of cold; in the same way, through the boundless impotence and poverty in my life, I understood the infinite power and mercy of my Creator, who answers my needs and wards off my innumerable enemies. I understood my duties of entreaty, supplication, worship, abasement, and seeking refuge with God, and I undertook these duties.⁵²

He also emphasizes that it is not only human beings, but all creatures act as mirrors to the Maker's power and riches through their impotence and poverty:

These beings are mirrors. As darkness is the mirror to light, and however intense the darkness is, to that degree it will display the brilliance of the light, so these beings act as mirrors in many respects by reason of the contrast of opposites. For example, be-

⁴⁷ See Nursi, *The Words*, pp. 562-63.

⁴⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, p. 324.

⁴⁹ See Nursi, *The Flashes*, p. 274.

⁵⁰ Nursi, *The Words*, p. 491.

⁵¹ See Nursi, *The Words*, p. 330.

⁵² Nursi, *The Rays*, pp. 81-82.

ings act as mirrors to the Maker's power through their impotence and to His riches through their poverty; similarly they act as mirrors to His everlastingness through their ephemerality. The poverty of trees and the face of the earth itself in wintertime and their glittering wealth and riches in springtime act as mirrors in most unequivocal fashion to the power and mercy of an Absolutely Powerful One, the One of Absolute Riches.⁵³

1.2.3 *Examples of These Impacts in Imam Bediuzzaman's Life*

It has been mentioned before that Imam Bediuzzaman's writings are not the result of a mere intellectual enterprise but living answers to problems he personally experienced. The circumstances in which he wrote *Risale-i Nur* were not easy. One year after the caliphate in Turkey was abolished, Imam Bediuzzaman was arrested along with many other Muslim scholars in eastern Anatolia. Some were executed and others exiled to remote areas in western Turkey. He was harassed by the authorities and forced to remain in exile. He was arrested, tried, and imprisoned many times for writing on the Islamic faith. Those who read his writings were also threatened, ill-treated, and imprisoned for no crime. This injustice lasted for more than 25 years. It pained him greatly, but he learned a great deal from it. He realized that a human without faith in Allah can be a cruel tyrant. He was also given the opportunity to realize that because of Divine unity nothing happens in this universe haphazardly on its own. Allah the Merciful controls everything. When he was all alone in exile, he came to realize all the more his infinite weakness and absolute need to seek refuge in Allah the Compassionate. He was sure that what had happened to him was based on Allah's Will for a special merciful reason. He was then able to overcome his affliction and dwell in the presence of Allah the Merciful. He had a positive view of all the events he underwent. Some examples that can be derived from his own experience of how he exposed the continuing threat of evil to meaning, purpose, and happiness in an otherwise intelligible world when he believed that all events had been caused by Allah based on His Mercy are described below.

1.3 Imam Bediuzzaman's Transformation of the Prison into a "School of Joseph" (*Medrese-i Yusufiye*)

Imam Bediuzzaman was imprisoned three times for writing *Risale-i Nur*. He was accused of founding a secret organization that engaged in activities against the government of Turkey. The students who supported him were also impris-

⁵³ Nursi, *The Letters*, p. 286.

oned as well, along with some commoners who had only the very slightest connection to Imam Bediuzzaman. During this time he successfully transformed these three prisons into places of learning he called the School of Joseph, or *Medrese-i Yusufiye*, after the Prophet Yusuf, the patron of prisoners. These three schools were the following.

1.3.1 *Eskisehir Prison*

Eskisehir Prison was the first place where Imam Bediuzzaman was sent for for 11 months. The prison conditions were very poor. Yet he continued to write and was able to complete five more treatises in the months he was here: The Twenty- Eighth, Twenty-Ninth and Thirtieth Flashes, and The First and Second Rays. He and his students successfully transformed the prison into a mosque and learning centre. One of the prison officers who was on his military service and was supposed to watch them was so impressed by this religious activity that he himself kept up a clandestine and close relationship with Bediuzzaman and *Risale-i Nur*. He used to be called "Postman Kamil." He later described those times to Sahiner in 1985 and said to him:

Everyone got on well with each other in Eskisehir prison...They used to perform the prescribed prayers all together, recite the Qur'an, and offer prayers." Later he continued, "The dark prison ward shone with the lights of the Qur'an. Everyone would rise early for the prayers, and take their section (a thirtieth part) of the Qur'an, then the recitations of the whole Qur'an would begin. After the Morning Prayer, the prayer for a complete recitation of Qur'an would be said, those were good days.... The prison became like a mosque. If only I have been able to be like them."⁵⁴

1.3.2 *Denizli Prison*

The conditions of Denizli Prison were worse than Eskisehir's. Imam Bediuzzaman was kept in solitary confinement under the most appalling conditions in a tiny damp, dark cell. He was also poisoned several times. But he continued his struggle. His students were forbidden to visit or speak with him, so he wrote notes and letters to them to encourage, console, guide, and direct them to write out and copy these letters and *Risale-i Nur*. He also managed to write the Eleventh Ray, "The Fruits of Belief."⁵⁵ He also wrote petitions and defense speeches. Besides his

⁵⁴ Shukran Vahide, *The Author of Risale-i Nur: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, p. 235.

⁵⁵ Shukran Vahide, "A Chronology of Said Nursi's Life," published in *Islam at the Crossroad: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, edited and with introduction by Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. xxi.

letters and defense speeches, it was mostly the Fruits of Belief he made copies of in the prison. "The Fruits of Belief" had been described as "a fruit of memento of Denizli Prison and a product of two Fridays," consisting of 11 pieces or topics. Addressing the prisoners in particular, each topic explains some matter of belief such as knowledge of God, the resurrection, and the hereafter, and particularly relevant to that situation, the question of death.

1.3.3 Afyon Prison

This was the last prison Imam Bediuzzaman was sent to, and he stayed there 20 months. During this period, he wrote a letter to his students who were also imprisoned and were prohibited from visiting him on various matters concerning their life in the prison. Most importantly, he urged them to look on their imprisonment in positive terms in the light of Divine wisdom as a trial and a test that presented new possibilities for service to the Qur'an through *Risale-i Nur* and counseled patience. His students always found ways to visit him and were successful in making circles of learning in their wards. The example of one student who was mistakenly arrested and benefited a great deal during his 11 months in the prison was Terzi Mustafa, who learned how to write the Qur'anic transcript from the students of *Risale-i Nur* and was later employed this area as a calligrapher by the Department of Religious Affairs. He also learned how to recite the Qur'an, so that for 10 years subsequent to being released from the prison he was an imam in a mosque in Emirdag.⁵⁶

1.4 Imam Bediuzzaman's Transformation of Barla into the First School of *Risale-i Nur*.⁵⁷

Imam Bediuzzaman was not guilty of any crime for which he should have been exiled to western Anatolia, and then to Barla,⁵⁸ a remote spot removed from contact with the outside world. The village of Barla is a tiny hamlet of around 15 to 20 houses in the mountains near the northwestern shore of Lake Egridir. The government wanted him to stay in a small, remote place where he would not attract followers and where he would be deprived of all company and society so that he would fade from memory and be forgotten. The authorities took all possible measures to isolate Imam Bediuzzaman so that he would not have any contact

⁵⁶ Vahide, *The Author of Risale-i Nur*, p. 310.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.205, quoted in Sualar, p. 598.

⁵⁸ Shukran Vahide, "The Life and Times of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," in *The Muslim World*, LXXXIX/3-4 (July-October, 1999): 225.

with anyone. Not only did they exile him here, but they also spread rumors that frightened the local people into avoiding him. They also had him continuously watched, followed, and harassed. He was under tight control and was even banned from speaking with the few villagers.⁵⁹ This injustice was transformed into "a Divine Mercy," his mind was kept clear, and he could serve the Compassionate Sustainer in a greater degree.⁶⁰

Imam Bediuzzaman was to remain in Barla nearly 8½ years. Throughout his stay here, he dedicated himself to writing *Risale-i Nur*. In this exile, he wrote the greater part of the 130 parts of *Risale-i Nur*. They were later compiled as the "Words," "Letters," and "Flashes" that make up the 75% of the *Risale-i Nur*. These treatises were distributed throughout Anatolia by an outstanding method. Those who were willing to become Imam Bediuzzaman's students were asked to preserve the use of Qur'anic letters to copy the treatises by hand.

Barla became the center of learning the truth of belief or faith. Imam Bediuzzaman called it "First Nur Medrese," which was the first *Risale-i Nur* School. By the end of his stay he had dictated three quarters, a total of 119 pieces.⁶¹ Sukran Vahide writes: "Thus began Bediuzzaman's silent struggle against the forces of irreligion."⁶² Barla became the center from which the light of the truths of belief shone at a time when the darkness of unbelief gathered force to completely uproot the Islamic faith of people in Anatolia.⁶³

Imam Bediuzzaman wrote a treatise proving the resurrection of the dead and the existence of the hereafter just a month or two after arriving in Barla. Soon he had six students: Samli Hafiz Tavfik, Siddik Suleyman, Hoca Halit, Sentral Sabri, Tigli Hakki, and Hulusi. Tavfik had listened to *The Sermon of Damascus* and later became an expert transcriber for Nursi in Barla. Soon the students, who were initially few, numbered in the thousands, publishing the treatises by hand by the tens of thousands and secretly distributing them throughout Anatolia. Nursi said once: "Man produces cruelty, but destiny brings justice." The enemy of Islam tried to isolate him in Barla, but the destiny of Allah sent him to meet excellent students who were also fast transcribers.

⁵⁹ Markham and Pirim, *An Introduction to Said Nursi, Life, Thought and Writings* (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited 2011).

⁶⁰ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Mektubet*, pp. 43-44.

⁶¹ See Horkuc, *Said Nursi's Ideal for Human Society: Moral and Social Reform in the Risale-i Nur* (Durham: University of Durham, 2004), p. 118.

⁶² Vahide, *The Author of the Risalei Nur, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, p. 204

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

1.5 Imam Bediuzzaman's Painful Circumstances were Very Fruitful

In one of the letters, Imam Bediuzzaman himself wrote that he viewed his 30 years of exile, imprisonment, and oppression as continual Divine warnings not to make his service to religion the means to personal benefit of any kind but to his own progress and advancement, and to salvation from Hell and meriting Paradise, and this could be achieved with absolute sincerity.⁶⁴ During his painful circumstances, with all types of obstacles and difficulties, and by the grace of Allah, he managed to complete *Risale-i Nur*. When *Risale-i Nur* was given official permission to be published and was printed on modern presses in the new script/Latin in 1957 in Ankara and Istanbul, it was then that Imam Bediuzzaman saw the fruits of the labor of 30 years of exile, imprisonment, and torment. He was filled with joy and declared: "Now is the time of *Risale-i Nur*'s festival. My duty is finished. This is the time I have long waited for. Now I can go."

1.6 Lessons from Understanding

The most recurrent divine attribute in the Qur'an is mercy.⁶⁵ Some of verses regarding this are:

كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

*Your Sustainer has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy.*⁶⁶

كَتَبَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

*He has prescribed Mercy for Himself.*⁶⁷

وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

*And My grace and mercy overspread everything (embraces all things).*⁶⁸

Following the scriptures, Imam Bediuzzaman stresses the theme of mercy in his writings. He shows how Divine mercy is displayed in all events in this universe as follows.

The universal law of mercy is seen everywhere:

⁶⁴ Emirdag Lahikasi, ii, 102-04.

⁶⁵ All of the 114 Qur'anic chapters but one (surah At-Taubah, chapter number 9) start: "In the name Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate." Allah's attributes of mercy are mentioned 288 times. The word "mercy" is also mentioned 114 times.

⁶⁶ The Qur'an, Al An'aam (6):54.

⁶⁷ The Qur'an, Al An'aam (6):12.

⁶⁸ The Qur'an, Al A'raf (7):156.

- Allah's mercy is shown in beneficial matters like good health, well-being, and pleasure for which people should offer thanks in the form of worship
- to display infinite power and unlimited mercy, Allah has made infinite impotence and unlimited need innate in humankind
- everything created in this universe is due to His mercy and special purposes; nothing happens by chance and is meaningless
- the creation of illness, sickness, feelings of fear, death, and other undesirable things and events are good with respect to their results
- apparent harms, disasters, and calamities are not misfortunes; they are created for many everlasting and beneficial results
- whatever happens to a person, good or bad, is a test, for which he is to thank God, as stated in Qur'an:

قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي لِيَبْلُوَنِي أَأَشْكُرُ أَمْ أَكْفُرُ وَمَنْ شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّي غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ

[H]e said: "This is by the Grace of my Lord! To test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful! And if any is grateful, truly his gratitude is (again) for his own soul; but if any is ungrateful, truly my Lord is Free of all Needs, Supreme in Honour!"⁶⁹

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا لُقْمَانَ الْحِكْمَةَ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِلَّهِ وَمَنْ يَشْكُرْ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ

We bestowed (in the past) Wisdom on Luqman: "Show (your) gratitude to Allah." Anyone who is (so) grateful does so to the profit of his own soul: but if any is ungrateful, verily Allah is free of all wants, Worthy of all praise.⁷⁰

The believer can take a lesson from what Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "Wondrous are the believer's affairs. For him there is good in all his affairs, and this is so only for the believer. When something pleasing happens to him, he is grateful, and that is good for him; and when something displeasing happens to him, he is patient, and that is good for him."⁷¹

Calamities are created to be:

- means of purification and spiritual progress

⁶⁹ The Qur'an, Al Naml (27):40.

⁷⁰ The Qur'an, Luqman (31):12.

⁷¹ Sahih Muslim, Hadith number 2999.

- atonement for sin, warnings and favors from the Merciful Lord
- to prevent one from falling into dissipation
- reminders of human's weakness and helplessness
- preparation for eternal life
- a bounty from Allah, since any Muslim afflicted with calamities such as sickness surrenders to Allah, knowing that it is a test and Allah is preparing a great reward for him in the hereafter.

1.7 Findings and Recommendation for Further Research

Imam Bediuzzaman has written a great deal on Allah's Beautiful Names. These are the meanings I have found throughout his writings. Further research of his discourse on this matter will be very beneficial for everyone.

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