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Interpretation of Youth from the Thinking of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi

Pengertian “Belia” dalam konteks Pemikiran Badiuzzaman Said Nursi

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Abstract

Today’s youth are tomorrow’s leaders. As such, there is a huge responsibility on the elders of the Ummah to mould and nurture young minds in the true Islamic spirit and identity. In order to achieve that, the youth need to be inculcated in the best possible manner so that they are physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally developed into an integrated Islamic personality. It is believed that when the young Muslim minds are developed in accordance with the Islamic philosophy of education; peace, prosperity and happiness will prevail not only in the Muslim world, but the world at large. The idealism that calls for the development of the young Muslim mind is also embedded in the thoughts of *Badiuzzaman Said Nursi*. As one of the well-known Muslim reformers of his time, Nursi has called for the Muslims, particularly the youth, to return to the Qur’anic mode of thinking. Among the ethical values stated in the Qur’an are moderation, fairness and justice in the way of thinking and actions. In line with that, this paper highlights the importance of thinking, ethics and morality that have been stated in Nursi’s “*Risal-e-Noor*.” Due emphasis is given to analyze *Nursi’s* ideas with regard to youth and how to prepare them to be the next echelon of leaders. Relevant data to the research were collected from the print and internet sources followed by analysis using textual and content-analysis methodology.

Keywords: Youth, Spiritual Life, Character Development, Managing Wealth, Success.

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Abstrak

Pemuda hari ini adalah pemimpin hari esok. Disebabkan itu, adalah menjadi tanggungjawab golongan tua dalam Ummah untuk membentuk dan memupuk minda anak muda dengan semangat dan jati diri Islam yang sebenar. Untuk mencapainya, para pemuda perlu disemai dengan akhlak murni sebaik mungkin agar fizikal, intelek, sosial dan emosi mereka berkembang mengikut keperibadian Islam yang padu. Telah dipercayai bahawa apabila pemikiran belia Muslim dibentuk sesuai dengan falsafah pendidikan Islam; kedamaian, kesejahteraan dan kebahagiaan akan terhasil bukan hanya di dunia Islam, tetapi di seluruh dunia. Idealisme yang memerlukan pengembangan pemikiran belia Muslim juga terdapat dalam pemikiran Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Sebagai salah seorang Mujaddid Muslim yang terkenal pada zamannya, Nursi telah meminta agar umat Islam, khususnya para pemuda, kembali ke cara pemikiran Al-Qur'an. Di antara nilai-nilai etika yang dinyatakan dalam Al-Quran adalah kesederhanaan dan keadilan dalam berfikir dan bertindak. Seajar dengan itu, makalah ini menyoroti pentingnya pemikiran, etika dan moral yang telah diketengahkan Nursi dalam "Risalah-a-Noor". Para penyelidik akan memberi penekanan yang sewajarnya dalam menganalisis idea-idea Nursi mengenai belia dan bagaimana mempersiapkan mereka untuk menjadi pemimpin pelapis di masa hadapan. Data yang relevan dengan penyelidikan ini akan dikumpulkan dari sumber cetak dan internet. Dalam proses menganalisis data, para penyelidik akan menggunakan kaedah analisis teks dan kandungan yang berada di bawah domain penyelidikan kualitatif.

Kata Kunci: Belia, Kehidupan Rohani, Perkembangan Watak, Mengurus Kekayaan, Kejayaan.

Introduction

According to the Oxford dictionary, one is regarded to a youth when one is at the stage between childhood and adult age. The word "youth" is used in various forms or interchangeably in many languages. In English, life before the youth is considered juveniles, and once, they grow up, they are considered adolescent. The period of adolescence is between the age of 10 and 20 years old.¹

In any case, one can be considered a person when he or she has reached maturity during adolescence. These people can be considered complete in terms of physical and cognitive development. These teenagers tend to think that they can do anything freely when they reach adulthood. They also tend to think that their sensible power is matured enough, and their bodies have grown and resulted in stronger physical strength. They also tend to improve on the psychological prowess and increased ability in judging what is right or wrong. They are quite active and desire the truth more than anything at this age. They respond emotionally and immediately to everything related to them, either positive or negative, and feel

¹ *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1 May 2008 - Juvenile Nonfiction – p. 2114.

immensely frustrated if their expectations are not fulfilled. In other words, this can be described as being “easily emotional.”²

It is truly difficult to predict the mentality of the youth because they think that they have unique qualities and courage as they grow older. As a matter of fact, parents can know that they are going through a perilous period while monitoring them because they make plenty of mistakes along the way. By looking at this, they can be considered not matured enough and need special attention and care. However, the youth consider all these unfulfilled desires and mistakes as a restriction to their endeavors, and they become easily emotional and angry upon the unwelcome criticisms of their guardians and parents. Bediuzzaman believed that these unusual circumstances and experiences in one’s youth were sent by God to prepare him or her for the excellent service he or she would perform in the future.³

In today’s increasingly interdependent and multi-religious world, it is vitally important to rediscover the epistemological foundation of the intellectual wisdom of the past great scholars who had been instrumental in ‘humanizing’ man and the society at large. Current researches on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi have no doubt inform the readers about the sequence of historical accounts that shaped Said Nursi’s life and thoughts. Such informative narrations have undoubtedly motivated various youth organizations, both in majority and minority Muslim societies.⁴ Said Nursi is known to the academia as great Muslim thinker, whose thoughts remained significant until today. As a true embodiment of Islamic scholarship, many researchers have regarded Said Nursi’s works as a revivalist piece of work by nature for it harmonizes theoretical and practical dimension of Islam, which serves as a response to the problem of knowledge during his time. Its implication for the youth has indeed fascinated many scholars around the globe.

Current literatures on Said Nursi’s influence to the modern youth are relatively less, particularly on the issue of identity, tradition and culture.

² Ediz Sözüer, *An Attempt To Make Risale-i Nur The Property Of Humanity: Risale-i Nur Explanatory work*, 2019.

³ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, p.81-85.

⁴ Serif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzama Said Nursi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989); Shukran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzam Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Colin Turner and Hasan Horkue, *Said Nursi: Maker of Islamic Civilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ian S. markhan and Seundam Birinci Pirm, *An Introduction to Said Nursi* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011).

Reclaiming the lost substance of sacred knowledge can be regarded as the *magnum opus* of Said Nursi's work. Descriptive historical accounts that inform the sicknesses besetting the communities in Turkey in the wake of turbulent collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the then prevalence of the new Turkish Republic have not been substantially studied. A glimpse on the study of the contemporary relevance of Said Nursi's discourses on the concepts of moderation as the middle way, hope, courage, honesty, love and brotherhood, self-sacrifice, awareness of the luminous bonds uniting the believers and mutual consultation may illuminate the readers on the true intent of Said Nursi's work, particularly in the transformation of the youth. Said Nursi's encounters with various religious tribal leaders and leaders of the new Turkish Republic have given him an intellectual vigor to address the problem of secularism without jeopardizing the interest of Islam as a religion and a way of life. Said Nursi's profound knowledge of his society and people has given him new intellectual windows for a remarkable remedy in healing the crises that they confronted.

The true embodiment of Said Nursi's exemplary model for the youth is yet to be written. The work of Qaisar Mohammad⁵ portrays an in-depth study about the socio-cultural and religious landscape that moulded the mind of Said Nursi in writing *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of Light). It reflects the ingenuity of Said Nursi in protecting the unity of knowledge at the midst of modernization in Turkey. It also relates the journey of Said Nursi as a dynamic leader and scholar of his time. It offers insightful perspective in understanding the responses of social movements, in which the youth were rejuvenated in their inquest for Islamic identity.⁶

Despite of the fact that there has been a scarcity of literatures on Islamic youth empowerment, leadership and personality development, however, Said Nursi's series of advices to the youth have been regarded by many scholars as all-inclusive guide for youth for any generation. Such concerns for the transformation of the youth can be read from Nursi's works like *Nurun ilk Kapillari* (The First Doors of Light), *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of Light), *Saiyqal al-Islam* (Reasonings), *Muhakemat* (Reasoned arguments), *Sunihat* (Manifestations) and *Munazarat* (Debates), *Divan-i Sitte* (Six Steps), *Khutba-i Shaamiya* (His sermon of 1911 in the Damascus

⁵ Qaisar Mohammad, "A Brief Sketch of the Memoirs of the Life and Works of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," *Analisa Journal of Social Science and Religion*, <http://blasemarang.kemenag.go.id/journal/index.php/analisahttps://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v3i02.686>

⁶ Ibid.

Mosque) and his biography *Seerat-i*. These literatures serve as the epitome of Said Nursi's thoughts and practices. It imprints practical approaches to spiritual and physical wellbeing of the youth for the Ummah to emulate. Revival of such messages through the reinterpretation of *Risale-i Nur* in particular, would certainly guide the youth of today in many ways. However, owing to the influence of secular-humanistic orientations to research, inherent flaws can be discerned from many of those researches that inevitably obscured the integral dimension of Said Nursi's thoughts and practices. Such research orientation is more often than not misappropriated the intuitive and inner dimension of Islamic knowledge and its relevance to individual, societal and civilizational life. However, the optimistic views of Said Nursi on the social realities faced by the youth with regards to challenges of western worldviews has in fact, invigorated the mental and spiritual strength of the youth.⁷ Thus, the integration of the message of the sacred text with worldly knowledge that pertains to youth empowerment as contained in the *Risale-i Nur* has undoubtedly brought an indelible mark into the minds of many scholars all over the world. In fact, such viewpoint of history has become the parameter for understanding "Modern Turkey" as a state that respects the rights of multi-cultural and multi religious communities. Such optimism for the possible revival of Islamic tradition and culture and the empowerment of the youth in the present Turkey may, to some extent, be attributed to many comprehensive works of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. These are reflected in many of the publications that combine the life and thought of Said Nursi, his ideas on youth, culture, society and politics, interfaith dialogue with a particular focus on Christian-Muslim relationship.⁸

⁷ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *A Guide for the Youth*, From the *Risale-i Nur* Collection, Cagaloglu: Sozler Publication, 2003; Shenner Dalk, *Approach, Method and Purpose of the Risale-i Nur*, Research Gate, 2016, DOI 10.12816/0024544.

⁸ Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey the Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Ian S. Markham, *Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi a Model of Interfaith Dialogue* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Thomas F. Michel, *Reflections on Said Nursi's Views on Muslim-Christian Understanding* (Istanbul, Turkey: Söz Basım Yayın), 2003; Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', ed., *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', ed., *Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought: The Case of Said Nursi* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010); Colin Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light* (Berlin: Gerlach, 2013).

Significance of Character Development

Youth who are the next echelon of leaders are the hope to propel a country to greater heights of success with their diverse talent and technology at their fingertips. As such, they must be moulded into character from a young age to be great leaders in the future. In this fast-paced world, good character development can be seen as an essential task. Globalization, social media, drugs, alcohol, terrorism, etc. posed overwhelming threat to today's youth. Nevertheless, parents also see the dangers lurking at their young children from all directions. Moral degradation, substance abuse, unethical behavior, illegal sex, vandalism, cybercrime to name a few. All this negative and unethical behaviors can lead the youth to a state of poor achievement in education and unemployment. At the national level, governments around the world have taken an essential step towards this issue.⁹

In fact, the characteristics of youth or adolescents begin in childhood. Hence, parents can discipline their children from the very tender age to become a good citizen and a valuable asset to the country when they reach the life of adolescents. Like crude wax, it is easier to form and shape to the desired characters or shapes only when it is soft, but when it hardens, it is difficult to give shape, the only result may be wax breaking. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a series of discussions on this topic and disseminate relevant information and knowledge gathered during this research that focuses on the youth.¹⁰

Said Nursi and *Risale-i Nur*

The *Risale-i Nur* shows that there is a distinct process involved in becoming a Muslim in the real sense of the word: contemplation to knowledge, knowledge to affirmation, affirmation to belief or conviction, and from conviction to submission. And since each new moment, each new day sees the revelation of new aspects of Divine truth; this process is a continuous one. The external practices of Islam, the formal acts of worship, also contribute to this process. Belief is, therefore, subjected to increase or decrease, strengthening or weakening, depending on the continuance of the process. Thus, it is the reality of belief that deserves most of our attention; from there, the realities of Islam will follow on inevitably. This nature of Islam must be instilled in the mindset of our youth.

According to Imam Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, the truth and nature of youth lie in the fact that this is a vibrant, sweet, and gentle blessing of Allah

⁹ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, p. 87.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.184.

(SWT). For that reason, one's time as a youth is to be used in the right way, in chastity and good deeds. With that, one will be rewarded with a great reward and happiness in the midst of others.¹¹

Advice to Youth in *Risale-i-Nur*

The moral teachings of Imam Bediüzzaman in *Risale-i Nur* are more of practice in every youth's life. Nursi has directed, as seen in "A Guide for Youth," practical moral teachings with the concrete concepts of faith rather than just giving advice. He talked about this worldly life, hereafter, life in the grave, the pleasure of life, lusts of the soul, and everything on proper guidance for youth. Nursi's moral teachings go beyond all geographical boundaries. It is applicable to youth of all nationalities in Europe, Asia, and Africa. His ideas on moral teaching has been spread like a wild fire with the active participation of young people. As most of the Nursi's followers back then belong to the students group, Nursi took the all possible opportunities available to him to educate the young minds through teachings.¹²

Whenever the younger generation has been decked out and fortified with the Quran and the science that irradiate from it, the nation to which that youth belong has begun to progress and advance. Here, the youth have begun to fill their spirits, burning with the need for belief and Islam with the lights of *Risale-i Nur*, a Qur'anic commentary.

Some who called themselves as "Muslims of the Quran" are not prepared to accept any supplementary explanation other than the Quran itself. They claim that the Quran is self-explanatory and does not require a scholarly explanation from any learned man in Islam. This fraction of people, undermine the effort of *Risale-i Nur*, in illuminating the beautiful and ethical values of the Qur'an. Quite contrary to the good intention of Nursi, his opponents claim that his ideas present in *Risale-i Nur* form as a stumbling block in understanding the true message the Qur'an intends to deliver.¹³

Despite the criticism by Nursi's opponents, a reader into *Risale-i Nur* will find that besides the interpretation, the book increases its value not only by providing precise interpretation of the Qur'anic message but also substantiates quotes from the Sunnah in giving advice to the youth. To

¹¹ Ibid., p.184.

¹² Ibid., 99.

¹³ Ediz Sozuer, *An Attempt to Make Risale-i Nur the Property of Humanity: Explanatory Works*. n.p., 2019.

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prove the case, Nursi quotes the following Hadith narrated by Abu Huraira (ra) in this book, which refers to youth:

“Seven are (the persons) whom Allah would give protection with His Shade on the Day when there would be no shade but that of Him: 1. A just ruler, 2. A youth who grew up with the worship of Allah; 3. A person whose heart is attached to the mosques; 4. Two persons who love and meet each other and depart from each other for the sake of Allah; 5. A man whom a beautiful woman of high rank seduces (for illicit relation), but he (rejects this offer by saying):" I fear Allah"; 6. A person who gives charity and conceals it (to such an extent) that the right-hand does not know what the left has given: and 7. A person who remembered Allah in privacy and his eyes shed tears.”¹⁴

This Hadith gives a powerful impetus to youth that if they remember Allah SWT all the time and follow His commandments, they are one of those who will be successful in this life and in the hereafter. Through *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi speaks to young people by saying: Your youth (strong health, bravery and high performance) will definitely leave you, and if you do not remain within the sphere of the licit, it will be lost, and rather than its pleasures, it will bring you calamities and suffering in this world, in the grave, and in the Hereafter. But if with Islamic training, you spend the bounty of your youth as thanks honorably, in uprightness and obedience, it will in effect remain perpetually and will be the cause of gaining eternal youth. In this regard, he gives an example of one Hadith as The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said; "Take advantage of five matters before five other matters":

1. your youth before you become old;
2. your health before you fall sick;
3. your richness before you become poor;
4. your free time before you become busy;
5. your life before your death."¹⁵

For Badiuzzaman, an affirmation of faith is much easier than denial, for a single indication is enough for the former, whereas an exhaustive investigation of the entire cosmos and throughout all times is necessary for the latter. He affirms that matters concerning what is sacred and spiritual

¹⁴ *Sahih Bukhari*, No. 620; *Sahih Muslim* 1712.

¹⁵ Ibnul Mubarak, *Al-zuhud wa al-Riqaq in obeying Allah SWT*. Hadith, no.2.

require certainty and advancement in spiritual work; so, a denial based on evidence from the material sphere and restricted only to what our eyes can see is unworthy of consideration. Belief is knowledge, and a manifestation of being and convictions underlying unbelief are ignorance and absence of judgment. Therefore conviction (*Iman*) is the most valuable ornament that will lead from the wrong path to the light and from an illicit position to the successful and cheerful places. In this connection, he continued to commend to the youth that apart from conviction, the action is followed and that action must be linked to the responsibilities according to their qualification and position where he referred to a Hadith: the prophet Mohammad, PBUH said:

“The son of Adam will not pass away from Allah until he is asked about five things:1. How he lived his life,2. How he utilized his youth,3. With what means did he earn his wealth,4. how did he spend his money and 5. what did he do with his knowledge?”¹⁶

Said Nursi sometimes gives an example of the prophet’s intelligence and seemingly joke to his communion, but it affects them tremendously and provides happiness and dedication. As the prophet said: It is narrated by Al Hassan that an old lady entered to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and said

“O Allah’s apostle ask Allah that I enter paradise.” He answered, “O Um Fulan, old ladies are not amongst the dwellers of paradise” The woman was leaving in crying in grief. Quickly he called her back and said, “Tell her that she will not enter paradise as an old woman. Then he recited the verses of Surat al Waqi’ah” (56:35.).¹⁷

Youth - the worships done in the youth are the everlasting fruit of youth

Attracting the young to a particular way of life and thinking is a true challenge for every family institution and society. Whilst new lifestyle and perspectives of life starts to gain momentum at different pace, both the practical dimension and ethical value system of religion need to be translated into actions that may captivate the awareness of the youth. Additionally, strategic collaborative efforts with the young minds through

¹⁶ Al-Tirmidhi, Eng. Translation, No.2424

¹⁷ Al-Tirmidhi, *Kitab Sifat al Qiyamah wal Raqa'iq.*

holistic empowerment guarantees a smooth passage of knowledge that entails the true message of Islam as religion and a way of life. There is no doubt that *Risale-i Nur* as the *Magnum opus* of the works of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was intended to demonstrate his profound thoughts on Islamization of knowledge which was crucial at a particular moment when the Islamic world, particularly the young were overwhelmed by the culture and practices brought by modernization and westernization in Turkey.

Implanting the seed of Islamic wisdom into the hearts of the young had undergone arduous challenges during the Kemalist regime's nationalist policies where formal religious study outside of state run institutions were made illegal. It had been among the prime concerns of Said Nursi to create a society whose people particularly the young are intellectually and spiritually equipped with the true knowledge of Islam, and thus have the capacity to respond to the various challenges posed by foreign worldviews and ideas. The notable strategies and humanistic approach of Said Nursi had gained him the support and sympathy of his people.¹⁸ His ability to merge and relevantize revealed knowledge, despite of being restricted by Turkish state authorities had in fact, given a new meaning to the emerging academic knowledge and discipline to the various networks of social movements throughout Turkey. This can be discerned from his method of transforming his followers, particularly the young as politically abiding citizens. Said Nursi's followers were socially labeled as pleasant and peaceful who followed universal ethical values that people from different faiths and orientation of living were able co-exist with them in a meaningful manner.¹⁹ How Said Nursi relates his thoughts and philosophy of life to the various concerns of the youth and their needs demands a thorough investigation.

Risale-i Nur reminds the young about using both mind and heart to know the Creator and to lead a spiritual life in any situation. So, Said Nursi has suggested a variety of ways to achieve it and reminded the moral crisis that young people face today. Given the influence of Said Nursi to the various established networks of social movements throughout Turkey, *Risale-i Nur* reminds that the world is going through a moral crisis. A pestilential disease has been born in Western society, whose moral foundations have been shaken, and it will spread all over the world over time. People would be consciously and unconsciously imprisoned in varied

¹⁸ Colin Turner, —Preface, I in Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Rays : Reflections on Islamic Belief, Thought,*

Worship, and Action, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2010), xv-i.

¹⁹ Colin Turner, *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, The Rays: Reflections on Islamic Belief, Thought, Worship, and Action*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2010), xv-i.

forms. Prisoners of Western thoughts as viewed by Said Nursi are in dire need of *Risale-i Nur*'s consolation, especially those young people who spend their prime time behind the bars of hedonistic way of life.²⁰ Therefore, the works of Said Nursi has informed its readers about the spiritual and intellectual vigour of *Risale-i Nur* and its importance as much as individuals need bread for their daily survival.²¹ Knowing that youth are mostly driven by their emotion and desire, and thus destroying their happiness in this world and hereafter, Said Nursi had reinvented a particular language for the youth to understand the "Fruits of Belief" that are necessary for their transformation as truthfully heroic youths and successful Muslims. Said Nursi's approach to worship portrays the inner strength of spirituality because of true submission by which, its practitioners are freed from any form of slavery and imprisonment. By what means will Muslim society oppose this contagious evil? After the downfall of Islamic caliphate, the Muslim world had witnessed how leaders were being negligent of Islamic practices and governance. The fortress of the faith cannot be supported by decayed columns of infidelity. Essentially, Said Nursi had concentrated all his efforts on the cause of the faith, by emphasizing its relevance to the inner life.²² Moral existence, conscience, and belief system of the nations based only on the oneness of God and other principles of the faith shown by the Qur'an make up the foundation stone of his teachings to the community. As has been noticed, Said Nursi changed his methodology in imparting Islamic teachings and thus kept himself and his students away from political divisions. It is worth pointing out that Said Nursi had actively engaged the youth with the conversational aspects of faith, rather than politics since the latter is essential for the eternal life.²³

Jundub bin Abdullah said: "We were with the Prophet (saw), and we were strong youths, so we learned Imaan before we learned the Quran. Then we learned the Quran, and our faith increased thereby."²⁴

The Prophet (saw) said, "Religion is very easy, and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way.

²⁰ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words: The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought*, Trans. Huseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Somerset, 2010).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 146.

²³ Andrew Rippin, *The Islamic World* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008).

²⁴ *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Chapter No. 1, The Book of the Sunnah.

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So, you should not be extreme, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings and nights.²⁵

Influenced by the transforming ideas of great Muslim scholars like Mawlana Khalid Baghdadi, the youth had been viewed as potential re-newers (*mujaddid*) of the Ummah whose journey is essentially in need of proper guidelines and model to actualize the essence of faith and its potential impact to self-renewal and change. Said Nursi reminds the youth that those who seek to learn the truth of belief even though they are poor, aged and ill, will find that each hour spent in this pursuit will be equal to a day's worship.²⁶ Faith that is gained at the young age is the undying fruit of the transient state of the self. Additionally, Said Nursi added that as the young grow older, and because he had obtained the enduring fruit of faith, certainly he would be saved from the harm and excesses of materialism posed by the society. In fact, substantial pages of *Risale-i Nur* serve as all enduring reminders for the youth to be conscious of the harm of disbelief and the need to uproot its influences at the given time and space without inflicting harm to its workers and the people at large.²⁷

Imam Nursi on the Spiritual Development of Youth

Practical approaches to meeting the challenges of modernity at the midst of secularism as experienced by Said Nursi and other contemporary Muslim scholars like Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Abduh has preoccupied the greatest minds of many researchers, both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Given the magnitude of the detachment of the self from tradition and the sacred text, the term spirituality had to be redefined by maintaining the unity of faith, knowledge and Islamic way of life. Said Nursi is indebted with the concept of spirituality as advocated by Ahmad Sirhindi, by which many had misinterpreted the harmony between the Shariah and spiritual dimension of Islam-*tasawwuf*.²⁸ Obstructed by the force of materialism and the systemic government ban for Islamic

²⁵ *Sahih Bukhari*, Chapter No. 2, Belief.

²⁶ Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words: The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought*. Trans. Huseyin Akarsu, (New Jersey: Somerset, 2010): 164.

²⁷ Şukran Vahide, *Badiuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to Religious Renewal and Its Impact of Aspects on Contemporary Turkish Society*, In *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, edited by Ibrahim M Abu-Rabi. Massachusetts: Blackwell Pub., 2006. 305–7, 311, 343. 305–7, 311, 343.

²⁸ Şukran Vahide, *Badiuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to Religious Renewal and Its Impact of Aspects on Contemporary Turkish Society*.

education, Said Nursi highlighted the duty of every conscious Muslim to uncover the reflection of the divine teachings within one self.

If the word spiritual means ‘connected to or concerning the spirit,’ then the Islamic revelation makes it abundantly clear that the human spirit is an uncreated entity, breathed into man by God himself. Man’s spirit is thus that uncreated ‘breath of the Compassionate’ (*nafas al-rahman*) within him that connects him to the divine, and that transforms an otherwise transient material being into the ‘vicegerent’ (*khalifah*) of God on earth, capable of rising above all other beings to take his rightful place in eternity, the highest of the high.²⁹

As Islam emphasizes the preservation of the root of knowledge and practices, it has been pertinent that the Ummah’s hope of future-the youth, are appropriately empowered with the true knowledge of Islam, and by then, history, religion and ethics would provide them the right perspective about life. The historical ignorance and the crises of thoughts and mind that the Muslim Ummah experienced at large and the youth in particular in a varied form was viewed by Said Nursi as destructive in their personal lives and the thus, the cumulative impact of the then moral decadence had not only shaken the family institution but the entire fabric of the society.³⁰ Responding to the cause of patriotism which was crafted from the European discourse of identity and nationalism, Said Nursi felt the urgency to create a shield to protect the youth from its danger and to live a life as a Muslim.³¹

Healthy Youth

There is no doubt that Said Nursi was among the few scholars who treated understanding of the self and its illnesses in a holistic manner.³² It was amongst the pivotal point of *Risale-i-Nur* to encompass knowledge of the self, its function and purpose. Understanding of human self that pertains to health and illnesses is essential because it informs about the value of life. Unbroken good health can become monotonous, flat, and empty; it resembles nonbeing more than the richness and fullness of life. Said Nursi is

²⁹ Colin Turner.

³⁰ Körpe, M. *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the youth*. 2015. The Pen Magazine. Retrieved August 9, 2019, from <http://www.thepenmagazine.net/bediuzzaman-said-nursi-and-the-youth>.

³¹ Şukran Vahide.

³² Noorani, Y. A. (1AD). *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi as a Guide to the Youth and the Teachings of Morality - Risale-i Nur*. Retrieved August 9, 2019, from <http://risaleinur.com/studies/141-conferences/2012/4185-bediuzzaman-said-nursi-as-a-guide-to-the-youth-and-the-teachings-of-morality.html>

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of the opinion that sickness is like a veil that shields human from the harsh reality of death.³³ However, Said Nursi notes that the sick person should ask for healing with humility and trust, instead of accusing God and complaining about the unfairness of his situation. In contrast, the act of complaining implies criticism of God's nature as a sustainer of life. Trust in God is a form of worship that places confidence in God's goodness and willingness to heal.³⁴ Light is indebted to darkness; pleasure is indebted to pain; there is no health without illness.³⁵ All these implied that the moral health and intellectual exhaustion as experienced by the youth can be cured when there is a harmony between the body and soul. The reality of life as rightly pointed out by Said Nursi is rightly conceived when one begins to enjoy life, animate it with belief, adorn it with religious obligations, and maintain it by avoiding sins.³⁶

Managing Wealth

In today's world, the youth irrespective of their cultural and religious background had begun to express themselves forcefully than ever before by exercising their power of reasoning. Said Nursi is aware of the fact that if religious issues that divides the youth are interpreted reasonably, there is no doubt for its acceptance as long as it projects the entirety of human life. Motivated by the need to preserve Islamic knowledge at the midst of devastating impact of materialism and self-centeredness, it can be discerned from the works of Said Nursi how he intelligently crafted visionary ideas that had been instrumental in bringing meaningful social change in his time. Such reformative aspect of intellectual and spiritual *jihad* had indeed brought an indelible mark in the minds of the youth. As such, the youth can quickly think and practice Islam in their day- to- day life.³⁷

Notwithstanding the given wealth of Islamic tradition and culture, it is however unfortunate to witness the presence of social ills such as permitting men and women to go together to the public baths. Such act encourages immorality.³⁸ Moreover, people who are devoid of Islamic

³³ Michel Thomas. (1AD). *For You, Illness Is Good Health - Risale-i Nur*. Retrieved August 9, 2019, from <http://risaleinur.com/studies/79-research-papers/4292-for-you-illness-is-good-health.html>

³⁴ Vahide Sukran. (2008). The Words | Yenişehir Wiki | FANDOM powered by Wikia. Retrieved August 9, 2019, from https://yenisehir.fandom.com/tr/wiki/The_Words

³⁵ Quotes from Nursi's quote in Risale-i Nur Collection

³⁶ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words: The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought*.

³⁷ Shukran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*.

³⁸ Karahan, F. *The True Meaning of Youth – The Pen Magazine*. Retrieved August 9, 2019,

knowledge may consider it lawful for vagabonds and the poor to plunder the property of the rich. Indeed, all mankind trembles in the face of this crisis of knowledge.³⁹ For it has made lawful for its youths the pleasing daughters and wives of upright people, and these youths act only according to their feelings, which are blind to all consequences.

Moreover, it is necessary for all Muslim youth to act heroically, and to respond to the current challenges with a keen interest like the way it has been explained in Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* project. Otherwise, those unfortunate youth will destroy utterly both their futures in this world, and their agreeable lives, and their happiness in the hereafter, and their eternal lives, and transform them into torment and suffering.⁴⁰

Said Nursi elucidates the bounty of *Risale-i Nur* by constantly reawakening the youth after their long complacency with the given condition. It was therefore necessary for Said Nursi to rekindle the true vision of *Risale-i Nur* by letting the youth to envisage that their abuses, dissoluteness and excesses in life is not only harmful for it drags them to the bondage of self-centeredness. In their old age, they will weep copiously with a thousand regrets. If, on the other hand, they protect themselves with Qur'anic training, and with the truth of the *Risale-i Nur*, they will become genuinely heroic youths, perfect human beings, victorious Muslims, and in some ways rulers over animate beings and the rest of the animal kingdom.⁴¹

Islamic eschatology occupies an important place in the works of Said Nursi. Estrangement and alienation of the youth from the reality of life after death would result into cultural and religious crisis. Said Nursi believes that profound knowledge of hereafter such as the concept of hell-fire may soften the heart and emotions of the youth. The knowledge of the Unseen World is vital for every believer as it sheds light about the reality of the eternal life. If not for fear of Hell, following the rule 'might is right,' in pursuing their desires, those drunken youths would turn the world into a wretched, weak, powerless, and the dignified humanity into base animality.⁴² In fact, Said Nursi had constantly reminded his students and the Muslim communities at large to reaffirm their commandments to reconnect themselves with the wireless cable that links man with his inherent nature,

from <http://www.thepenmagazine.net/the-true-meaning-of-youth/>

³⁹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words: The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought*.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

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which emanates the very purpose of human life.⁴³ Attributed to the last farewell message of Said Nursi, the youth in particular were reminded of the fact that the seeds that are sown in the fertile soil of Islam will eventually blossom like flowers in our respective gardens. He also reminded the youth to constantly remember the historical past of the great Muslim sages who became the true embodiments of Islamic knowledge and spirituality.⁴⁴

Effective Application of Free time

Said Nursi ensures that the concept and application of free time is understood by the youth. He views that the world of humanity in every age is like a tree inviting contemplation, and the world as a whole is like an artificial tree the fruits of which are dispatched to the market of the hereafter.⁴⁵ Such concept of time creates an impression to the youth that life can be compared with the condition of the fruits, flowers and leaves on the tips and branches of a tree who is sustained and maintained by God. As time passes, they eventually become old and their duties come to an end. The time of *zuhr*-past midday may resemble the prime of youth, and the period of man's creation in the lifetime of the world and calls to mind the manifestations of mercy and the abundant bounties they contain.⁴⁶ Being concerned with the future condition of the youth, Said Nursi views the need to re-socialize the youth and to get acquainted with the historical past where time is associated with the concept of right action and knowledge. Ignorance of such perspective may erode the mind and thoughts from the fountain head of religion.

A Successful Life

The youth had also been reminded by Said Nursi about the reality of human life cycle. This includes the significant stages of childhood, youth, maturity, and old age. Said Nursi estimated the proportion of the total population at each stage. Children and the elderly are each said to represent one-quarter of humanity, while youth constitute one third, and the remaining one-sixth consist of the sick and oppressed.⁴⁷ The stage of youth is fleeting and will depart, and this is something that the young should bear in mind.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rab.

While instilling hope for everyone, Said Nursi counsels seriousness, restraint, and consciousness of death due to its all-enduring impact to life.⁴⁸

The true success of life is determined by the end result of one's deeds and actions. In many occasions, Said Nursi used to emphasize that for those who believe, the grave is the door to a world far better than this world, for those who believe in the hereafter, but who approach it on the path of dissipation and misguidance, it is the door to a prison of solitary confinement, an eternal dungeon, where they will be separated from all their loved ones and, for the unbelievers and the misguided who do not believe in the hereafter, it is the door to eternal extinction.

Therefore, such fact about the reality of death, reward and punishment had been confirmed in the sacred texts revealed to the messengers of God in which, saints and scholars had reconfirmed it with certainty at the degree of knowledge. In light with this, Said Nursi categorically mentioned that the only way to be saved from extinction and eternal imprisonment, and be directed towards eternal happiness is through belief in God and obedience to Him.⁴⁹

Said Nursi highlights the story of the 'People of the Cave' whereby a group of youths hid inside a cave outside the city of Ephesus around 250 CE to escape a religious persecution in which the Qur'an describes its full accounts in Surah al-Kahf, particularly in verse 18:9–26. A successful life from the perspective of Said Nursi requires a perfect model to guide his personal and social affairs. Similar with the classical Muslim scholars, Said Nursi appeals to the theory of Prophetic Role Model (*uswah hassanah*) or Theory of the Perfect Role Model. This theory is to serve as a fundamental source of our Islamic understanding of youth. The youth of the Cave (*ashab al-kahfi*) can provide a source of inspiration to youth as exemplary youths with deep faith (*iman*) in Allah; having excellent mindset and attitudes: trust and confidence in Allah to resolve youth affairs; these are some of the prerequisites of a healthy youth culture.

Conclusion

Said Nursi provided an important insight about the socio-cultural and religious condition of the youth of his time. His ideas to overcome the

⁴⁸ Hermansen, Marcia K.. (2015). *Faith Development and Spiritual Maturation in the Works of Said Nursi* | Bediüzzaman Said Nursî. Retrieved August 9, 2019, from <http://www.bediuzzamansaidnursi.org/en/icerik/faith-development-and-spiritual-maturation-works-said-nursi>

⁴⁹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words: The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought*.

challenges faced by the youth are truly in accordance with the true teachings of Islam. The panacea to the calamities and misfortunes which had befallen upon the youth due to the overwhelming impact of foreign ideas and worldview are contained in many of the works of Said Nursi. Many of those great ideas are enshrined and expounded by Nursi in his *Risale-i Nur*. Despite the continuous military pressure that hampered the efforts of Said Nursi and his followers, there emerged a few social movements based on his ideas as vanguards for the preservation of Islamic identity in the Turkish society. The historical accounts that described how the youth had endured the challenges of the given time, how they were empowered by the strength and shield of Islamic knowledge and spirituality as it was inspired by Said Nursi, may serve as all-inclusive guide for youth for any generation. We have argued that among the main concerns of *Risale-i Nur* is to produce good Muslim youth who can be great future leaders. Notwithstanding the rich literatures that dealt with youth from Said Nursi's perspective, the real challenge is how to create a healthy youth culture as an integral component of an *Ummatic* identity and culture that the Qur'an refers to as *khayra ummatin ukhrijat li'l-nas* ("the best community ever evolved for mankind") and as *ummatan wasatan* ("community of the middle path"). In our endeavour to create a healthy culture among the youth of our society today based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah remains the single most challenging thing. Nevertheless, this research has proven that Said Nursi's philosophy and approach in bring up youngsters in line with the Qur'an idealism can be effective.

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