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Knowledge and Faith and their Utilization for Human Peace and Happiness: Said Nursi's Perspective

The highest aim of the human's inborn character and the most inspirational result of the human's innate nature are to have faith in God. And the most dignified position and the greatest status in the ranks of humanity are to achieve the knowledge of God within faith in God. The most delightful happiness and the sweetest reward for human beings are to attain the love of God within the knowledge of God. The purest joy for the human spirit and the finest pleasure for the human heart are to experience the spiritual taste contained within the love of God. Surely, all true happiness, pure joy, pleasant bounty, and sheer taste are all found in and experienced through the knowledge of God and the love of God.

For Nursi knowledge and faith both are important preconditions for the human happiness. It is through knowledge that life, from the first unicellular organisms to humans has been able to exist and to preserve itself, and faith in God would help to create happiness in the life, as Nursi further proclaims with firm conviction that a person's joy and happiness in this world is dependent upon and commensurate with his or her knowledge and love of God.

Mahatma Gandhi the fasther of the nation, was a strong faith oriented personality wanted to spread paece through faith and knowledge. He says
"I believe in the fundamental Truth of all great religions of the world. And I believe that if only we could, all of us, read the scriptures of the different Faiths from the stand-point of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom, all one and were all helpful to one another".

The paper would precisely focus on the Bediuzzeman Said Nursi's perspective (who is also the spiritual guide of Ustad Fathullah Gulen) in this regard as to how Knowledge and Faith can best be utilized to create peace and happiness in society. All religions in the world concentrate on knowledge and faith to achieve true peace and happiness. Since his interpretation of the Knowledge and Faith is quite universal, therefore it would be of a great tribute to him if I introduce his teachings on Non-violence day.

Key Words: Knowledge, Faith, Logic, Rationality, Sprituality, Love, Peace, Happiness

A Brief Sketch of Ustad Nursi:

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was born, in 1877. It was the period of great challenges and the time of unbelievable social, economic and ideological development from Eastern Asia to Europe and America. When Nursi started to make his voice heard through his Peaceful Dinamic Movement on the intellectual scene of the Ottomans, almost all the Turkish republic of today had been occupied and annexed by Russia, while the Muslim Turkish Khanates of the Far-East had been swallowed by China[1]. However, exception of Iran, the whole of the Islamic countries were under the rule of either British or French Colonies.

Born in the heart of Euro-Asia, in a village in Eastern Anadola, he, since the very first year of his life, was deeply involved in the world's innovation. Still, being born in the village Nurs, from which he later on received the name Nursi, he belonged to the traditional Oriental society.

That is why; he made his first step in receiving education from the famous oriental scholars and teachers of the region. That was the beginning of his growing up, and became his first school of life. He realized all the importance of education and showed at a very early age, unique ability and extraordinary intelligence in his studies. Moreover, when he was only sixteen years old, he debated with many distinguished scholars on many topics. Thus, through debates or philosophical discussions, which were very popular in many Oriental countries, he became famous and well received among scholars in Turkey. However, the age in which Badiuzzaman started his movement known as "Nur Movement" was the age of disaster and perdition.

What is even more important, Nursi was not a traditional scholar in the real sense of the term; he also studied many modern branches of sciences and humanities. He dedicated himself to understanding of the ambivalent nature of the world, to understand all the aspects of the Universe and the Mankind. His intellectual and social life and struggle are like a reflection in a model person's life of the various stages that Islamic world has passed through this century.

This combination of classical theology on one hand, and modern knowledge, on the other, allowed him to turn into one of the most outstanding reformists, spiritual leaders and educationists of his time. He understood that traditional knowledge would not be sufficient enough to carry debates with representatives of Western scholarly thought.

Nonetheless, Nursi's approach to Islam through his movement became apparently more clear when he distinguished the leading Islamic values saying.

"Love, brotherhood and affection are basic to Islam, and they are its bond. Fairness and favourable thinking mark the Islamic character"[2].

[1] Badiuzzama Said Nursi and the Ideal of Islamic Unity, Husain Celik

[2] From the Risale-i Nur Collection. The Demascus Sermon by Badiuzzama Said Nursi. Translated from Turkish, By Sukran Vahide. P.51,

For Nursi knowledge and faith both are important preconditions for the human peace and happiness. God would help to create happiness in life, as Nursi further proclaims with firm conviction that a person's joy and happiness in this world is dependent upon with his or her knowledge and love of God.

Nursi emphasizes on the use and importance of two inter-related notions; Faith in God (*Iman-billah*) and knowledge (*Ilm*) in particular the knowledge of God (*Ma'rifetullah*). However, for Nursi these two essential concepts appear to constitute the very roots of the meaning of human happiness. Consequently, they deserve to be called the two fundamental realities of life upon which a believer's world-view is supposed to rest and evolve and through which his worldly affairs are expected to be handled efficiently and daily problems be resolved satisfactorily. Moreover, through the fusion of these two core realities, which ultimately results in the completion of the love of God (*Muhabbetullah*), a believer will be able to receive spiritual pleasures from this physical life, as Nursi himself explicitly declares:

> "You should definitely know that the highest aim of the human's innate character (*khilkat*) and the most sublime result of the human's inborn disposition (*fitrat*) are to have faith in God. And the most exalted position and the greatest status in the ranks of humanity are to attain the knowledge of God within faith in God. The most delightful happiness and the sweetest bounty for *Jinn* and human beings are to attain the love of God within the knowledge of God. The purest joy for the human spirit and the finest pleasure for the human heart are to experience the spiritual taste contained within the love of God. Surely, all true happiness, pure joy, pleasant bounty, and sheer taste are all found in and experienced through the knowledge of God and the love of God".[3]

Nursi further proclaims with firm conviction that one, who has attained these two life-sweetening realities, knowledge and love of God, indeed, enjoys whatever one possesses, small and big, material and spiritual in this world. But, he who lacks them, even if he owns the whole world, cannot find peace within himself and outside, because, without faith and knowledge, he feels physically and spiritually weak, vulnerable, and helpless, especially when he is exposed to possible calamities, hardships, miseries, pains, and fears of this bewildering fleeting world.'[4]

According to Nursi, it is faith in God that ensures and guarantees the peace and security of human beings. It is the knowledge of God that enables them to lead a fruitful life and attain happiness in this world. And it is the love of God, which in fact is the necessary outcome of the unification of these two fundamental principles that allow human to turn this transient abode into, what Nursi terms, "a garden of recreation" and enjoy the short-lived pleasures of this garden but with full sense of responsibility and accountability, while at the same time hoping to attain the permanent pleasures of the eternal abode. Human beings, after all, have been created for eternity; therefore, the real pleasures for them lie in such eternal matters.[5]

The Necessity of Faith and Knowledge for Human Peace and Happiness:

[3] Mektubat, 20, p. 448; The Letters, 20, p.265.
[4] Ibid.
[5] İşârâtü'l-İ'câz, Bakara 2:25, p. 1243.

For Nursi Faith in God involves at least two dynamic performances on the part of a human; one involves finding God through the self-reflection and the observation of the world. The other, a consequence of the former, is rather a spiritual action, as it demands complete reliance on God in all circumstances and at all times, which can be achieved by knowing God. The centre of these two cognitive and spiritual activities, according to our thinker, is not the soul (*nafs*) or the mind (*zihn*) or the intellect, (*aqil*) as philosophers asserted in the past; rather it is the heart, he declares:

> "Is that which is established in the heart. If it is only in the intellect, it lacks value for human being[6]." Knowledge without the insight of the heart, he further proclaims, turns into a form of ignorance".[7]

It is noteworthy to mention here that knowledge for Nursi has at least two types. The first one is such that when we have it once and reflect on it once or twice, it is sufficient. The other one is however just like a bread or water that all the time we need to think of it. And we cannot say about this knowledge, for instance, that we have understood it once and that is enough. The knowledge of faith, Nursi affirms, belongs to the second category.[8]

Concept of Faith:

"God is the Protector of those who believe; He leads them out of darkness into light"[9] Faith' as a true relation to God is identified with 'luminosity' and paying careful attention to God, whereas unbelief, as a severance of that relation is compared to darkness and heedlessness. Therefore, when the light of faith enters the heart of a person, Nursi stresses, he will become not only enlightened in himself but also illuminate others. Consequently, he will become truly heedful of his Creator and continue to put his reliance on Him as long as he maintains his faith.

Belief or faith is a trust and sincerity of doing something without any logic trying to interpret it. Religiously, faith is stronger than reason. While Islamically, faith is called "*iman*" or "*'Aqidah*", it is a complete submission to the will of God. It includes belief, profession and the performance of deeds consistent with the man's commission as vicegerent on earth, all according to God's will.[10]

In the same context, Bediuzzaman draws people's attention to the importance of faith. He pointed out:

> "If any person wants to understand this world and man's spirit within the world and the nature and value of religion, and how the extent to which the world is a prison, understanding religion is important. Without religion man becomes the most miserable of creatures".[11]

From the foregoing statement of Nursi, it's crystal clear that the knowledge and belief in Islam are the foremost important components to attain human happiness and peace and a clear invitation posed by Bediuzzaman Nursi to the people worldwide. He goes on saying:

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[6] The Letters, Preface to the Seeds of Reality, p. 541.
[7] Mektubat, 20, p. 448; The Letters, 20, p.265.
[8] Barla Lahikasi, 27. Mektup, p. 1516.
[9] The Holy Qur'an 2:257.
[10] The Holy Quran: Ya-Sin: 82-83.
[11] Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, The words, p 45.

"Unbelief leads to misery, pain, and misfortune, all of which Nursi epitomizes in the concept of misguidance (*dhalalat*). As for the former state of faith, it generates happiness, joy, and pleasure, all of which he sums up in the notion of guidance".[12] (*hidayat*)

Logic and Faith

The classical logic is such guiding force that distinguishes humans from all other living beings including animals. Nonetheless, what makes human into human, claims Nursi is indeed "faith" and in saying so he probably intends to provide reasons based on the Qur'an. An alternative definition of human being to that of the Muslim philosophers' such as Al-Farabi and Ibn-e-Sina, who had literally borrowed the well-known Aristotelian definition: "A human being is a rational animal." (*Haiwan-e-Aaqil*) Nonetheless, rationality is also regarded by Nursi as an essential distinguishing feature of human being that other living beings do not possess; but, as he argues, unless rationality is crowned and illuminated with faith, it will be fruitless, if not completely useless.

Faith, therefore, for Nursi's, is more important for human beings than mere rationality. Such a conviction sounds astonishing and challenging, and even it may give the impression that as if he is downgrading the value of rationality in relation to faith. However, we may begin to see the positive side of this view, even if we do not agree with it completely, if we look closely into possible causes of today's crises in many parts of the world, most of them, particularly the economic ones, do not arise because of the insufficiency of rationality in people's approaches to conducting and managing their businesses, but as a result of many diverse factors, most common of which is uncontrolled and self-centred human behaviour, which is generally caused, according to Nursi's diagnosis, by the lack of faith. For it is by virtue of faith, he indicates, that human being is able to connect himself with His Creator and thus uses all his physical and immaterial resources responsibly as a trust on His behalf and within the limits set by Him.' A person, who is devoid of faith, on the other hand, severes his relation with God and thus employs all of those resources, mostly irresponsibly, for the sake of his own carnal soul.[13]' Consequently, the conscience (*vijdan*) of such a person is constantly troubled and remains unrest until it is reconnected to God.

Nursi often demonstrates the strength of faith with the necessity of light, while he compares the negativity of unbelief to the futility of darkness. So much so that all the wonderful inscriptions of the Divine Names and all their beautiful reflections can only become manifest in human being through the light of faith, or to put more precisely, through the luminous connection of faith, without which otherwise they all remain concealed. He further says:

"Depending on the degree of the strength of this luminous relation, human being gains a comparable value and elevates his rank even higher than that of the angelic beings. But, once he cuts off this dynamic spiritual connection, he may descend to the lowest of the low and even turns into a beast."[14]

[12] Sözler, 23, p. 132; The Words, 23, p. 320.
[13] The Words, 6, p. 40
[14] Sözler, 23, p. 132; The Words, 23, p. 319.

Faith is not only the light that enables human being to discover all the works of the Divine art that are hidden in his body and the universe, but also empowers him with a kind of forceful insight through which he himself is able to read them consciously and help others to read in the same way. Besides, faith is exclusively for human being, who is the most precious of all creatures in the eyes of God. As such, he should first turn to himself and by virtue of his faith try to discover all the meanings dormant in his microcosm. If he fails to do so, he becomes no longer a true human being, as Nursi warns:

> O human being! You consider yourself as a true human being. Read yourself! Otherwise, it is likely that you become either an animal-like human or inanimate."[15]
>
> Every act of God and every inscription of His Names are inherently loaded with numerous hidden meanings; they can be uncovered only by the luminosity of faith and rendered intelligible only through the insight of faith.[16]

Answer to a Probable Question:

The question may arise as to why there is a need for knowledge and faith in God to attain human happiness, when there are man made laws to regulate human behavior? This can be answered in two ways.

First, Islam maintains that **ethics** has a major role to play in human lives, and the Quranic ethical code deals with aspects that human laws may not touch upon. Secular laws may not provide universally accepted moral systems and ethical standards. It is religion that gives them a uniform standard. Furthermore, in Islam, every individual has the responsibility to promote a healthy society, the community has the obligation to take care of its poor and needy. Thus Islam places collective responsibility to create a model society for the rest of the world to emulate.

Second, in global age, morality, or the lack of it, is no longer a personal affair. Injustice, cruelty, brutality, breach of trust etc., have become part of national policies. It therefore becomes the responsibility of religion to provide a universally accepted morality, and it is up to religion to educate the conscience of the masses in this respect. Islamic morality emphasizes justice for all. It enjoins upon its followers a respect for differences, be they religious, racial or political. Nevertheless, these are an integeral part and principal componants to be utilised to attain human peace and happiness.

CONCLUSION

Islam is a religion that emphasizes on the responsibility and accountability of human beings. Although, Islam teaches that God has predetermined the span of our life and the time of our death, "it does not mean that even our actions are predetermined by Him. We surely are free in our actions and are, therefore, accountable for them before God.

From Nursi's standpoint, the worst type of misguidance is forgetting one's self due to the disconnection of one's faith-bond with the Creator. Such a misguided person, when working and performing his duty, forgets himself completely and recognizes no limits

[15] Sözler, 33, p.316; The Words, 33, p.719.
[16] The Words, 23, p. 320

whatsoever to his ego and thus becomes arrogant. He only remembers himself when it is time to collect the rewards and the fruits. A guided person, on the other hand, does quite the opposite. On account of his constant connection with the Creator, he always remembers himself while fulfilling his tasks and duties and forgets himself when it is time to get the rewards. A believer therefore guided by his faith works sincerely and happily for the sake of his Lord not for himself.[17]

By this holistic vision Nursi aims to explain and convey to the Muslims and non-Muslims alike, at least three main Qur'anic teachings. The first is the vitality of faith in God for human being for a true understanding of the purpose of creation. The second one is the importance of the preservation of this faith by human being in order to maintain the sound and healthy relation between him and other fellow human beings and all creatures. The third one is ensuring that the meaning and significance of this faith be properly and thoroughly understood, and transmitted efficiently and adequately through generations. That is why he rigorously emphasizes that humanity becomes humanity through faith.[18]

It is frequently suggested that the problems affecting us stem from moral degradation and abandoning of ethical principles. While striding in the world of science and technology, humanity has forgotten the fundamental principles and has neglected essential human values which have come as a clear threat for humans to attain security, peace and happiness. People are continuously motivated to live to earn and consume more. In the pace of life the spiritual and moral sides of human nature seem to have been forgotten. Homes have grown larger, but families have grown smaller. Human beings have journeyed to the depths of space, but have strayed from the paths leading inward to their own selves. Information technology has been developed to an astounding degree, but psychological problems, social injustices, global crises, and ecological disasters have also increased which is a clear threat to the material and spiritual future of humanity.

How has all this happened? Science should have brought greater understanding of the human being, nature and the purpose of creation.

This is because, science was misunderstood and misused. It was utilized solely in serving particular interests and material needs. However, the source of these problems was the absence of knowledge and faith and spirituality, which keep humanity away from overload and turn them towards doing well. Sometimes the loss of spirituality has been the cause of people suffering loneliness and unhappiness and their becoming insensitive and aggressive.

For the human beings to live with the dignity they deserve, various civil and social organizations work to resolve the problems, but more often than not, they neglect spiritual aspects. Risale-i Nur, the magnum-opus Quranic Exegesis authored by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi offers a variety of solutions to these problems. Its method is based on acquiring knowledge and faith and connecting it in the best of ways to attaining human peace and happiness.

It is only through the intuitive power of faith that one can exceed beyond the boundaries of this perceptible material world and notice the importance of the metaphysical

[17] Al-Mathnawi al-'Arabi al-Nuriya, Shu'la, p. 636.
[18] Sözler, 23, p. 134; The Words, 23, p. 324.

aspect of things to attain happiness and satisfaction in life. In another word, the happiness of humanity in this world and the next depends on their faith, as Nursi firmly states:
"Faith necessitates affirmation of Divine unity, which in turn necessitates submission to God, which in turn necessitates reliance on God, which in turn necessarily leads to happiness in this world and the next".[19]

[19] The Words, 23, pp. 322-323