

MATERIALISM, HEDONISM, SPIRITUALITY,
AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING:
AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF *RISALE-I NUR* (RN)
READERS

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Abstract

*Since the Enlightenment, particularly in the West, the quest for happiness has been primarily sought through material consumption. Although global capitalism has been successful in producing more wealth, many studies reveal that more wealth and consumption have not increased human happiness. Muslim scholar, Said Nursi, has argued that this failure to achieve happiness is due to the adherence to hedonic and materialist values at the expense of spiritual and moral values. He links the success of the Islamic exegesis, the *Risale-i Nur* (RN) to its novel approach to happiness. The purpose of this empirical study is to determine whether pleasures of Paradise or true happiness are more likely attained with a life that focuses on good deeds, virtues and spirituality. We designed and conducted a comprehensive internet-based electronic survey among 1523 *Risale-i Nur* readers to test Nursi's argument. The survey was designed to capture the values/goals of RN readers and their subjective well-being through over 100 questions. The survey included the Satisfaction with Life Scale, the Social Well-Being Scale, and the Aspiration Index as well as additional items that queried three additional domains of intellectual life, honesty and fairness, and aesthetical life. The study reveals that the more participants read the RN, the more they report the value of spirituality, fairness and honesty, family and friendship, intellectual activities, personal growth, aesthetics experience, conformity, altruism, and health. Conversely, the more they read the RN, the less they value hedonic pleasures, popularity and fame, money and material gains, image making, and fear and anxiety.*

Introduction

Throughout history, people search for happiness even though the paths they take vary significantly. Since the Enlightenment, particularly in the West, the quest for happiness has been mainly through material consumption. Jeremy Bentham the English jurist, philosopher, and legal and social reformer stated, "The goal for human beings is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain." Free market capitalism provides a calculator to assist people making estimates toward maximizing their utility through material consumption. The simple formula for happiness is defined as follows: the more you consume, the happier you will be. Indeed, the global market economy based on free market capitalism has been very successful at producing more wealth and providing more opportunities for people to consume. However, as will be discussed later, many studies suggest that more wealth and increased consumption do not lead to higher levels of human happiness as promised by capitalism.

Perhaps, the main flaw in the materialistic happiness model is the perception of wealth, hedonic satisfaction, and sensuous pleasure being either the sole or the greatest source of happiness. The model ignores or sometime denies intellectual and spiritual pleasures. Therefore, those who embrace materialistic values seek happiness through material possession and consumption instead of spiritual experience. Paradoxically, an increase in materialism can result in a decrease in happiness. Once basic needs such as food and shelter are met, increased wealth has very little impact on happiness.

Well-being, as studied in the West, is often related to intrinsic not extrinsic values. Unfortunately, there are no similar studies for Muslim societies. This study will be one of the first of its kind conducted on Muslim group capturing 15 different domains of their life experience. The purpose of this study is to determine how well-being is related to materialistic, hedonic and moral values in one group of Muslims. The study seeks empirical evidence regarding the impact of Islamic values compared to materialistic and hedonic values on subjective well-being. The survey data is used to test a comprehensive theory of human nature and happiness model from an Islamic perspective to see whether it

helps to achieve more happiness with less/moderate consumption. It has a great potential to explain whether Islam could provide authentic happiness to humanity in this life.

Brief History of Happiness

Since early Greek history, philosophers have contemplated happiness. Plato (428–347 B.C.) wrote a series of dialogues covering Socrates' ideas. In selected excerpts from the Plato's Republic, Socrates is challenged to defend his idea that a life of injustice leads to unhappiness, while living justly results in happiness (Plato and Lee 1974). Socrates taught that a man "must know how to choose the mean and avoid the extremes on either side, as far as possible. Seneca (3 B.C.–A.D. 65), a Roman philosopher, argued that happiness requires living in accord with reason, putting aside desires and fears, and being dutiful. The most important and influential Greek philosopher of happiness is undoubtedly Aristotle. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), a student of Plato, in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, developed the view of happiness as a life activity in accord with virtue and contemplation of scientific and philosophical truths. Aristotle argued that the psychology of the soul and its virtues is based on the golden mean between the extremes or the so called "Golden Mean."

According to Aristotle, we all aim an end in our action and thought. We desire everything for certain ends. This could be intermediate or final ends. While intermediate end is desired for other ends, final end is desired for itself. In other words, anything that helps to reach desirable outcome is good; however, supreme good is desired by itself. According to Aristotle, happiness is such a supreme/final good for human being. He argues that happiness is not pleasure even though it comes with pleasure. Happiness is virtue. It is to live virtuous life. In other words, happiness is not thought, "activity in accord with virtue" (Aristotle, 1999, p.1098b 31). It is not affection and capacity as well: "We are neither called good nor called bad nor are we praised or blamed, insofar as we are simply capable of feelings. Further, while we have capacities by nature, we do not become good or bad by nature" (Aristotle, 1999, p.1106 a 8-12).

Since Aristotle defines happiness as the supreme good through virtuous actions, he had to provide definition and means for virtue, too. He argues that virtue is excellence in life. By excellence he means moderation in actions. For that matter, eudonic happiness is to act wisely in terms of making choice for the final good. It is to avoid excessiveness and deficiency in life. It is striking the means. It is finding a balance point between a deficiency and an excess of a trait. In his view, excellence in life can be achieved through “practical intelligence” which he defines as exercising prudence and wisdom. In his terms, “one has all the virtues if and only if one has prudence”(Aristotle, 1999, p.1145a 2). In other words, if a happy person is the one who employs his mind in a proper way and understand that living well is living in moderation. Such a person will assign the proper weight to each virtue in accordance to its contribution to the final good, happiness.

Aristotle hierarchically puts pleasure into three categories: sensual, egoistic (or pleasure of honor) and intellectual (contemplative) pleasures. He argues that the last one is the best among the three. While the first type is unique to animal, the second one is common among politicians. However, the third one, which is the highest and most worthy one, is unique to human beings. Even though Aristotle considers the highest pleasure in contemplative/virtuous life, he does not think that pleasure is the highest goal. Indeed, he argues that bad pleasures could even lead to an unhappy life: “most people are deceived, and the deception seems to come about because of pleasure—for it appears a good thing when it is not. So they choose what is pleasant as something good, and they avoid pain as something bad” (Aristotle, 1999, p.1113a 35-b2). For that matter, according to Aristotle, it is important to use practical wisdom to identify good pleasure in virtuous actions from bad pleasure in vice.

The Western philosophy of happiness changes mirroring, the tautological focus on religion of the Western society. Saint Augustine (354–430), a Christian theologian, argued that the happy person possesses wisdom that comes from God. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), a great theologian and philosopher of the medieval period, argued that the greatest happiness cannot be found in bodily

pleasures, honors, wealth, power, glory or even moral actions. Rather, it can be found in the contemplation of God.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), a founding figure in English moral and political philosophy, argued that individuals driven by self-interest will fail to reach happiness if there is no effective government. David Hume (1711–1776), one of our most influential philosophers, argued that life is governed more by chance than by reason; therefore, we should not expect a perfect correlation between virtue and happiness. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), also a preeminent figure in the history of philosophy, argued that the existence of God cannot be proved, but needs to be postulated in order to ensure a correlation between morality and happiness. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), a German philosopher, argued that we live in the worst of all possible worlds, and all happiness is but an illusion.

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1822), the father of capitalist consumer theory, argued that the goal for human beings is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain (Bentham 2007). He developed a “utility calculator” in order to assist people making estimates toward maximizing their utility through material consumption. The simple formula in his happiness model is defined as follows: the more you consume, the happier you will be. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), a leading British philosopher of the 19th century, argued that pleasures differ qualitatively. In his words, “it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a fool satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied” (Mill and Crisp 1998, p.57).

Happiness is no longer a subject matter confined to disciplines of philosophy, religion and psychology; it is now the subject of research in the fields of sociology, economics, and even neurology. New fields such as Positive Psychology, Economics of Happiness, and Neuroeconomics were conceived due to growing interests in “Happiness” related issues. While psychologists analyze the sources of human satisfaction, economists use happiness data to retest assumptions about consumer preferences and utility maximization. They have used subjective well-being data to measure the non-pecuniary effects of unemployment (Clark et al. 1994; Darity Jr and Goldsmith 1996, 121), to study the relationship between

happiness and economic growth (Kenny 1999, 3), to measure the effects of political institutions (Frey & Stutzer, 2000), and to study the non-monetary effect of crime (Powdthavee 2005, 531-547) on well-being. Of the literature identified by an ECONLIT search from 1960 to 2006, sixty-one percent of publications since 2000 are on subjective well-being (Clark, Frijters, and Shields 2008, 95). Furthermore, some economists (Di Tella & Macculloch, 2008; Frey & Stutzer, 2002) are seriously trying to create a uniform Gross National Happiness (GNH) index, similar to the Gross National Product (GNP) index, in order to better measure and monitor the happiness of nations.

There are humanistic psychologists, such as Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Erich Fromm who developed theories that are based on fulfillment as the driving force for happiness. Positive psychology, ushered in by Martin Seligman in 1998, associates happiness with the cardinal virtues, strengths of character, orientations to happiness, and life satisfaction. Through the study of how ‘things go right’ research on happiness is not just focused on “how things go wrong”—in other words, studying those who describe themselves as happy and adding a reduction of negative influences on happiness while increasing positive influences on happiness or happier (Manusov et al 1995).

The results of many relatively recent studies report on the negative impact of materialistic (or extrinsic) values on subjective well-being. Extrinsically oriented teenagers, college students and adults report lower rates of self-actualization and positive experience, along with higher rates of depression, anxiety, narcissism, and substance abuse (Kasser T and Ryan RM 1993, 410-22; Kasser and Ryan 1996, 280; Kasser 2002; Sheldon KM and Kasser T 1995, 531-43; Williams et al. 2000, 1756). The opposite was found for intrinsically oriented people (Richins and Dawson 1992, 303; Sirgy 1998, 227-260). They argue that compared to those who are low in materialism, those who are high in materialism have an underlying feeling of insecurity, poor interpersonal relationships, and a low or contingent sense of self-esteem. Also, those who are high in materialism tend to ignore psychological need-satisfying behaviors, such as social engagement and affiliation (Duriez B et al. 2006,

2892-2908). They argue that intrinsic values for self-acceptance, affiliation, and community feeling increase psychological well-being while extrinsic values for material success, fame and image experience decreased personal well-being.

It was Easterlin (1974) who first came up with some quantitative signs of the happiness crisis in capitalism. In his study which covered the years between 1946-1970, he found that despite a great increase in the real income per capita, there was not a significant change in subjective well-being. He later completed a similar study for Japan and found that the average self-reported happiness level did not increase in Japan between 1958 and 1987 despite a five-fold increase in real income. Since this study, we have seen a surge in studies on happiness. Most of them confirm Easterlin's findings in terms of the impact of monetary wealth on happiness. A recent study shows that the case is not quite different for China which has been experimenting with consumer culture for the last two decades. The study found that remarkable economic growth from 1994 to 2005, with real income per capita increase of 250 percent, ownership of color television sets rose from 40 percent of households to 82 percent, and the number of people with a telephone jumped from 10 percent to 63 percent. Yet, this did not translate into higher life satisfaction. Rather, the percentage of people who say they are dissatisfied has increased, and the percentage who says they are satisfied has decreased (Kahneman and Krueger 2006, 3-24).

Needs for a New Theory of Human Nature

We suggest that a major shortcoming of existing happiness theories emanates from a difference on interpretation of human nature. Navigating a path to happiness requires a journey through consciousness and an understanding of what we refer to as the human's "Inner Universe." Since ancient Greece, many philosophers and scholars argue that it is impossible for any person to reach authentic, pure, and lasting happiness without becoming aware of the key elements of the inner universe and knowing how to utilize the elements that lie within that universe. Jonathan Haidt, the author of *the Happiness Hypothesis*, emphasizes the importance of

understanding human nature when he writes, “I realized why modern philosophy seemed sterile: it lacked a deep understanding of human nature... only by knowing the kinds of beings what we actually are, with the complex mental and emotional architecture that we happen to possess, can anyone even begin to ask about what would count as a meaning of life” (Haidt 2005, p. 205).

By human nature, we mean the common universal elements shared by humanity. It does not matter whether human nature is shaped by God, nature, or nurtured by society. It is the fact that we all have similar biological needs. While types of food may vary from culture to culture, the need for food is common across all cultures. Similarly, we all experience sensual, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs because of the universality of our nature. Although methods to satisfy these needs vary among cultures, existence of the needs is shared by all human beings. For instance, every human being has the capacity to love and the desire to be loved. It is only the objects of love and values surrounding the concept that differ across cultures.

Nursi’s Theory of Human Nature and Model of Happiness

Established on the writings of Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazzali (2007) and Rumi (2004), Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960) developed a comprehensive theory of human nature (1996c; 1996a; 1996b). Nursi describes that human motivation and action, and therefore happiness and unhappiness, are likened to a palace (Markham and Pirrin 2011). Even though Nursi uses the palace as a metaphor for human body and residents as human faculty, Aydin (2012) developed a recreational vehicle (RV) and its residents (*King, Judge, Adviser, Elephant, Showman, and Driver*) as metaphor to define a new theory of human nature called Grand Theory of Human Nature (GTHN) based on Nursi’s writings. In one way, this paper is an empirical test of GTHN. He later adds dog to residents of human nature (Aydin 2015).

Traveling in an RV relates to the interaction of various facets that contribute to happiness on the happiness road. Indeed, happiness is defined as experience on the road rather than a destination to be reached. The *King* is the spiritual heart that is the source of love,

compassion, and inspirational knowledge. He relates to the role of spiritual fulfillment in happiness. Metaphorically speaking, the spiritual heart of an individual is like the King in a human vehicle. He has the capacity for love, compassion and inspiration. He also has certain needs and desires for the fulfillment of his potential. The King uses his capital of love to make attachments with material and/or immaterial things such as money, property, lovers, friends, nature and God. The King also has capacity for compassion, which is the source of empathy for the well-being of other individuals. He receives pleasure from exercising this compassion and feels pain when not able to exercise compassion. GTHN suggests that individuals should take care of the needs and desires of the inner King first.

The *Judge* is the conscience that is the source of positive feelings after performing “good things” and negative feelings experienced after doing “bad things.” The *Judge* is analogous to Freud’s super-ego.

The *Adviser* relates to the cognitive self or thinking mind. The *Elephant* is the animal spirit or Freud’s *id*, which is the source of animalistic desires. The *Showman* is the self-centric ego that pursues power and possession to show its importance to others. The *Dog* is an inner drive for protection of personal belongings with potential to oppress others of their possessions. The *Driver* is the deciding self (free will) that drives the vehicle under the influence of the residents.

In Nursi’s view, it is not possible for a person to discuss “happiness” in the singular form because there are many “residents” (selves) who are competing within the human “vehicle.” When we say “I am happy,” who do we mean is happy, the *Dog*, the *King*, the *Judge*, the *Adviser*, the *Elephant* or the *Showman*? Of course, we could make a collective statement on behalf of all the residents if they all experience the same level of happiness. In this regard, happiness is not a destination; it is experience on the highway of life. Nursi’s view of human happiness can be summarized as a happiness matrix.

The happiness matrix captures six different dimensions of the human experience as represented by the residents of the vehicle. For instance, happiness for the King depends on how one fulfills the

needs/desires of love, compassion and inspiration. Love pursues beauty, perfection and benefits. Life for the King in this regard is a journey of making attachments. The number, intensity, and duration of attachments produce spiritual or esthetical pleasures. As the King gains pleasure by making attachments through love, compassion, and inspiration, he also suffers from any detachments that occur. Like the King, each resident of the human vehicle experiences pains and/or pleasures from daily activities. Therefore, if we follow Nursi's understanding of human nature, we should define happiness as a function of subjective well-being for all residents in the matrix as shown below:

$$H = \sum w_i h_i(X_i) = w_1 h_1(K) + w_2 h_2(J) + w_3 h_3(A) + w_4 h_4(D) + w_5 h_5(E) - w_6 h_6(S)$$

Where H is one's overall satisfaction with life, w_i is the weight of specific happiness variable in one is overall happiness with life, h_1 is one's happiness function with the King, h_2 is one's happiness function with the Judge, h_3 is one's happiness function with the Advisor, h_4 is one's happiness function with the Dog, h_5 is one's happiness function with the Elephant, and h_6 is one's happiness function with the Showman. In Nursi's view, overall life satisfaction is maximized when the needs and desires of the first five are fulfilled in a balanced way while the effect of the last one (the Showman) is minimized.

Nursi argues that authentic happiness is possible if individuals listen to the voices of all residents of the human vehicle and try to fulfill their needs and desires in a balanced manner. One cannot achieve true happiness by listening to only one resident while disregarding the others. By knowing each resident in terms of their needs, desires, and dangers, an individual can attempt to find that balance. In many ways, the residents of our body are quite similar to the members of a family living in the same house. As the entire family's peace and happiness is possible if each family member lives in peace and prosperity, the inner peace of a person is also possible if each resident of his vehicle lives in peace and prosperity. Making one family member happy and leaving the rest of the family in misery is not true happiness for the family. Likewise, making one resident of

the human vehicle happy, but neglecting the others, is a recipe for discontent. Therefore, it is important to define the happiness function for each resident separately based on the relevant variables in the table above.

In order to achieve overall happiness, each resident's happiness should be considered. Prioritizing the needs and desires of residents in case of scarcity and conflict allows harmony. For instance, if we spend too much time earning money for sensual pleasure, we will have less time left for pursuing other pleasures. Furthermore, things that give pleasure to one resident might be painful for the other. For instance, drinking too much alcohol might create sensual pleasure, but kill intellectual pleasure. Thus, overall happiness requires effort to balance the needs and desires of all residents very similar to Aristotle's theory of the Golden Mean.

While materialism attempts to fulfill sensual desires of human beings through conspicuous consumption, Nursi suggests a happiness model through moderate material consumption and spiritual nourishment. Our study is designed on the conceptual and theoretical framework of Nursi's spiritual happiness model. Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, positive psychology that emphasizes hedonic adaptation and the relationship of happiness to higher level spiritual and aesthetic pleasures, and the Nursi Spiritual Happiness model, we would like to test and see if in a highly spiritual group of Muslims who study the work of Said Nursi, will report higher levels of satisfaction as related to devotion and spiritual practice.

Hypotheses

In his answer to a question asked by many on the secret for the success of RN, Nursi points out that in good deeds and virtues and spirituality are to be found pleasures like the pleasures of Paradise. This study is an empirical test of Nursi's happiness model and argument. Nursi's argument could be reformulated in the form of hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Happiness is measurable in terms of pleasures, positive feelings, and overall satisfaction and can be related to the fulfillment of human needs. The higher level pleasures will result in a

greater, longer lasting life satisfaction.

- ✓ Specific Aim 1: To modify the Aspiration Index to identify domains of human experience as they relate to a hierarchy of pleasures.
- ✓ Specific Aim 2: To correlate the hierarchy of needs with a pyramid model of pleasures that can result in a greater sense of well-being and life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: RN readers are well informed about the undesired consequence of materialist, hedonic, egoistic values.

- ✓ Specific Aim 1: To measure the success of RN readers in terms avoiding hedonic and materialist life styles.
- ✓ Specific Aim 2: To measure the correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic values and subjective well-being for different groups of RN readers.

Hypothesis 3: RN readers gain comprehensive understanding of human nature and human needs. As they read RN, they are involved in more spiritual, intellectual, and social activities. Therefore, they are expected to have greater life satisfaction.

- ✓ Specific Aim 1: To measure the change in need fulfillment for the different groups of RN readers in order to see whether advancement in reading of RN results in the greater fulfillment of needs.
- ✓ Specific Aim 2: To measure the level of subjective well-being among RN readers comparatively to see whether advancement in reading of RN increase the level of subjective well-being as suggested by Nursi.

Research Design

During 2010, 1523 questionnaires were sent using an online survey tool (Vovici), to *Risale-i Nur* (RN) readers identified by the Istanbul Science and Culture Foundation, a foundation with a mission of promoting Said Nursi's views. The *Risale-i Nur* is the name of the collection of six-thousand-page commentary on the Qur'an written by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. The survey consists of three sections. The first section includes 13 questions about demographic information,

such as gender, age, level of education, household income, and marital status, the frequency of RN readings, the number of times the entire RN collection was read and participation in relevant activities. The second section includes 86 questions aimed at capturing the frequency of certain activities within 14 life domains using a 9-point Likert-type scale (the choices given range from almost never (1) to almost always (9)). This section reproduces the well-known Aspiration Index that captures eleven domains of human experience that include self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling, security, health, spirituality, financial success, image, popularity, hedonism, and conformity (Kasser, T. (2007). Our survey adds three more domains, namely **intellectual life, honesty and fairness, and aesthetics experience**. The third section of the survey captures three sets of questions on **life satisfaction, needs, and pleasures**. The first set includes five questions of the Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by Ed Diener and colleagues (1985) to measure life satisfaction (Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. 1985). The second set includes ten questions on the satisfaction of certain needs. The third set asks participants to rank ten pleasure types in terms of their contribution to happiness, ranking from the lowest (1) to highest (10) based on the degree and intensity of their contributions.

The face validity is assessed by experts in the field of well-being, including the author of the Aspiration Index. The questionnaire was validated with senior researchers in the field of well-being, including the author of the Aspiration Index. The questions measuring the profile of RN readers were shared with several experts on Nursi's works. Many questions were modified based on the expert opinions.

Data Analysis and Results

Profile of Participants by Levels

For comparison, the participants were divided into three subgroups based on their responses to the following questions: (1) the number of times they read the entire RN collection; (2) the number of pages per day they read from the RN collection; (3) the number of RN study circle they attend per week; (4) the number of times they recite

long *dhikr* (*tasbihaat*) after the five daily prayers; and (5) the number of years they have studied the RN collection. The level of participants was determined based on the weighted scores of their responses to the questions above. The weighting factor was arbitrarily determined as 30 percent for questions 1 and 2, 15 percent for questions 3 and 4, and 10 percent for question 5. The three subgroup categories based on these weighted scores were: Beginner (0 to less than 1.5 points); Intermediate, (1.5 to less than 4.1 points); and Advanced (4.1 points and above).¹

The statistical program SPSS 17 was used to analyze the data. Psychometric properties of the Aspiration Index and Satisfaction with Life Scale were checked using the protocol suggested by the authors of the original scales and as used in previously published work in these areas.¹

RESULTS

In total, 489 individuals (32%) responded to the survey. Those who failed to respond to fifty percent or more of the questions were also dropped. In total, the responses of 341 individuals were assessed. The demographic profile of the respondents is very much consistent with the known profile of RN readers. Even though the number of females is one fourth of the participants, the sub-sample of women is sufficient to conduct a gender analysis. Overall, the response rate and the sample size are considered high compared to other web-based surveys.²

The beginners, on average, read the RN collection less than one time. They rarely read the RN or recite *tasbihaat*. They generally attend one RN study circle per a week and were familiar with RN for up to 4 years. The individuals at the intermediate level, on average, have read the entire RN collection 1-3 times; read up to five pages of RN per day; recite *tasbihaat* a few times per day; attend 2 weekly RN study circles per week and were familiar with RN for 4-12 years. The

¹ The information is available on this Dr.Kasser's personal website:

<http://faculty.knox.edu/tkasser/aspirations.html>

² Can J Public Health. 2010 May-Jun;101(3):251-4.; Doerfling P, Kopec JA, Liang MH, Esdaile JM.

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individuals at the advanced level, on average, have read the RN collection seven or more times; read 10-15 or more pages from RN collection every day; recite *tasbihaat* regularly after daily prayers; attend 3-5 weekly RN study circles per week and were familiar with RN for 13 years or more. As is expected from the factors used to define the RN reader's levels, the beginners are relatively young and less educated compared with the other two groups. The three groups are otherwise comparable in terms of ages, marital status, education levels, and household income.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Values and Subjective Well-being

The second section of the survey is based on the Aspiration Index. The questions were designed to capture the values and goals of individuals within 14 different domains. This measurement allows for the assessment of the relative centrality of particular goals/values within an individual's personal goal/value system. In our survey, we ranked the importance of each domain based on the frequency of occurrence of relevant activities. We consider this as an indirect and more reliable measure of personal goals/values.

To measure the relative importance of each value/goal within the entire value/goal system, we conducted the following steps: First, we calculated the mean score for each value domain by taking the average response of relevant questions. Second, we calculated the mean of 14 domain scores to find the total importance of values/goals for an individual. Third, to find the relative importance an individual placed on each type of aspiration, we subtracted the total importance score (the mean score of 14 domains) from each of the 14 raw subscale scores. This gave us 14 different mean-corrected importance scores, one for each type of aspiration. We also calculated a summary intrinsic score by averaging the 7 intrinsic mean-corrected importance scores (spirituality, honesty, affiliation, intellectual life, personal growth, aesthetics experience, altruism) and a summary extrinsic score by averaging the 4 extrinsic mean-corrected importance scores (hedonism, popularity, money, and image).

The results for each level of RN readers are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 shows the domains with positive mean-corrected scores while Table 2 shows the domains with negative mean-corrected

scores. As seen in Table 1, spirituality, fairness and honesty, affiliation, intellectual activities, self-acceptance and personal growth, aesthetics experience, conformity, community feeling, and physical health have positive mean-corrected scores. The mean score for all goal/value domains mentioned are consistently higher for higher levels of RN readers. In other words, the more they read RN and are involved in relevant activities, the greater importance they place on these goals/values in their life.

Table 1: Life Domains with Positive Aspiration Index Scores

	Beginner (n=82)			Intermediate (n=191)			Advanced (n=68)		
	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.
Spirituality	2.5	2.7	0.8	2.8	2.8	0.6	2.9	2.9	0.5
Fairness and honesty	2	2.1	1.1	2.1	2.2	0.9	2.1	2	0.8
Affiliation	1.7	1.8	0.8	1.9	2	0.8	1.8	2	0.7
Intellectual life	1	0.9	1	1.1	1.2	0.9	1.4	1.4	0.7
Self-acceptance and growth	0.8	0.8	0.9	1	1	0.8	1.3	1.2	0.8
Aesthetics experience	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.3	1.3	1	1.1	1.1	0.9
Conformity	0.2	0.3	1.1	0.5	0.5	1.1	1.1	1.1	0.9
Community feeling and altruism	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7
Physical Health	0.2	0.3	1.2	0.4	0.5	1.1	0.6	0.6	1.3
7 Intrinsic Values	1.4	1.4	1.0	1.6	1.6	0.8	1.6	1.6	0.7

As seen in Table 2, hedonism, popularity and fame, money, image, security and fear have negative mean-corrected scores for all three levels of RN readers. Again, the negative scores are consistently greater for higher levels of RN readers. The more they read RN, the less importance they place on the goals/values in Table 2 and the

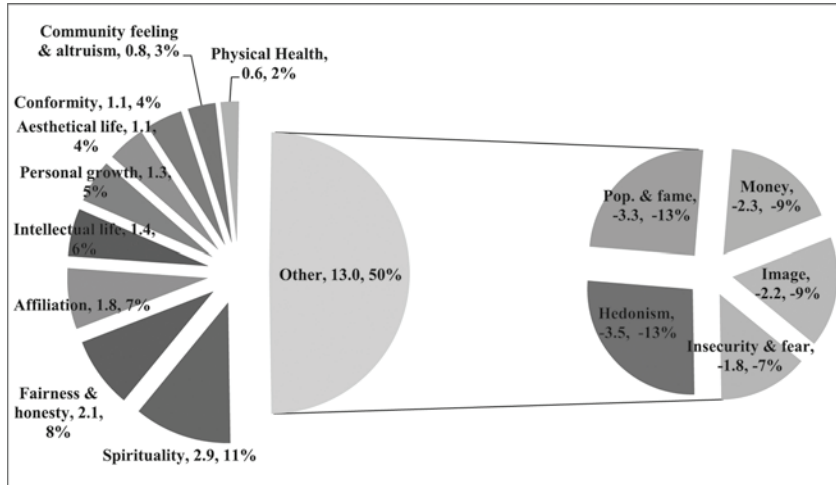
more they value spirituality, fairness and honesty, family and friendship, intellectual activities, personal growth, aesthetics experience, conformity, altruism, and health in Table 1.

Table 2: Life Domains with Negative Aspiration Index Scores

Levels of RN Readers		Hedonism	Popularity and Fame	Money	Image	Insecurity and Fear	4 Extrinsic Values
Beginner	n	82	82	82	82	82	
	Mean	-2.9	-2.6	-1.9	-1.8	-1.1	-2.3
	Median	-3.0	-2.7	-1.9	-1.9	-1.4	-2.4
	Std. Dev.	0.8	1.3	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.0
Intermediate	n	191	191	191	191	191	
	Mean	-3.2	-3.0	-2.1	-2.0	-1.5	-2.6
	Median	-3.2	-3.2	-2.1	-2.1	-1.5	-2.7
	Std. Dev.	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9
Advanced	n	68	68	68	68	68	
	Mean	-3.5	-3.3	-2.3	-2.2	-1.8	-2.8
	Median	-3.5	-3.5	-2.2	-2.3	-1.8	-2.9
	Std. Dev.	0.7	1.1	0.8	1.1	0.9	0.9

Since the mean-corrected importance scores peak for the advanced level of RN readers, we would like to focus on this group in terms of their world value system and subjective well-being. Figure 1 captures the world value/goal system for the advanced level of RN readers. Based on the mean-corrected importance scores, the figure shows that the advanced level RN readers place greater importance on spirituality, honesty and fairness, family and friendship, intellectual activities, personal growth while they try to stay away from hedonic, egoistic, and materialistic goals/values.

Figure 1: The World Value/Goal System for the Advanced Level RN Readers



Subjective Well-being of the RN Readers

We used the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) to measure the subjective well-being of RN readers (Diener et al. 1985). The SWLS is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. Participants were asked to indicate their relative agreement with each item in Table 4 by placing the appropriate number ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Based on the findings of numerous studies, Diener and colleagues published a guideline on how to interpret the SWLS scores.³ The guideline divides the SWLS scores into six categories of life satisfactions: 1) extremely satisfied (with 30-35 total score or 6-7 mean score); 2) Satisfied (with 25-29 total score or 5-6 mean score); 3) Slightly satisfied (with 20-24 total score or 4-5 mean score); 4) Slightly dissatisfied (with 15-19 total score or 3-4 mean score); 5) Dissatisfied (with 10-14 total score or 2-3 mean score); 6) Extremely Dissatisfied (with 5-9 total score or 1-2 mean score).

³ <http://www.psych.illinois.edu/~ediener/Documents/Understanding%20SWLS%20Scores.pdf>, accessed on September 19, 2010.

According to a comprehensive life satisfaction survey conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute in 2010, 54 percent of people are satisfied with their life. The response to the comparable question (the question # 3 in Table 3) in our study, 62 percent of the beginner, 82 percent of the intermediate, and 93 percent of the advanced group members are satisfied with their life.

Table 3 shows the SWLS scores of RN readers stratified by levels. If we assess their overall life satisfaction based on question 3, according to the Diener SWLS scale above, the beginner would fall in the high level of satisfaction group while the intermediate and advanced groups would fall in the highest level of life satisfaction. The mean score increases from 5.5 point to 6.3 when they advance in their reading level of RN. The increase of life satisfaction across the groups is consistent for all five questions. This is evidence that the advancement in reading RN collection increases people's life satisfaction. According to the SWLS total score, the beginners fall in the high ceiling of the third category of life satisfaction. They have the mean score of 23.4 and median score of 25.8. On the other hand, the intermediate group falls into the highly satisfied category while the advanced group is just one point shy of the extremely satisfied category based on the median score of 28.5. This means that the individuals in the advanced group "love their lives and feel that things are going very well. Their lives are not perfect, but they feel that things are about as good as life gets." While the individuals in the intermediate group feel that things are mostly going well. Means comparison between the three groups, using one-way ANOVA, shows statistically significant values for each question as seen in the last column of Table 3.

Table 3: SWLS Scores of RN Readers

	Beginner			Intermediate			Advanced			One-Way ANOVA
	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Sig. between groups
1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.	4.8	5.1	1.7	5.4	6.0	1.3	5.6	6.0	1.1	.001
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.	4.2	5.0	1.7	5.0	5.0	1.4	5.2	5.5	1.3	.000
3. I am satisfied with my life.	5.5	6.0	1.3	5.9	6.0	1.2	6.3	6.0	0.7	.000
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.	5.0	5.3	1.5	5.4	6.0	1.3	5.7	6.0	1.0	.006
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	3.9	4.3	2.0	4.3	4.4	1.8	5.0	5.0	1.8	.002
Total SWLS Score	23.4	25.8	8.2	25.9	27.4	7.0	27.8	28.5	5.9	
Mean SWLS Score	4.7	5.2	1.6	5.2	5.5	1.4	5.6	5.7	1.2	

The Need Satisfaction and the Pleasure Pyramid

In order to understand the factors affecting subjective well-being, we asked the participants to express their level of satisfaction by using 1-7 scale (1 for strongly disagree and 7 for strongly agree) in fulfilling the following types of needs:

1. I am satisfied with fulfilling my “sensual” needs/wants such as eating, drinking and sex.
2. I am satisfied with fulfilling my “spiritual/religious” needs/wants such as worship and pray.
3. I am satisfied with fulfilling my “intellectual” needs/wants such as reading and contemplating.
4. I am satisfied with fulfilling my “aesthetics” needs/wants such as enjoying beauty in nature.
5. I am satisfied with fulfilling my “social” needs/wants such as friendship.
6. I am satisfied with fulfilling my “altruistic” needs/wants such as helping others through charity.
7. I am satisfied with fulfilling “self-acceptance” needs/wants such as trusting my abilities.
8. I am satisfied with fulfilling my “conscience” needs/wants such as being honest and fair.
9. I am satisfied with fulfilling my “egoistic” needs/wants such as being admired and fame.
10. I am satisfied with fulfilling my “emotional” needs/wants such as having love and compassion.

The need satisfaction scores indicate how much the respondents are satisfied with fulfilling their particular needs. As seen in Table 4, the advanced group scores extremely high for spiritual, intellectual, conscience, aesthetics experience, social, altruistic, and emotional pleasures. Second, the satisfaction scores increase as the level of RN readers rises. In other words, the advanced group has greater satisfaction in need fulfillment for all needs with the exception of egoistic need. Indeed, other questions on egoistic goals and values clearly indicate that RN readers do not think favorably about egoistic pleasures. Therefore, the decline in the egoistic score when we moved from the beginner to the advanced group is consistent with other

findings. Third, the highest mean gains between beginner and advanced group (last column in Table 4) are seen for the fulfillment of spiritual and intellectual needs followed by social, emotional, sensual, aesthetics experience needs. As seen in the last column of Table 4, means comparison between the three groups, using one-way ANOVA, shows statistically significant values for all need fulfillment except the following three: conscience, altruistic, and personal growth.

Table 4: Need Satisfactions for RN Readers by Levels

	Beginner (n=82)			Intermediate (n=191)			Advanced (n=68)			Net Mean Gains	Sig.
	Mean	Med.	Std. Dev.	Mean	Med.	Std. Dev.	Mean	Med.	Std. Dev.		
Spiritual	5.5	6	1.6	6.2	6.1	1	6.4	7	0.8	0.9	.000
Intellectual	5.5	6	1.4	6.1	6	1	6.4	7	0.8	0.9	.000
Conscience	6	6	1.1	6.1	6	0.9	6.3	6.1	0.9	0.3	.183
Aesthetics	5.7	6	1.3	6	6	1	6.2	6	0.7	0.5	.006
Social	5.5	6	1.5	5.9	6	1	6.1	6	0.8	0.6	.002
Altruistic	5.6	6	1.2	5.8	6	1.1	6	6	0.8	0.4	.067
Emotional	5.3	6	1.5	5.7	6	1.2	5.9	6	1.2	0.6	.015
Sensual	5.1	6	1.6	5.6	6	1.3	5.7	6	1	0.6	.017
Personal growth	5	5.2	1.5	5.1	5.2	1.4	5.4	6	1.3	0.4	.225
Egoistic	3.5	3.1	1.8	2.9	3	1.5	2.9	2.5	1.7	-0.6	.038

Immediately after the need fulfillment, the participants were asked to rank 10 different pleasures in terms of their contribution to their happiness, ranking from the lowest (1) to highest (10) based on the degree and intensity of contributions. We calculated the final ranking based on cumulative score, not individual score for each pleasure type. For instance, the ranking of nine, we added ranking of 9 and above for each pleasure.

One way was to test the hypothesis about the relationship between subjective well-being and the fourteen life domains captured in our study was to measure the correlation coefficient and significance for each domain. As seen in Table 6, according to Pearson Correlation coefficients, all of the domains except image and popularity are statistically significant. In other words, the significance test indicates that the correlation is a real one and not a chance occurrence. Personal growth has the highest correlation coefficient followed by spirituality, affiliation, health, conformity, intellectual growth, honesty, altruism, and aesthetics experience growth. Consistent with the aspiration index scores, insecurity and fear, hedonism, and money have negative correlation with subjective well-being.

Discussion of the Findings

Nursi places great importance on a spirituality based on a verified belief set not on blind imitation. For that, first, he insists on intensive involvement in reading and reflection in addition to worshipping. Therefore, it is not surprising to see spirituality as the most important life domain for RN readers. Second, Nursi mentions conscience or what Freud refers to as the super-ego as an important human psychological process that results in discomfort when we act unfairly and dishonestly. As an important part of their spiritual beliefs and study, RN readers place high importance on fairness and honesty in their life. Third, the high scores for affiliation, intellectual life, and personal growth are consistent with the teachings of RN. Indeed, RN puts great emphasis on sincere friendship and family values. RN readers regularly come together for intellectual and spiritual activities. Fourth, the positive score for the aesthetic experience is reflected in Nursi's emphasis on the artistic dimension of God's works in the universe. Nursi urges his readers to observe the manifested beauty in the universe as a great sign of God's existence. RN readers focus on the beauty of the Universe and therefore regard aesthetic pleasure as important to their level of well-being. Fifth, the positive score for conformity may be due to Nursi's teaching of tolerance and universal friendship. Indeed, Nursi encourages his readers to feel a friendship with everything in the universe through

understanding their interconnectedness as creatures of God. Sixth, the positive score for altruism might be a result of Nursi's emphasis on sacrifice as a required quality of sincere friendship and brotherhood/sisterhood.

The importance of Nursi's teaching can also explain the negative aspiration index scores as well. For RN readers, hedonism is least important or even most deleterious to their level of happiness. Nursi provides compelling evidence against hedonic pleasures as a source of happiness. Nursi argues that hedonic pleasures contain poison; therefore, they result in painful rather than pure pleasures. In his view, the source of this type of pleasure is the instinctual soul (*nafs*). He encourages his readers to stay away from these types of pleasures (as a fulfillment of need). He provides spiritual and intellectual training for such restraint. The more people read the RN collection, the more they avoid hedonic pleasures. Second, the high negative scores for both popularity and image might be due to Nursi's emphasis on the ego/self (*ana*) as the most dangerous internal enemy. Nursi argues that the understanding of God and submission to His power could only happen if we understand who we are and give up our imaginary egotism/godship. Third, the negative score for materialist values and money might reflect Nursi's emphasis on the worldly possessions as means rather than end goals. Even though Nursi acknowledges the importance of material gains as means, he warns his readers on indulging in material possession as an end goal. Finally, the negative score for fear and insecurity might be due to Nursi's emphasis on absolute control of God in all worldly affairs. Nursi argues that those who have certainty in God as the Absolute Power in control of everything with infinite mercy and absolute goodness would not worry about anything. They would do their part and place their trust in God.

We were not surprised that spiritual pleasure was ranked as the highest type of pleasure. However, we were surprised to see that if ranked based on the individual score, the egoistic pleasure would be the lowest for one half and the highest for the other half. In other words, the respondents were evenly divided in their rankings of the egoistic pleasure. This is in direct contradiction with what the high negative aspiration index scores for the popularity and fame and image

domains show. It also contradicts with the egoistic need fulfillment score in Table 6 as well. Furthermore, when we analyzed the responses to the questions related to egoism in the second part of the survey, we found negative correlation between the level of RN readers and egoism. For instance, when asked about their desire for lasting fame even after their death, fifty four percent of the beginners said they never or rarely have such desire while sixty five percent of the intermediate group and seventy five percent of the advanced group said that they would desire lasting fame. Due to the conflicting evidence mentioned, we think that the statement on egoistic pleasure was not clear enough, therefore, misunderstood by many respondents. Particularly, the clarifying example given in parenthesis might have confused the respondents. Therefore, we decided to drop the egoistic pleasure in our final analysis.

Since the advanced group falls into the highest life satisfaction level, we believe it is important to present their rankings of pleasures. In other words, we would like to see what works for people by examining the pleasure pyramid of the individuals with highest level of life satisfaction. As seen in Table 5 and Figure 2, spiritual, intellectual and emotional pleasures are the peak of the pyramid. This means that for the advanced RN readers, spirituality, intellectual growth, love and compassion are the most desired qualities in their life. In other words, if they were asked to give three most important keys for happiness, they would say: pray, read, and love. This is quite consistent with the teaching of RN. In Nursi's view, since the source of love is God, the love for worldly things is part of the love of God if one understands that his or her object of love is nothing other than the manifestation of the names of God. According to the pleasure pyramid, the other secrets for happiness are hidden in the appreciation of the arts and beauty, in the honest and fair acts, in the altruistic behaviors, in the family and friendship, in the personal growth, and the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Putting sensual pleasure at the bottom of the list does not mean that advanced RN readers do not enjoy sensual pleasures. Indeed, as seen in Table 5, they read RN more as they experience sensual pleasures. However, compared to other type of pleasures, for the advanced RN readers, sensual pleasure are the least important.

Table 5: Ranking of Pleasures by the Advanced RN Readers

Ranking	Type of Pleasures	Cumulative Ranking Score									
		10	9-10	8-10	7-10	6-10	5-10	4-10	3-10	2-10	1-10
10	Spiritual	30	35	39	40	43	44	45	47	52	69
9	Intellectual	3	18	26	31	31	31	35	41	46	48
8	Emotional	3	12	21	30	39	46	51	55	59	59
7	Aesthetics	0	1	10	19	31	31	42	48	52	56
6	Conscience	2	9	15	25	28	36	42	50	56	57
5	Altruistic	0	2	9	15	27	27	35	40	42	44
4	Social	2	3	8	16	25	28	39	44	45	45
3	Personal Growth	2	9	14	18	22	23	32	39	56	58
2	Sensual	2	8	14	21	23	26	31	31	45	48

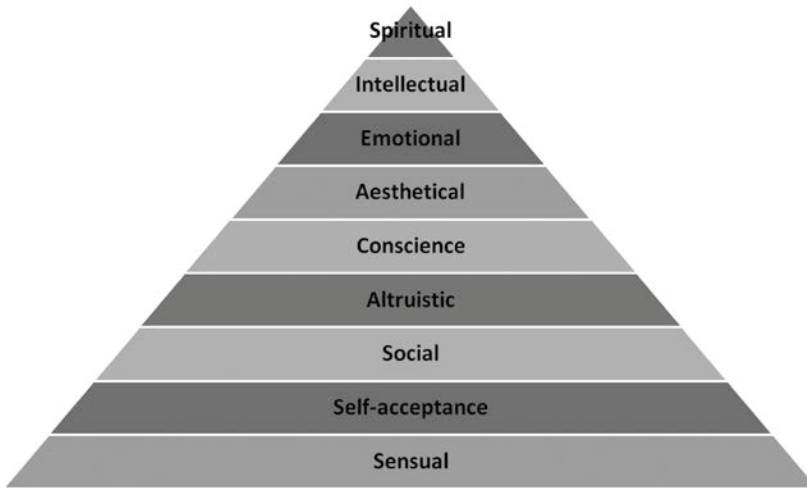


Figure 2: The Pleasure Pyramid for the Advanced RN Readers

Table 6: The Correlation between Subjective Well-being and Value/Goal Domains

Levels	Beginner (n=82)		Intermediate (n=191)		Advanced (n=68)	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Honesty	-.019	.866	.183***	.011	.150	.223
Aesthetics	.014	.904	.124*	.087	.196	.109
Intellectual	.018	.871	.090	.217	.237**	.052
Insecurity & Fear	-.329***	.003	-.024	.738	.036	.774
Hedonism	-.058	.607	-.134*	.065	.175	.154
Image	-.018	.872	-.027	.711	.173	.159
Self-acceptance	.215**	.053	.437****	.000	.402****	.001
Spirituality	.002	.988	.357****	.000	.207*	.090
Money	-.019	.869	-.128*	.078	.137	.266
Health	.197*	.076	.324****	.000	.210*	.085
Affiliation	.179*	.108	.328****	.000	.049	.690
Pop. & Fame	.113	.310	-.040	.585	.059	.634
Altruism	-.104	.350	.142**	.050	.197	.108
Conformity	.025	.825	.259****	.000	.211*	.084

*p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, ****p<0.001

Concluding Remarks and Limitations

This study adds to the literature on well-being and satisfaction that a life filled with spiritual growth, positive emotions, psychology, and behaviors, and a desire to improve oneself and humanity evident in the writings of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi contribute more to well-being and satisfaction than a life dedicated to hedonic pleasures and materialism. It shows that Islam could offer an alternative way of happiness to those who are trapped in the “Hedonic treadmill” as suggested by Nursi.

Indeed, while materialism attempts to fulfill sensual desires of human beings through conspicuous consumption, Nursi offers a happiness model through moderate material consumption and spiritual nourishment. He also provides means to control sensual desires. Nursi says that it is necessary to be freed from material desires in order to develop spiritual dimension. He believes that we are spiritual beings sent to this materialistic world to find and reach the Divine, not to live in an animal form of life. Therefore, spiritual development is the essential goal for a practicing Muslim who is supposed to detach his heart from all material attachments and adhere to the Divine. In Nursi's view, although happiness is not life's purpose for a Muslim, it is the by-product of his spiritual journey.

Nursi challenges consumer culture with his writings and Sufi type life style. He argues that "absolute vice" was being called civilization, and he severely criticizes this "dissolute civilization" which promotes a consumer culture. He says that it casts humanity down to the level of animals: "... its alluring service is to excite lust and the appetites of the soul and facilitate the gratification of whims, and their result is vice." "The mark of lust and passion is always this: they transform man into a beast, changing his character; they deform him, perverting his humanity" (Nursi, *The Words*, p. 745).

Nursi refers to the civilization based on Abrahamic tradition as a "virtuous civilization" because it takes all the subtle faculties of man into account, causes him to progress spiritually, and to rise higher than even the angels.⁴ For virtuous civilization, Nursi says: "Its aim is virtue instead of self-interest ... Its service takes the form of guidance and direction instead of lust and passion. And the mark of guidance is progress and prosperity in ways befitting humanity; "The spirit is illumined and perfected in the way it requires" (*The Words*, p. 745-6). In Nursi's view, dissolute civilization looks on life as a sort of amusement and makes the world into a "theme park." It tries to gratify people's instinctual souls through entertainment of all sorts. It is because of this that whenever they can, its pupils organize

⁴ For further discussion on this issue, please read the following article by Dr. Furkan Aydin: "Virtue vs. Decadence: The Struggle of Civilizations with the Global Village", in the *Globalization, Ethics, and Islam: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Ashgate, 2005.

gatherings for the purpose of fun and want to experience carnal pleasures of every kind. Where dissolute civilization amuses the instinctual soul, virtuous civilization gratifies the spiritual subtle faculties, chiefly the heart, affording happiness.

In his answer to a question asked by many on the secret for the success of RN, Nursi says that “the Risale-i Nur demonstrates that in misguidance is a sort of Hell in this world, while in belief is a sort of Paradise.” It points out the grievous pains in sins, bad deeds, and forbidden pleasures and proves that in good deeds and virtues and spirituality are to be found pleasures like the pleasures of Paradise. “In this way it saves the sensible among those who have fallen into vice and misguidance”⁵ He also argues that this is the only effective way to save people from contemporary temptation: “Since man’s emotions, which are blind to the consequences of things and prefer an ounce of present pleasure to tons of future joys, have prevailed over his mind and reason, the only way to save the dissolute from their vice is to show them the pain present in their pleasure and to defeat their emotions. Although they are aware of the diamond-like bounties and pleasures of the hereafter, as the verse (they deem lovable the life of this world (Qur’an, 14:3)) indicates, while being believers, the people of misguidance choose worldly pleasures, which are like pieces of glass soon to be shattered. The only way of saving them from this love of the world and from the danger of surrendering to it is by showing them the hell-like torments and pains they suffer even in this world. This is the way the Risale-i Nur takes.”⁶

Nursi further argues that it is no longer possible to affect people’s behaviors by reminding the reward and punishment of the hereafter. “For at this time, due to the stubbornness arising from absolute unbelief and the intoxication caused by the vice and misguidance arising from science, perhaps only one in ten or even twenty can be induced to give up his evil ways by proving the existence of Hell and its torments, after having told him of Almighty God. Having heard this, such people are likely to say: “God is Forgiving and Compassionate, and Hell is a long way off,” and continue in their debauchery. Their hearts and spirits are overcome

⁵ Said Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon / Introduction*, p. 19.

⁶ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon / Introduction*, p. 20.

by their emotions. Thus, by showing through most of its comparisons, the grievous and terrible results in this world of disbelief and misguidance, the *Risale-i Nur* makes even the most stubborn and arrogant people feel disgust at those inauspicious, illicit pleasures, leading them to repent.” Nursi makes a very bold argument in the same book: “those who follow vice and misguidance, suffer a hellish torment in this world too, while through the manifestations of belief, the believers and righteous may taste through the stomachs of Islam and humanity the pleasures of Paradise. They may benefit according to the degree of their belief.”⁷

This study provides strong empirical evidence for Nursi’s happiness model. However, it is important to note few weaknesses before concluding the paper. The response rate is higher than many internet-based surveys; however, there could be significant reporting bias. It is possible that only the very motivated or ardent followers of Nursi answered the survey. Time constraints, internet availability, technology competency could have also affected the response rate. The Vovici software has been reported to slow down with certain browsers, and prospective respondents could have been unable or unwilling to battle the technology. A repeat study to confirm findings would be helpful.

A larger sample size with more demographic variables especially women is necessary to determine any differences lost due to a small sample size. In addition, future studies are necessary to test the findings in this study. The cohort was derived from one organization and therefore could be biased. It is possible that followers of Nursi who do not belong to the Istanbul Science and Culture Foundation, would respond differently.

Happiness is measurable in terms of pleasures, positive feelings, and overall satisfaction and can be related to the fulfillment of human needs. Those participants that study, practice, and live according to the teachings of Nursi report great levels of satisfaction. The teachings of Nursi emphasize a life dedicated to God, love, compassion, service to others and high spiritual achievement and de-emphasize hedonic pleasures and materialism. Although it is not known if these teachings would result in the same findings across

⁷ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon / Introduction*, pp. 23-24.

societies, cultures, and religions, the results suggest that the universal values taught in Islam result in high levels of life satisfaction in practicing participants.

Finally, in order to further test our hypothesis, especially in regards to a pleasure pyramid, future studies should compare findings across cohorts that endorse varying personal values and beliefs. For example, in order to further test the concept of a pleasure pyramid, groups that endorse spiritual, intellectual, emotional, aesthetics experience, conscience, altruistic, social, self acceptance and sensual pleasures could be queried with the same methodology.

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