

ATTAINING INNER PEACE
ACCORDING TO THE *RISALE-I NUR*

Submitted by

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Master of Arts (Islamic and Arabic Studies)

**A thesis submitted in total (partial) fulfilment requirements of the
requirements of the degree of Philosophy**

School of Theology and Philosophy

Australian Catholic University

November 2015

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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Zuleyha Keskin

November 2015

STATEMENT OF APPRECIATION OR DEDICATION

When I thank people, I always worry I am going to forget someone, but here I go...

I would firstly like to thank my Creator for giving me the strength, direction and ability to complete this task. I can never thank Him enough for all that He has blessed me with in my life.

I also want to thank my supervisor, Professor Ismail Albayrak, for his ongoing support and patience throughout the years. His knowledge and wisdom on one side and his encouragement on the other, have been like two wings that have helped me complete this long journey. I would also like to thank Associate Professor Salih Yucel for being a source of strength and for being inspirational. Not only did he provide additional academic support, but he also believed in me as well. He also took on an incredible workload so I could find the time to write. I would like to thank ACU, Theology and Philosophy Faculty, Research office and ACU library.

At the heart of it, I would like to thank my husband, Ahmet, for contributing so wholeheartedly to make this thesis a reality. I am grateful for his tireless efforts to keep me motivated, his ongoing assistance in the home and his extra support for the children in times of need. I would also like to thank my children, Eyup and Safiye, who have become accustomed to seeing their mother in front of the computer doing her 'homework'. Their patience and understanding of 'mummy's homework' at such a young age has meant a lot to me. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, particularly my father, who has taught me not only to aim high, but then to achieve...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES	i
STATEMENT OF APPRECIATION OR DEDICATION.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
ABSTRACT	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction	1
Area of Research	7
Literature Review	9
1. Literature on Said Nursi and his Works	9
2. The Initial Literature Written in English	9
3. More Contemporary Topics.....	12
4. Literature on Inner Peace.....	19
5. General Literature on Inner Peace	19
6. Islamic Literature on Inner Peace	24
Conceptual Framework.....	28
Methodology.....	30
1. Primary Sources.....	32
2. Secondary Sources.....	33
Proposed Research Outline.....	37
1. Chapter 1: Inner Peace in Islam: General Discussion	38
2. Chapter 2: Belief in God and Inner Peace	38
3. Chapter 3: Knowing One's Self Inner Peace	38
4. Chapter 4: Islamic Worldview and Inner Peace	39
5. Chapter 5: Nursi's Life and Inner Peace.....	39
6. Conclusion	40
CHAPTER 1: INNER PEACE IN ISLAM: GENERAL DISCUSSION.....	41
1.1 Introduction	41
1.2 Inner Peace in Islam	42
1.2.1 The Meaning of Islam.....	42
1.2.2 Inner Peace in the Qur'ān and <i>Hadīth</i>	42
1.3 Islamic Concepts Similar to Inner Peace.....	46
1.3.1 <i>Ridā</i> (Contentment)	46

1.3.2	<i>Sakīna</i> (Serenity) and <i>Iṭmīnān</i> (Peacefulness)	48
1.3.3	<i>Husn al-Ẓann</i> (Positive Thought).....	50
1.4	Reconciling Inner Peace and Negative Emotions	54
1.4.1	Negative Emotions in the Life of Prophet Muḥammad	55
1.4.2	A Constant State of Low Mood – Depression	60
1.5	Conclusion	63
CHAPTER 2: BELIEF IN GOD AND INNER PEACE		65
2.1	Introduction.....	65
2.2	Belief in God.....	66
2.3	Belief in Oneness of God.....	69
2.4	Knowledge of God.....	72
2.5	The Relationship Between Belief in God and Inner Peace.....	76
2.6	The Names of God and Inner Peace	84
2.6.1	All-Powerful (<i>al-Qādir</i>).....	88
2.6.2	All-Merciful (<i>al-Raḥmān</i>).....	96
2.6.3	All-Just (<i>al-'Adl</i>).....	99
2.7	Conclusion	105
CHAPTER 3: KNOWING ONE’S SELF AND INNER PEACE.....		107
3.1	Introduction.....	107
3.2	Knowing One’s Self to Know God.....	108
3.2.1	How to Know One’s Self.....	111
3.3	Belief and Self-Evaluation.....	117
3.3.1	Realising One’s Potential.....	120
3.4	Proper Use of Faculties and Emotions.....	127
3.4.1	The <i>Nafs</i>	128
3.4.2	The Heart and Mind	132
3.4.3	Emotions	137
3.5	The Gap.....	144
3.5.1	Worship; the Natural Outcome of Self-Awareness.....	150
3.6	Conclusion	153
CHAPTER 4: TAWḤĪD-CENTRIC WORLDVIEW AND INNER PEACE.....		155
4.1	Introduction.....	155
4.2	Summary of the Purpose of Life.....	158
4.3	Perspective	163
4.3.1	<i>Mānā-yī Harfī</i> Versus <i>Mānā-yī Ismī</i>	165

4.4	Suffering	168
4.4.1	Concept of Good and Evil	178
4.5	Natural Disasters	191
4.6	Illnesses	197
4.7	Old Age	200
4.8	Death	203
4.9	Conclusion.....	208
CHAPTER 5: INNER PEACE IN THE LIFE OF SAID NURSI.....		211
5.1	Introduction	211
5.2	Said Nursi's Life in Brief	213
5.3	Reflection on Nursi's Life	217
5.3.1	The Decline of the Muslim World.....	217
5.3.2	Exiles	221
5.3.3	Imprisonments	225
5.3.4	The Death of his Spiritual Son.....	229
5.4	Conclusion.....	231
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION		233
6.1	Concluding Remarks	233
6.2	Findings	235
6.2.1	Summary of Findings	235
6.2.2	Measures for Soundness of Framework	238
6.3	Recommendations	242
6.3.1	More Literature on Inner Peace	242
6.3.2	Further Analysis of Nursi's Work	243
6.3.3	Interfaith Comparative Study	244
6.3.4	Cross-Disciplinary Studies	244
6.3.5	Deconstructing the Inner Peace Process	245
BIBLIOGRAPHY		247

ABSTRACT

Islam meaning peace becomes an important point in the discussion of inner peace; Muslims believe the religion of Islam is a source of inner peace for them, citing various Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* in support of this notion. Furthermore, *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism) is rich with discussion of concepts relating to inner peace, such as *riḍā* (contentment), *sakīna* (serenity) and *īmīnān* (peacefulness). This further strengthens the idea that inner peace is part and parcel of Islam. However, when Islamic literature is reviewed, very little is found on the topic of inner peace. Based on the approach of Said Nursi (d. 1960), a twentieth century Islamic scholar, I would argue that the little information found on inner peace can be attributed to a consensual assumption among Muslims scholars that one who has belief has inner peace; that is, inner peace is a default state for one who believes. According to Nursi, the intellectual and spiritual decline within the Muslim world in the twentieth century has shaken belief, so certain states and specific beliefs can no longer be assumed to be inherent in a believer; inner peace as a state and belief in the hereafter as a specific belief would be prime examples. This awareness becomes Nursi's driving force in his writings; the *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of Light), a commentary of the Qur'ān.

This puts Nursi in a unique position, where seeks to convincingly argue and thus establish the foundational beliefs and states which are necessary for a prosperous life and after life for a believer. Specific to this thesis his emphasis on the notion Islam gives its adherents inner peace. Thus the objective of this thesis is to draw out Nursi's understanding of how one attains inner peace through Islam. However, the description of inner peace is not so simple and necessitates formulating based on inductive research of the *Risale-i Nur*. Through the research, it becomes apparent that inner peace is a process, according to Nursi, a process that has three phases. The process commences with belief and knowledge of God with great emphasis on the names of God while still remaining focused on the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). This is followed by

knowledge of one's self, which feeds back to knowing God, since knowing the self means knowing God. But it also becomes the starting point to understanding how to best use the self for optimal outcomes. The final part of the process is the *tawhīd*-centric worldview one should have, particularly in relation to suffering and calamities. The previous two steps (knowing God and knowing one's self) become the building blocks to construct the worldview. It is a cyclic process so the worldview further enhances belief and knowledge of God, and so the cycle continues spiralling upwards.

Based on this process, inner peace is attained when the world is decoded through the names of God, so life and events can be given meaning in a way that satisfies the heart and mind. More briefly, it is giving life and events a *tawhīd*-centric meaning. If this is the definition of inner peace according to the *Risale-i Nur*, then Nursi become the lived example of inner peace. While one is the theory, the other is the practise.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

There are multiple measures to determine the significance and impact of a prominent scholar's ideas. While their ideology, approach to the fundamental sources and ability to influence are of paramount importance, primarily their impact and prominence are measured "by the role their ideas play at the moment when a society is undergoing a crisis or confronting problems which need to be solved in order to secure its future"¹. Outstanding scholars can only be described as great, if they leave their mark by influencing nations in coming generations. Among such thinkers, Said Nursi (1877-1960) occupies an important place.

Said Nursi is a twentieth century original Muslim thinker and scholar who made a significant contribution to contemporary Islamic thought through his magnum opus the *Risale-i Nur Collection* (Treatise of Light). Nursi lived at a time when the Muslim world was undergoing significant changes – intellectually, spiritually, politically and economically. The Ottoman Empire, a civilisation that had been a superpower for hundreds of years, was collapsing while it watched Europe advance in every possible way. "Indeed, up to 1869 the Islamic world could hardly conceive of assuming a subordinate position with respect to Europe."² But this was exactly what was now happening. The Ottomans, the governing body at the time Nursi was born, was losing land day by day as he was entering his teens and trying to make sense of the world he found himself in. In 1900, when Nursi was 13 years old, 160 million Muslims were under colonial power, while only 41 million Muslims made up the independent states of the Islamic world.³ His world was changing very fast.

¹ Leonid Sykianen, "Said Nursi's Approach to Justice and its Role for Political Reforms in the Muslim World," in *Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Vermont: Ashgate Pub., 2010), 181.

² Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World*, trans. Azizeh Azodi (London: I.B.Taurus, 2002), 15.

³ Ibid, 25.

Not only was the Muslim world crumbling in front of his eyes, but the identity of his nation was also changing. The country he lived in was being rebuilt so it could take its place in the “civilised” world. This meant rapid modernisation, and modernisation meant Westernisation.⁴ It could be argued that Nursi witnessed the greatest revolutions, “not only in Turkish history, but in the history of mankind” during his lifetime.⁵

It was these changes that Nursi was trying to deal with as he knew they had a significant impact on his people, whose faith was greatly shaken by the changes. Religious practises were losing their presence within society, while ideologies opposing Islam’s belief system were creeping into Muslim societies. Through his personal experiences, Nursi knew that political activity would not solve the problems he was witnessing. He saw the solution to the Muslim world’s problems to be in “saving and strengthening religious belief, which would form the basis of renewal and reconstruction.”⁶ This became his life philosophy, which permeated every facet of his life and the life he was encouraging Muslims to embrace.

While Nursi is popular with millions of followers today, he also has critics. For his followers or those inspired by his work, Nursi was the awaited *mujaddid* (renewer) of the fourteenth century of Islam,⁷ reviving Islam through renewed expression and articulation. He is also acknowledged for playing a critical role in saving the belief of Muslims at a time when the Muslim world was declining; this decline made the Muslim world vulnerable to the onslaught of atheistic materialism, nationalism and ultra-secularism.

Those critical of Nursi have questioned his approach to religious revival, which has been described as passive resistance, particularly his adamant stance against politics. Some have even

⁴ Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2005). 189.

⁵ Ibrahim Canan, “The Chief Questions Facing the Islamic World and Their Solutions According to Bediüzzaman,” in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlük, 1993), 78.

⁶ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 177

⁷ Muslims believe a *mujaddid* will appear each century to revive Islam and interpret the Qur’ānic principles in accordance with the understanding and demands of the day.

questioned whether such a stance could be considered Islamic.⁸ At the other extreme, he has been accused of opposing the secularisation of Turkey, a change that some believed to be essential for Turkey's progress. His lack of formal secular education has also been put under the spotlight and used to question his credentials.⁹

Yet, whether he is thought of highly or not, all agree that "Nursi is arguably the most important and influential scholar to emerge from Turkey in the past five hundred years,"¹⁰ leaving his mark on his generation and those to come through his works, namely the *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi's influence has transcended Turkey with his writings being translated into over fifty languages.

The *Risale-i Nur Collection*, a 6,000 page Qur'ānic commentary (*tafsīr*), comprises individual treatises with names such as rays, flashes and gleams. Thus, the *Risale-i Nur* "models itself as a sort of hermeneutical prism catching what its author considers to be the effulgence of divine light from the Qur'ān and refracting it as colours visible to, and understandable by, the eye of the human heart."¹¹ What is further noteworthy is that the 'flashes' captured from the Qur'ān are those that Nursi believes are most needed to address the problems faced by Muslims of today. Furthermore, Nursi provides a commentary on these verses in a style that a contemporary person can relate to.

While the *Risale-i Nur* is a *tafsīr*, it is not the traditional type of *tafsīr*. According to Nursi, there are two types of *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān: those that expound on the words of the Qur'ān (*lafzi*) and those that focus on the spiritual meaning of the Qur'ān (*manawi*). While more than 350,000 *lafzi tafsīrs* have been written, *manawi tafsīrs* are much more of a rarity.¹² The *Risale-i Nur* is believed to be a *manawi tafsīr*, a spiritual commentary, and many would claim it is the most

⁸ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "Ghurbah as Paradigm for Muslim Life," in *Islam at the Crossroads*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 247.

⁹ Colin Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light* (Berlin: Gerlach, 2013), 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 4.

¹² Ahmed Akgunduz, "The Risale-i Nur as a New School of Belief," in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 149.

powerful and valuable of this type.¹³ Having said that, Nursi also provides commentaries on the words of the Qur’ān (*lafzi tafsīr*) from time to time. Once again, this demonstrates that it is difficult to compartmentalise Nursi into conventional categories.

As a *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān, the *Risale-i Nur* expands on the teachings of the Qur’ān by incorporating classical Islamic sciences and modern scientific knowledge, while at the same time refuting the bases of materialist philosophy.¹⁴ It gives priority to the question of certain affirmative belief (*taḥqīqī imān*), also described as ‘belief by investigation’, and does this in a way that is relevant to the needs of today.¹⁵ *Taḥqīqī imān*, which is conscious verification of belief, is the opposite of belief by imitation (*taqlīdī imān*). Nursi felt that *taqlīdī imān* “could be easily negated by the scepticism of the scientific age.”¹⁶ It is common for scholars to criticise *taqlīdī imān* and warn individuals against its potential dangers. However, they have not been as successful in replacing *taqlīdī imān* with *taḥqīqī imān*. Nursi’s real difference and contribution has been to not only warn against the potential dangers and shortfalls of *taqlīdī imān*, but to also instil *taḥqīqī imān* into the hearts, with the full awareness that only *taḥqīqī imān* provides inner peace to believers.

Therefore, it was essential to have faith that was grounded on knowledge that could resist all challenges. In his own words, Nursi reflects on how he was searching for a “short way to obtain firm faith and a complete understanding of Islam that would not be shaken by the attacks of the numerous damaging currents.”¹⁷ In response to this search, he explains how the *Risale-i Nur* was bestowed on him “which is a safe, short way inspired by the Qur’ān for the believers of the

¹³ Said Nursi, *The Rays*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler, 1995), 399.

¹⁴ Şükran Vahide, “Towards an Intellectual Biography,” in *Islam at the Crossroads*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁵ Colin Turner, “Renewal in Islam and Bediuzzaman,” in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözler, 1993), 157.

¹⁶ Şükran Vahide, “A Survey of the Main Spiritual Themes of the *Risale-i Nur*,” in *Spiritual Dimension of Bediuzzaman’s Risale-i Nur*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 6.

¹⁷ Mustafa Sungur, in Necmeddin Şahiner, *Said Nursi ve Nurculuk Hakkında Aydınlar Konuşuyor* [The Enlightened Ones are Talking about Said Nursi and Nurculuk] (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Yayınları, 1979), 399.

present time.”¹⁸ Therefore, Nursi emphasises making the Qur’ān the solution for today’s problems, but he also highlights the point that the Qur’ān is explained in a way that addresses the challenges of today.

As the author of the *Risale-i Nur*, it is important to know Nursi’s disciplinary position. Nursi’s scholarship in the Islamic sciences is well established. Although Nursi emerged from the tradition of Islamic sciences, he presents the essence of what they contained in a different form. He is not a traditional *mufasssır* (exegete), *mutakallim* (theologian) or *mutasawwuf* (scholar of Islamic spirituality); “In this respect Nursi and his works are revolutionary.”¹⁹ Although he strongly follows mainstream Islam in his various views and opinions, the methodology he uses in solving classical and modern theological problems is original. “Most of his writings comprise logical explanations and justifications for core matters of faith and traditions of Islam.”²⁰ In addition, his emphasis on the theology of social responsibility (socialising the theology) allows him to tackle many social and individual problems.²¹ Therefore, his work does not remain theoretical, but provides a template for living out the ideologies and principles that his writings contain. This revolutionary style of writings makes Nursi different from his classical as well as contemporary counterparts in many ways, as will be explored in this thesis. Yet, Nursi wrote in a style that could be understood by his target audience, which was the masses.

When Nursi is asked why the *Risale-i Nur* is so popular and why it has been embraced by so many people like no other book, he responds, “Being a true commentary on the All-Wise Qur’ān through the mystery of its miraculousness, the *Risale-i Nur* demonstrates that in misguidance is a sort of Hell in this world, while in belief is a sort of Paradise.”²² This point brings us closer to the topic of this thesis; Nursi attributes the success of the *Risale-i Nur* to its

¹⁸ Vahide, *An Intellectual Biography*, 167.

¹⁹ Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (USA: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

²⁰ Zeki Sarıtoprak, “Islam and Politics in the Light of Said Nursi’s Writings,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 19, no. 1 (2008): 112.

²¹ Sener Dilek, “The *Risale-i Nur*’s Method and Aim,” in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 117.

²² Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1989), 18-19.

ability to demonstrate how one can attain a Paradise-like state. This, he explains, is through belief. When Nursi's works are reviewed, the Paradise-like state he describes is the state of inner peace.

On this note, it is extremely important that the life of Nursi is studied to appreciate the relationship between Nursi and his works in the context of inner peace. When Nursi's life is reflected upon, it becomes apparent that it is filled with hardships and challenges. Having lived through the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Balkan wars (1911-12), Turkish independence war (1919-1922), World War I and World War II, how is it possible that one could be in a state of inner peace or even write about inner peace? On a personal level, Nursi was sent into exile in 1925 at the age of forty-eight. This marked the beginning of thirty-five years of courts, exiles and imprisonments.²³ Reflecting back on his life, Nursi explains:

In my 80 or so years of life I have known nothing of worldly pleasure. My entire life has been spent on battlefields, in prison camps, or in the jails and court rooms of my country. There is no suffering or torment to which I have not been subjected. I have been treated like a monster by military courts, and exiled from place to place like a vagabond. I have been condemned to months of solitary confinement in the country's prisons. I have been poisoned many times, subjected to all forms of insult...²⁴

Despite these hardships, Nursi was at peace with himself and the events that were taking place around him. He also had the ability to see the positive in everything and relay that positivity to his students during his lifetime and to the readers of his work in today's time. He also instilled hope at what would be considered the worst of times. Nursi had the formula for inner peace, which he lived by and also expressed throughout his writings.

However, Nursi's style was new and unprecedented. Inner peace had not been such a strong focus for any Muslim scholar before. It could be argued that, as the *mujaddid* of the century,

²³ Ahmad Bahjat, "A Short Look at Bediuzzaman's Life of Service," in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 227.

²⁴ Said Nursi, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı* [Historical Biography] (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1991), 604.

Nursi focused on matters that needed attention for today's people and that included explaining how one can attain inner peace. The next section will expand on what it was about Nursi's time that made him focus on a topic that used to be taken for granted in the past.

Area of Research

Islam meaning peace becomes an important point in the discussion of inner peace; Muslims believe the religion of Islam is a source of inner peace, citing various Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* in support of this notion.²⁵ However, inner peace is not a concept that is commonly addressed within Islamic literature. This is not because Islam does not provide inner peace; I would argue the opposite: the Islamic faith assumes one who has faith is naturally at peace because of their faith.

Despite this being the case, Nursi felt the need to articulate how the religion of Islam leads to inner peace, primarily because certain aspects of the Islamic faith were not as apparent as they once used to be. Muslims were showing signs of malfunction, which he attributed to the intellectual and spiritual decline of the Muslim world. Due to the situation at hand, Nursi uses a unique method to explain matters of faith, compared to classical and even contemporary Islamic scholars. Nursi knew the needs of the people and he also knew how to address them.

In this regard, Nursi explains there are two unique conditions in today's time that have led to the method followed in the *Risale-i Nur*. Firstly, he argues that today's people are overwhelmed by emotions so they "prefer an ounce of present pleasure to tons of future joys"²⁶ where the future joys are referring to the joys of the hereafter. For such people, the hereafter is too far away to be concerned about now. The present becomes the motivator and determiner for their actions and decisions. He describes such people as believers, but as being misguided since they are lured to illicit worldly pleasures²⁷ despite knowing they are illicit. After all, traditionally

²⁵ Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* relating to inner peace will be discussed in chapter 1.

²⁶ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 19.

²⁷ Ibid.

speaking, a true believer would not embrace any beliefs or undertake any practises that would put their hereafter in danger.

According to Nursi, “The only way of saving them (believers) from this love of the world and from the danger of succumbing to it is by showing them the hell-like torments and pains they suffer even in this world.”²⁸ Or put another way, demonstrating to believers that their Islamic belief is a source of inner peace, becomes a motivator for them to strongly hold onto their faith and practise their religion. Thus, the immediate pleasures of belief and its practise become an appealing factor for believers who would otherwise easily be lured to illicit worldly pleasures if they were to think the alternative (belief) did not offer them any worldly benefits.

The second unique condition Nursi highlights is that, in former times, science did not challenge faith as it does today.²⁹ Therefore, classical Muslim intellectual writings were able to articulate matters related to belief and knowledge of God without facing any real external challenges to the theological integrity of Islam.³⁰ Their arguments were sufficient, quickly dispelling any unbelief arising from doubts.³¹ This is no longer the case, according to Nursi, as everything now needs to be proven and justified. This obliges the expression and articulation of Islam and its teachings in a way that meets the needs of Muslims who are faced with the challenges of modernity.³² Therefore, explanations and proofs are needed to demonstrate how Islamic belief and its practise leads to inner peace. These explanations become the very evidence for the truth of those beliefs and practises, according to Nursi.³³ That is, if it can be proven that Islam and its practise is a source of inner peace, then Islam must be the truth. Thus, it became Nursi’s mission to prove that Islam well and truly provides inner peace; if Muslims could be convinced

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 23.

³⁰ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi‘, “How to Read Said Nursi’s Risale-i Nur” in *Islam at the Crossroads*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi‘ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 68.

³¹ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 23.

³² Abu-Rabi‘, “How to Read Said Nursi’s Risale-i Nur,” 68.

³³ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 24.

on this matter along with other matters of belief, then their doubts about unbelief would be dispelled.

Before discussing Nursi's approach to inner peace, it is important to review the literature about the *Risale-i Nur* to check whether the topic of discussion has been studied and analysed already. Literature on inner peace will also be studied to provide context for this thesis topic.

Literature Review

1. Literature on Said Nursi and his Works

The literature on Nursi has been growing significantly since the 1990s. While various biographies have been written about Nursi, there have also been books written focusing on particular themes of the *Risale-i Nur*, such as interfaith dialogue, spirituality and ethics. The academic interest in Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* has also increased, particularly through the sponsoring of conferences and recruiting scholars to publish research on the life of Nursi, his thought and his contribution to the renewal of Islamic society.³⁴ Nursi's major works have been translated to fifty languages,³⁵ which has significantly increased the outreach of the *Risale-i Nur*. It is apparent that interest in the *Risale-i Nur* continues to grow at every level, including the world of academia.

2. The Initial Literature Written in English

The *Risale-i Nur* is predominantly written in Turkish, with some parts written in Arabic and Persian. Key individuals played an important role in making the *Risale-i Nur* available in English. Hamid Algar³⁶ (b. 1940) was one of the first scholars to introduce Nursi to the Western academic audience through his translations of the *Risale-i Nur* as early as the 1970s. Algar's

³⁴ Haddad, "Ghurbah as Paradigm for Muslim Life," 238.

³⁵ "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Works," accessed July 26, 2015, <http://www.nurpublishers.com/about-said-nursi/his-works/>.

³⁶ British-American professor emeritus of Persian studies at the Faculty of Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

work also aids in the understanding of the political context of the secular Turkish Republic after the death of Nursi in 1960.³⁷

Şükran Vahide³⁸ (b. 1940) is a key author and scholar to consult in any study on Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*. Vahide has authored two major biographies of Nursi in English and has been the official translator of the *Risale-i Nur* into the English language, having translated a large portion of it. Thus, her work has significantly opened the study of the *Risale-i Nur* to a wider English speaking audience. Her contribution is not only through translations, but also through scholarly contribution. Almost all books written about Nursi or his works has a contribution by Vahide. Vahide's articles and biographies on Nursi provide the most valuable insight into Nursi's life and thought, and are used as one of the main reference points by academics. Therefore, her work is of paramount importance to better understand the life of Nursi and his works.

More recently, some parts of the *Risale-i Nur* have been translated into English by Hüseyin Akarsu. The language used by Akarsu is simpler, making it easier for the layperson to understand Nursi's complex and sometimes philosophical discussions. However, Akarsu's work has received criticism that it loses some of the important meanings within the *Risale-i Nur* by simplifying its content. Vahide's translation remains the most popular.

The *Risale-i Nur* has also been translated into Arabic to make it available to the Arabic speaking world. The collection has been translated by Iḥsān Qālim Şāliḥī. Not only has the collection been translated into Arabic but it is also available in twenty eight languages on a website specifically attributed to Nursi's writings³⁹.

³⁷ Hamid Algar, "The Centennial Renewer: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Tradition of Tajdid," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 3 (September 2001): 291-311.

³⁸ Vahide is a researcher and author of the *Risale-i Nur* and its author.

³⁹ <http://www.saidnur.com/en/>

i. Biographies and Turkish Context

*Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: The Author of the Risale-i Nur*⁴⁰ was the first book to be written in English about the life of Nursi, being published in 1992. This was followed by another biography by the same author, Vahide, in 2005, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*.⁴¹ The second book provides more detailed insight into Nursi's early life after documents were "unearthed in recent years among what remains of the Ottoman state archives, and from private sources."⁴² Both of these are a valuable source for this thesis, particularly in providing a context to Nursi's writings. They also provide insight into Nursi's personal life and the hardships he endured, which become important when discussing inner peace. Colin Turner⁴³ and Hasan Hörküç's⁴⁴ book *Said Nursi: Makers of Islamic Civilization* is a much briefer summary of Nursi's life with many commonalities with Vahide's biographies.

*Anatolia Junction: A Realistic Portrait of the Current Situation in Turkey*⁴⁵ written by Fred Reed⁴⁶ (b. 1939) is another book that focuses on the life of Nursi. However, the book lacks scholarly content, coming across more as a light read instilled with the socio-political state of Turkey. It also lacks critical analysis, drawing a portrait of Nursi that is very biased. On the other hand, Şerif Mardin's book *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*⁴⁷ contributes greatly not only to Nursi studies, but also to the study of

⁴⁰ Şükran Vahide, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: The Author of the Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Sözler Publications, 1992).

⁴¹ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lecturer in Islamic studies and Persian at the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at the University of Durham.

⁴⁴ Research fellow in Islamic and comparative studies, and director of Durham University's Risale-i Nur Studies Program.

⁴⁵ Fred A. Reed, *Anatolia Junction: A Journey Into Hidden Turkey* (Burnaby: New Jersey, 1999).

⁴⁶ Fred Reed is a journalist and translator of literature who has published and translated several books.

⁴⁷ Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: Suny Press, 1989).

the role of Islam in Turkey. His other works and articles on Nursi⁴⁸ give added perspective to Nursi's emphasis on the need for cultural and social influence for reformation to be successful.

3. More Contemporary Topics

A significant shift is being observed in the recent scholarship of Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*; more recent literature has moved away from biographies and writings about the *Risale-i Nur* in the Turkish socio-political context to focusing on topics that are relevant not only to Muslims, but to all of humanity in contemporary times. Topics such as ethics, interfaith dialogue, conflict resolution and spirituality have been identified and addressed through the lens of the *Risale-i Nur*, with the intention of highlighting the relevance of the *Risale-i Nur* as a solution to today's problems.

An example of such an academic work is the collection of essays in *Globalization, Ethics and Islam*⁴⁹ edited by Ian Markham⁵⁰ (b. 1962) and Ibrahim Ozdemir⁵¹ (b. 1960). In this book, Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars reflect upon Nursi's achievements and apply his thoughts to the complex issues of non-violence, dialogue and globalisation.

*Islam at the Crossroads*⁵², a compilation of papers edited by Abu-Rabi'⁵³ (d. 2011), is a critical and key text in any study on Nursi and his thought. Abu-Rabi' upholds that one of the key objectives of the book is to help readers understand "Nursi's work as a modern Muslim theological text that grapples with both historical and philosophical problems,"⁵⁴ and by doing so, putting Islam in a position to address the challenges faced with modernity. There are many

⁴⁸ See Şerif Mardin, "Reflections on Said Nursi's Life and Thought," in *Islam at the Crossroads* (2003); Şerif Mardin, "Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: The Shaping of a Vocation," in *Religious Organization and Religious Experience* (Istanbul: C.S, 1982); Şerif Mardin, "Bediüzzaman's Understanding of Striving (Jihad) is not Armed Struggle," in *Panel 1 Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, 1993).

⁴⁹ Ian Markham, *Globalization, Ethics and Islam: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005).

⁵⁰ Ian Markham is a professor of theology and ethics.

⁵¹ Ibrahim Özdemir is a professor of philosophy, ecology and religion.

⁵² Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Islam at the Crossroads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

⁵³ Ibrahim Abu-Rabi' was a professor in Islamic studies in the Department of History and Classics at the University of Alberta, Canada.

⁵⁴ Abu-Rabi', *Islam at the Crossroads*, ix.

relevant resources in this book for the topic of inner peace; Abu-Rabi's "How to Read Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur" helps to empathise with Nursi, due to the challenges he endured, which is important for this thesis. He also discusses Nursi's positive approach to exiles, making it an important component of Chapter Four where Nursi's response to struggles is covered. Mehmet Aydin's "The Problem of Theodicy in the Risale-i Nur" provides good analysis of Nursi's explanation of theodicy, which is essential for developing a positive worldview. Yvonne Haddad's "Ghurbah as Paradigm for Muslim Life" helps to further appreciate Nursi's response to exiles as Haddad compares exiles to *ghurbah*, someone who lives away from their homeland, after which she demonstrates how it is an important means of getting closer to God.

There are two recent books that focus on interfaith dialogue. Ian Markham is the author of one of these books where he develops a model for interfaith dialogue: *Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, a Model of Interfaith Dialogue*.⁵⁵ The second is *Said Nursi's Views on Muslim-Christian Understanding*,⁵⁶ a book written by Thomas Michel with a particular focus on Christian-Muslim dialogue. Although these books have not been used for this thesis, they are a demonstration of Nursi's awareness of today's needs. Living in a globalised world, interfaith dialogue has become essential where different cultures and religions are interacting more than ever before.

One of the books most relevant to this thesis is Abu-Rabi's edited book, *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur*.⁵⁷ As the editor states, the objective of the book is to "present the reader with a picture of the spiritual dimensions of a major religious movement in the contemporary Muslim world by focusing on spiritual ideas of its leader."⁵⁸ Key topics related to inner peace are addressed, such as self-awareness, the need for hope, dealing with

⁵⁵ Ian Markham, *Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, A Model of Interfaith Dialogue* (Vermont: Ashgate, 2009).

⁵⁶ Thomas Michel, *Said Nursi's Views on Muslim-Christian Understanding* (Istanbul: Söz Basım Yayın Ltd, 2005).

⁵⁷ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, ed., *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

⁵⁸ Abu-Rabi, *Spiritual Dimensions of Risale-i Nur*, vii.

suffering and the importance of worship. These topics contribute towards the understanding of inner peace as they play an important role in the way one perceives their life and environment. This, in turn, affects the state of one's inner world. Despite the relevance of this book to inner peace, the nature of the book, which is a compilation of papers written by different authors, does not allow in-depth study of the topics addressed. Also, it focuses on certain aspects of spirituality and therefore does not delve into matters of theodicy in too much detail, which is an important part of inner peace. Additionally, one of the shortfalls of edited books, such as this one, is that different authors tackle different topics. Although there is a theme of spirituality across them all, they are often not interconnected, so one author may address the analogies used by Nursi, while another discusses hatred as the root of violence. As a result, many topics are covered briefly and separately.

Another book edited by Abu-Rabi' is *Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought: The Case of Said Nursi*.⁵⁹ In this book, the contributors unpack Nursi's understanding of important concepts related to theodicy and justice, such as hereafter, death, final judgement, evil and suffering. They are explained and analysed in a way that they can be understood in this era. There are also comparative studies included where Nursi's views of theodicy and justice are compared to a number of Western philosophers and theologians, such as Dante, Merton, Kant and Moltman. The key objective of the book is to provide a contemporary understanding of God's justice and wisdom as explained by the *Risale-i Nur*, making the book an important reference for this thesis, particularly when discussing worldview and suffering. However, because the focus is theodicy and justice, other factors that can contribute to inner peace, such as relationship with God and self-awareness, are not part of the book's discussion. Thus, the book fulfils its own purpose, but it does not fulfil the purpose this thesis is trying to achieve, which is to identify the factors that contribute to inner peace.

⁵⁹ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', ed., *Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought: The Case of Said Nursi* (Vermont: Ashgate, 2010).

More recently, another edited book, edited by Hasan H rk  , has been published: *God, Man and Mortality: The Perspective of Bedi zzaman Said Nursi*,⁶⁰ which consists of essays related to the title of the book although the scope is broad, covering Divine immanence and transcendence, human spirituality, humankind’s role as Divine vicegerent and so on. There are essays that are relevant to this thesis, such as Zeki Saritoprak’s “Nursi on the Problem of Theodicy,” but otherwise it is a very theocentric book, which serves its own purpose.

Having mentioned the edited books, there are also books emerging that have a single author. Ali  nal’s *General Principles in the Risale-i Nur Collection for a True Understanding of Islam*⁶¹ is one of those books. A unique book as  nal identifies general principles within the *Risale-i Nur*, categorises them and then very briefly discusses them. The objective of the book appears to be to get people thinking, believing and living according to Islam. Therefore, the book is more reflective in nature than academic.

A book that has brought the literature on the *Risale-i Nur* to a new level is Colin Turner’s *The Qur’an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi’s Epistles of Light*.⁶² In this book, Turner provides 643 pages of critical analysis of the 6,000 page collection, making it the first of its kind. The book is divided into eighteen topics like “buildings of a complex,” as described by Turner.⁶³ Some of these chapters are highly relevant to this thesis, such as “The Hereafter,” “Belief and Unbelief,” “Spirituality” and particularly “Practical Wisdom and Pastoral Theology,” where Nursi’s advice regarding matters such as death, imprisonment and illnesses are analysed. An important point Turner makes when comparing the *Risale-i Nur* to a complex

⁶⁰ Hasan H rk  , ed. *God, Man, and Mortality: The Perspective of Bedi zzaman Said Nursi*. (N.J.: Tughra Books, 2015).

⁶¹ Ali  nal, *General Principles in the Risale-i Nur Collection for a True Understanding of Islam* (N.J.: Tughra Books, 2015).

⁶² Turner, *The Qur’an Revealed*.

⁶³ Ibid, 4.

building is that many of the buildings that make up the complex remain unexplored,⁶⁴ opening the door of possibility for different research areas.

Has there been anything written precisely about inner peace and the *Risale-i Nur*? There are no books, but there are two papers. Thomas Michel's paper titled "Inner Peace"⁶⁵ would be the first. This paper explains how Nursi divides peace into three categories: practical, psychological and universal. Practical peace is linked to one's practical efforts to gain eternal peace or salvation. Psychological peace is described as the state of "tranquillity and peace of mind, an inner confidence born of faith that enables the religious believer to face adversity without anxiety or despair."⁶⁶ The connection between faith and inner peace resonates with the approach of this thesis, however, how belief actually achieves such a state of inner peace is not discussed. The expression of inner peace is the point of discussion of the paper, explaining how a believer can face death without anxiety, which gives one peace of mind. Similarly, Michel explains how, when Nursi and his students were incarcerated, they did not try to change what they could not, which gave them peace of mind. However, the question of 'what is it about belief that enables a person to have peace of mind under such difficult circumstances?' is not addressed. Answering the 'how' of inner peace is pivotal for this thesis.

Finally, universal peace is discussed, with a particular focus on Nursi's active non-violence method of activism. Michel then changes the focus of his paper slightly and spends some time discussing the relationship between forgiveness and peace, highlighting that forgiveness will generate inner peace and universal peace. But once again, the 'how' is not answered.

This paper of Michel's, along with other papers he delivered on various occasions, particularly successive "International Symposia on Bediüzzaman Said Nursi," have been compiled in

⁶⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁶⁵ Thomas Michel, "Inner Peace," *Nur Web Page*, January 5, 2006, accessed January 2, 2014, http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Inner_Peace_82.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Insights from the Risale-i Nur: Said Nursi's Advice for Modern Believers.⁶⁷ There are two chapters from this book that are relevant to this thesis: “God’s Justice in Relation to Natural Disasters” and “Pardon and Peace according to Pope John Paul II and Said Nursi” – the paper that was formerly known as “Inner Peace” after some modifications.

The second paper that discusses inner peace is “Contentment in Search of Inner Peace a Look at the Thought of Nursi and Sikh Gurus.”⁶⁸ When focusing on Nursi’s work, Singh demonstrates there is a relationship between frugality and contentment, stating they have “a symbiotic relationship.” The entire paper is written with an implicit suggestion that contentment means inner peace. However, this definition of inner peace is not justified or supported in any way. Through the analysis of these two papers, as well as other literature on inner peace, it becomes apparent very quickly that there are varying understandings of what inner peace is and, more often than not, inner peace is not defined.

Hence, when the English literature about Nursi and his work is evaluated, it becomes apparent that the number of sources is increasing with some of the books now specialising on particular themes found within the *Risale-i Nur*. However, there is very little about inner peace with only two papers directly addressing the topic. Why would this be so? If inner peace is such a prevalent topic within the *Risale-i Nur* as I am claiming, why has so little been written about it? Colin Turner answers this questions succinctly when he compares the *Risale-i Nur* to a whole complex of edifices. He makes the point that many of the buildings (edifices) that make up the complex remain unexplored. Even those buildings that have been open to the public for years, contain rooms, passages and tunnels that remain locked to this day.⁶⁹ I would argue that the

⁶⁷ Thomas Michel, *Insights from the Risale-i Nur: Said Nursi's Advice for Modern Believers*. (N.J.: Tughra Books, 2013).

⁶⁸ Nirmal Singh, “Contentment in Search of Inner Peace: A Look at the Thought of Nursi & Sikh Gurus,” *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, accessed July 26, 2015, <http://www.bediuzzamansaidnursi.org/en/icerik/contentment-search-inner-peace-look-thought-nursi-sikh-gurus>.

⁶⁹ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 5

topic of inner peace is one of those buildings where the door is slightly ajar, but has not yet been entered.

Since the majority of the *Risale-i Nur* is written in Turkish, it is important to review the literature written about Nursi and his works in Turkish as well. However, most of the literature is on topics other than inner peace: *Kur'ân İlimleri ve Tefsir Açısından Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin Eserleri* [The Writings of Said Nursi from the Aspect of the Sciences of the Qur'ân and Exegesis],⁷⁰ *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı'ndan Damlalar* [Drops from the Risale-i Nur Collection],⁷¹ *Müslümanlık ve Nurculuk* [Being a Muslim and Being a Follower of Nursi],⁷² *Bediüzzaman ve Siyaset* [Bediüzzaman Politics],⁷³ and *Risale-i Nur'dan İlmi ve İmani Tahliller* [Scientific and Faith Analysis from the Risale-i Nur].⁷⁴

The website <http://www.gencnur.com/turkish/akad4.htm> lists over 200 books that have been published about Said Nursi or his works. Of these, there is not a single book that is about inner peace. There are a few books that indirectly address inner peace, such as *Bediüzzaman'dan Çözümler* [Solutions from Bediüzzaman],⁷⁵ where the author Ibrahim Canan⁷⁶ (d. 2009) discusses solutions to the social problems of the Muslim world, such as overcoming the disunity among Muslims and the way to achieve peace within the world. Therefore, the focus is global peace with some slight focus on how this affects inner peace. Reviewing the Turkish literature about Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* once again highlights the negligible amount written on inner peace from the *Risale-i Nur* perspective. However, this is not reflective of the quantity of

⁷⁰ Niyazi Beki, *Kur'ân İlimleri ve Tefsir Açısından Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin Eserleri* [Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's Writings from the Perspective of the Sciences of the Qur'ân and Tafsîrs] (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 1999).

⁷¹ Bilal Eren, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı'ndan Damlalar* [Drops from the Risale-i Nur Collection] (Istanbul: Anahtar Yayıncılık, 1991).

⁷² Turan Dursun, *Müslümanlık ve Nurculuk* [Being a Muslim and Being a Follower of Nursi] (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1996).

⁷³ Bekir Berk, *Bediüzzaman ve Siyaset* [Bediüzzaman Politics] (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 1993).

⁷⁴ Cemal Doğan, *Risale-i Nur'dan İlmi ve İmani Tahliller* [Scientific and Faith Analysis from the Risale-i Nur] (Istanbul: Alem Yayınları, 1993).

⁷⁵ Ibrahim Canan, *Bediüzzaman'dan Çözümler* [Solutions from Bediüzzaman] (Istanbul: Ibrahim Canan, 1993).

⁷⁶ Ibrahim Canan was a professor in Islamic theology and an author of many books.

literature written on inner peace when all literature on the topic matter is reviewed, as will be seen in the next section.

4. Literature on Inner Peace

Generally speaking, there is a vast pool of literature available on the topic of inner peace, since inner peace is a state desired by the natural human disposition. Attaining it has been the ambition of both the religious and irreligious. As a result, various techniques and methods have been put forward to attain inner peace. This section will review literature that relates to inner peace. Therefore, the review will not be limited to Islamic literature only. Although this thesis is not a comparative study and therefore addresses inner peace from an Islamic perspective, providing a review of non-Islamic literature offers valuable insight into the position of Islamic literature on the topic in relation to other religions. After all, it could be claimed that all religions seek to provide inner peace. Having an appreciation of the level of focus on the topic by the various religions and no religions, helps to slot Islamic literature on a spectrum within the discipline. This task will further demonstrate the vast gap that exists for Islamic literature on inner peace.

5. General Literature on Inner Peace

When scanning the literature on inner peace, it becomes evident that most of the literature on this topic has been written from the Buddhist and Hindu perspectives. Considering Buddhism and Hinduism are Eastern religions, the number of books written in a style that appeals to a Western audience is impressive to say the least.

One example of such a book is *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence*,⁷⁷ a compilation of essays that highlights the teachings and principles of Buddhism on the topic of peace. Ultimately, inner peace is achieved through detaching the self from the

⁷⁷ Kenneth Kraft, ed., *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

material world, according to Kenneth Kraft (b. 1949).⁷⁸ The author relays the message that the reason why Buddhists have been so successful in achieving peace and nonviolence, is due to the inner peace that Buddhism offers. The fact there were no Buddhist crusades or inquisitions are seen as evidence for the peaceful nature of Buddhism.⁷⁹ Due to this strong and supported association between Buddhism and peace, as contended in this book, inner peace books that are based on Buddhist teachings have become very popular.

The promotion of a state of inner peace by well-known Buddhist religious leaders, such as the Dalai Lama, have also played a key role in reinforcing the association between Buddhism and inner peace. The Dalai Lama not only talks about inner peace in many of his speeches, but his words on the topic have also been the source of content for a number of books on inner peace. *The Art of Happiness*⁸⁰ is such an example, a best seller written in collaboration with Howard Cutler; 1.5 million copies have been sold in the US alone and the book remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for almost two years.⁸¹ The Dalai Lama's comments are often generic and light, engaging people from different backgrounds. The book's website describes the book to have a rational approach that can be practiced by individuals from any background, tradition or religion.⁸² Comments or reflections like, "The basis for inner peace is love and compassion"⁸³ are common. Due to the inclusive language, the book is made relevant to everyone.

Such an inclusive approach by authors is quite common with spiritual books; although the spiritual leader may be from a different faith tradition to the reader, there can be a great appeal in what is being taught as certain philosophies are deemed relevant to people of all faiths. In

⁷⁸ Kenneth Kraft is a professor of religious studies at Lehigh University, Pennsylvania.

⁷⁹ Kraft, *Inner Peace, World Peace*, 112.

⁸⁰ Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living* (New York: Riverhead, 1998).

⁸¹ <http://www.theartofhappiness.com/>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Rajiv Mehrotra, *All You Ever Wanted to Know from His Holiness the Dalai Lama on Happiness, Life, Living, and Much More: Conversations with Rajiv Mehrotra* (Carlsbad, Calif: Hay House, 2008), 48.

such cases, the spiritual leader explains certain concepts without referring to any particular religion, drawing on fundamental principles rather than religious texts.

Sri Chinmoy (d. 2007) is another example of a religious leader who uses inclusive language. Chinmoy, who draws upon Hindu principles, is claimed to have written over 1,500 books, according to his followers.⁸⁴ The books have wide appeal as Chinmoy states all religions are divine and therefore embraces people of all faiths. Chinmoy has written on topics such as *The Inner Promise: Paths to Self Perfection*⁸⁵ and *The Wings of Joy: Finding your Path to Inner Peace*⁸⁶. His key message is that inner peace is achieved through self-realisation, and self-realisation is God-realisation, “for God is nothing other than the Divinity that is deep inside each one of us.”⁸⁷ Although Chinmoy may embrace all religions, this description of inner peace is not one that could be embraced by all religions since the notion that human beings are Divine is not a teaching of many religions, including Islam. Chinmoy’s approach is not only theological, but it is also practical as he puts great emphasis on meditation as a means for inner peace.⁸⁸

Books have also been written from faith perspectives other than Buddhism and Hinduism. Father Gerard Dowling⁸⁹ (b. 1932) draws on insights from the Bible and the teachings of Jesus in his book titled *Achieving Inner Peace*.⁹⁰ The book is written for “people suffering from scruples, whose lives were daily tormented by excessive feelings of guilt and worries about committing sin.”⁹¹ *Pathways to Inner Peace*⁹² is another book written by a Christian author, Reverend James Webb.⁹³ However, the book is described as not being based on one religious

⁸⁴ http://au.srichinmoycentre.org/resource/chinmoy_books

⁸⁵ Sri Chinmoy, *The Inner Promise: Paths to Self Perfection* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

⁸⁶ Sri Chinmoy, *The Wings of Joy: Finding your Path to Inner Peace* (New York: Fireside Book, 1997).

⁸⁷ Chinmoy, *The Wings of Joy*, 13.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Father Gerard Dowling is an Australian Catholic priest and radio personality.

⁹⁰ Gerard Dowling, *Achieving Inner Peace* (NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2008).

⁹¹ As written on the back cover of the book.

⁹² James Webb, *Pathways to Inner Peace: Life-Saving Processes for Healing Heart-Mind-Soul* (Virginia: Prism Pub., 1999).

⁹³ Rev. Jim Webb is an ordained interfaith minister.

practice and being suitable for people of all religious and philosophical beliefs. Webb explains how one needs to learn to freely receive the pleasures that God endowed so one can live without guilt, fearful expectations or self-destructive patterns.⁹⁴

Personal Kabbalah: 32 Paths to Inner Peace and Life Purpose,⁹⁵ written by Penny Cohen,⁹⁶ is a book that focuses on the teachings of the Kabbalah, the mystical aspect of Rabbinic Judaism. Cohen explains that life is filled with universal energies that flow at different rates and intensities. When these energies are channelled, it leads to the experiencing of inner peace and the passion to fulfil the Divine purpose.⁹⁷ Then there is the book titled *Creating Peace by Being Peace: The Essene Sevenfold Path*.⁹⁸ The author of this book, Gabriel Cousens (b. 1943),⁹⁹ addresses the increasingly urgent need to transform humankind with the ancient peace wisdom of the Essenes, a Judaic mystical group, where an essential part of inner peace is to let go of the ego.¹⁰⁰

Not only have many books been written on inner peace, but various journal articles have also been written on the topic. There is even a journal that focuses on happiness, titled “Journal of Happiness Studies.”¹⁰¹ It is a peer reviewed scientific journal devoted to subjective well-being. While the journal does not focus on inner peace, it covers many topics that overlap with inner peace, such as life satisfaction and reducing stress levels. It is worth noting that none of the articles within the journal have the words “inner peace” in their title. Therefore, it appears the journal focuses more on material factors that contribute to happiness without a real theological interest for the process of inner peace.

⁹⁴ As written on the back cover of the book.

⁹⁵ Penny Cohen, *Personal Kabbalah: 32 Paths to Inner Peace and Life Purpose* (New York: Stirling Publishing, 2005).

⁹⁶ Penny Cohen is an author and a clinical social worker/therapist.

⁹⁷ Cohen, *Personal Kabbalah*, 9.

⁹⁸ Gabriel Cousens, *Creating Peace by Being Peace: The Essene Sevenfold Path* (California: North Atlantic Books, 2008).

⁹⁹ Gabriel Cousens is an American physician and a spiritual writer.

¹⁰⁰ Cousens, *Creating Peace by Being Peace*, xx.

¹⁰¹ <http://link.springer.com/journal/10902>

There are many articles in various journals that address inner peace, highlighting the notion that inner peace is approached by almost all disciplines. For example, “Climate Change and Inner Peace” in *Peace Review*¹⁰² discusses how individuals with inner peace are more likely to be conscious of their personal ecological impact. According to the article, such a consciousness would contribute positively to the environment. That is, inner peace has a positive impact on climate change. Another article on inner peace comprises research on the relationship between meditation and living longer. The article titled “Does Inner Peace Lead to Longer Life?” in *New Scientist*¹⁰³ claims that participants of transcendental meditation, which involves repeating a mantra out loud or in one’s mind to achieve inner peacefulness, live longer. Then there is a journal article that seeks to demonstrate that art education leads to inner peace. “Developing Inner Peace and Joy through Art Education” in *Journal of Social Sciences*¹⁰⁴ produces the results of surveying 400 Bachelor of Education students who undertook a workshop on art education. Based on the survey results, the art education gave peace and joy to the participants.

By briefly discussing three articles that focus on inner peace, it quickly becomes evident that inner peace is addressed by multiple disciplines. This brief discussion was not intended to be comprehensive, but be indicative of the diverse approach to inner peace in journal articles. However, their approach to the topic is very different to the approach of this thesis since these articles often focus on a very specific aspect of the expression of inner peace.

In summary, there is a vast amount of literature focusing on inner peace with different explanations given as to how one attains inner peace, the benefits of inner peace and how inner peace manifests itself. Therefore, non-Islamic literature on inner peace is well-established and

¹⁰² Paul Wapner, “Climate Change and Inner Peace,” *Peace Review* 25, no. 4 (October 2013): 568-575.

¹⁰³ Alison Motluk, “Does Inner Peace Lead to Longer Life?” *New Scientist* 186, no. 2498 (May 2005): 17.

¹⁰⁴ Susmita Lakhyani, “Developing Inner Peace and Joy through Art Education,” *Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2012): 177-181.

thriving in the English speaking world to say the least. The next section will consider Islamic literature written on inner peace.

6. Islamic Literature on Inner Peace

Where does Islamic literature on inner peace fit among this vast collection of literature? The number of sources on inner peace or topics related to it is minimal. There are a handful of classical sources which do exist. However, their approach to inner peace is very indicative of the era they have been written in.

Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī¹⁰⁵ (d. 1111) is one of the classical scholars who wrote on the topic of happiness. His major work, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) was summarised and published in Persian as a book titled *The Alchemy of Happiness*.¹⁰⁶ Whilst there are striking similarities between Nursi's and al-Ghazzālī's approach, there are also striking differences. The commonality would be the strong focus on knowing one's self and knowing God for happiness which they both discuss. However, Ghazzālī also focuses on *ibādāt* (worship) and *mu'āmalāt* (dealings) as key components of attaining happiness. By worship he is referring to matters such as the five pillars of Islam and by dealings he is referring to matters such as manners of eating meals, manners of marriage, manners of journeying and so on.¹⁰⁷ However, in Nursi's writing, there is minimal focus on worship in the way that Ghazzālī focuses on it. There is also almost no focus on dealings. This would be because of the era in which Nursi lived where the basic beliefs of Muslims is in question, making the discussion of matters of faith, top priority. Therefore, inner peace has a very strong association with knowing God. Nevertheless, Ghazzālī is extensively referenced in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 where knowing God and knowing the self is the prime focus. The nuance

¹⁰⁵ Ghazzālī had expertise in various fields including theology, philosophy, jurisprudence and Sufism. He was believed to be a *mujaddid* (renewer of the faith). His work has been so highly acclaimed that he has been referred to as *hujjat al-Islam* (the proof of Islam).

¹⁰⁶ Abu Hamid Ghazzālī, Jay R. Crook, and Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Alchemy of Happiness (Kimiya al-Saadat)* (Chicago, IL: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, xxi.

differences between Nursi's and Ghazzālī's approach to these topics becomes further apparent in these chapters.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah (d.1350)¹⁰⁸ also wrote on the topic of happiness with his book titled *Miftāḥ al-Sa'ādah* (*Key to the Abode of Happiness*).¹⁰⁹ In his book, Ibn Qayyim identifies three contributors to happiness; to be thankful when blessed, to persevere when tried and to seek forgiveness when sins are committed. Like Ghazzālī's, these three points have one thing in common and that is an already existing strong belief in God. Therefore, while this literature serves a person deeply immersed in faith, it may not be as strongly applicable to a person of the twenty first century who needs to deal with many uncertainties related to belief and the challenges that stem from that.

The contemporary books that exist are often written from a Sufi perspective. One such example is *Heart, Self & Soul: The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance, and Harmony*¹¹⁰ written by Robert Frager¹¹¹ (b. 1940). It is a book that has a particular focus on purifying the soul, a common focus of Sufism. Frager explains that love of God is at the core of inner peace, while wisdom also plays a critical role.¹¹² However, while Sufism is considered to be in line with Islamic principles, there can be some beliefs or practises undertaken in the name of Sufism that are problematic. In this book, Frager offers a practical exercise to develop "deep inner peace." He instructs the reader to calm the mind for five to ten minutes. "Do this with absolute faith that God is fully present within you...it is extremely important to sit with the faith that your deepest nature is divine..."¹¹³ Without going into a theological discussion, the wording used in

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah was jurist, commentator on the Qur'ān and a theologian.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Miftāḥ al-Sa'ādah: Saadet Anahtarı: Miftāḥ al-Sa'ādah*, trans. Muhammed İhsan Oğuz, (İstanbul: Ahmet Sait Matbaası: 1968).

¹¹⁰ Robert Frager, *Heart, Self & Soul: The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance, and Harmony* (USA: Quest Books, 2013).

¹¹¹ Robert Frager is the founder of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, now called Sofia University, in California,

¹¹² Frager, *Heart, Self & Soul*, 76.

¹¹³ Ibid.

these instructions is problematic from an Islamic theological perspective. While the author may not imply that a person is Divine, the description of such matters is sensitive and needs to be articulated clearly. The book also constantly refers to Sufi teachings, psychology and practises, implying these are separate to Islamic teachings, psychology and practises. This approach gives the book a Sufi specialised feel, which can give some readers the impression that Sufism is separate to Islam.

Another book that touches on inner peace is *Islam and World Peace: Explanations of a Sufi*.¹¹⁴ It is a compilation of Bawa Muhaiyeddin's¹¹⁵ (d. 1986) talks where the author draws attention to the Sufi aspect of inner peace. As the title indicates, world peace is the primary focus of the book, but there is also discussion of inner peace. As is the tradition with Sufism, there is a strong emphasis on purifying the self. That is, one needs to transform within and have peace in the heart to then be able to spread peace.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the formula to inner peace is explained to be the attaining of God's qualities and remaining in that state.¹¹⁷ As with the prior book, these comments can be misunderstood and need further clarification, but this is not provided. What does it mean to attain God's qualities? Unless these comments are explained, it may give the reader the message that attaining God's qualities means to become God-like or Divine, which goes against Islam's theological principles. Furthermore, the book is political in nature when discussing world peace, which greatly affects the intended spiritual air of the book.¹¹⁸

Finally, a paper titled "Inner Peace Leading to Outer Peace"¹¹⁹ has been written by Zeki Saritoprak¹²⁰. The paper quotes various Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* related to peace with the

¹¹⁴ Bawa Muhaiyeddin, *Islam and World Peace: Explanations of a Sufi* (Philadelphia: The Fellowship Press, 1987).

¹¹⁵ Bawa Muhaiyeddin is a Sufi scholar from Sri Lanka who moved to US in 1971.

¹¹⁶ Muhaiyeddin, *Islam and World Peace*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ The author focuses on places of conflict, such as Jerusalem, providing a chronological history of Jerusalem to demonstrate the ongoing bloodshed that has taken place in that city. It also discusses what the United Nations' role should be and so on.

¹¹⁹ Zeki Saritoprak, "Inner Peace Leading to Outer Peace," *American Baptist Quarterly* 21 (3:2012).

¹²⁰ Zeki Saritoprak is the director of the Bediuzzaman Said Nursi Chair in Islamic Studies, John Carroll University, Ohio.

underlying message that belief in God leads to inner peace. Saritoprak states “Attainment of inner peace is a direct reflection of the divine name the Peace.”¹²¹ To maintain inner peace, the essentiality of the five daily prayers is emphasised, followed by good character and good deeds. When the key points of this paper are compared to the key points in this thesis, there are strong similarities, yet some differences as well. While the importance of knowing God (with a focus on the names of God) and knowing one’s self to attain inner peace is common ground, this paper does not include the importance of worldview for inner peace. It could, however, be that Saritoprak assumes the needed correct worldview will naturally stem out of belief.

In summary, when the literature on inner peace is reviewed, it becomes apparent very quickly that Buddhism is leading the way in its publications on inner peace. It is as though Buddhism has become synonymous with inner peace. Nevertheless, inner peace has been discussed from various religious and non-religious approaches. However, there is negligible literature on inner peace from an Islamic perspective. The classical literature which discuss happiness and inner peace are not so applicable for Muslims of today who face many faith related challenges. On the other hand, the contemporary literature makes an intended strong stance that it is a Sufi perspective of inner peace. While Sufism is considered to be an established discipline of Islamic studies, some of the statements within these particularly books are theologically problematic. Out of all the Islamic literature written about inner peace, Saritoprak’s “Inner Peace Leading to Outer Peace” article has the most striking resemblance to this thesis. However, the limited word count, since it is a journal article, and the fact it focuses on outer peace as well, limits its comprehensive use and analysis in this thesis.

Through this literature review, it becomes very clear there is a vast gap present on the topic of inner peace from an Islamic perspective. How does one attain inner peace according to Islam? More specifically, how does Nursi formulate the attainment of inner peace, based on his *manawi*

¹²¹ Saritoprak, “Inner Peace Leading to Outer Peace,” 329.

tafsīr (spiritual exegesis) of the Qur’ān? How does he articulate the formula for inner peace based on the needs of today? Finally, how does Nursi live out the inner peace formula in his own life? These are the primary questions that will be answered in this thesis. However, before these hefty questions are tackled, it is necessary to outline the theoretical framework that will be followed in this thesis.

Conceptual Framework

The first point to note regarding inner peace in the *Risale-i Nur* is that inner peace is not only a concept, but it is also a process. Being a process, there is a starting point that can also be described as the gateway to inner peace. For Nursi, belief in God is that gateway. Once there is belief in God, the next step is to know one’s self. Knowing the self helps to better understand the relationship between the individual and God, an outcome that contributes to the state of inner peace. Once this relationship has been firmly established, having the correct worldview is the third and final step.¹²² With the correct worldview, life and events can be given meaning in a way that satisfies the heart and mind. Although the three points have been described as steps, it is not necessarily a linear process that consists of a starting and ending point. It is actually a cycle since one feeds the other and then step 3 feeds back to step 1. That is, the correct worldview strengthens belief in God through the knowledge of God that is attained through life experiences. This cycle would continue spiralling upwards, which in turn will enable one’s state of inner peace to spiral vertically and grow. According to Nursi, the cycle can only be kick-started with knowledge of God, which is expressed through the names of God; in Nursi’s work, the names of God are essential for the inner peace process to become a reality. The three step process is demonstrated in the following diagram.

¹²² These steps will be elaborated upon in the Proposed Research Outline section.

Diagram 1: Cyclic inner peace process

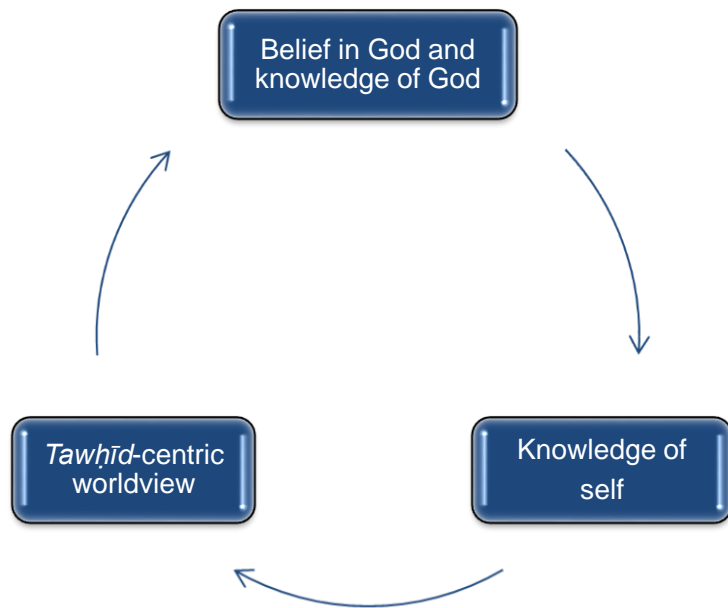


Diagram 2: Upward spiralling third dimension of the process.

Based on this three-step process, the conceptual framework for inner peace, which also forms its definition, is: **Inner peace is attained when the world is decoded through the names of God, so that life and events can be given meaning in a way that satisfies the heart and mind.** In more simple terms, inner peace can be described as giving life and events a *tawhīd*-centric meaning.

There are multiple measures in place to test the soundness of the conceptual framework. The three measures that have been identified to measure the success of this framework are: the logical strength of framework, the Islamic soundness of the framework and the level of support of the framework by the *Risale-i Nur*.

Firstly, the logical strength of the framework will be measured by evaluating how well each step flows to the next: belief in God, knowledge of self and *tawhīd*-centric worldview. Can a clear connection be established between these three steps so a natural flow from one step to another is apparent or does there appear to be breaks in the flow? Does each step clearly build on the previous step? Finally, does step 3 feed back to step 1, as mentioned previously?

Importantly, in the context of this thesis, testing to see if the theory is supported by the Islamic teachings is the second measure for the soundness of this framework. This is an essential measure since this thesis has an Islamic approach to inner peace. The support of the framework by the Islamic tradition will be measured by the relevance of Qur'ānic verses, *ḥadīth* (Prophetic narratives) and the existing Islamic scholarship, to the content of the thesis. Are there Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* that support the overall conceptual framework of the thesis as well as the arguments put forward within each chapter? Conversely, are there Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* that contradict the posed framework? How well do the established Islamic concepts fit in with this thesis and its framework?

Thirdly, since the focus of this thesis will be the process of attaining inner peace based on the writings of Nursi, vis-à-vis *Risale-i Nur*, a measure of the theory's success will be how well the theory is supported by the *Risale-i Nur*. Is there enough content in the *Risale-i Nur* to support the framework put forward? Are there points made in the *Risale-i Nur* that contradict the theory? Are there secondary sources written about the *Risale-i Nur* that support or contradict what is being stated?

These three measure will be evaluated and discussed in the conclusion to see how well the thesis holds up against criteria needed for a successful conceptual framework in this field. Just as important is the methodology followed in this research.

Methodology

It should be kept in mind that the *Risale-i Nur Collection* is not a compilation of books that is just about inner peace, neither is there a chapter or section titled "inner peace." Nursi describes his work as covering topics relevant to the needs and demands of today. However, when covering these topics, his writing does not follow the style of a Western academic work; therefore, the structure and methodology of his work is different to that of academic writing.

Not only is the *Risale-i Nur* a *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān, but it also adopts the style of the Qur’ān, so it has no apparent thematic structure.

Keeping in mind the style of the *Risale-i Nur*, the methodology used in this thesis was the interpretive research method. This research method provides insight and emphasis on meanings and implications of the text being studied. It is also used predominantly to form concepts rather than apply concepts.¹²³ Since inner peace related content is dispersed throughout the *Risale-i Nur*, this research method was found to be appropriate. The text was scanned, meanings were drawn out and themes were systematically categorised. Content analysis in the context of interpretive research was used. The content analysis comprised a three phase analysis: conventional, directed and summative analysis.

Conventional content analysis is generally used to immerse a researcher in the data to allow new insights to emerge, rather than being influenced from preconceived ideas on the topic.¹²⁴ This method is often used when there are very few theories available on a topic.¹²⁵ As was evident from the literature review, there is hardly any content written on inner peace from an Islamic perspective. Therefore, there are no theories or conceptual frameworks available that are relevant to this thesis. A new conceptual framework needed to be developed. Thus, the use of conventional content analysis, through an inductive process, allowed the development of a conceptual framework on inner peace based on the *Risale-i Nur*.

Once the three-step conceptual framework (knowing God, knowing self and *tawḥīd*-centric worldview) was developed, *directed content analysis* was undertaken. This type of analysis is guided by a more structured process than in the conventional approach so key concepts are used

¹²³ Stanley A. Deetz, “Critical Interpretive Research in Organisational Communication,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 46 (1982): 142.

¹²⁴ Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis,” *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (2005): 1279.

¹²⁵ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis. An Introduction to its Methodology* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980), 76.

as initial coding categories.¹²⁶ The key concepts that had been identified in the first phase helped to flesh out the skeleton conceptual framework so the sub-categories became apparent. For example, belief in God was identified as the first step of the framework which leads to inner peace. Through the directed content analysis, the importance of *tawhīd* became apparent as well as the importance of the names of God in the context of belief in God. Thus the directed content analysis predominantly developed the subheadings of chapters 2, 3 and 4.

The final step was the *summative content analysis* where the focus was discovering underlying meanings of the words or content¹²⁷ of the *Risale-i Nur*. This enabled further expansion of the content that had already been developed. For example, Nursi focuses on *tawhīd* so much that it became apparent that Nursi was promoting a *tawhīd*-centric worldview. This worldview would then colour every aspect of life. Nursi also focuses on the names of God but what is it about the names of God which lead to inner peace? Through summative content analysis, it became clear that each name of God contributed to a positive state within the individual, leading to inner peace through their unique contribution to the state of inner peace. These examples will be discussed in detail throughout the thesis. The examples were provided simply to give a better understanding of the methodology applied.

The three phase content analysis was used successfully to develop a detailed, well fleshed out conceptual framework. Once the conceptual framework was established, primary and secondary sources were used to discuss and analyse the conceptual framework in detail.

1. Primary Sources

The primary sources are the *Risale-i Nur Collection* and the Qur'ān. The whole content of the *Risale-i Nur* was studied in a three phase process, as described above. Qur'ānic verses, as quoted and explained by Nursi, were identified for each chapter. Since each chapter (chapters

¹²⁶ James. W. Potter and Deborah Levine-Donnerstein, "Rethinking Validity and Reliability in Content Analysis," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 27 (1999): 267.

¹²⁷ Hsieh and Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," 1284.

2, 3 and 4) is a step within the conceptual framework and since the *Risale-i Nur* is a *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān, it was important to identify Qur'ānic verses that played a foundational role for each chapter. The use of secondary sources followed.

2. Secondary Sources

i. *Tafsīrs* (Exegeses) of the Qur'ān

An important part of my methodology was the analysis of the *tafsīrs* of the Qur'ān. While Nursi's interpretation and analysis of the identified Qur'ānic verses was discussed, they were also compared to the interpretation and analysis of the verses by various *tafsīr* scholars.

The *tafsīr* scholars who were cited are renowned scholars from the classical as well as from the more contemporary period. They include 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abbās¹²⁸ (d. 687), Sahl ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī¹²⁹ (d. 896), Muḥammad ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī¹³⁰ (d. 923), Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn al-Ḥusayn Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī¹³¹ (d. 925), 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Hūzān Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī¹³² (d. 1073), Abu al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī¹³³ (d. 1144), Abū 'Abd Allāh Al-Qurtubī¹³⁴ (d. 1273), Imām Aḥmad ibn 'Amr¹³⁵ (d. 1221), Ibn Kathir¹³⁶ (d. 1373), Baqliyyi¹³⁷ (d. 1294), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī¹³⁸ (d. 1459), Jalāl

¹²⁸ Ibn 'Abbās was one of the cousins of Prophet Muḥammad. He was also one of the early *tafsīr* scholars, having written *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* [*Tafsīr* of Ibn 'Abbās].

¹²⁹ Tustarī was a Sufi and a *tafsīr* scholar. He wrote the *Tafsīr al-Tustarī* [*Tafsīr* of Tustarī].

¹³⁰ Ṭabarī wrote on *tafsīr*, history, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *sīrah* (biography of Prophet Muḥammad) and *ḥadīth* (Prophetic narratives). He wrote the *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* [*Tafsīr* of Ṭabarī].

¹³¹ Rāzī was a theologian and philosopher. He wrote the *Tafsīr-i al-Kabīr* [The Great *Tafsīr*] also known as *Maḥfūṭ al-Ghayb* [The Keys to the Unknown].

¹³² Qushayrī wrote the famous *tafsīr* called *Laṭā'if al-Isharat* [Subtleties of the Illusions].

¹³³ Zamakhsharī was a *tafsīr* scholar who wrote the *tafsīr* titled *Al-Kashshāf* [The Revealer].

¹³⁴ Qurtubī was a scholar of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* (Prophetic narratives) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). He wrote *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* [The Collection of Qur'ānic Injunctions].

¹³⁵ Ibn 'Amr wrote the *tafsīr* titled *al-tā'wīlu'l Najmiyyah fī tafsīr-i Sufiyyi Ish'ariyyi* [Starry Interpretations in Sufi *Tafsīr*].

¹³⁶ Ibn Kathir wrote on *tafsīr*, history and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). He wrote *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* [*Tafsīr* of the Qur'ān].

¹³⁷ Baqliyyi wrote the *tafsīr* titled *Araisu'l Bayan fī Haqaiqi'l Qur'ān* [Muses of Explanation in the Truths of the Qur'ān].

¹³⁸ Maḥallī was a *tafsīr* scholar who first composed *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* [*Tafsīr* of the two Jalāls].

al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505)¹³⁹ and Ismail Haqqī Bursawī¹⁴⁰ (d. 1725). The outcome of such a comparison was that Nursi's work was analysed and examined in light of the major *tafsīrs*. These *tafsīrs* are still reference points in today's world of scholarship and academia. Therefore, it is critical to identify the commonalities and differences that exist between Nursi and other *tafsīr* scholars in the context of inner peace.

It should be highlighted that the classical *tafsīrs* have been predominantly obtained from the website titled Al Tafsir.com¹⁴¹ for this thesis. This website was established by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought,¹⁴² an independent international organisation with its main office located in Amman, Jordan. The website provides classical and contemporary *tafsīrs* of the Qur'ān among many other resources. In making the *tafsīrs* available through the website, each of the Qur'ānic *tafsīrs* have been typed in, word for word, from the original written text. The typed works were then triple checked by different teams of scholars. In support of its reliability, the website has been endorsed by the Rector of Al-Azhar University, Professor Ahmad Al-Tayyib.¹⁴³

ii. Sources Written About the *Risale-i Nur*

Another category of secondary sources that was used are those written about the *Risale-i Nur*. These sources shed light on the *Risale-i Nur* through the scholarly discussions and analysis that have been undertaken about the *Risale-i Nur* from various angles, as explained in the literature review. There are certain authors who have emerged as experts on the analysis of the *Risale-i Nur* in the English language. They include Şükran Vahide, Colin Turner, Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', Zeki Sarıtoprak, Hasan Hörküç and Thomas Michel. Therefore, their writings provide insight

¹³⁹ Suyūṭī was a *tafsīr* scholar who completed *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* [*Tafsīr* of the two Jalāls] which his teacher Maḥallī had commenced.

¹⁴⁰ Bursawī was a Sufi scholar and *tafsīr* scholar. He wrote the *tafsīr* called *Ruhu'l Bayan fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* [The Spirit of the Commentary].

¹⁴¹ <http://www.altafsir.com/>

¹⁴² <http://www.aalalbayt.org/en/index.html>

¹⁴³ <http://altafsir.com/>

into various aspects of the *Risale-i Nur*, which has been valuable for this thesis. Depending on their area of focus, their works have been quoted where appropriate. Authors like Vahide and Turner were quoted extensively as they have not only plenteously written about the *Risale-i Nur*, but they have also written about it from various angles.

Journal articles and conference/symposium papers have also been an important source of information for this thesis. The International *Risale-i Nur* Symposiums in particular have been an important avenue for producing articles on the *Risale-i Nur*. While the first symposium was organised in 1991, the tenth and most recent one was held in 2013; the symposiums are organised every two to three years. A large number of papers from the symposiums has been made easily accessible to the public through the “Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture” website.¹⁴⁴ Each symposium has a different theme. Some of the themes are closely tied with the topic of this thesis, such as “2004: Bringing Faith, Meaning, and Peace to Life in a Multicultural World: The *Risale-i Nur*’s Approach”¹⁴⁵ and “2007: The Role of Justice in Building a Better World.”¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, each symposium has had papers that were related to an aspect of this thesis.

The symposium proceedings have been published as books after each symposium. Where possible, these books have been sourced to cite relevant articles. Some of the articles have also featured in edited books. For example, Abu Rabi’s “Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s *Risale-i Nur*” has a number of papers that were presented at the “2004: Bringing Faith, Meaning, and Peace to Life in a Multicultural World”¹⁴⁷ symposium and “2007: The Role of Justice in Building a Better World”¹⁴⁸ symposium. Also, some of the presented papers have been published as journal articles, such as Turner’s 2007 Symposium presentation paper “The

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.iikv.org/en/>

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/issue/view/46>

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/issue/view/47>

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/issue/view/46/showToc>

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/issue/view/47/showToc>

Divine Name al-’Ādil: The Concept and Ontology of Justice in the Risale-i Nur,” which was published in *Asian Journal of Social Science*.¹⁴⁹ Hence, great diligence was shown to source articles from published sources where available. However, if the articles could not be obtained elsewhere, then they would be obtained from the “Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture” website.

Thus, websites were predominantly used to obtain these two types of sources; the classical *tafsīrs* from the Al Tafsir.com website and the symposium proceedings from the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture website. Sources from these two reliable websites make up about ninety percent of the online sources used in this thesis.

iii. Sources Written About Inner Peace Related Concepts

The third category of secondary sources was the literature written by various classical and contemporary Islamic scholars who have discussed certain concepts and topics tackled in this thesis, such as the names of Allah, the *nafs* (ego), theodicy and love. Using these sources provided a comparison between Nursi and other scholars whose work in particular fields is well-established in the Islamic literary tradition. The classical scholars include Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī¹⁵⁰ (d. 1111), Imām Rabbānī Shaykh Aḥmad al-Farūqī al-Sirhindī¹⁵¹ (d. 1624), ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī¹⁵² (d. 1166), Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Arabī¹⁵³ (d. 1240), Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī¹⁵⁴ (d. 1273). The

¹⁴⁹ Colin Turner, “Bediuzzaman and the Concept of ‘Adl: Towards a Nursian Ontology of Divine Justice,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38 (2010): 554-582.

¹⁵⁰ Ghazzālī had expertise in various fields including theology, philosophy, jurisprudence and Sufism. He was believed to be a *mujaddid* (renewer of the faith). His work has been so highly acclaimed that he has been referred to as *hujjat al-Islam* (the proof of Islam).

¹⁵¹ Sirhindī was a jurist and Sufi. He is often referred to as the *mujaddid* (reviver) of the second millennium.

¹⁵² Jīlānī was a jurist and Sufi. He also taught *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*.

¹⁵³ Ibn ‘Arabī was a philosopher and Sufi. He was referred to as the greatest (Sufi) master.

¹⁵⁴ Rūmī was a poet, jurist, theologian and Sufi. His poetry is still widely read today by Muslims and non-Muslims.

contemporary scholars include Fethullah M. Gülen¹⁵⁵ (b. 1941), William C. Chittick¹⁵⁶ (b. 1943) and Hamza Yusuf¹⁵⁷ (b. 1960).

Often, similarities can be identified between the views of these scholars and those of Nursi, and these similarities have been acknowledged where appropriate. However, there are also unique differences that have been discussed and analysed in the context of the topics being covered.

The transliterations used in this thesis follow Library of Congress (ALA-LC) standard. Where there was the option of using English or Turkish transliteration for words, the English transliteration was used. However, it must be kept in mind that Nursi used Turkish transliteration because he wrote in Turkish. When the words are considered, the English transliteration is often closer to the real pronunciation. *Tawḥīd* (oneness of God) is a good example of this. Because there is no ‘w’ in Turkish, *tawḥīd* would be written as *tevhid*. The English transliteration is much closer to the Arabic pronunciation since the word *tawḥīd* has a letter pronounced as ‘w’. *Ḥadīth* is another example. In Turkish, this word would be written as *hadis* as there is no ‘th’ in Turkish. Once again, *ḥadīth* would be closer in pronunciation to the Arabic word. Where the word is a Turkish word, such as *tekke* (Sufi establishments), then the Turkish transliteration has been used.

Proposed Research Outline

The thesis comprises this introduction, five chapters and the conclusion. Below is a brief outline of each chapter.

¹⁵⁵ Gülen is a contemporary Islamic scholar who has inspired millions through the Hizmet movement. He has also written extensively on various topics.

¹⁵⁶ Chittick is a contemporary scholar with a focus on philosophy Sufism. He has written extensively on the thoughts of Ibn ‘Arabī, Islamic philosophy and Islamic cosmology.

¹⁵⁷ Yusuf is an American Islamic scholar and the founder of Zaytuna College.

1. Chapter 1: Inner Peace in Islam: General Discussion

This chapter provides a general discussion on inner peace from an Islamic perspective with a particular focus on Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth*, which have been quoted in support of inner peace. This is followed by an analysis of Islamic concepts that have established themselves in the Islamic literature and have a strong affiliation with inner peace. The nature of the affiliation is analysed with a focus on their difference to inner peace.

Next, inner peace is reconciled with negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety and frustration, answering the critiquing question “does having inner peace mean that one will never feel sad, anxious or frustrated?” Finally, the negative emotions in the life of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh)¹⁵⁸ are analysed to identify how he reconciled negative emotions with inner peace.

2. Chapter 2: Belief in God and Inner Peace

This chapter examines how belief in and knowledge of God lead to inner peace. Nursi's unique emphasis on the importance of belief for this life when traditionally the benefits of belief have focused on the hereafter is evaluated. Also, Nursi's emphasis on knowing God through the names of God is unpacked. Three names of God are identified to better understand this emphasis.

3. Chapter 3: Knowing One's Self Inner Peace

Chapter 3 analyses how knowing the self leads to inner peace. Nursi broadly divides the relationship between knowing the self and inner peace into four sections. Firstly, to know God, one needs to know the self. Therefore, knowing the self contributes to knowledge of God, which feeds back to the points made in Chapter 1. Secondly, knowing one's self changes the way the self is perceived. Great value is attributed to human beings as a connection is made between

¹⁵⁸ Pbuḥ is short for “peace be upon him.” Out of respect and love for Prophet Muhammad, Muslims make this short prayer for him each time they utter or hear his name. This acronym will not be repeated each time Prophet Muhammad's name is written in this thesis. However, it is implied.

human beings as a creation and God as the creator. This has a significant positive effect. Thirdly, when there is knowledge of the self, there is proper alignment of the self with human nature. This proper alignment means the correct usage of the faculties such as the heart, intellect and emotions. Fourthly, with self knowledge comes the realisation that only God can fulfil the wants and desires of humankind. This then becomes the trigger of worship. These four points are explored in relation to inner peace, as indicated by Nursi.

4. Chapter 4: Islamic Worldview and Inner Peace

Chapter 4 looks at the worldview constructed when belief in God and knowledge of the self are well established. The Qur'ānic verse Nursi quotes in this context is “Who has created everything in the best way.”¹⁵⁹ Nursi's understanding of this verse along with his explanation of suffering is analysed to identify how everything can be viewed with an awareness of the beauty inherent within them. This worldview is then projected to events that are often perceived to be calamities, such as natural disasters, illness and death.

5. Chapter 5: Nursi's Life and Inner Peace

Chapter 5 analyses the life of Nursi due to the importance of understanding how Nursi perceived his life, which was filled with hardships. This chapter sees the previous chapters come to life through the analysis of Nursi's life. Such an analysis sheds light on how Nursi was able to be in a state of inner peace despite the difficulties he encountered. Since Nursi did not refrain from sharing his emotions and thoughts at his lowest points, analysing the elevation in his emotions and thoughts at moments of hardships, provides important insight into how his belief, and resultant worldview, helped him to deal with hardships. Therefore, this chapter could be viewed as a case study of Nursi's life to determine how well he lived out the inner peace process that he put forward.

¹⁵⁹ Qur'ān 32:7.

Due to the objective of chapter 5, I felt it would be best to save the detailed discussion about Nursi's life to chapter 5; therefore, his life has not be discussed extensively in the introduction. Although it may be argued that having an in-depth understanding of Nursi's life from the beginning would enhance the understanding of his works, I decided that discussing Nursi's life in chapter 5 would serve its purpose better since Nursi's life will be analysed in the context of the findings of this thesis. Having said that, there has already been a good amount of discussion about the context in which Nursi lived, as well as the challenges he faced. Furthermore, during Nursi's lifetime, he always sought to divert the focus from himself and put the focus on the *Risale-i Nur*. He did not want the *Risale-i Nur* to be read as a writing by Nursi, but instead he wanted the works to be acknowledged in their own right, as a *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān. By discussing the *Risale-i Nur* before focusing on the author of the writings, it is anticipated this strong stance of Nursi's would also be respected.

6. Conclusion

Concluding remarks are provided, followed by the key findings within the thesis. Finally, recommendations are made for further research.

CHAPTER 1: INNER PEACE IN ISLAM: GENERAL DISCUSSION

1.1 Introduction

Inner peace as a concept has not been extensively discussed in Islamic literature as inner peace per se.¹⁶⁰ However, this does not mean it is a concept foreign to Islam. On the contrary, there are strong ties between Islam and inner peace, linguistically and spiritually to say the least. The very fact that Islam means peace (*salām*) is an important indicator of this point. Acknowledging that one of God's names is *al-Salām* (Source of Peace) is another significant measure. Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* that discuss the notion of peace (*salām*) will be analysed in this chapter to demonstrate the relationship between Islam and inner peace.

A further indication that Islam leads to inner peace is through the presence of concepts such as *riḍā* (contentment), *sakīna* (serenity), *iṭmīnān* (peace) and *husnu al-zann* (positive opinion). These concepts and those like them, have been written about extensively by classical and contemporary scholars. These four concepts have been specifically identified due to their strong association with inner peace. Their association will be studied in this chapter, along with the differences that exist between them and inner peace.

Furthermore, while arguing that inner peace is at the core of Islam, it makes no claim that one who has inner peace will never experience sadness, frustration, anxiety or other negative emotions, nor is it a claim that one would be in a state of bliss and happiness at all times. Such an assumption would imply that negative emotions stem from having weak faith. It could also wrongly suggest that only those whose relationship with God is shaky, experience negative emotions. This is not the stance of Islam nor this thesis. This chapter will reconcile inner peace with negative emotions while also considering depression and its causes. There will also be an

¹⁶⁰ *Tazkiyyah al-nafs* (purification of the ego) was discussed extensively in the classical period. Although there are similarities between *tazkiyyah al-nafs* and inner peace, they do not have the same meaning. *Tazkiyyah al-nafs* will be discussed in Chapter 3.

analysis of the negative emotions experienced by Prophet Muḥammad as a case study of how negative emotions can be reconciled with inner peace.

1.2 Inner Peace in Islam

1.2.1 The Meaning of Islam

Often the point is made that Islam means peace. Although this notion has almost become a cliché in a world where Islam's relationship with peace is sought to be justified, the topic at hand necessitates its discussion again in light of inner peace. How does Islam mean peace? Lexically, Islam means the act of submitting one's self¹⁶¹ and in the religious context, it means submitting one's self to God. Such a submission is the outcome of having a relationship with God that is marked by absolute trust and confidence in God.¹⁶² Linguistically, Islam means a particular kind of surrender; "it is a surrender in which one is in complete tranquility and peace with that who is the object of the surrender."¹⁶³

The words 'Islam' and '*salām*' (the Arabic word for peace) come from the same root word.¹⁶⁴ This lexical fact further highlights the connection between Islam and peace. What is meant by peace here is not an absence of war, but an absence of turmoil within the self so that inner peace is experienced where one has attained tranquillity and serenity through faith. Islam's literal meaning of peace is also described to be the inner confidence that is born as a result of faith, enabling "the religious believer to face adversity without anxiety or despair."¹⁶⁵

1.2.2 Inner Peace in the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*

The notion that Islam is peace is further alluded to by the following Qur'ānic verse: "Whereby God guides whoever strives after His good pleasure to the ways of peace (*salām*) and He leads

¹⁶¹ Jamal Zarabozo, *What is Islam* (Riyadh: Under-Secretariat of Publications and Research, 2005), 110.

¹⁶² Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 132.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 133.

¹⁶⁴ Zarabozo, *What is Islam*, 110.

¹⁶⁵ Michel, *Insights from the Risale-i Nur*, 41.

them by His leave out of all kinds of darkness into light, and guides them to a straight path.”¹⁶⁶

In explaining this verse, Maḥallī and Suyūṭī state that striving for God’s pleasure is by believing in God, which then opens the way to peace.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, belief in God is seen as the pathway to peace. Ibn ‘Abbās explains this verse as God guiding those who seek His pleasure onto paths of peace, which is the religion of Islam; peace is understood to mean Islam. Ibn ‘Abbās further points out that peace is actually God (*al-Salām*)¹⁶⁸ so seeking God’s pleasure leads one to God (*al-Salām*). That is, according to Ibn ‘Abbās’ *tafsīr*, peace means Islam and peace means God so the word peace (*salām*) is interchangeable with the religion of Islam and God.

Furthermore, in this verse, “Islamic guidance is depicted as the light that leads from darkness to the paths of peace.”¹⁶⁹ Nursi also uses the light analogy in many parts of his writings to indicate that belief sheds ‘light’ on one’s life, such that “belief saves man from seeing the world as empty, grievous, desolate, purposeless, and abounding in perils and enemies.”¹⁷⁰ Hence, Nursi explains that if one “attains Divine guidance and belief enters his heart...then the universe will suddenly take on the colour of day and be filled with Divine light.”¹⁷¹ Nursi’s use of the light analogy will be discussed further in the next chapter. Accordingly, it is sufficient for now to state that Nursi uses the same analogies as those used in the Qur’ān and, just as the Qur’ān uses the light analogy to mean belief, which leads to peace, so does Nursi.

As further evidence of the relationship between inner peace and Islam, the names of God can be studied; the names of God are important in Islam as they are a means of knowing and relating

¹⁶⁶ Qur’ān 5:16

¹⁶⁷ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* [*Tafsīr* of the Two Jalals], trans. Aisha Bewley (London: Dar Al Taqwa, 2007), 243.

¹⁶⁸ Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās* [*Tafsīr* of Ibn ‘Abbās], trans. Mokrane Gezzou (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2008), 135.

¹⁶⁹ Shin Chiba and Thomas John Schoenbaum, *Peace Movements and Pacifism After September 11* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2008), 114.

¹⁷⁰ Muhammed Rushdi Ubayd, “The Thought of Said Nursi: A Contemporary Approach,” *Nur Web Pages*, accessed January 2, 2014, http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/The_Thought_of_Said_Nursi_A_Contemporary_Approach_191.

¹⁷¹ Said Nursi, *The Words*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 322.

to God.¹⁷² *Al-Salām* (Source of Peace) is one of the names of God that has been well-documented in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*. *Al-Salām* is mentioned in the following Qur’ānic verse: “God is He, other than Who there is no deity; the Sovereign, the Holy One, the **Source of Peace**, the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety...”¹⁷³ Based on this verse, peace comes from God, since God is the source of peace. Furthermore, Nursi explains that the purpose of life for human beings is to mirror the names of God.¹⁷⁴ When a person mirrors or manifests the Divine name *al-Salām*, it means that one would feel a sense of peace and tranquillity in their life.¹⁷⁵

When explaining this Qur’ānic verse, a linguistic *tafsīr* scholar from the classical period, Zamakhsharī, states that the source of peace means granter or donator of peace.¹⁷⁶ That is, it is God who grants inner peace to humankind. Bursawī, an Ottoman *tafsīr* scholar, states that God must be asked for peace in this world and the hereafter. He further describes a peaceful person to have a peaceful and purified heart, with no jealousy, evil inclination, deceit or envy. Also, their organs (eyes, tongue, hands, etc.) are not misused. Such a person’s desires have not taken control of their intellect. That is, their reasoning is not blurred by their desires.¹⁷⁷ Thus, Bursawī provides a detailed description of the qualities found within a person of peace.

The word *salām* is also the key word in the Islamic greeting, *assalamu alaykum* (peace be with you). Prophet Muḥammad encouraged the use of this greeting in various *ḥadīth*. In one *ḥadīth*, he states, “Offer food generously to others, initiate the greeting of *salām* (peace) to those whom you know and those whom you do not know.”¹⁷⁸ In response to this instruction by Prophet Muḥammad, Muslims exchange this greeting when commencing any type of communication

¹⁷² This point about the names of God being as a means to relate to God will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

¹⁷³ Qur’ān 59:23.

¹⁷⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 141.

¹⁷⁵ Saritoprak, “Inner Peace Leading to Outer Peace,” 329.

¹⁷⁶ Abu al-Qāsim Maḥmūd Zamakhsharī, “Al-Kashshāf” [The Revealer], accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=2&tSoraNo=59&tAyahNo=23&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

¹⁷⁷ Ismail Haqqi Bursawī, “Rūḥu'l-Bayān” [The Spirit of the Commentary], accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=36&tSoraNo=59&tAyahNo=23&tDisplay=yes&Page=3&Size=1&LanguageId=1>.

¹⁷⁸ Ibn Mājah, vol. 4, book 29, *Ḥadīth* 3253.

or when passing by each other. By offering peace to others, the greeting “helps to relieve hearts of all forms of enmity and grudges and rancor people may keep within them, replacing it with good will, mutual respect, tranquillity, security and happiness.”¹⁷⁹

There is also an invocation that Prophet Muḥammad encouraged Muslims to recite after each of the five daily prayers. The invocation focuses on the name of God, *al-Salām*: “O God, you are peace and from you is peace. Blessed are you, the Majestic and Generous.”¹⁸⁰ The invocation reaffirms the notion that God is peace and He is the source of peace. Therefore, Muslims are reminded five times a day that they should seek peace and they should seek it from God.

Furthermore, in the prescribed five daily prayers, the final stage of the prayer ends with a greeting of peace where the worshipper turns their head to the right and says “Peace and mercy of God be with you” followed by turning the head to the left and repeating the same phrase. This is based on the practise of Prophet Muḥammad, as documented by the *ḥadīth*: Amr ibn Sa’d related that his father said, “I saw the Prophet making the *salām* on his right side and on his left side...”¹⁸¹ This well-documented and well-established practice is performed by Muslims at the end of each prayer, five times a day, every day. The greeting is “intended to give peace and mercy to human beings and angels who may be joining them in prayer.”¹⁸² Therefore, the notion of spreading peace and encouraging others to attain inner peace is the direct outcome of a *ḥadīth* that inspires such acts.

As evident from the presence of the word *salām* in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, there is an important place in Islam for the concept of inner peace. Not only is it linked to belief, but God is seen as an embodiment of peace and therefore the source of peace. This notion is imperative as it demonstrates that the concept of inner peace is not foreign to Islam at all; it is actually at the

¹⁷⁹ Abdul Rahman Al-Sheha, *Islam is the Religion of Peace* (Riyadh: Saudi Arabia World Wide Association for Introducing Islam, 2011), 12.

¹⁸⁰ Abu Dawud, book 8, *ḥadīth* no. 1507.

¹⁸¹ Related by Aḥmad, Muslim, Nasā’ī and Ibn Mājah.

¹⁸² Saritoprak, “Inner Peace Leading to Outer Peace,” 330.

core of it. To further augment the notion that inner peace is an integral part of Islam, the next section will discuss concepts that have a close relationship with inner peace.

1.3 Islamic Concepts Similar to Inner Peace

Concepts related to inner peace have been the focus of Islamic scholars for centuries, particularly in the discipline of *tasawwuf*. It is important to acknowledge what already exists to avoid the impression that inner peace is a completely new phenomena that does not have any ties to the already established concepts.

Not only have these concepts been discussed in Islamic literature, but they have also been embraced by *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* scholars, since there are various Qur’ānic verses and *ḥadīth* related to these concepts. The next section will analyse and evaluate what has been written in this area thus far. This will also serve the purpose of determining whether there is a distinction between inner peace, as defined by this thesis, and the existing concepts that have close ties with inner peace. It needs to be clearly demonstrated that what is being put forward in this thesis is not a repetition of what has already been said in the literature. The first concept that will be discussed is *riḍā* (contentment).

1.3.1 *Riḍā* (Contentment)

Riḍā, which is often translated as contentment, has also been translated as resignation and satisfaction. In essence, it means “showing no rancor or rebellion against misfortune, and accepting all manifestations of Destiny without complaint and even peacefully.”¹⁸³ Muḥammad ibn Khafīf¹⁸⁴ (d. 982) separates *riḍā* into two types; *riḍā* with God and *riḍā* with what comes from God. *Riḍā* with God is when one is content with God’s arrangement of affairs, while *riḍā* with that which comes from God is contentment with His decree.¹⁸⁵ God’s arrangement of

¹⁸³ Fethullah Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*, vol. 1 (New Jersey, USA: The Light Inc, 2006), 104.

¹⁸⁴ Muḥammad ibn Khafīf was a Sufi scholar from Persia.

¹⁸⁵ Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayrī’s Epistle on Sufism*, trans. Alexander Knysh (UK: Garnet Publishing, 2007), 207.

affairs would be the systems and processes that He has put in place in the universe which affect human beings in every way, since human beings are part of that system. Thus, one is content in this system that one finds themselves to be a part of.

Having *riḍā* with God's decree means accepting whatever God has ordained for a person, even if it appears to be negative. Rabi'a al-Adawiyyah (d. 801), a famous female Sufi, sees it as more than accepting God's decree; she describes *riḍā* as "When he rejoices at afflictions as much as he rejoices at bounty,"¹⁸⁶ so a person feels the same state of elation no matter what is experienced; good or bad, positive or negative. Therefore, all types of suffering would trigger the same reaction as would a joyful experience. In this understanding of *riḍā*, it "is not a patient bearing and suffering of all the vicissitudes of life, but happiness in poverty and affliction."¹⁸⁷

However, the notion of rejoicing at afflictions is not easy for the layperson. Therefore, *riḍā* has been understood to have levels so an ordinary person's experiencing of *riḍā* is different to that of someone who has profound spirituality.¹⁸⁸ For ordinary people, *riḍā* means not objecting to what God has willed for them and being content to order one's life "according to God's commandments in willing submission to His Lordship and administrative authority."¹⁸⁹

For those with a deeper spiritual knowledge of God, *riḍā* means "welcoming God's decrees and ordinances without objection."¹⁹⁰ At this level, one's connection with God is considered constant so no experience causes swerving of the heart.¹⁹¹ The third level of contentment is that of those who have profound spirituality. At this level, one is pleased with what pleases God so anger, joy or grief is not felt for personal reasons. "Such a person, no longer feeling, thinking, or desiring for himself or herself, experiences the pleasure of annihilation in the Lord, for only

¹⁸⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism*, 208.

¹⁸⁷ Annemarie Schimmel and Carl W. Ernst. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 126.

¹⁸⁸ Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, vol. 1, 108.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 109.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

His Will and decisions remain.”¹⁹² Therefore, the self is negated so that what God is pleased with becomes the driving force, not the needs and wants of the self.

The following Qur’ānic verse encompasses all three levels of *riḍā*: “O you soul at peace. Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with Him), and well-pleasing to Him. Enter, then, among My servants (fully content with servanthood to Me)! And enter my Paradise!”¹⁹³ As indicated by this verse, being content with God’s judgment and being pleased with Him is described to be a source of spiritual peace and happiness in both worlds.¹⁹⁴ The contentment is reciprocated with God being content with the person who is content.

Nursi connects *riḍā* to frugality in various parts of his writings, indicating a strong relationship between the two.¹⁹⁵ According to Nursi, being content means being satisfied with little, so contentment becomes profitable thanks.¹⁹⁶ Thus, *riḍā* is a precursor to *shukr* (thankfulness), which is another important quality for a Muslim to have. For a greater appreciation of the benefits of *riḍā*, Nursi explains the “lack of contentment destroys enthusiasm for work; it causes laziness, opens the door to complaining about life, and makes the dissatisfied person complain continuously.”¹⁹⁷ If lack of *riḍā* leads to such negative emotions, then *riḍā* has to have the opposite effect where it motivates and drives a person in life. This then leads to great satisfaction from life.

1.3.2 *Sakīna* (Serenity) and *Imānān* (Peacefulness)

Sakīna literally means calmness, silence and steadiness so that a person experiences tranquillity.¹⁹⁸ In the context of Islamic spirituality, it also means the heart has come to a rest as a result of its connection with God so it is not shaken by worldly fear, grief or anxiety, and finds

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Qur’ān 89:27-30

¹⁹⁴ Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, vol. 1, 106.

¹⁹⁵ Nirmal Singh, *Searches in Sikhism: Thought, Understanding, Observance* (New Delhi: Hemkunt Publishers, 2008), 145.

¹⁹⁶ Said Nursi, *The Letters*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1995), 338.

¹⁹⁷ Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1995), 197.

¹⁹⁸ Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, vol. 1, 139

peace, integrity and harmony between their inner world and the outer world.¹⁹⁹ Someone with *sakīna*, therefore, is able to deal with the challenges and difficulties that come with life without being shaken so one is not unsettled by such experiences. *Sakīna* is affiliated with the unseen realm rather than drawing its strength from the world that the physical eye can see. For example, a substance that resembled vapour or mist is believed to have surrounded Usayd ibn Khudayr, one of the companions of Prophet Muḥammad, while he was reading the Qur’ān, which gave him a feeling of exhilaration. This feeling of exhilaration is attributed to *sakīna*.²⁰⁰ Thus, it is like a positive energy that surrounds a person, giving them a feeling of peace.

Sakīna is mentioned in the Qur’ān as a means of reaffirming one’s faith; “It is He who sent down tranquillity (*sakīna*) into the hearts of the believers that they would increase in faith along with their [present] faith...”²⁰¹ Maḥallī and Suyūṭī describe *sakīna* as a spirit of peace sent down by God as a Divine reassurance to those who believe.²⁰² Ibn ‘Abbās explains how *sakīna* further reaffirms and strengthens the faith of the believer, adding certainty, belief and knowledge to the faith that one already has.²⁰³

Iṭmīnān (peacefulness), on the other hand, is defined as full satisfaction and contentment so that one is in a state of complete rest. It is a spiritual state surpassing *sakīna*; if *sakīna* is understood to be the “beginning of being freed from theoretical knowledge and awakened to the truth, *iṭmīnān* is considered to be the final point or station.”²⁰⁴ In other words, *sakīna* eventually leads to *iṭmīnān*. But, as indicated above, both have a strong correlation with knowledge that has been internalised rather than theoretical knowledge, which can often be challenged through negative life experiences.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 140.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 139.

²⁰¹ Qur’ān 48:4.

²⁰² Maḥallī and Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 1097.

²⁰³ Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās*, 685.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

The Qur’ān mentions *iṭmīnān* as a level of the nafs (*ego*) that one aspires to achieve: “O you soul at peace. Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with Him), and well-pleasing to Him. Enter, then, among My servants (fully content with servanthood to Me)! And enter my Paradise!”²⁰⁵

Based on this Qur’ānic verse, there is a connection between *iṭmīnān* and *riḍā*: when *raḍiyyah* (being pleased with God) and *marḍiyyah* (being pleasing to God) is achieved, it means a person has reached a state of *iṭmīnān*. Therefore, *iṭmīnān* is the result of having *riḍā* with God and all that He has decreed, but it also necessitates reciprocation of *riḍā* by God. Further, “those who have acquired this rank find the greatest peace only in feeling the company of God.”²⁰⁶ This notion has been expressed in the Qur’ān in the verse: “Indeed, in the remembrance of God do hearts find peace (*tatma-innu*).”²⁰⁷

Therefore, it could be said that inner peace manifests itself through the different states that are experienced in one’s spiritual journey: contentment, serenity and peace.

1.3.3 *Husn al-Zann* (Positive Thought)

Positive thought is the mindset in which everything is viewed, perceived or evaluated on a positive note. From a religious perspective, positive thought denotes having good intentions, undertaking positive thinking and being able to perceive the beautiful in all.²⁰⁸ Positive thought is ultimately one’s approach to life and events. It is about seeing and appreciating the good. The Qur’ān discusses the concept of positive thought in various ways; in some cases, it commands it, while in other cases it encourages it. There are also occasions when the Qur’ān prohibits negative thought.

²⁰⁵ Qur’ān 89:27-30.

²⁰⁶ Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, vol. 1, 141.

²⁰⁷ Qur’ān 13:28.

²⁰⁸ Hikmet Isik, “We Should Think well of Others,” *Fountain Magazine* 64 (2008), accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/We-should-think-well-of-others>.

Positive thought “is first meant to be held towards God and the Universe, including all its contents and events, and human beings.”²⁰⁹ Having a positive thought about God is of paramount importance in Islam as it lays the foundation to the type of relationship one has with God; if one has a positive thought of God, then the relationship is trusting and positive, whereas if one has an ill thought of God, then the relationship is fragmented, resentful and filled with displeasure. Muḥammad Mawlud²¹⁰ (d. 1905) highlights that one of the diseases of the heart that causes great spiritual destruction is displeasure with Divine decree,²¹¹ so one is not able to see the good in what God decrees for the person. Prophet Muḥammad stated “Anyone from among you must not die without having *ḥusn al-ẓann* of God. The people who had *su-i ẓann* (ill opinion) perished.”²¹² Thus, positive thoughts about God is considered important for this life as well as the hereafter. Yusuf pinpoints this ability to have positive thoughts about God to being God-conscious; when God-conscious people are asked about what their Lord has given them, they say that all of it is good,²¹³ expressing their heartfelt positive thoughts about God.

Having positive thoughts about God is so important that it can determine the fate of a person according to a *ḥadīth qudsī* where God declares, “I am as my servant thinks I am.”²¹⁴ Ibn Hajar²¹⁵ (d. 1449), a famous *ḥadīth* scholar, described this *ḥadīth* to mean that God is saying, “I am able to do whatever he expects I will do.”²¹⁶ That is, if one thinks of God as being generous,

²⁰⁹ Salih Yücel, “The Notion of ‘Husnu’l Zann’ or Positive Thinking in Islam: Medieval Perspective,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 4, no. 6 (2014): 102.

²¹⁰ Mawlud was a scholar in various fields including *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, Sufism and *adab* (Islamic etiquette). His book titled “Purification of the Heart” was recently translated by Hamza Yusuf. Yusuf also provided a commentary of the book.

²¹¹ Hamza Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart: Signs, Symptoms and Cures of the Spiritual Diseases of the Heart* (London: Dar Al Taqwa, 2012), 48.

²¹² Abū ‘Abd Allāh Qurtubī. “al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān” [The Collection of Qur’ānic Injunctions], accessed August 30 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=5&tSoraNo=41&tAyahNo=23&Display=yes&Page=2&Size=1&LanguageId=1>.

²¹³ Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart*, 48.

²¹⁴ Bukhārī, book 97, *ḥadīth* no. 34. A similar *ḥadīth* is “Allah said, ‘I am to my slave as he thinks of Me, (i.e. I am able to do for him what he thinks I can do for him).’” Bukhārī, book 97, *ḥadīth* no. 130.

²¹⁵ A well-known scholar who wrote a commentary on the Bukhārī *Ḥadīth* collection that is still commonly used today.

²¹⁶ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, as cited in “I am as My Servant Thinks (expects) I am,” *Hadithaday.org*, accessed July 29, 2015, <http://hadithaday.org/hadith-qudsi/i-am-as-my-servant-thinks-expects-i-am/#sthash.COGG.dpuf>.

compassionate, forgiving and so on, these expectation of God will be met. According to Imam Nawawī (d. 1277), another great *ḥadīth* scholar, this *ḥadīth* should be understood to mean “expecting the best of Allah is to expect that He will have Mercy on him and relieve him of hardship.”²¹⁷ On this notion that one receives the good that one anticipates from God, Abdullah bin Mas’ud, a companion of the Prophet, states the best thing that a believer could have been granted is positive thoughts about God, for “no servant of Allah expects good of Him except that Allah gives him what he expected, since all good is in His Hand.”²¹⁸ Hence, having positive thoughts about God is portrayed to be a criteria for one’s life to be filled with positivity and goodness. That is, whatever one expects of God, God will deliver it.

Just as important as having positive thoughts about God, is it to have positive thoughts about events. There is the general understanding that “what comes to a person in his or her life may help a person move closer to God when the response is right.”²¹⁹ Thus, it is not about the act or the event, but it is about how one perceives them and then responds, which is important. The Qur’ānic verse often quoted in this context is, “It may be that you dislike something, though it is good for you. And it may be that you love something, though it is bad for you. And God knows, and you do not know.”²²⁰ As this verse highlights, it is not that simple to determine what is good and what is bad. The verse encourages the individual to think about the possible good in a situation as well as the possible bad. This ensures a deeper and more complete evaluation of matters so one does not make quick judgements which stem from reactive and immediate emotions. This emphasises the importance of having a sound and positive perspective.

²¹⁷ Nawawī, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, as cited in “I am as My Servant Thinks (expects) I am,” *Hadithaday.org*, accessed July 29, 2015, <http://hadithaday.org/hadith-qudsi/i-am-as-my-servant-thinks-expects-i-am/#sthash.pmxsCOGG.dpuf>.

²¹⁸ Abdullah bin Mas’ud, *Husn adh-Dhann bi Allah*, as cited in “I am as My Servant Thinks (expects) I am,” *Hadithaday.org*, accessed July 29, 2015, <http://hadithaday.org/hadith-qudsi/i-am-as-my-servant-thinks-expects-i-am/#sthash.pmxsCOGG.dpuf>.

²¹⁹ Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart*, 49.

²²⁰ Qur’ān 2:216.

The opposite of positive thought is negative thought. God speaks strongly against having negative thoughts about others in the Qur’ān; “O you who have believed, avoid much [negative] assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin. And do not spy or backbite each other...”²²¹ There is a strong emphasis in Islamic literature on having positive thoughts about others and to give people the benefit of the doubt. Negative thoughts is also strongly associated with backbiting, because backbiting is considered the unspoken form of negative thoughts.²²²

Nursi is also critical of having negative thoughts of others and explains that “suspicion of others causes people to think that others suffer the same defects and vices that they do.”²²³ With this mindset, a person is critical of everyone and unable to see the goodness in others, which prevents them from deriving some benefit from them. As a result, people turn an illuminated life of happiness and bliss into a life of darkness and negativity.²²⁴

Therefore, there is a strong correlation between thinking positively and seeing positively:

Such a person lets good things blossom within himself, living in the Paradise he has formed in his soul. As for a person who looks around from the darkness of their own soul and smears everything with the ugliness inside them, they complain about everyone and can never see anything positively, think beautifully, or truly enjoy life.²²⁵

Thus, according to Nursi, when one has a negative thought about God, life and events, life becomes a dark and hell-like place to live in. The good in life can never be seen and therefore life can never be enjoyed. On the contrary, positive thoughts provides a paradise-like state. However, as Nursi highlights, to be able to see the positive and beauty in the outside world, one has to form a Paradise-like state within themselves first. In other words, one needs to have inner

²²¹ Qur’ān 49:12.

²²² Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart*, 61.

²²³ Said Nursi, *al-Mathnawi al-Nuriyya: Seedbed of the Light*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Light, 2007), 87.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Isik, “We Should Think Well of Others.”

peace to be able to have *husnu al-zann* (positive thought) about the world. Only then can life become a Paradise-like experience.

Having discussed the Islamic concepts associated with inner peace, it is now timely to discuss how inner peace and the manifestation of it can be reconciled with negative emotions.

1.4 Reconciling Inner Peace and Negative Emotions

At this point, it is important to note that inner peace does not mean one will be in a state of elation at all times. It would be naïve to think this would be the case. The reality is, experiencing sadness, frustration, disappointment and other negative emotions is part of life. However, experiencing low moods does not mean one does not have inner peace, since inner peace is about giving meaning to life and events in a way that satisfies the heart and mind. The important point is to be able to give meaning to events even though they may still pain the heart or trouble the mind. This in turn will also ease the pain.

No doubt, experiences can cause hurt, pain and sorrow, but if they can be understood for what they can achieve, whether it be in this world or the hereafter, there will be a feeling of peace embedded within the negative emotions being experienced. Although there will be discomfort, it will not lead to inner turmoil, despair and hopelessness, which can have a paralysing effect on the individual, but instead will lead to patience and reliance on God.

How can painful experiences have meaning that satisfies the heart and mind? This is possible when the positive in these experiences can be understood or when there is consolation for the negative experiences, so when a child dies, a natural disasters occur, illnesses strike or an injustice takes place, the response is sadness, grief and frustration, but these emotions do not get so intense that they are destructive to the person. The emotions would not be so intense because a meaning could be given to these experiences; the wisdom in the incident can be seen or there is consolation for the suffering that eases the heart. If the opposite is the case, no

meaning or wisdom would be seen in the suffering. The suffering would appear futile, unjust, unnecessary and cruel. This would only further add to the suffering. The notion of suffering and giving meaning to suffering will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. For now, the point to note is that inner peace does not contradict negative emotions or low moods. What it does do is help alleviate the hurt and pain during times of low moods.

To further understand how negative emotions can be reconciled with inner peace, the next section will look at the expression of negative emotions in the life of Prophet Muḥammad to better understand its place in within inner peace.

1.4.1 Negative Emotions in the Life of Prophet Muḥammad

The *sunna* (tradition) of the Prophet is the primary source for inner peace after the Qur’ān. Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate on his tradition to better understand how negative emotions can be reconciled with inner peace. There are many examples from the life of Prophet Muḥammad where he felt negative emotions due to the hardships he faced. How did he respond to these hardships? Were the negative emotions a hindrance to inner peace?

An example of a difficult event that Prophet Muḥammad lived through was the death of his sixteen-month-old son Ibrahim.²²⁶ When Ibrahim was breathing his last breaths, Prophet Muḥammad kissed his son and smelled him as a father would, expressing his love for his child. He then started to cry. Abdur Rahman bin Auf, one of the companions of Prophet Muḥammad, expressed surprise that the Prophet was crying because this suggested to Auf that the Prophet was not happy with God’s decree. Thus, Auf stated “Oh Messenger of God, even you are weeping!” In response, Prophet Muḥammad stated, “Auf this is mercy.” The Prophet continued

²²⁶ Avner Gil’adi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses: Medieval Islamic Views on Breastfeeding and Their Social Implications* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 33.

to cry and stated, “The eyes are shedding tears and the heart is grieved, and we will not say except what pleases our Lord. Oh Ibrahim, indeed we are grieved by your separation.”²²⁷

This incident presents a situation where the Prophet is grieved by the loss of his son. Does the feeling of such grief oppose inner peace? There are two points to be made. Firstly, Prophet Muḥammad’s crying could be seen as a sign of the mercy found within the heart of the Prophet, as indicated by his response to Abdur Rahman bin Auf; “Auf this is mercy.” It would actually be of concern if the Prophet did not cry at the death of his son, suggesting he is a person with no compassion. Considering the leadership position Prophet Muḥammad held, for him to lack compassion would be to the detriment of Muslims in his time, but also to those who came after him since one of the greatest ambitions of Muslims is to emulate the mannerisms and character of Prophet Muḥammad. Therefore, it should be part of human nature to cry at the death of one’s child.

Secondly, Prophet Muḥammad believed there would be consolation for the suffering endured through the death of his son. Therefore, while his heart was aching, he was also at peace with what he believed the death of his son meant. He stated “My son Ibrahim died as a nursling (when he was still being nursed), but he has two nurses who will complete his nursing period in Paradise.”²²⁸ Expressing the belief that Ibrahim’s nursing will be completed in the hereafter is a source of consolation for the Prophet. There are many *ḥadīth* that provide consolation to parents who have lost a child. One such example is; “Their little ones are the little ones (children) of Paradise. When one of them meets his father – or his parents – he takes hold of his garment – or his hand – as I am taking hold of the hem of your garment, and he does not let go until God admits him and his parents to Paradise.”²²⁹ These *ḥadīth* have a commonality, which is that the ending of life does not mean a complete end to life for a Muslim, nor does it

²²⁷ Bukhārī, book 23, *ḥadīth* no. 62.

²²⁸ Musnad ibn Hanbal, volume 3, no. 112 as cited in Gil’adi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, 33.

²²⁹ Muslim, book 45, *ḥadīth* no. 198.

mean a permanent separation; if anything, it is seen to be a promise of a better life. Based on the Islamic tradition, the belief that death is a transition of life to a new realm and the hope there will be a reunion with the child, provides peace for the heart at a time when there is often great pain caused by the death.

When the trials of Prophet Muḥammad are thought of, the year of sorrow also comes to mind. While Prophet Muḥammad was living in Mecca, the situation came to a point where the Meccans decided to eject the clans of Banu Hashim and Banu ‘Abdel Muttalib out of Mecca as they were the two clans from which most of the converts to Islam came.²³⁰ The two clans were driven into a barren enclosed valley just outside the city. The boycott began where the Meccans were not allowed to trade with them, intermarry with them, shelter them or provide them with supplies.²³¹ This continued for three years after which the boycott ended and the two clans were allowed back into Mecca. However, the harsh conditions of the boycott took its toll on Abu Talib, the Prophet’s uncle who was his protector, and Khadija, his supportive and loving wife. They both passed away soon after the boycott ended.²³²

With the loss of his protector and supporter, the Meccans took advantage of the situation and made life even more difficult for Prophet Muḥammad, harassing him on a daily basis. At this point, he decided to go to Taif. However, that was to be an extremely unpleasant experience for him as he was pelted out of Taif with stones. The supplication the Prophet made at this point is noteworthy as it provides insight into the meaning he gave to the situation:

You are the most Merciful of the merciful!

You are the Lord of the weak and the powerless!

You are my Lord!

To bloody and cruel enemies, or my brash and ruthless relatives to whom You please to submit my work?

If You are not angry with me, then I do not care for anything in the world; the Wellbeing that

²³⁰ Yahya Emerick, *The Life and Work of Muhammad* (Indianapolis, IN: Alpha, 2002), 87.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid, 92.

You bestow upon me is more important to me than anything else in the world.

I seek refuge in You that You may not treat me with Your wrath, that You may not manifest Yourself to me with your rage.

I seek refuge in You, You who arrange all worldly and otherworldly things, You with who all darkness turns into light, I seek to enter your face of light.

I will be at your gate until I have earned Your contentment!

There is no support other than You, nor any other power one can count on!²³³

Through this supplication, the mind frame of Prophet Muḥammad can be understood. His pain and suffering from the recent experiences is apparent, but they are not his prime focus in the supplication. Instead, his focus is his relationship with God, the acknowledgement that he has no other protector but God. It becomes clear that his belief in and dependence on God was a source of peace for him. The death of Khadija, who was his supporter, and Abu Talib, who was his protector, spiritually matured the Prophet as he developed a strong conviction that God was his true supporter and protector. These sentiments are expressed when he states, “There is no support other than You, nor any other power one can count on.” Thus, the Prophet was able to give meaning to the situation, which is heartbreaking at one level, but it had the ability strengthened his relationship with God even further. This is an important part of inner peace, as mentioned previously – to be able to give meaning to events that facilitate spiritual growth.

Another point Prophet Muḥammad makes in his supplication, which is of particular significance to the discussion, is: “You who arrange all worldly and otherworldly things, You with who all darkness turns into light.” It is worth highlighting how Prophet Muḥammad expresses the notion that God has arranged all worldly and otherworldly things. This notion of arrangement suggests everything is ordered and meaningful, rather than being random and chaotic. This is an important part of giving meaning to events – if events are chaotic or random, meaning cannot be drawn out of them since there is no pattern and therefore no chance of understanding.

²³³ Reşit Haylamaz, *Prophet Muhammad: The Sultan of Hearts* (Clifton, NJ: Tughra Books, 2013), 300.

Whereas, if events are arranged, it means there is thought, order, intent and pattern, and meaning can be drawn out from the events, leading to a state of peace.

The analogy of light used by Prophet Muḥammad in his supplication is also worth noting. The light analogy used in Chapter 5 Verse 16 of the Qur'ān was mentioned previously, where belief in God is depicted as the light that leads from darkness to the paths of peace. Prophet Muḥammad is emulating this verse in his own words in this supplication, declaring how his belief in God leads him to a state of inner peace despite all the difficulties and hardships he has endured.

As can be seen, inner peace does not mean one is always in a state of elation. What it does mean is that a person is in a state of peace even when experiencing hardships and challenges because meaning can be given to those experiences, which provides the relief and consolation needed at those moments. Therefore, it is to be expected that one would experience negative emotions, but the ideal is to experience such emotions while in a state of inner peace. Although this may sound like a paradox, according to the Islamic teachings, it is not. It is a realisation that negative emotions have a role to play in life so one embraces this reality with a positive attitude.

While there is room for reconciliation between low moods and inner peace, reconciling dysfunctional low moods with inner peace is not so easy. Depression, for example, is a very complex illness. It requires comprehensive study and research by multiple disciplines, including Islamic spirituality. However, extensive study has been done on depression, providing a lot of data about its causes. These causes will be analysed with the elements of inner peace in mind to see how they can potentially work together. The intent is not to reconcile inner peace and depression, but rather to demonstrate that elements of inner peace can be used alongside other treatments to help manage depression.

1.4.2 A Constant State of Low Mood – Depression

While the difference between what is considered normal low mood and dysfunctional low mood can be subtle, illness begins when the experience of low mood remains for prolonged periods of time or when there is a marked diminish or response to previously enjoyable activities.²³⁴ Due to the symptoms just described, depression has also been referred to as malignant sadness.²³⁵ Those who experience depression are not only affected by extreme low moods, but also affected by negative self-concept, negative wishes such as desires to escape, hide or die, changes in diet and sleep, and/or retardation or agitation in activity level.²³⁶ Thus, in contrast to normal low moods, depression has a debilitating and often long term effect on the individual, affecting all facets of life.

To fully understand depression, one needs to understand why depression occurs. There are many theories posed for the cause of depression, but commonly it is divided into two types: genetic and psychological.

1.4.2.1 Genetic Causes of Depression

Research has shown that depression has been linked to one's genetic make-up, so having a parent with depression significantly increases a child's risk of developing depression.²³⁷ It was found that 26-42% of variance in depression was attributed to genetic effects with the highest rates of heritability in children of parents with depression.²³⁸ In other words, if one or both parents of a child have depression, the child has a much greater chance of also having depression.

²³⁴ Ian Gotlib and Constance Hammen. *Handbook of Depression*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Publications, 2008), 364.

²³⁵ Lewis Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness: The Anatomy of Depression* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 240.

²³⁶ Aaron T. Beck, and Brad A. Alford, *Depression: Causes and Treatment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 8.

²³⁷ Gotlib and Hammen, *Handbook of Depression*, 364.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, 246.

According to this line of research, the dysfunctionality of certain chemicals, namely serotonin and dopamine that lead to depression is influenced by genes.²³⁹ That is, if a person has a chemical imbalance, it is due to their genetic make-up, which is then likely to lead to depression. The research in this area is extensive, therefore, the genetic influence of depression cannot be ruled out. However, the complexity of the causes of depression should not be underestimated with the overlap of genes, environment and the biology of the brain in their contribution to depression.²⁴⁰ Having said that, it is not easy to separate where the influence of one stops and the other starts.

1.4.2.2 Psychological Causes of Depression

Another dominating theory in understanding the causes of depression is the inability to deal with stress and negative life events. “Traumatic life events and taxing living conditions often precede depression.”²⁴¹ Thus, research shows a strong correlation between high stress levels and depression symptoms, suggesting individuals with high levels of stress are more likely to develop depression.²⁴²

This is explained by the chemical imbalance caused by one’s stress levels,²⁴³ which is then the trigger for depression. Based on this theory, chemical imbalance is caused more so by stress rather than genetics. The increased risk of depression in children of parents with depression is explained by the greater stressful home environment and greater negative parenting behaviours experienced by children with parents who have depression.²⁴⁴ Having parents fight because of a depressed parent or having a parent withdraw emotionally from a child because of depression

²³⁹ Pearson-Fuhrhop et al., “Dopamine Genetic Risk Score Predict Depressive Symptoms in Healthy Adults and Adults with Depression,” *PLOS One* 9 (5) (2014): 2.

²⁴⁰ Roger N. Rosenberg, *The Molecular and Genetic Basis of Neurologic and Psychiatric Disease* (Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer Health, 2008), 773.

²⁴¹ Herman M. van Praag, E. R. de Kloet, and J. van Os. *Stress, the Brain and Depression* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xi.

²⁴² Shen Chengfeng et al., “Hyperhomocysteinemia is a Result, Rather than a Cause, of Depression under Chronic Stress,” *PLoS ONE* 9:10 (2014): 4.

²⁴³ Gotlib and Hammen, *Handbook of Depression*, 247.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 245.

can have detrimental effects on the child.²⁴⁵ Thus, the influence of the environment cannot be underestimated as a cause of depression.

The impact of stress can be further seen by the change in structure that takes place with the brain, with the hippocampus being 9-13% smaller in those with depression. According to the research, there is a correlation between bouts of depression and the smaller size of the hippocampus.²⁴⁶ Experts believe stress can suppress the production of nerve cells in the hippocampus, and thus the reduction in its size, which can then show its effect as depression.²⁴⁷

Thus, the relationship between stress and depression has been well documented. However, it is important to emphasise that depression “is not directly caused by stressors; rather, it is a state that results from an individual’s perception and reaction to those stressors.”²⁴⁸ The notion that one’s response to a stressor determines whether depression will be experienced is of paramount importance to this topic. Challenges will always be experienced in life. However, as per the inner peace definition, the meaning one gives to those challenges is extremely important. Two individuals can be exposed to the same stressor, but the level of stress it causes each individual will be determined by their perception and response; while one may develop depression as a result of the stressor, the other may not.

It is not the place of this thesis to declare that giving meaning to events will combat depression; more quantitative and qualitative research is needed to substantiate such a claim. However, what becomes evident when depression is studied is that there is a strong correlation between how one responds to a stressor and depression. The most that could be said about the matter at

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ “What Causes Depression,” *Harvard Health Publications*, July 18, 2015, accessed July 18, 2015, <http://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/what-causes-depression>.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Jihan S. R. Mahmoud et al., “The Relationship Among Young Adult College Students' Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Demographics, Life Satisfaction, and Coping,” *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 33 (2012): 150.

this point in time is that elements of inner peace may have a positive contribution towards treating depression.

1.5 Conclusion

Islam is a religion that gives inner peace to its adherents. This is often described through the lexical meaning of the word, Islam, which means peace and submission, so one feels peace when they willingly submit to God. With one of God's names being *al-Salām* (Source of Peace), the belief that peace comes from God is further augmented. There are also various Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* related to *salām* (peace) and its expression. Furthermore, *riḍā* (contentment), *sakīna* (serenity), *iṭmīnān* (peace), *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive opinion) and concepts similar to them have a strong association with inner peace as they are an expression of a positive and satisfying life and therefore a peaceful life. This further puts inner peace in a pivotal place in a Muslim's life.

It also essential to clarify from the outset that having inner peace does not mean one never experiences negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety and frustration. These emotions are part of life and can never be eradicated, nor are they meant to be. These emotions are, however, are kept in check and used to serve the important purpose of spiritual growth when one has inner peace. This is particularly evident when Prophet Muḥammad's life is analysed from this perspective.

Before moving to the next chapter, it important to note that *riḍā*, *iṭmīnān* and other similar concepts will be encountered in the *Risale-i Nur*. This is because these states are viewed to be an expression or manifestation of inner peace. That is, if an individual is in a state of inner peace, they will experience *riḍā*, *sakīna*, *iṭmīnān* and so on because their inner world of peace will project outwards.

However, talking about inner peace through its expressions does not explain how one attains inner peace. Therefore, the concern of this thesis becomes the ‘how’; how does one attain inner peace so it can be expressed and manifested in the way described above? Knowing the ‘how’ is the most important aspect of inner peace; if one does not have inner peace, it cannot manifest through *riḍā* and *sakīna*. In such a case, these states will be no more than what one aspires to achieve, without knowing how to achieve them. Thus, understanding how inner peace is attained is of utmost importance. The next chapter will discuss the gateway to inner peace as explained by Nursi, which is belief in God.

CHAPTER 2: BELIEF IN GOD AND INNER PEACE

2.1 Introduction

A large portion of the *Risale-i Nur* focuses predominantly on answering three key questions: Does God exist? Is there one God? How does one relate to God? Nursi not only exerts great effort to prove the existence of God, but he also allocates much time to argue that belief in God provides immense happiness in this world and the hereafter:

Be certain of this, that the highest aim of creation and its most important result are belief in God (*iman-ı billah*). And the most exalted rank in humanity and its highest degree are the knowledge of God (*marifatullah*) contained within belief in God. And the most radiant happiness and sweetest bounty for jinn and human beings are the love of God (*muhabbatullah*) contained within the knowledge of God. And the purest joy for the human spirit and the sheerest delight for man's heart are the rapture of the spirit (*lazzat-i ruhaniya*) contained within the love of God. Indeed, all true happiness, pure joy, sweet bounties, and untroubled pleasure lie in knowledge of God and love of God; they cannot exist without them.²⁴⁹

According to Nursi, a natural progression to believing in God should be knowledge of God, which then leads to love of God. In other words, one's joy and happiness is dependent on one's knowledge and love of God that is founded on belief in God. One who has these "two life-sweetening realities" of knowledge and love of God, will be at peace in this life, no matter what experiences are encountered. "But, he who lacks them, even if he owns the whole world, cannot find peace within himself and outside, because without faith and knowledge, he feels spiritually and physically weak, vulnerable and helpless."²⁵⁰

The above passage can be considered the foundational criteria to attain the state of inner peace, with many other parts of the *Risale-i Nur* supporting this passage; that ultimately, it is belief in

²⁴⁹ Nursi, *The Letters*, 265.

²⁵⁰ Bilal Kuşpınar, "The Fusion of Faith and Knowledge in Finding Solutions for Problems: Nursi's Illuminative Path," in *Knowledge, Faith, Morality and the Future of Humanity* (Istanbul: Istanbul Ofset, 2000), 46.

God that leads to inner peace. This chapter will expand and analyse the key principles found within the above passage which connects belief in God to inner peace.

Furthermore, I will look at the Islamic approach to belief in God, oneness of God and Nursi's emphasis on proving the existence and unity of God. I will also discuss the importance of knowing God and the type of knowledge one can attain about God. This will be followed by a discussion on how belief in God leads to inner peace.

Finally, I will analyse the relationship between the names of God and inner peace. Nursi places great emphasis on the names of God. The reason behind this emphasis will be analysed. The emphasis then affects how the names of God contribute to inner peace. The names that will be discussed are: All-Powerful (*al-Qādir*), All-Just (*al-'Adl*) and All-Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*).

2.2 Belief in God

The Qur'ānic verse that explicitly explains the purpose of creation is "I have not created the jinn and humankind but to (know and) worship Me (exclusively)."²⁵¹ As Nursi explains,

According to the meaning of this mighty verse, the purpose for the sending of man to this world and the wisdom implicit in it, consists of recognizing the Creator of all beings and believing in Him and worshipping Him. The primordial duty²⁵² of man and the obligation incumbent upon him are to know God and believe in Him, to assent to His Being and unity in submission and perfect certainty.²⁵³

It is, therefore, no surprise that the central theme of the *Risale-i Nur* is belief in God (*imān*).²⁵⁴

Nursi is not alone in his emphasis of this theme of belief in God, especially considering the context he lived in when non-belief was on the rise. However, he is unique in putting it at the

²⁵¹ Qur'ān 51:56.

²⁵² The original Turkish *vazife-i fitratı* has been translated as primordial duty. The word *fitra* can also be translated as innate nature or innate disposition. That is, humankind is inclined towards knowing and believing in God, through the very nature of human creation.

²⁵³ Nursi, *The Rays*, 125.

²⁵⁴ Vahide, "A Survey of the Main Spiritual Themes of the *Risale-i Nur*," 3.

centre of his theology and reading everything in the light of it, relating almost all his discussions to belief in God.

Nursi states “The *Risale-i Nur*’s function is to strengthen and save belief. We are charged with serving belief without differentiating between friend and foe, and without taking sides.”²⁵⁵ This is no surprise since Prophet Muḥammad’s life was based on establishing the foundations of belief and then maintaining it.²⁵⁶ Therefore, Nursi is seen to be emulating the way of Prophet Muḥammad. In this age of science, technology and information revolutions where the knowledge base of Islamic worldview is under attack,²⁵⁷ Nursi focused on re-establishing the foundations of faith that had been shaken.

As a result, Nursi expends much effort to prove the existence of God in his works. Besides many religious evidences, he also uses logical arguments, philosophy, secular arguments and analogies in a way that the layperson can understand and be convinced of God’s existence. One such example is: “Every village must have its headman; every needle must have its manufacturer and craftsman. And, as you know, every letter must be written by someone. How, then, can it be that so extremely well-ordered a kingdom should have no ruler?”²⁵⁸ Nursi would use such arguments to challenge non-belief. Realising how various theories such as the evolution theory, natural selection and causal theory were affecting belief in God, Nursi also sought to demonstrate the impossibility of non-belief by disproving all such theories. In *The Flashes*,²⁵⁹ Nursi explains his intention for doing this, stating there “cannot and should not be any doubt about God Almighty.”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ Nursi, *The Rays*, 416.

²⁵⁶ Ahmad Abdurrahman Al-Sayih, “The ‘Bediuzzaman Factor’ in the Strengthening of Belief,” in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 74-75.

²⁵⁷ İmtiyaz Yusuf, “The Spiritual Interface Between Two Mujaddids: Sirhindi and Nursi,” in *The Qur’anic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlür Neşriyat, 2002), 207.

²⁵⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 60.

²⁵⁹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 232-254.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 233.

Nursi would use allegorical comparisons (*tamthīl*) in his writings of objects that are familiar to people of all walks of life, such as the sun, a mirror and the season of spring. Use of such comparisons is common among Muslim scholars, but Nursi gives them a special place in his writings. Although such comparisons appear simple, they prove to be compelling arguments to all walks of life, from the layperson to the intellectual scholar. As a result, belief in matters, such as the existence of God, one's closeness to God and the omnipresence of God, become easier to comprehend.²⁶¹ Nursi explains that great things are achieved through the use of allegorical comparisons; "imagination is compelled to submit to thought, the hidden is made present, the abstract made tangible, and the meaning made palpable."²⁶²

The use of comparisons is also an important part of the Qur'ān's methodology, with the Qur'ān containing over one thousand allegorical comparisons.²⁶³ There are also many verses that highlight the use of comparisons and their importance.²⁶⁴ The comparisons used by Nursi in the *Risale-i Nur* are often the same as those used in the Qur'ān. This is of no surprise since the *Risale-i Nur* is a *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān.²⁶⁵

The spring analogy, which Nursi often uses to argue that resurrection will take place, appears to be a further expansion of the Qur'ānic verse that states "Look, then, at the imprints of God's Mercy – how He revives the dead earth after its death: certainly then it is He Who will revive the dead (in a similar way). He has full power over everything."²⁶⁶ The sun analogy is one that Nursi uses most commonly, where the sun is used as a similitude of God. This similitude appears to be a further elaboration of the Qur'ānic verse "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth..."²⁶⁷ The light analogy is also used in the Qur'ān to highlight the difference between

²⁶¹ Züleyha Keskin, "Overcoming challenges in understanding metaphysical and spiritual concepts," in *Journal of Religious Education* 58 no. 4 (2010): 47.

²⁶² Said Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness: The Inimitability of the Quran's Conciseness*, trans. Şükran Vahide, (Istanbul: Sözlür, 2007), 123.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Some examples of such verses are Qur'ān 13:17, 14:25, 22:73 and 30:28.

²⁶⁵ Nursi, *The Rays*, 513.

²⁶⁶ Qur'ān 30:50.

²⁶⁷ Qur'ān 24:35.

a believer and a non-believer.²⁶⁸ Belief and guidance are likened to light, while non-belief and misguidance are likened to darkness.²⁶⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, Nursi also uses the light analogy to explain how belief provides light into one's world so the reality of everything can be seen. This brings great comfort and peace for humankind, according to Nursi, since it saves one from seeing the "world as empty, grievous, desolate, purposeless, and abounding in perils and enemies."²⁷⁰ The analogy highlights the positive influence belief has on the way the world is perceived.

2.3 Belief in Oneness of God

After belief in God, believing in the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) is at the core of the Islamic faith, described as the "the cornerstone of Islam"²⁷¹. It is the first tenet of the Islamic faith upon which all other beliefs of Islam are assembled. The five pillars of Islam, which are accepted by all Muslims to be the core practices of Islam, commence with the creed that is a declaration that there is no deity but God and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. It could be said that belief in God is the foundation of the Islamic faith upon which all other beliefs and practices are built.

The Qur'ān strongly and repeatedly declares the oneness of God: "And your God is One God: there is no God but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful."²⁷² Through the declaration of one God, there is the emphasis that there is only one true object worthy of worship and that is God²⁷³ so that associating any human being or thing with God is tantamount to *shirk*²⁷⁴ (associating partners with God). The Qur'ān also firmly denounces any association of partners with God; "Indeed God does not forgive that partners be associated with Him; less than that He forgives

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Qur'ān 2:57; 14:1.

²⁷⁰ Ubayd, "The Thought of Said Nursi."

²⁷¹ Oliver Leaman, *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2006), 651.

²⁷² Qur'ān 2:163.

²⁷³ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 49.

²⁷⁴ Mohamad Abdalla and Ikebal Patel, "An Islamic Perspective on Ageing and Spirituality" in *Spirituality and Ageing*, ed. Elizabeth MacKinlay (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2010), 113.

to whomever He wills. Whoever associates partners with God has indeed strayed far away (from the Straight Path).”²⁷⁵ Thus Such is the strong belief in one God in the Islamic teachings.

There are many verses that encourage reflection (*tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *tadhakkur*, *ta’aqquq*)²⁷⁶ on the universe to witness the oneness of God, such as “If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been confusion in both!”²⁷⁷ In line with the Qur’ānic approach, Nursi employs examples from the universe to argue the unity of God through natural and rational observations that many can relate to:

However, the fact that the beings in the universe come into existence with infinite ease and facility and no difficulty at all, and in perfect form, self-evidently shows the manifestation of Divine Singleness and proves that everything is directly the art of the Single One of Glory.²⁷⁸

Nursi often builds on the Qur’ānic notion that the universe is devoid of any defect and confusion; this orderliness is attributed to the existence of one God.²⁷⁹ Because there is no chaos, which would result should there have been many competing gods, His sovereignty is absolute. Nursi further sophisticates this argument and focuses on the remarkable law of interconnectedness across the universe. Simply put, Nursi contends that the universe is an integrated, interdependent creation; the production of one apple necessarily requires the existence of the entire universe as a result of this universal interconnectedness principle.²⁸⁰

Thus, together with highlighting the extraordinary art in the creation of things, especially in living beings, Nursi also highlights their connection to one another: a seed is a small sample of the fruit; a fruit is a miniature specimen of the tree; a tree is a summary index of the species;

²⁷⁵ Qur’ān 4:116.

²⁷⁶ *Tafakkur*: reflect; *tadabbur*: ponder; *tadhakkur*: to bear in mind or take into the heart; *ta’aqquq*: to use one’s mind in the right way.

²⁷⁷ Qur’ān 21:22.

²⁷⁸ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 417.

²⁷⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 52.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 90.

the species is a concise map of the universe and in meaning is its seed. Therefore, the one who created any one of them must be the one who created the entire universe.²⁸¹

At this juncture, Nursi raises a thought-provoking theological question, which is not frequently asked by the classical scholars: “How can a single individual be in innumerable places and do innumerable things at the same time with no difficulty?”²⁸² Nursi poses this question with the intention of cementing belief in the oneness of God. He first explains the method he will use to answer this self-posed question:

Man’s mind can only look at this mystery through the telescope and observatory of comparison and allegory. While there is nothing similar or analogous to God Almighty’s Essence and attributes, the functions of His attributes may be looked at to a degree by means of comparison and allegory.²⁸³

Nursi then continues to explain that reflections of the sun are not identical to the sun. Although the sun is a particular and single individual, it can be seen in everything through its reflections. Its reflection can be witnessed, like a mini-sun, in all shining objects, drops of water and fragments of glass, on the face of the earth, according to their capacity. The sun’s heat, light and the seven colours in its light, a sort of likeness of the essential sun, are found in all shining physical objects.²⁸⁴ Nursi continues to explain how the sun’s comprehensiveness and penetration increase to the extent of its all-empowering luminosity. It is because of the greatness of its luminosity that the tiniest things cannot hide or escape from it. This means that, through the principle of luminosity, its immense vastness does not exclude even the most insignificant or tiniest of things. Similarly, it is because of the greatness of God’s knowledge and power that even the tiniest things are not ignored by God.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Nursi, *The Rays*, 35.

²⁸² Nursi, *The Words*, 637.

²⁸³ Ibid, 637.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 638.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

Instead of using many textual evidences from the major sources of Islam, Nursi prefers to use rational reasoning to shed light on such theological issues. Nevertheless, his rational reasoning does not stop here. He goes further by pointing out that, if we suppose the sun had knowledge and consciousness, then every mirror would be like a dwelling place or seat for the sun and it would be in contact with everything in person. Communicating with one thing would not be a barrier to communicating with another. It would make its presence felt everywhere. This analogy aids in understanding God's omnipresence and that God can perform innumerable actions at the same time, an essential principle of *tawḥīd*.²⁸⁶

Nursi discusses the existence and oneness of God with the intention of convincing the reader of their truth. The importance that Nursi gives to the belief in the oneness of God cannot be underestimated. The next step he takes in this path of learning and development is to explain how one can get to know the God according to Islam.

2.4 Knowledge of God

According to the *Risale-i Nur*, the duty of worship of and servitude to God (*'ubudiyyah*) taught by the Qur'ānic verse "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me"²⁸⁷ is only realised by knowing God.²⁸⁸ However, the Islamic concept of God claims He has no form, shape or gender, nor is He an object or creature. Rather, He is unique, unlike creation and, as stipulated in the Qur'ān, "none is like Him."²⁸⁹ A famous statement with regard to God's nature has dominated Islamic theology for centuries: "Whatever comes to your mind about His nature, God is different to that."²⁹⁰ A prominent Islamic theologian, Imam al-Ṭahāwī (d. 935), states:

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Qur'ān 51:56

²⁸⁸ Ali Mermer, "The Ways to Knowledge of God in the Risale-i Nur," *Nur Web Pages*, April 1, 2006, accessed January 2, 2014 http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/The_Ways_to_Knowledge_of_God_in_The_Risale_i_Nur_112.

²⁸⁹ Qur'ān 112:4.

²⁹⁰ Leaman, *The Qur'an*, 36.

“Imagination cannot attain Him, comprehensions cannot perceive Him, and creatures do not bear any similarity to Him.”²⁹¹

This brings about the dilemma of “how can one relate to God, if one cannot comprehend Him?” Along similar lines is the question of how close is God to his creation since distance affects the type of relationship one has with God. In this context, there are two Qur’ānic verses that appear to be contradictory at first glance; “And We are closer to him than his jugular vein”²⁹² suggests God is extremely close to us, while the verse “The angels ascend to Him in a day the measure of which is fifty thousand years”²⁹³ suggests God is very distant.

Firstly, Nursi reconciles these two verses. He commences the task by explaining “The Divine Name of Light has solved many of my difficulties. God willing, it will solve this one too. Choosing the way of comparison, which brings clarity to the mind and luminosity to the heart...”²⁹⁴ From here, Nursi uses the sun analogy to explain the two verses. Even though the sun is very far from earth and everything on it, it is still very close to every object. On the window of a house, for example, the sun’s light, heat and complete image appear, making one feel the sun’s closeness. In a similar way, the sun simultaneously appears on every transparent object on earth because it radiates those attributes (heat, light, etc.) in all directions. Thus, the sun is close to a piece of glass with its attributes, but as a physical entity, it is located very far from the glass.²⁹⁵ Similarly, God is very close to everything and everyone with His names and attributes, but He is physically far from his creation.

And so, we surely believe with complete certainty as though witnessing it that the All-Glorious One, Who is the Light of Light, the Illuminator of Light, the Determiner of Light, and in comparison to Whose knowledge and power the sun’s light and heat is like earth, is all-present

²⁹¹ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Taḥāwī, *The Creed of Imam al-Taḥāwī*, trans. Hamza Yusuf (USA: Zaytuna Institute, 2007), 50.

²⁹² Qur’ān 50:16.

²⁹³ Qur’ān 70:4.

²⁹⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 209.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 211.

and all-seeing and infinitely close to all things with His knowledge and power, and that things are utterly distant from Him...²⁹⁶

Thus, Nursi explains that knowledge of God is possible through knowing God's names and attributes, while it is God's essence (*dhāt*) that is not knowable. "God's relationship with the creation is mediated by 'His beautiful names'...the pillars upon which the phenomenal world rests."²⁹⁷ The universe acts as a mirror, with all objects within it reflecting and manifesting God's names and attributes,²⁹⁸ with a single object reflecting at least twenty names of God.²⁹⁹ Therefore, one can witness the names and attributes of God by pondering on what they see and experience within themselves and the universe.³⁰⁰

This concept of relating to God through His names is also prevalent in the work of Ghazzālī. Ghazzālī states the path open for conceptualising God is through understanding His names by their manifestation on humankind; "it is conceivable for man to be characterised (by these names) to the extent that they may be spoken of him."³⁰¹ Nursi has a similar approach where knowledge and observation of one's self is an important way of knowing God. However, nuance differences exist, with Nursi having a greater focus on the notion of 'I', an important component of the *nafs* (ego). This is not surprising considering the strong presence of the ego in individuals of today, a point that will be discussed in detail in chapter 3. The notion of 'I' hypothetically states: "As I made this house and arranged it, so someone must have made the universe and arranged it."³⁰² Through such comparison between the qualities existing in an individual and God, an individual is able to appreciate the names of God in a limited fashion. For example, by witnessing a mother's compassion towards her child, one is reminded of God's compassion

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 221.

²⁹⁷ Turner, *The Qur'ān Revealed*, 22.

²⁹⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 221.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 655.

³⁰⁰ The relationship between knowing one's self and knowing God will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

³⁰¹ Abu Hamid Ghazzālī, *Ninety-Nine Names of God in Islam*, trans. Robert Charles Stade (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1970), 39.

³⁰² Nursi, *The Words*, 559.

towards all of creation, although one can never fully grasp the enormity of God's mercy since "each mother's compassion...are but a single radiation of this Mercy,"³⁰³ as expressed by Nursi.

It is important to note that Islamic theology also accepts that God has eight personal attributes – life, knowledge, will, power, speech, producing/creating, seeing and hearing. In this way, according to Ghazzālī and Nursi, the outcome of conceptualising God by the names is the presence of a sharing in the name. However, such an understanding can never be absolute, since God (and thus the name Allah) is "so specific that it is inconceivable that there could be any sharing of it either metaphorically or literally."³⁰⁴ To emphasise the difference between God and creation, Sirhindi, a famous mystic Islamic scholar, states "The difference between them (God and creation) is objective and real; like the difference between any two objects"³⁰⁵ and therefore the two can never be seen to be part of the one. Nursi notes the difference by focusing on the beauty of God, stating that one could never grasp God's beauty when Earth, and all that is on it including humankind, is "but a shadow of a few radiations of that Beauty, and spring is only one of its flowers."³⁰⁶ Despite the limitations in one's ability to know God, according to Nursi, the universe is a manifestation of God's names and therefore the means to know God.³⁰⁷

The names of God, as mentioned above, are often referred to as the *asmā al-husnā*, translated most accurately as the 'the Most Beautiful Names of God'. The *asmā al-husnā* originates in the Qur'ān, in which it says "God – there is no deity save Him; His are the All-Beautiful Names."³⁰⁸ The names of God have often been associated with the number 99, based on the *ḥadīth*, "God has ninety-nine Names, one-hundred less one; and one who memorises them all by heart will enter Paradise."³⁰⁹ Books that discuss the 99 names of God have played an important role in

³⁰³ Nursi, *al-Mathnawi al-Nuriyya*, 54-55.

³⁰⁴ Ghazali, *Ninety-Nine Names of God in Islam*, 39.

³⁰⁵ Ahmad Sirhindi, "Selections from the Letters of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi," in *Sufism and Shariah*, ed. and trans. Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1986), 269.

³⁰⁶ Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 56.

³⁰⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, 343, 655.

³⁰⁸ Qur'ān 20:8.

³⁰⁹ Bukhārī, book 97, *ḥadīth* no. 21.

Islamic theology and Islamic spirituality as they help to mould one's understanding of God and thus one's relationship with God. Many authors of these books point out that the number 99 should not be taken too literally³¹⁰ or the number of God's names should not be limited to 99 only.³¹¹ This is because limiting the names to 99, limits God through this limited description. Such a limitation opposes the theological understanding of God.

In the context of this discussion, the names of God are an important means to conceive, conceptualise and understand the transcendent God of Islam so one can then relate to Him. Therefore, reading the universe as one would read a book and to witness the names of God is a central theme of the *Risale-i Nur*.³¹² According to Nursi, such knowledge of God is an essential precursor to attaining inner peace, as will be discussed in the next section.

2.5 The Relationship Between Belief in God and Inner Peace

Throughout Nursi's writings, there is a strong association between belief and inner peace. However, as one studies Nursi's work, it becomes evident through the arguments he puts forward and the analogies he provides, that belief in God implies one has knowledge of God and knows how to interpret the 'work of God'. This knowledge is particularly through the names and attributes of God.

Before discussing what it is about belief that gives a person inner peace, it is timely to view Nursi's approach to describing the 'benefits' of belief. Nursi's approach is unique since he discusses the benefits of belief for this life as well as for the hereafter. Often, he will mention the pleasures that come with belief and the torments of non-belief in various ways, of which there are numerous examples.

³¹⁰ Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, 58.

³¹¹ Fethullah Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*, vol. 4, trans. Ali Ünal (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2011), 163.

³¹² Şükran Vahide, "The Book of the Universe: Its Place and Development in Bediuzzaman's Thought," in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 2000), 466.

Belief is not only described as providing happiness and bounty, but also pleasure and ease.³¹³ Through belief, one is able to change their worldview so everything becomes easier, but also more pleasant, generating “tranquillity and peace of mind, an inner confidence born of faith that enables the religious believer to face adversity without anxiety or despair.”³¹⁴ Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Nursi is one of the leading Muslim scholars who established a very strong relationship between belief and inner peace.

In traditional Islamic understanding, belief is often associated with the reward of Paradise in the hereafter and being saved from Hellfire. Having said that, Nursi does not downplay the importance of the hereafter for a Muslim; the Tenth Word, in *The Words*, which focuses on resurrection and the hereafter is 74 pages long, the longest ‘Word’ in the book. However, Nursi was also aware of the challenges of discussing the non-tangible hereafter. “The modern conceptualisation implies...theories, doctrines, and principles concerning non-observable realities cannot be scientific. A natural consequence of this way of thinking is to be sceptical about metaphysical realities in the belief that the absolute reality is the physical one.”³¹⁵

Nursi knew he was competing with this mindset when discussing the non-tangible hereafter. After all, resurrection was a belief in which Muslims had blind faith, a belief for which Ibn Sīnā said “The resurrection of the dead cannot be proved by rational criteria.”³¹⁶ For this reason, Nursi focused on proving that resurrection will take place and life in the hereafter must exist.³¹⁷ Consequently, with any point he makes about the hereafter, he assumes that one has strong conviction in this tenet of faith. I am certain that Nursi would refer a reader who is doubtful

³¹³ Nursi, *The Words*, 27.

³¹⁴ Michel, “Inner Peace.”

³¹⁵ Ali Sebetci, “The Islamic Conceptualization of the Sciences,” *Fountain Magazine*, 72 (2009), <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/The-Islamic-Conceptualization-of-the-Sciences>

³¹⁶ Necmeddin Şahiner, “The Bediuzzaman Factor in the Liberation of the East,” in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 219.

³¹⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, 59-132.

about the hereafter to the Tenth Word. Discussion about inner peace would also necessitate such a referral.

Nursi was also aware that individuals of today seek immediate benefits. Asking them to wait until the next life to see the benefits of their belief would have demonstrated a lack of awareness of his times, since he could see a shift in mindset and culture where there was a “movement away from preparing for an afterlife towards the modern practice of finding comfort in this one.”³¹⁸ Nursi needed to portray the message in a way that would appeal to individuals who were seeking benefits in this life. In the introduction to the translation of his famous *Damascus Sermon*,³¹⁹ Nursi explains that people’s emotions are blind to the consequences of actions, preferring a small amount of present pleasure to great pleasures in the future. He also states that emotions have prevailed over mind and reason.³²⁰ Nursi adds, the only way to create concern in individuals about their wrongdoings and disbelief is to show them the pain caused by their act and/or state.³²¹

The *Risale-i Nur* demonstrates that, in disbelief, there is a sort of spiritual Hell in this world, while in belief is a sort of spiritual Paradise. It points out the grievous pains in disbelief, sins, bad deeds, and forbidden pleasures. At the same time, it proves that in belief, good deeds, virtues and the truths of Islam are to be found pleasures like the pleasures of Paradise.³²²

Therefore, this world is an incentive for belief, not just the hereafter. “For Nursi, man is truly fulfilled only with the attainment of belief.”³²³ Nothing else will make an individual happy or content, neither material possessions nor physical pleasures. As for other worldly joys that are not connected to belief, Nursi argues they will not genuinely give happiness or inner peace.

³¹⁸ Judith Stamps, *Unthinking Modernity: Innis, McLuhan, and the Frankfurt School* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 17.

³¹⁹ The Damascus sermon was delivered at the Umayyad Mosque on a Friday in 1911 in the presence of 10,000 people and 100 renowned scholars of the time. In the 1950s it was translated into Turkish by the author and then published as part of the *Risale-i Nur* collection.

³²⁰ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 19.

³²¹ Avoiding pain is considered a primary driving force for human beings.

³²² Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 19.

³²³ Colin Turner, “The Six-Sided Vision of Said Nursi,” in *Spiritual Dimension of Bediuzzaman's Risale-i Nur*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 30.

This is evident by the way Nursi portrays the non-believer as insecure, fearful and extremely unhappy. “As for life, without belief, or because of rebelliousness belief is ineffective, it will produce pains, sorrows and grief far exceeding the superficial, fleeting enjoyment it brings.”³²⁴ Thus, Nursi does not completely negate the pleasures that may exist in actions going against belief, but he often compares it to poisonous honey³²⁵ where there is pleasure experienced at the moment of consumption from its sweet taste and smooth texture. However, because of the long term damage, pain and suffering the poisonous honey causes, that momentary pleasure is very quickly overtaken by unwanted effects. Since Nursi seeks to speak to the intellect and heart, the use of the poisonous honey analogy is a compelling intellectual argument that seeks to convince a heart that wants to avoid pain.

Thus, even if an individual was immersed in comfort and their life appeared to be heaven-like, Nursi has no doubt that such a life would be hell-like if there is no belief in their heart. Although physical comfort and pleasures may be experienced, they are strongly overpowered and overshadowed by tormenting feelings of pain incurred on the heart and spirit from a lack of belief:

Can it be said of someone whose body is in a false and fleeting paradise and whose heart and spirit are suffering the torments of Hell that he is happy?...You make them suffer the torments of Hell in a false heaven.³²⁶

As mentioned previously, Nursi’s approach, where the immediate and worldly pleasures of belief are discussed, is an integral part of his approach. It cannot be claimed it was never discussed before, but it certainly was not highlighted as it has been in Nursi’s work. After all, in the traditional Islamic way of thinking, there was a belief that one should not seek worldly pleasure, even if it was through belief. The great Sufis scholars show a strong emphasis on

³²⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 158.

³²⁵ Nursi, *The Rays*, 225; Nursi, *The Words*, 157.

³²⁶ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 160

forgetting the world and all it has to offer, and living for only the next world. Rūmī, a great Sufi scholar, regularly discusses life and death in his writings. Rūmī's poetry sends a message of great dislike of this world and the need to abandon it as it is seen as an obstacle to being with God. In one of his poems, Rūmī states, "The life of this world is in fact death. Death that scares us is life itself...You are in fact imprisoned in the prison of body. When death comes and that place collapses you will be free."³²⁷ Thus, the world is portrayed as an unpleasant and miserable place to be in, a prison-like dwelling that is preventing one from being with God. Hence, one impatiently waits for their time of death to come so they can leave this unpleasant world and reunite with the one they love, God.

Even forgetting the next world is sometimes seen as necessary in Sufism. Seeking the next world is interpreted as not seeking God. On the Naqshbandī³²⁸ path, one must abandon four things: the world, the hereafter, existence and the self (*tark-i dunya, tark-i ukba, tark-i hasti, tark-i tark*).³²⁹ By abandoning these elements, which are often perceived to be essential, it is believed that annihilation in God will be achieved since this way of thinking leads to desiring nothing, but to be with God. It is a state where nothing is seen to exist, even one's self, only God exists. As expressed by Rūmī, "We and our existences are all non-existences, but You are absolute Existence, appearing as annihilation."³³⁰

Once again, knowing the reality of his times very well, Nursi was aware that very few people could reach this level of annihilation with God, which is a very high level in the journey of *tasawwuf* (Islamic spirituality) that necessitates great sacrifices and self-discipline.³³¹ Nursi knew very well that the ego had taken a strong hold of the individuals in today's society;

³²⁷ Rūmī, *Divan-i Kabir*, VII, 3172 as cited in Şefik Can, *Fundamentals of Rumi's Thought: A Mevlevi Sufi Perspective* (New Jersey: Light, 2004), 83.

³²⁸ Major Sufi order dating back to the 12th century with millions of global followers even today.

³²⁹ Nursi, *The Letters*, 38.

³³⁰ Rūmī, *Mathnawī I* 602 as cited in William Chittick, *Sufism A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 129.

³³¹ Fethullah Gülen, "Fana Fi'llah" [Annihilation in God], Fethullah Gülen Website, July 17, 2007, <http://fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-works/sufism/key-concepts-in-the-practice-of-sufism-2/25746-fana-fillah-annihilation-in-god>.

therefore, negating the ego, as needed for annihilation in God, would be an impossible achievement for the masses. Thus, Nursi chose a path that most can relate to and endure, but still reach the same goal set by *tasawwuf*, which is to bring one closer to God. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

Nursi is also different from the 19th and 20th century modernist Muslim intellectuals who gave prime importance to worldly wealth. Musa Kazim (d. 1920), one of the late Ottoman Sheikh al-Islam (chief religious officials), Abdullah Cevdet (d. 1932), “a leading publicist and freethinker who used Islam to promote modernization and materialism”³³² and Indian scholar Ghulam Ahmad Parvez (d. 1985) are a few of the many scholars who gave great importance to worldly wealth and possessions. Kazim for example, states, “one who does not have of the world will not have of the hereafter. Money is life itself, it is the cause of his/her salvation, it is compulsory to be rich.”³³³ If Naqshbandi’s principles are on one side of the spectrum, then the modernist Muslim intellectual’s principles for life are on the other.

As a man of balance and the middle way, it is safe to say that Nursi has a good balance between now (this world) and the future (the hereafter), and encourages strengthening one’s connection with God through means that may be considered worldly in *tasawwuf*.

On one occasion, Nursi is asked a question regarding this matter. Nursi is asked to explain the *ḥadīth*, “Love of this world is the source of all error.”³³⁴ In response to this question not only does Nursi explain a positive side to the world in a spiritual sense, but for the first time, he explains the world has three different facets. One facet is seeing the world as a mirror to God’s names, which means everything is God’s artwork as they reflect His names. Another looks to the hereafter, which means this world is viewed as a fertile ground to gain ultimate salvation

³³² Charles Kurzman, ed., *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 172.

³³³ Ismail Albayrak, *Klasik Modernizmde Kur’an’a Yaklaşımlar* [Approaches to the Qur’ān in Classic Modernism], (Istanbul: Ensâr Publication, 2004), 36, 156.

³³⁴ Al-Munāwī, *Fayd al-Qādir*, iii, 368, number 3662 as cited in Nursi, *The Words*, 510.

and the third looks to transience and non-existence.³³⁵ The third facet has also been described as relating “directly and exclusively to the world itself, and is where people gratify their bodily desires and seek to meet the needs of this transient worldly life.”³³⁶ Similar descriptions are used in other parts of the *Risale-i Nur*.³³⁷

The first facet of the world mentioned, which focuses on the names of God, is one of the major themes of the *Risale-i Nur*. “Nursi says, that the cosmos is a gallery of signs and symbols, or a vast mirror reflecting the names of God.”³³⁸ By focusing on this aspect of the world, one is able to know the Creator through the creation as all creatures are like Divinely-written books and letters, explaining their Writer.³³⁹

The second aspect of the world, which focuses on this life as a fertile ground where one plants the seeds of good deeds to reap the rewards in the hereafter, correlates best with the traditional understanding of Muslim scholars where this world is not seen as a world of pleasure and happiness, but rather a place of hard work for which the rewards will be seen in the hereafter – the true abode of happiness. Nursi does not negate the happiness that will be experienced in the hereafter for the good work done in this life, but he adds that pleasure and happiness will also be experienced in this world while ploughing the ground and planting the seeds of good deeds. He states that, if one is not busy in the farm of good deeds, they will experience pain and suffering even though one may appear to be experiencing comfort and happiness.³⁴⁰

According to Nursi, it is this third aspect of the world that a believer needs to stay away from; seeking to gratify the bodily desires and meet the needs of this transient worldly life. When Muslim scholars talk negatively about this world, it is usually this aspect of the world they are

³³⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 355.

³³⁶ Nursi, *al-Mathnawi al-Nuriyya*, 120.

³³⁷ The three faces of the world are also covered in Nursi, *The Words*, 510, 653.

³³⁸ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 298.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 170.

referring to.³⁴¹ Similarly, Nursi argues that, if one focuses on this third aspect of the world, pain and suffering take place and this is what the abovementioned *ḥadīth* is referring to. Nursi goes to great lengths to describe the suffering if one was to focus on the transient aspect of the world, since the world would be embraced with an intense emotion of love, which the world does not deserve. According to such love for the world would become boundless torment and tribulation.

For an orphan-like compassion, a despairing softness of heart will be born of that love. He will pity all living beings. Indeed, he will feel sympathy for all beautiful creatures which suffer decline, and the pain of separation, but he will be able to do nothing, he will suffer in absolute despair.³⁴²

Thus, showing intense love and extreme interest for this world, as one would for the third aspect of the world, brings with it much pain. The compassionate nature of the human being is stirred each time death and decline is witnessed. Separation, which is the outcome of death and decline, causes great suffering and pain.

From these explanations made by Nursi, it becomes evident that he seeks to convince all faculties of the human being through his intellectual, rational and emotional approach. His writings do not come across as mere dialectic; the words uttered by Nursi appear to be heartfelt and internalised as one becomes convinced they are based on his personal experience and the empathy he feels towards others is real. Interestingly, Nursi does not claim to be the absolute author of the *Risale-i Nur*, but that they were written as a result of Divine favour, which led to inspiration:

Fifty to sixty treatises were bestowed in such a way that, being works that could not be written through the efforts and exertions of great geniuses and exacting scholars, let alone someone like me who thinks little, follows the apparent, and does not have the time for close study, they demonstrate that they are directly the works of Divine favour.³⁴³

³⁴¹ Nursi, *The Words*, 653.

³⁴² Nursi, *The Letters*, 29.

³⁴³ *Ibid*, 439.

This has significant implications for the author and the reader who believes the *Risale-i Nur* is a Divine favour for Muslims of today. With this belief in place, the content becomes ever more valuable since it is now perceived to be inspired by God. Nursi becomes merely a vehicle for the deliverance of the content.

Another unique aspect of Nursi's style is that he is not at all imposing. Rather, he puts forward his thoughts and experiences as though addressing himself and leaves it to the reader to respond or react to his writings as they wish. It is common for Nursi to start his writings addressing himself, since he sees his writings as a lesson for himself. He starts some sections with the phrase, "O my soul (*nafs*)."³⁴⁴ This is a very powerful way to narrate. Firstly, the reader feels comfortable to freely reflect on what is being said since they do not feel like they are the target or being judged for their shortfalls, which could easily lead one to becoming defensive, and therefore receiving advice. It is also a powerful style of writing because Nursi is being a role model to the reader.³⁴⁵ By declaring he is speaking to his own *nafs* (soul), it makes the reader think, 'I should also let this writing speak to my *nafs* (soul).'

As can be seen, according to Nursi, belief in God not only brings with it pleasures and beauties in the hereafter, but it also leads to inner peace in this life. Since Nursi puts great emphasis on the names of God as a means of knowing Him, it could be assumed the names of God play an important role in inner peace as well. The next section will explore this notion.

2.6 The Names of God and Inner Peace

According to Nursi, knowledge of God is attained through the reading of the cosmos, which is a "divinely penned book, composed of words or verses that, once deconstructed, reveal nothing less than embodiments or individualisation of the beautiful names (*asmā al-husnā*) of God

³⁴⁴ In *The Words* alone, Nursi uses the phrase "O my soul" twenty times.

³⁴⁵ Imaduddin Khalil, "The Literary Beauty in Bediuzzaman's Work," in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 52.

Himself.”³⁴⁶ One cannot know God, unless one is able to identify the names and attributes of God by reading the universe since “the reality of the universe and of all beings is based on the Divine Names.”³⁴⁷ In light of Nursi’s work, I would argue that the means to inner peace are as many as the names of God. Each name of God adds to the understanding of the world, provides meaning to life and events, and satisfies the heart and mind in a manner that generates inner peace within the individual.

To further understand this point, the names of God need to be unpacked. The Qur’ānic verse “God! There is no God but He. To Him belongs all beautiful names”³⁴⁸ attributes “the most beautiful names” to God. The words “the most beautiful” are important as they imply there is nothing ugly about God. Since God’s names are beautiful, and in each of His names “there are thousands of degrees of bounty and beauty, perfection and love”³⁴⁹, His acts and creation must also be beautiful. It is unthinkable that God could do anything ugly or evil, according to Nursi. Since God’s names are beautiful, then God is the All-Beautiful³⁵⁰.

While focusing on the names of God, Nursi does not negate the existence of evil and ugliness. Nursi is able to give meaning to evil and ugliness without tarnishing the “beautiful names” of God or downplaying the “beauty and perfection”³⁵¹ that He holds. Nursi’s explanation of ugliness and evil will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. For now, it is important to note that Nursi does not ignore events that may appear to be evil and ugly; he is aware of their existence. He is also aware of how they are perceived in today’s world.

Addressing all the names of God is beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, the discussion will be limited to three names of God in some detail after which other names will be discussed more generally. The names of God that will be discussed in detail are All-Powerful (*al-Qādir*),

³⁴⁶ Turner, “The Six-Sided Vision of Said Nursi,” 30.

³⁴⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, 655.

³⁴⁸ Qur’ān 20:8.

³⁴⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 667.

³⁵⁰ Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 361.

³⁵¹ Nursi, *The Words*, 656.

All-Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*) and All-Just (*al-'Adl*). These three names have been chosen for a number reasons.

Firstly, these names are commonly mention in the *Risale-i Nur*. Therefore, there is a lot of content that provides good insight into how Nursi understood these names of God. He provides various examples of how these names manifest within the universe and how they are a source of inner peace.

Secondly, the First Word of *The Words*, one of the main books of the *Risale-i Nur*, focuses on the phrase *Bismillah* (in the name of God). This phrase is very important for Muslims as they are encouraged to start all their actions with this phrase. It is also the phrase with which 113 out of 114 chapters of the Qur'ān commences. In the First Word, where the importance of *Bismillah* is discussed, All-Powerful and All-Merciful are the only two names of God that are emphasised and linked to *Bismillah*.³⁵² Therefore, these two names play a critical role in understanding the events of this world. The third name of God, *al-'Adl*, was chosen because it is the name that best helps to understand this world in the context of the hereafter. Trying to understand the events of this life without taking into consideration the hereafter is like a half-told story that does not make sense and the discussion remains incomplete. Also, the suffering seen in this world is often a stifling point for inner peace. Having a better understanding of *al-'Adl* will help to make sense of suffering.

Thirdly, God's names have traditionally been divided into two categories; majesty (*jalāl*) and beauty (*jamāl*). The *jalālī* names are associated with God's incomparability (*tanzih*), such as God's power or overpowering force, which is beyond human comprehension. The *jamālī* names

³⁵² Ibid, 15.

are closely connected with His similarity, such as God's mercy, which can be comprehended by humankind in a limited fashion.³⁵³ As Nursi explains,

Since these Names require to demonstrate their decrees through different manifestations, the Glorious Creator blended together opposites in the universe. Bringing them face to face, he gave them aggressive and defensive positions, in the form of a sort of wise and beneficial contest. Through making the opposites transgress one another's bounds, He brought conflict and change into being, and made the universe subject to the law of change and transformation and the principles of progress and advancement.³⁵⁴

Thus, in the human domain, the 'law of contest' plays out as struggle, which is a vehicle for spiritual progression on the path towards perfection. "Without apparent conflict, without change and failure and disappointment, success and salvation can have no meaning."³⁵⁵ While it is the distinction between the two particular groups of names that is the cause of diversity within the universe, their interplay in a balanced manner is impressive:

The more you turn the pages of the *Risale-i Nur* the more you see the intensity within gentleness, the power within compassionateness, the dignity within mercy, the tremendousness within humility the firmness within favour, the heart within mind, the mind within heart...³⁵⁶

Therefore, understanding these two types of names of God is important to attain inner peace, since through such understanding, one is able to make sense of life and events in a way that satisfies the heart and mind. For this reason, All-Powerful has been chosen as a *jalāli* name and All-Merciful has been chosen as a *jamāli* name. A balance between the *jamāli* and *jalāli* names is essential as though weighing on two sides of a scale. God's balance is expressed prominently through the name of God All-Just, which is the third name to be explained.

³⁵³ Rabia T. Harris, "On Majesty and Beauty: The Kitāb Al-Jalāl Wa-l Jamāl of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* VIII (1989): 6.

³⁵⁴ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 115.

³⁵⁵ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 67.

³⁵⁶ Edib Ibrahim Dabbagh, "Bediuzzaman and the Literature of Belief," in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 241.

While these three names will be discussed in detail, as Nursi highlights, it is not possible to isolate the names of God completely when studying them because there is a vast overlap and great interdependence between them.³⁵⁷ The imprints of the names are so interwoven on all beings that it becomes difficult to count, analyse and distinguish them from one another.³⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it is possible to see one name dominate in each sphere while the “other names are subordinate to it, rather, they are there on account of it.”³⁵⁹ With this in mind, each name will be addressed separately with some discussion of their interplay with other names of God.

2.6.1 All-Powerful (*al-Qādir*)

God’s power is the topic of discussion in many of the analogies used in Nursi’s writings. Human beings witness power within the universe and everyday life. This power is often attributed to different things, such as nature or causes. A point that Nursi emphasises throughout his writings is that God has power over all things. One of the names of God mentioned regularly in the Qur’ān is *al-Qādir*. When explaining the verse “...Certainly, God has power over all things”³⁶⁰ Qurtubī’s explanation resonates with Nursi’s emphasis. Qurtubī makes the clear point that it is an obligation for every individual to know that God is *Qādir* (All-Powerful). Whatever God wants to do, He can do it.³⁶¹

However, not only does Nursi emphasise that God has power over all things but he also explains there is great happiness in attributing all power to God, since believing in God’s power provides security and certainty in life. In the First Word,³⁶² Nursi gives the analogy of two men setting off on a journey: the first man travels in the name of a tribal chief, while the second traveller does not assume the name of anyone. As a result of travelling in the name of a tribal chief, the

³⁵⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, 341-342.

³⁵⁸ Ümit Şimsek, “Flashes of Divine Names in the Risale-i Nur,” in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 188.

³⁵⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 342.

³⁶⁰ Qur’ān 2:20.

³⁶¹ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Qurtubī, *Tafsīr Al-Qurtubī: Classical Commentary of the Holy Qur’an* (London: Dar al-Taḳwa, 2003), 177.

³⁶² *The Words* is one of the first books written by Nursi where he predominantly focuses on matters of faith.

first traveller is described to have travelled safely wherever he went, while the latter “suffered indescribable calamities throughout his journey.”³⁶³

Nursi likens the man travelling in the name of a tribal chief to one who travels through life in the name of God (*Bismillah*), since travelling in the name of a greater power provides security and protection. Therefore, according to Nursi, the mere thought of trusting in a greater power offers peace of mind and a sense of security to one who is travelling through the journey of life.

In the Second Word, Nursi again compares the worldview of a believer and non-believer. After a detailed description of the two men’s worlds, Nursi attributes the different experiences of the two men to belief and non-belief in God. Through belief in God, Nursi argues that interpretations of events are positive and good; nothing looks ugly or feels scary.³⁶⁴ Even events such as storms and earthquakes, which are associated with power and might, appear to be like submissive officials. Storms and earthquakes are described by Nursi as “instances of wisdom which though apparently harsh are in fact most gentle, like the storms and rains of spring.”³⁶⁵

The key to these types of reassurances is the belief that everything is under the control of a Power, but even more importantly, a Power that is an “utterly just, compassionate, beneficent, powerful, order-loving, and kind...”³⁶⁶ This develops a trust and belief that there must be wisdom in such events, even if they cause apparent damage and harm. According to Nursi, destruction and losses that may come with an earthquake are charity for which the individual will get the reward in the hereafter and the suffering will be a means of purifying one from sins, leading to spiritual elevation leading to entry into Paradise in the hereafter.³⁶⁷

The explanations Nursi gives to natural disasters is important in understanding God’s power. Such explanations are often not seen in Islamic literature. Ghazzālī describes *al-Qādir* and *al-*

³⁶³ Nursi, *The Words*, 16.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 28.

³⁶⁵ Ibid, 322.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 28.

³⁶⁷ Ibid, 184.

Muqtadir (Possessor of Power)³⁶⁸ as “He Who acts, or does not act as He pleases.”³⁶⁹ Then as Ghazzālī describes God’s power, there is a sense of a mighty, powerful God who can do whatever He wills when He wills. Although this description is correct, it does not give an appreciation for God’s mercy, compassion and justice within that power. A tyrant and dictator are also powerful, but they are not just. A similar description is given by Tosun Bayrak³⁷⁰ (b. 1926) who states, “*Al-Qādir* has infinite ability. His capacity for causing things to happen, His powers of invention and creation, are conditioned by only one thing: His will.”³⁷¹ Once again, there is a strong focus on the power of God, which can be overwhelming if considered on its own.

Thus, the way the All-Powerful God is understood significantly contributes to the way events are perceived. Where that power is attributed to is just as important. That is, it is not the actual events that cause fear, but to whom those events are attributed to. The fact the two men were in the same country and had such opposingly different experiences is because they were attributing the events to different “powers.” It is either attributed to an utterly just, compassionate, beneficent, powerful, order-loving and kind God, as per the analogy, or it is attributed to aimless nature and causes. In the context of this analogy, Nursi describes God to be the Most Generous Lord and All-Compassionate Owner. This intentionally chosen description of God offers safety and security to a person who cannot control the events around them and thus is at the mercy of the power that does control them.

Nursi’s views resonate with the famous jurist and third sheikh of the Shadhili Sufi order, Ibn Ata Allah (d. 1309), who states: “‘What does the one who finds God lose? And what does the one who loses Him find?’ That is, the one who finds Him finds everything, while the one who

³⁶⁸ Ghazzālī gives the same meaning to both names of God mentioned here, “possessor of power,” but highlights that *al-Muqtadir* does this to a greater extent than *al-Qadir*.

³⁶⁹ Ghazzālī, *Ninety-Nine Names of God in Islam*, 106–107.

³⁷⁰ Tosun Bayrak is the sheikh of the Jerrahi-Halveti Order in America. He has also written and translated many books on Sufism.

³⁷¹ Tosun Bayrak, *The Name and the Named: The Divine Attributes of God* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000), 155.

does not find Him, can find nothing.”³⁷² If one finds God, the All-Powerful, one does not need to fear anyone else, since they cannot act outside the power of God. Whereas, if one does not find God, then everything will generate fear in the individual, since there is no one who can protect them against the onslaughts of life.

Similarly, Nursi concludes the Second Word with the sentence: “Belief in God bears the seed of what is in effect a *Tuba*³⁷³ tree of Paradise, while unbelief conceals the seed of a *Zaqqum*, a tree found in Hell.”³⁷⁴ That is, it is through belief in an all-powerful, merciful and compassionate God that this world becomes like paradise, replacing the hellish state that non-belief causes. As this parable implies, Nursi strongly advocates bringing paradise to worldly life with the help of unconditional faith and submission to the All-Powerful God. Such belief in God is like a tree that grows and influences every facet of life as the branches and leaves positively affect life in every way possible. Similarly, without belief in God, life becomes a place of torment and suffering, again, affecting every aspect of life as that state of misery is felt at every level.

Additionally, Nursi argues that the natural outcome of believing in an All-Powerful God is the ability to entrust “all his burdens to the hand of power of the Absolutely Powerful One.”³⁷⁵ Rather than trying to ‘carry’ his burdens, he ‘offloads’ them to the All-Powerful. An analogy is used in the Twenty-third Word to help explain the above relationship; two men with heavy loads board a large ship. While one man leaves his load on the deck, the other man does not, preferring to carry his load on his head and back because he is worried it would get lost if he puts it down. He also reminds the guard of his strength and ability to guard his property by carrying it. According to the analogy, the ship is the life journey and the mountainous waves are the events in one’s life. A person who chooses to carry the burdens of life, is like the man who feels the need to carry his load on the ship, an action Nursi portrays as not making sense;

³⁷² Ibn ‘Ata’illah as cited in Nursi, *The Letters*, 44.

³⁷³ A tree found in heaven.

³⁷⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 28.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 322.

an action that would cause great fatigue in life as one worries and feels responsible for everything taking place around them, trying to control and manage all events in one's life to the nth degree.

Nursi makes the point that one needs to rely on God, but this does not mean one should reject causes. "Knowing that attempting causes is a sort of active prayer, it is to seek the effects only from Almighty God, recognize that the results are from Him alone, and to be thankful to Him."³⁷⁶ To understand how this 'system' of submitting and relying on the All-Powerful God works, Nursi explains the relationship between the different states:

....belief necessitates affirmation of Divine Unity, affirmation of Divine Unity necessitates submission to God, submission to God necessitates reliance on God, and reliance on God necessarily leads to happiness in this world and the next.³⁷⁷

Once again, the importance of belief is highlighted as Nursi states that faith (*imān*) is a precursor for happiness in both worlds (*sadet-i dârayn*). As he demonstrates in various parts of his writing, God must exist and God can only be one. Elaboration of this point is beyond the scope of this discussion, so I will move to the next part of the phrase, which is that affirmation of Divine Unity (*tawhīd*) necessitates submission to God (*taslīm*). The theological understanding is that, through the affirmation of Divine Unity, one realises everything is under the control of God; not only human beings but all of creation, since God created them he has power over all things.³⁷⁸ Therefore, one should submit to God (*taslīm*) and no one else, according to Nursi.

The Qur'ān highlights that all of creation naturally submits to God, but humankind has the freedom of choice to decide whether to submit.³⁷⁹ If there is submission by humankind, this is considered a willing submission, a positive submission, which is the outcome of knowing God

³⁷⁶ Ibid, 323.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, 3.

³⁷⁹ Qur'ān 22:18

and being fully aware of His Power and Will.³⁸⁰ This Power and Will is Compassionate, Wise and Merciful, as Nursi highlights in his writing. As with the boat analogy, there is a realisation that everything is under the control of God and therefore willingly submitting to God and finding the peace and comfort that comes with putting the baggage down.

Nursi's non-fatalistic *taslīm* approach takes shape through his explanation of *du'ā* (supplication). *Du'ā* will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 from a worship perspective, but in this context, Nursi's approach to *du'ā* is important in understanding the role of humankind and the role of God in the face of seeking certain outcomes; does one submit in a fatalistic manner and take a completely passive role, simply watching events unravel without any input or does one try and control every single event and incident they are faced with, thinking they have absolute charge of everything? In the analogy provided by Nursi, the fatalistic approach would be akin to taking no responsibility on the boat to ensure one's possessions and self are managed in a safe and secure manner. On the other hand, the controlling approach would be the one who carries the load on their back at all times, believing that nothing can provide protection from all dangers except for one's self. Nursi takes the middle approach, which means ensuring that safety rules are followed on the boat and by doing so, not being irresponsible and endangering one's life, but at the same time, knowing that ultimately, the boat is being steered and protected by the All-Powerful.

According to Nursi, *taslīm* leads to *tawakkul* (relying and trusting only in God). Submission to God is possible when there is acknowledgement there is an all-Powerful God. But to trust in a powerful God necessitates knowing Him to be compassionate, merciful and just. Thus, trusting in God is not only an outcome of belief, but it is the ultimate test of belief according to the following Qur'ānic verse; "And in God you must put your trust if you are truly believers."³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, vol. 1, 67.

³⁸¹ Qur'ān 5:23

The word *tawakkul* comes from the word *wakil* (trustee), *al-Wakīl* being one of the names of God. *Al-Wakīl* can be translated to mean the Trustee and the Dependable³⁸² or “the Ultimate and Faithful Trustee”³⁸³. It portrays an image of a God who is reliable and trustworthy, but at the same time, powerful, wise and compassionate enough to implement what is best for each individual. The Qur’ān states: “And put your trust in God. God suffices as One on Whom to rely (and to Whom to refer all affairs).”³⁸⁴ This suggests God is the one whom you trust your affairs to so He can take care of them. Thus, *tawakkul* is the outcome of trusting in the power that one has come to witness and acknowledge. That power can only be trusted if it is just, compassionate, beneficent and kind.³⁸⁵ Such a “trust in God brings with it courage and the ability to withstand the vicissitudes of earthly existence,”³⁸⁶ so one can be in a state of peace no matter what is faced in life.

It is important to note that this reliance and trust in God is not considered a blind passive trust. According to a *ḥadīth*, Prophet Muḥammad was asked whether one should tie their camel and trust in God or untie one’s camel and trust in God. Prophet Muḥammad responded, “Tie her and trust in God.”³⁸⁷ Therefore, there must be utmost effort to fulfil an outcome before submitting to God (*taslīm*) and trusting in God (*tawakkul*).

Nursi states *tawakkul* leads to happiness in this life and the hereafter (*saadet-i dareyn*); it leads to happiness in this life because there is an end to worries about matters that are outside one’s control – handing over such affairs to the One who is in the best position to look after them. It brings happiness in the hereafter because there is acknowledgement and trust in God’s power, knowledge, compassion and wisdom, which God is pleased with. When there is complete submission and trust in God, it saves a person from “begging before all the universe, trembling

³⁸² Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Allah's Names and Attributes: (Al-Asmā' WaAl-Ṣifāt) Excerpts* (Fenton: As-Sunna Foundation of America, 1999), 56.

³⁸³ Bayrak, *The Name and the Named*, 129.

³⁸⁴ Qur’ān 33:3.

³⁸⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 28.

³⁸⁶ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 292.

³⁸⁷ Tirmidhī, book 37, *ḥadīth* no. 2707,

before every event, from pride, making a fool of yourself, misery in the hereafter, and the prison of the pressures of this world...’’³⁸⁸

Thus, through a solid understanding of God’s name, the All-Powerful, events of life are viewed in a more comforting and secure way so signs of power such as earthquakes and storms do not cause fear but are instead witnessed with wisdom. Further, the name All-Powerful leads one to submit and trust in God. This leads to a state of peace since there is a lightening feeling, despite the burdens of life.

Nursi states that, not only does one attain inner peace through the realisation of God’s power, but “a person with knowledge of God takes pleasure from impotence, from fear of God.”³⁸⁹ He gives the example of a twelve-month-old baby who may be fearful of his mother’s anger, but still takes refuge in her arms. The fear pushes the baby into the arms of the Compassionate Guardian even more, resulting in the pleasure that is experienced from the protection sought by the mother. Relying on the power of God and having confidence in His wisdom is even described as being medicinal because of the pleasure it brings. Nursi does not see this as real fear as he asks:

What fear can a man have, who, through the certificate of his impotence, relies on a Monarch of the World with the power to command: “Be!” and it is. For in the face of the worst calamity, he says: Verily, to God do we belong, and verily to Him is our return, and places his trust in his Most Compassionate Sustainer.³⁹⁰

Thus, not only does Nursi argue there is great happiness and inner peace in acknowledging God’s power, but there is also great happiness in realising one’s weakness and impotence.

³⁸⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 323.

³⁸⁹ Ibid, 43.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

2.6.2 All-Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*)

God's mercy is a common theme in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. When the Qur'ān is opened, the first line before any of the chapters even begin says "In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate." This same phrase is found at the beginning of all chapters of the Qur'ān except one. Ibn Amr (d. 1221) highlights that the name *al-Raḥmān* comes straight after God's specific name, *Allāh*, in this phrase. Ibn 'Amr draws the conclusion that God's name *al-Raḥmān* comes before all other names of God, making it the most important name of God after *Allāh*.³⁹¹ He adds that without God's name *al-Raḥmān*, nothing would have been created. In other words, this name of God is the cause for the existence of creation.³⁹²

God's mercy is further highlighted in the Qur'ān when God declares "...My Mercy embraces all things..."³⁹³ When explaining this verse in his *tafsīr*, Bursawī puts a context to the verse by explaining that *al-Raḥmān* comes from the word *raḥmāh*, and *raḥmāh* means the state of being sensitive, soft and tender.³⁹⁴ Bursawī continues by highlighting that *Raḥmāh* is categorised into two types, general and specific, with the first type being for all of creation, highlighting the comprehensive nature of God's *raḥmāh* (mercy).³⁹⁵

A *ḥadīth* that highlights the magnitude of God's mercy is: "Allah divided Mercy into one-hundred parts and He kept its ninety-nine parts with Him and sent down its one part on the earth, and because of that one single part, His creations are Merciful to each other, so that even the mare lifts up its hoofs away from its baby animal, lest it should trample on it."³⁹⁶ Another *ḥadīth* mentions how the ninety-nine parts of the mercy God has kept with Him will be of

³⁹¹ Imām Aḥmad ibn 'Amr, "Al-tā'wialtu'l Najmiyyah fī tafsīr'i Sufiyyī Ish'ariyyi" [Starry Interpretations in Sufi Tafsīr], accessed August 30, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=97&tSoraNo=1&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&Page=17&Size=1&LanguageId=1>.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Qur'ān 7:156.

³⁹⁴ Bursawī, "Rūḥu'l-Bayān," accessed August 30, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=36&tSoraNo=1&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&Page=4&Size=1&LanguageId=1>.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Bukhārī, book 78, *ḥadīth* no. 31.

benefit for humankind in the hereafter.³⁹⁷ These *ḥadīth* portray God to have mercy on such a scale that it is beyond mathematical calculations, yet at the same time provide an appreciation for its magnitude.

An incident that also gives an appreciation for God's mercy is that of a lady who loses her child among a crowd and then finds the child, after which the mother compassionately starts to nurse her child. Having witnessed this incident, Prophet Muḥammad asks his companions, "Do you think this lady can throw her son in the fire?" to which the companions respond, "No." The Prophet then said, "God is more merciful to humankind than this lady to her son."³⁹⁸ With the mother's mercy and compassion being considered as symbolism of mercy, this *ḥadīth* sends a strong message that God's mercy surpasses that of a mother.

Such Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* demonstrate the vastness of God's mercy, which is often the topic of discussion for Nursi as he describes in detail the mercy that is manifested within the universe, particularly within the animal kingdom. Therefore, it is of no surprise that a recurring theme in the *Risale-i Nur* is God's mercy. Often, God's mercy is linked to God's power in the writings. While All-Powerful is an expression of God's majesty (*jalāl*), All-Merciful is an expression of God's beauty (*jamāl*), complementing each other in a balanced manner. God's power leads to action and movement within the universe, so the stars and particles are in motion, while God's mercy makes those actions and movements beautiful and beneficial to all of creation. Nursi describes the presence of such mercy within the universe as:

What makes this boundless universe rejoice is clearly Divine Mercy. And what illuminates these dark beings is self-evidently Divine Mercy. And what fosters and raises creatures struggling within these endless needs is self-evidently again Divine Mercy...And what designates ephemeral man for eternity and makes him the addressee and beloved of a Pre-Eternal and Post-Eternal One is self-evidently Divine Mercy.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Bukhārī, book 81, *ḥadīth* no. 58.

³⁹⁸ Bukhārī, book 78, *ḥadīth* no. 30.

³⁹⁹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 135.

The universe is portrayed in a way where the all-encompassing mercy of God can be witnessed upon all of creation through the countless bounties that are bestowed upon it.⁴⁰⁰ Thus, God's mercy is evident and its presence is strongly felt by all. The analogy of the sun is used to highlight how God does not distinguish among his creation when shining His Mercy upon all of creation, just as the sun's light shines on all indiscriminately.⁴⁰¹ Therefore, everything and everyone indiscriminately gets their share of God's mercy, including the good and the bad, the faithful and the rebel, the beloved and the hated.⁴⁰² Such a description of God's mercy is a suitable *tafsīr* of the Qur'ānic verse "...My Mercy embraces all things..."⁴⁰³

God's Mercy has a particular focus on humankind, according to Nursi, making humankind the focal point of the universe. Nursi explains it is the Divine's Mercy that causes the whole universe to be turned towards humankind, running to its assistance.⁴⁰⁴ While there are significant theological implications for humankind being the focal point of creation, it also has significant implications for the way humankind perceives and therefore values itself. This perception of the self is important since feeling valued is an integral part of inner peace. According to Nursi, God is telling human beings they are so valuable that He created the whole universe for them and made them the focus of His Mercy.

Nursi describes God's mercy as a powerful, inviting, sweet, assisting lovable truth due to what it offers humankind. By relying on God's mercy, an individual is able to "be saved from absolute desolation and the pains of unending needs"⁴⁰⁵ providing a state of inner peace since being conscious of God's mercy provides reassurance, knowing that God looks after all of one's needs – better than a mother could.

⁴⁰⁰ Nursi, *The Rays*, 190-191.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Bayrak, *The Name and the Named*, 48.

⁴⁰³ Qur'ān 7:156.

⁴⁰⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 20.

⁴⁰⁵ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 135.

On another occasion, Nursi states, “He who finds this Mercy (God) finds an eternal unfailing treasury of light.”⁴⁰⁶ Through the recognition of Divine mercy, an individual feels protected in a world that otherwise appears harsh and chaotic. There is great reassurance in knowing that everything is under the control of the merciful God. This prevents fearing events and matters that would otherwise cause a lot of panic. Nursi explains “In fact, for a worshipper with a truly illuminated heart, it is possible that even if the globe of the earth became a bomb and exploded, it would not frighten him.”⁴⁰⁷ This is only possible knowing that the One who does this is the All-Merciful God. Furthermore, Nursi explains the mercy of God showers not only on human beings, but the whole of creation. Therefore, when one looks at the world, there is a sense that everything is being taken care of and the One taking care of everything is All-Merciful.

Thus, knowing God to be All-Merciful brings with it great comfort and peace. The comfort and peace that comes with feeling protected by a mother is magnified, not only for the self but all of creation. God’s mercy also offers reassurance for humankind who has multiple needs, trusting that the Merciful will fulfil the needs of all. Therefore, one who knows God through this name is able to experience inner peace through what the All-Merciful offers the individual.

2.6.3 All-Just (*al-’Adl*)

God’s justice (*adalat*) is associated with key topics in the *Risale-i Nur*, with its prevalence in the discussion of life after death, Divine determination and theodicy. Nursi also refers to *al-’Adl* as the greatest name or one of the six greatest names that belong to God.⁴⁰⁸ The definition of justice that Nursi adopts is similar to the definition used by philosophers; “putting a thing in its proper place” or “a middle path or a moderate (positive) action or a mean that lies between

⁴⁰⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, 25.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 30.

⁴⁰⁸ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 400. There are many *ḥadīth* that mention the Greatest Name (*ism a’zam*), a name of Allah that deserves much more merit; therefore, it is believed that calling upon Allah using this name makes one’s supplication worthy to be answered by Allah. It is believed the Greatest Name is a secret not known to all. Based on *ḥadīth*, a number of different names of God are compiled together to form the Greatest Names. Nursi believes six names of Allah make up the Greatest Name, of which *al-Adl* is one of them.

two extremes.”⁴⁰⁹ While the terms justice and fairness are often thought of in the context of justice to humankind, Nursi broadens the definition to include everything that exists within the universe, from the animate to the inanimate. Nursi describes *al-’Adl* as “balance, equilibrium and equilibration”⁴¹⁰ that is apparent within the whole of the universe. As a result of this balance, equilibrium and equilibration, Nursi explains that everything is treated justly and everything is given its due right in the best possible way. He gives the following example to demonstrate God’s justice:

Although it would be justice to record one evil as a thousand and a single good deed as one or not at all, He records a single evil as one, and a single good deed as ten, and sometimes as seventy or seven hundred, or even sometimes as seven thousand.⁴¹¹

When discussing the justice witnessed in the universe, which is a manifestation of God’s name All-Just, Nursi quotes the following Qur’ānic verses:

And the heaven – He has made it high (above the earth), and He has set up the balance (*mizān*). So that you may not go beyond (the limits with respect to) the balance (*mizān*). And establish weight in justice (*wazn*) and do not make deficient the balance (*mizān*).⁴¹²

Qushayrī interprets this Qur’ānic verse to mean that justice must be implemented in all acts of life, including human rights and God’s rights. He also understands it to mean that one must be sincere, truthful, in that one must have equality outwardly and inwardly.⁴¹³ Bursawī quotes the Prophet when explaining this verse, “The Prophet said justice is a pillar of the earth and heaven.”⁴¹⁴ Nursi comments there are four degrees and four types of balance that highlight the

⁴⁰⁹ Bilal Kuşpınar, “Justice and Balance in Creation” in *Justice and Theodicy in Modern Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’ (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 228.

⁴¹⁰ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 400.

⁴¹¹ Nursi, *The Words*, 330.

⁴¹² Qur’ān 55:6-9.

⁴¹³ ‘Abd al-Karīm Qushayrī, “Laṭā’if al-Isharat” [Subtleties of the Illusions], accessed July 15, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=31&tSoraNo=55&tAyahNo=7&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁴¹⁴ Bursawī, “Rūḥu’l-Bayān,” accessed July 15, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=36&tSoraNo=55&tAyahNo=7&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

importance and greatness of balance within the universe, which means there is no injustice in anything. In other words, balance means justice.⁴¹⁵ To make his argument compelling, Nursi gives examples that demonstrate this balance, such as the cells and blood vessels within animals, and the balance of the sun with the planets. Since balance can be witnessed all around us, there must be justice.⁴¹⁶

To further emphasise the central role that justice has in Islam, Nursi explains that justice is one of the four main themes addressed by the Qur'ān, alongside Divine Unity, prophethood and resurrection. Everything that is discussed in the Qur'ān, in one way or another, returns to one of these four topics.⁴¹⁷ Therefore, the understanding of justice is broad and encapsulates the individual, the universe and God.

2.6.3.1 Resurrection and the Hereafter

A key part of understanding God's justice, according to Nursi, is taking into consideration the seen and unseen realms, that is, the physical and metaphysical. At face value, one may not be convinced there is justice. This in particular, Nursi explains, when explaining Divine determination (*qadar al-ilāhī*), giving examples of how apparent causes are not sufficient in understanding God's justice. However, this notion of justice is used when Nursi argues there must be a life in the hereafter, stating that true justice will only prevail in the hereafter:

Would a mercy and wisdom which compassionately preserve the rights of life of a fly violate the countless rights of life of all conscious beings and the numberless rights of numberless beings, through not bringing about the resurrection?⁴¹⁸

In other words, if God preserves the rights of a fly, He will preserve the rights of all beings. However, absolute justice will manifest in the hereafter, according to Nursi, which means belief

⁴¹⁵ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 402.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 38.

⁴¹⁸ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 403.

in resurrection and life in the hereafter is essential for true justice. In the Tenth Word, Nursi compares the hereafter to a Supreme Tribunal, explaining that “But here in this land, not a thousandth part of the requirements of such wisdom and justice is fulfilled...So again we say, matters are postponed for the consideration of a Supreme Tribunal.”⁴¹⁹ Although Nursi argues only one-thousandth of God’s justice is manifested within the universe, he uses this same argument to explain that God is just.

The fact that all things are given their rights in accordance with their disposition, that they receive all the necessities of their being and all the requirements of life in the most fitting form – this too is the sign left by a hand of infinite justice.⁴²⁰

This may sound like a paradox; however, through the reflection (*tafakkur*) on the universe, justice and balance can be seen according to Nursi. A justice that creates reassurance and trust in the Creator. Nevertheless, true justice will not prevail until the hereafter. Thus, there is a sharp contrast between the marvellous beauty and order of the natural world, which paints the Creator as a just Creator, and the human experience, which is consistently disordered and unjust.⁴²¹ This tension will be resolved with resurrection where the final judgment will take place. What this means is that “this very hour, we are shaping our eternal destinies in decisive ways, in the grand symmetry of divine justice.”⁴²²

To further clarify the distinction between God’s justice and humankind’s attempt to implement justice, Nursi divides justice into two: absolute (*mahza*) and relative (*izafi*).⁴²³ That is, God’s justice is perfect, whereas humankind’s justice is not; God’s justice is absolute, while humankind’s justice is relative. Relative justice, the justice implemented by humankind, is the

⁴¹⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 61.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, 78.

⁴²¹ Leo D Lefebure, “The Resurrection of the Dead: Said Nursi and Jurgen Moltmann,” in *Justice and Theodicy in Modern Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi‘ (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 105.

⁴²² W Mark Richardson, “Resurrection in the Writing of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” in *Justice and Theodicy in Modern Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi‘ (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 95.

⁴²³ Hasan Hörküç, “Is Justice Binary? Absolute and Relative Justice in the Teachings of Said Nursi,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38 (2010): 601, accessed June 4, 2015, doi: 10.1163/156853110X517791.

outcome of the limited knowledge, reason and perception of right and wrong among humankind, and from the extent to which humankind naturally yields to its prejudices and passions.⁴²⁴ The resultant imperfect justice implemented by humankind does not go against God's perfect justice; God's justice encapsulates the relative and imperfect justice of humankind. Once again, this can only be explained by having the hereafter as part of the discussion. That is, absolute justice will be prevalent in the hereafter when the implementation of justice will be by God only.

Despite the imperfections witnessed in the world, Nursi underlines his foremost conviction that "in the phenomenal world there is an apparent justice whose origin is God."⁴²⁵ That is, there is abundant evidence that God is just. When world events and events in our own lives are viewed with the belief in a God who is All-Just, it transforms the way those events are perceived. Either the 'injustices' are no longer seen as such through the outcomes they may produce or belief in the hereafter provides a state of inner peace, knowing that everything that is done will be accounted for in the hereafter, through the postponement of matters to a "supreme tribunal, an ultimate bliss."⁴²⁶ Otherwise, living in a world of tyranny, oppression and various acts of violence and terror can be difficult to reconcile with God's justice.

Nursi offers a scenario to demonstrate God's justice: a society is suffering adversity under a tyrant ruler, great injustice is taking place, resulting in pain and suffering. There are three groups of people in that society who suffer as a result. However, they receive different outcomes because of their role within that society:

- 1 The poor, the afflicted, and the weak: they will end up with a one hundred fold profit from the situation.
- 2 The oppressors: their suffering is pure Divine justice.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Kuşpınar, "Justice and Balance in Creation," 229.

⁴²⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, 77.

- 3 Those who were seeking to help the oppressed: the material and immaterial results of such sacrifice are so great that they make the calamity a means of honour and distinction for them, and should make them love it.⁴²⁷

The three possible outcomes demonstrate God's justice. Based on the circumstances and actions of each group, justice would manifest itself in different ways. It is interesting to note the third group will 'love' the suffering because of the great outcomes they will receive. The notion of what really is a calamity becomes important. If there is suffering that will result in eternal bliss, is it really suffering?⁴²⁸ Once again, the essential role that the hereafter plays in how people perceive events becomes evident. Another important point about this example is that one cannot always know the state of an individual and therefore cannot judge it as being unjust. When the suffering of an old person is witnessed, it can be heart-wrenching. However, if they are going to make a one-hundred-fold profit from the situation, is it really heart wrenching? When seeing a heroic or nice person die, one is often heartbroken thinking "he or she was such a nice person, they did not deserve to die in that way." But if the "material and immaterial results of such sacrifice are so great that they make the calamity a means of honour and distinction for them" should we be heartbroken by it?⁴²⁹ Nursi would answer no.

In summary, God's name *al-'Adl* is one of the most important names relating to inner peace, since inner peace necessitates a feeling of justice for all of creation. According to Nursi, this is why resurrection and the hereafter are so important. It is also due to this desire for justice that Nursi focuses so much time discussing resurrection and the hereafter. As he explains, "the manifest injustice of life requires another world where wrongs will be corrected, victims will be avenged, and upright behaviour will be rewarded."⁴³⁰ To have the conviction that no one and

⁴²⁷ Said Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, (Istanbul: Sinan Matbaası, 1960), 75–76.

⁴²⁸ The concept of calamity will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

⁴²⁹ Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 75–76.

⁴³⁰ Thomas Michel, "Resurrection of the Dead and Final Judgement in the Thought of Said Nursi," in *Justice and Theodicy in Modern Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 30.

nothing will be treated unjustly helps in dealing with the ‘injustices and cruelties’ that are witnessed in life. Such a conviction necessitates the belief in an All-Just God.

2.7 Conclusion

Belief in God (*imān*) is the core theme in the *Risale-i Nur*. Not only does Nursi expend extensive time and effort to prove the existence and unity of God (*tawhīd*), but he also goes to great effort to prove that belief is essential for one to be in a state of inner peace, arguing that belief is not only essential for happiness in the hereafter, but it is also essential for happiness in this life, which is an important component of Nursi’s methodology.

The link between belief and inner peace is further augmented by emphasising the importance of knowledge of God, particularly through the study of the beautiful names of God (*āṣma al-ḥusnā*) within the universe and within humankind. According to Nursi, belief in God should naturally lead to knowledge of God, which is made easy through the use of allegorical comparisons commonly found in the *Risale-i Nur*. Consequently, knowledge of God should lead to love of God. “Indeed, all true happiness, pure joy, sweet bounties, and untroubled pleasure lie in knowledge of God and love of God.”⁴³¹

One of the major impacts of belief in God is that it changes the way one views the world, transforming the world into a ‘paradise like abode’ as the world converts from darkness to light. Nursi also provides a mindset that allows the world to be approached in a balanced manner; it does not need to be completely negated or rejected, and neither should it be fully accepted with all its aspects. Instead, the world should be embraced as a manifestation of God’s names and as a fertile ground to sow good deeds for the hereafter, rejecting the aspects of the world that are about feeding the ego, immersing in sins and forgetting God.

⁴³¹ Nursi, *The Letters*, 265.

The resultant outcome of believing in God is the attainment of a state of inner peace and tranquillity, which is founded upon knowledge of God. Knowledge of God increases as the universe is decoded through the names of God so each name becomes a means of inner peace through what it offers. This was demonstrated through the names *al-Qādir* (All-Powerful), *al-Rahmān* (All-Merciful) and *al-'Adl* (All-Just). God's name the All-Powerful provides a sense of security, All-Merciful generates a sense of hope and comfort and All-Just generates a sense of reassurance. But, at the same time, the intertwined nature of the names of God need to be acknowledged, as was evident through the discussion.

Since the focus here is the relationship between God and humankind, knowing God means a half understood relationship. Knowing the self is just as important to fully appreciate the relationship between God and humankind. Furthermore, Nursi emphasises the importance of knowing the self to attain inner peace in various parts of his writings. These discussions will be analysed in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: KNOWING ONE'S SELF AND INNER PEACE

3.1 Introduction

Belief and knowledge of God is the purpose of life in Nursi's philosophy. To him, such belief and knowledge not only brings happiness in the next life, but also provides immense strength, happiness and inner peace in this life. By decoding the universe into the names of God, everything becomes legible and familiar.

Once there is belief and knowledge of God, the questions that naturally follows are, "what does that knowledge mean to me and how do I respond to that knowledge?" Nursi states that God has created humankind for a purpose. Just as important is the notion that God created humankind with a particular nature (*fitrah*) on purpose. Nursi frequently discusses human nature in the context of finding happiness in this life and in the next. In this process, the physical and spiritual aspects of humankind are taken into consideration.⁴³²

In accordance with Nursi's approach, four aspects of a human being will be discussed in this chapter. Firstly, to truly know God, one needs to know one's self as indicated by the Qur'ānic verse: "And be not like those who forgot God, so He made them forget their own souls..."⁴³³ Therefore, knowing the self brings one closer to God, which in itself is a source of peace as explained in chapter 2. How does one know the self? According to Nursi, the *nafs* (ego) has a central role in knowing the self. The purity of the *nafs* also determines the type of relationship one has with God. This chapter will analyse the importance of knowing the self in the human-God relationship, which ultimately affects inner peace. The chapter will also analyse the role of the *nafs* within this relationship.

⁴³² Adem Tatlı, "Bediüzzaman's Education Method," in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözler, 1993), 96.

⁴³³ Qur'ān 59:19.

Secondly, truly knowing the self, changes the way the self is appraised. When the Creation is linked to a Creator, it changes the whole perception of it, including humankind, elevating its value to an esteemed level. Within this context, realising one's potential becomes a great source of peace and joy as one experiences a continual increase in value through their achievements. This notion that human beings' value elevates through association will be studied in this chapter. Examples from Nursi's writing will also be provided about how unravelling potential contributes towards inner peace.

Thirdly, once there is self knowledge, the self can then become aligned with its human nature, ensuring the proper uses of the faculties, such as the heart and intellect. The faculties can then be used for the purpose they were created which is essential for one to attain inner peace, according to Nursi. This chapter will study the purpose of the heart and intellect as explained by Nursi. From this stems the importance of the proper use of emotions. Emotions are an inherent part of a human being, which cannot be negated. The chapter will also discuss how the correct channelling of emotions can assist in attaining inner peace rather than causing emotional turmoil.

Fourthly, with self-awareness comes the realisation of a gap – a gap between what one can realistically attain and what one desires to attain, triggering feelings of inadequacy. This chapter will discuss how such feelings bring one closer to God through the realisation that only God can fulfil one's needs. It will also be explained how this naturally leads to worship, which becomes a means of reassurance and peace.

3.2 Knowing One's Self to Know God

Realising one's potential is only possible through knowing one's self, an emphasis Nursi makes in various parts of his writings. However, knowing one's self is directly linked to knowing God. This relationship between knowing the self and knowing God has been discussed in detail

among various prominent scholars such as Ibn Sīnā⁴³⁴, Ghazzālī⁴³⁵, Iqbal⁴³⁶ (d. 1938)⁴³⁷ and Gülen⁴³⁸. This is of no surprise since this relationship is alluded to in the Qur’ānic verse “And be not like those who forgot God, so He made them forget their own souls...”⁴³⁹

However, while this verse is often quoted to emphasise the importance of knowing the self to know God, it has not been understood in that way by all *tafsīr* scholars. According to Ibn ‘Abbās, this verse refers to those who forget God and by doing so they commit sins. In return for their negligence, “God abandoned them such that they left His obedience altogether,”⁴⁴⁰ according to Ibn ‘Abbās. Thus, forgetting God is associated with forgetting the commandments of God and by doing so, committing sins. This act of forgetfulness then further enhances the heedless state. When the discussion is reversed, the explanation suggests that when one tries to follow the commandments of God, He helps that person to fulfil their responsibilities and protects them from sinning.

In *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* the interpretation is very similar. Forgetting God is explained to mean forgetting to obey God so He makes them forget their own souls, which is explained to mean that one forgets to send ahead good deeds for one’s own benefit.⁴⁴¹ Tustarī has a similar understanding, although he additionally emphasises the importance of repentance. He explains that, if one commits a sin and does not repent (by forgetting God), it will lead one to another sin, which will cause them to forget the former sin.⁴⁴² Therefore, the state of forgetfulness is a forgetfulness of one’s transgression against God.

⁴³⁴ Lenn Evan Goodman, *Avicenna* (USA, Cornell University Press, 2006), 172.

⁴³⁵ Abu Hamid Ghazzālī, *Al-Ghazzālī on Knowing Yourself and God*, trans. M. N. Abdussalam. (Chicago, USA: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2002), 7.

⁴³⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *Secrets of Ego* (Islamic Book Service, 1977), 14.

⁴³⁷ Iqbal was a twentieth century scholar who excelled in academia, poetry and philosophy.

⁴³⁸ Fethullah Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*, vol. 3 (Somerset, NJ: Tughra, 2009).

⁴³⁹ Qur’ān 59:19.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās*, 757.

⁴⁴¹ Maḥallī and Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 1191.

⁴⁴² Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allāh Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī* [Tafsīr of Tustarī], trans. Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011), 227.

Nursi's understanding of this verse is broader, although the essence is similar. His focus is more on the mindset that comes with forgetting God and its immediate consequences, rather than the sins one commits as a result. By forgetting God, Nursi explains that one forgets about the fleeting nature of this world and imagines the self to be undying. In other words, one becomes oblivious to the reality of one's true nature. There is a sense of denial of who one really is, leading to embracing this world with intense emotions. Nursi explains that "such love (for this world) will be boundless torment and tribulation"⁴⁴³ for the individual, causing suffering in absolute despair. Therefore, Nursi stresses the suffering imbued in forgetting God, rather than the sins. Nursi knows he needs to highlight the pain and suffering associated with the sins, since highlighting the sins is not enough to move people in today's time.

A *ḥadīth* that is often quoted in the context of knowing one's self, and is highly relevant to this subject matter, is "He who knows himself knows his Lord."⁴⁴⁴ Although the authenticity of this *ḥadīth* is uncertain, it is nevertheless commonly quoted in the context of knowing the self⁴⁴⁵ since it clearly articulates the relationship between knowing the self and knowing God. It actually goes further and reaffirms the notion that is not possible to know God if the self is not known.

Nursi emphasises the importance of knowing the self by stating, "Read yourself! Otherwise it is possible you come to be either animal-like or inanimate!"⁴⁴⁶ The admonition here for humankind to study and gain knowledge of one's self and acquire insight⁴⁴⁷ is also based on the following Qur'ānic verse: "And in the earth there are signs for those who are certain. And in

⁴⁴³ Nursi, *The Letters*, 29.

⁴⁴⁴ According to Ibn Taymīyah, it is not the words of Prophet Muḥammad (<https://unity1.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/know-thyself.pdf>) whereas according to Ibn 'Arabī, it is a hadith as per next footnote.

⁴⁴⁵ Ghasem Kakaie, "Know yourself, According to Qur'an and Sunnah: Ibn Arabi's View," in *Philosophical-Theological Research* 9 (2006): 10.

⁴⁴⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, 719.

⁴⁴⁷ Mahdiyya Amnuh, "The Qur'anic Understanding of Questions Related to Man According to the Risale-i Nur," *Nur Web Pages*, http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/The_Quranic_Understanding_of_Questions_215

your own selves; will you not then see?’’⁴⁴⁸ The questioning nature of the Qur’ān is challenging humankind to know the self and read the signs that are so prevalent to the one who looks.

Nursi distinguishes humankind from other creations with this concept of knowing the self, something that humankind have been given the capacity to do, but not animals and inanimate objects, which ties back to his point to not be like animals or inanimate objects. This point will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter as it is an important difference between humankind and other creations, which has theological and spiritual implications. It is now timely to discuss how to know the self.

3.2.1 How to Know One’s Self

Nursi explains there is a ‘measure’ embedded within a human being that needs to be used for knowing God called the *ana* (the ego or the *nafs*)⁴⁴⁹. The *ana* is described to be an element found within humankind that enables one to say ‘I’ and to differentiate one’s self from the rest of the cosmos.⁴⁵⁰ From the onset, Nursi explains that the *ana* has the potential to be “the seed of a terrible tree of *Zaqqum*,⁴⁵¹ as well as the potential to be a luminous tree of *Tuba*⁴⁵² “which shoots out branches around the world of humankind.”⁴⁵³ Nursi refers to the Tuba tree throughout his work and connects it with a state of bliss, happiness and peace. By mentioning a tree that is found in Paradise when discussing this worldly life, Nursi is asserting that one can live a Paradise-like life in this world if the *ana* is used for the correct purpose. On the other hand, *Zaqqum* is a tree found in hell. Therefore, misusing the *ana* creates a hell-like state for an individual in this life.

According to Nursi, the Qur’ānic verse central to the discussion of the *ana* is:

⁴⁴⁸ Qur’ān, 51:20-21.

⁴⁴⁹ Gülen refers to the *ana* as the ego in Fethullah Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*, vol. 3, trans. Ali Ünal (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2009), 149.

⁴⁵⁰ Turner, *The Qur’an Revealed*, 179.

⁴⁵¹ See, Qur’ān 37:62; 44:43; 56:52.

⁴⁵² See, Qur’ān 13:29.

⁴⁵³ Nursi, *The Words*, 557.

We did indeed offer The Trust (*amānah*) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains but they refused to undertake it being afraid thereof, but man undertook it; he was indeed unjust and ignorant.⁴⁵⁴

The key word in the whole verse is *amānah* (trust). The word trust implies that whatever is offered must be held temporarily and returned preserved in its original or in better form. The trust is in the disposition of the one who is trusted and the trustee has certain expectations, as will become clear, although many classical and modern *tafsīr* scholars understand the trust to be different things. While some scholars have understood the trust to be the role of being *caliph* (guardian) on earth (Qur’ān 2:30), others have understood this to mean responsibilities and injunctions (*fards*) of religion.⁴⁵⁵ Yusuf Ali, a contemporary *tafsīr* scholar, interprets the trust as the freedom to choose good and evil.⁴⁵⁶ Nursi has a completely different understanding of what the trust is. According to Nursi, one aspect of the trust is the concept of *ana*.⁴⁵⁷ Great significance and ‘power’ is given to the *ana* as it is considered a key, which opens all the doors of the world; through the enigmatic *ana*, the hidden treasures of the Creator of the universe can be discovered.⁴⁵⁸ However, the *ana* is a trust, which means it needs to be used “in accordance with the wishes of the giver.”⁴⁵⁹ Nursi asserts that, if the *ana* is used correctly, the expected outcome will be achieved and lead to happiness for the user since this face of the *ana* looks to good and existence; therefore, it is only capable of receiving favour.⁴⁶⁰ Whereas if it is misused, there will be grave consequences and misery since it looks to evil and non-existence.⁴⁶¹

So, what is the correct usage of the *ana* and what are the expected outcomes? Nursi explains that God has absolutely no limits and one cannot comprehend something that is absolute and unlimited. He gives the example of light; light cannot be perceived if there is no contrasting

⁴⁵⁴ Qur’ān 33:72

⁴⁵⁵ Maḥallī and Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 913.

⁴⁵⁶ Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran* (Beltsville, Md: Amana Publications, 1997), 293.

⁴⁵⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, 557.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, 558.

⁴⁵⁹ Turner, “The Six-Sided Vision of Said Nursi,” 33.

⁴⁶⁰ Nursi, *The Words*, 559.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

darkness next to it. However, the moment a line of darkness is drawn, the light can be perceived due to the contrast that has been provided.⁴⁶² It is like a projector shining light on a wall. The contrasting brightness of the light cannot be truly known or appreciated until shadows appear on the wall. Once the darkness of the shadows is witnessed, the contrast allows one to appreciate the light that is being projected.

Nursi continues to explain that, since God's names and attributes do not have limits, it is necessary to draw a hypothetical line or imaginary limit. The *ana* or 'I' does this. Through life events, the *ana* experiences pretence dominicality, ownership, power and knowledge. This is like the line of darkness drawn to be able to perceive the light. That is, it places an imaginary limit on the all-encompassing attributes and shares the ownership with God. It is through this process that the *ana* is used as a measure to understand the names and attributes of God.⁴⁶³

How does this 'measure' help to understand the names and attributes of God? When apparent ownership is experienced, Nursi explains that it leads one to say, "As I made this house and arranged it, so someone must have made the universe and arranged it"⁴⁶⁴ or "Like I am the owner of this house, so too is the Creator the owner of the universe."⁴⁶⁵ Similarly, with partial knowledge, one can gain an appreciation for God's infinite knowledge, and with a small amount of acquired art, one may understand the art of the All Glorious Designer.⁴⁶⁶ Therefore, through knowing of one's self, knowledge of God is attained.

Essentially, the *ana* is like a mirror, measure or instrument for seeing or finding. Its real nature is only indicative and indicates the meaning of things other than itself.⁴⁶⁷ "Like any other unit of measurement, the 'I' (*ana*) does not have a concrete material existence."⁴⁶⁸ When the *ana*

⁴⁶² Ali Ünal, *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* (Somerset, N.J: The Light, 2006), 1313.

⁴⁶³ Nursi, *The Words*, 558.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 559.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 558-559.

⁴⁶⁷ Ünal, *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, 1314.

⁴⁶⁸ Turner, "The Six-Sided Vision of Said Nursi," 33.

understands its role in this way, it “abandons its imaginary ownership and, ascribing both itself and other beings to their True Owner, sees the universe”⁴⁶⁹ A purified *ana* is applauded in the Qur’ān; “Truly he succeeds who purifies it.”⁴⁷⁰ Such a person has “shown his superiority to the angels by properly using the ‘Trust’ committed to him.”⁴⁷¹ The proper use of the *ana* also provides deep insight into the names of God, which are mirrored within the self, leading to knowledge and love of God. As discussed in chapter 2, this then leads to inner peace. When mercy is shown to others, God’s mercy (*al-Raḥmān*) is remembered, generating comfort and hope in the one who shows mercy to others. When one seeks to be just to others, God’s justice (*al-’Adl*) comes to mind, stirring a sense of reassurance in the justice-seeking person. When one uses their power to protect the vulnerable, God’s power is recalled, creating a sense of security. Therefore, each name of God, which is reflected within the self, becomes a pathway to inner peace.

Nursi explains, on the contrary, if the *ana* gives power and ownership to itself and the causes surrounding it, it has betrayed the trust, not seeing the universe as it is in reality and inevitably the *ana* turns to *shirk* (associating partners with God).⁴⁷² Because the true nature of the *ana* is not known and hence not applied properly, its imaginary line of existence is believed to thicken and spread throughout the human self “swallowing it whole like a dragon.”⁴⁷³ Nursi quotes the Qur’ānic verse “And he fails who corrupts it”⁴⁷⁴ to describe this state since the *ana* has been failed to be used for its correct purpose. In such a case, God is completely taken out of the picture; the mirror is no longer seen as the object reflecting the light, but is seen as the source of the light, negating the real source of light, which is God. According to Nursi, this is a state

⁴⁶⁹ Vahide, “A Survey of the Main Spiritual Themes of the Risale-i Nur,” 11.

⁴⁷⁰ Qur’ān 91:9.

⁴⁷¹ Şimsek, “Flashes of the Divine Names in the Risale-i Nur,” 190.

⁴⁷² This is why the next verse in Chapter 33, after mentioning the trust, talks about punishment for the *mushrikeen* (those who associate partners with God) (Qur’ān 33:74).

⁴⁷³ Nursi, *The Words*, 560.

⁴⁷⁴ Qur’ān 91:10.

of turmoil since it is a state of disbelief. All the benefits of belief are stripped away so the pain and suffering remains. As articulated by Nursi, “in disbelief there is a sort of spiritual Hell.”⁴⁷⁵

Ghazzālī has a similar approach to Nursi, giving examples of how God’s names manifest on humankind, leading to a better understanding of God’s names. As an example, Ghazzālī explains how the name of the King (*al-Malik*) is mirrored on human beings as they are rulers of their own kingdoms.⁴⁷⁶ The kingdom intended here is the heart and physical body since they should be under the control of the individual.⁴⁷⁷ However, a significant difference between Nursi and Ghazzālī is that Ghazzālī does not link this mirroring of God’s names to the *nafs*. This is an indication of the undeniable role the *nafs* plays in knowing the self today, which was not the case during Ghazzālī’s time. This point will be expanded on further when discussing the perception of the *nafs*. However, it is noteworthy to highlight that the mirroring of the names of God by human beings has been an established source of knowledge of God for many centuries.

It is timely to discuss Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach to the relationship between self-knowledge and knowledge of God, since Ibn ‘Arabī is considered to be one of the greatest scholars of Sufism within the Muslim world. How does Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach to this relationship between knowing God and knowing the self compare to Nursi’s? Ibn ‘Arabī discusses this notion of knowing the self in various parts of his writings, stating that one will know God only “when we know the unity of ourselves and God without distinction.”⁴⁷⁸ That is, coming to a realisation that God alone is absolutely real and exists, and the self has no real existence.⁴⁷⁹ This state is referred to

⁴⁷⁵ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 19.

⁴⁷⁶ Ghazzālī, *Al-Ghazzālī on Knowing Yourself and God*, 47.

⁴⁷⁷ Ghazzālī, *Ninety-Nine Names of God in Islam*, 19.

⁴⁷⁸ Kakaie, “Know Yourself, According to Qur’an and Sunnah,” 18.

⁴⁷⁹ Reza Shah-Kazemi, “The Notion and Significance of Ma’rifa in Sufism,” in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 13, no. 2 (2002): 177.

as *fanā fī Allāh* (annihilation with God), where there is a realisation that one does not exist and only God exists, negating the self completely.⁴⁸⁰

This leads down a pathway of problems according to Nursi, since it is based on the concept of ‘Unity of Existence’ (*wahdat al-wujūd*). Unity of Existence is a doctrine that leads one to maintain that God is the only Being that truly is, and that the existence of anything ‘other-than-God’ is an illusion.⁴⁸¹ Although Nursi also explains that one’s *ana* does not have concrete real existence, nevertheless, he does state the *ana* is like a mirror. Therefore, there is a function served by the *ana*. Otherwise, to completely negate the existence of everything but God can go as far as denying God, according to Nursi, since there is a negation of the universe being a mirror to the Divine names.⁴⁸² For example, for the name of God “The Creator” to be real, there must be a real creation. To state that creation is imaginary or an illusion puts the name the Creator in doubt.⁴⁸³ Such a view not only has theological implications, but it also has spiritual implications, which is particularly relevant for this discussion.

The spiritual implication is that individuals of this time would find it almost impossible to negate their self when the self and the ego are so much at the forefront. This is one of the main reasons why Nursi has contended “this is not the age of Sufism.”⁴⁸⁴ Muslims of today do not have the discipline or conviction to implement the intensive practices and doctrines of Sufism, according to Nursi. Following a Sufi way helps bring one closer to God, assuming one already has strong belief in God, whereas Nursi’s focus is to save people’s faith at a time when the faith of Muslims as a collective was at risk.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁰ William Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 56-60.

⁴⁸¹ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 57.

⁴⁸² Nursi, *The Letters*, 107.

⁴⁸³ Ibid, 108.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 85.

⁴⁸⁵ Muhammad Machasin, “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Sufi Tradition,” *Al-Jami'ah* 43, no. 1 (2005): 15.

When literature on the *nafs* is studied, it becomes evident that discussions are often descriptive, merely providing details of what qualities one would have at each level.⁴⁸⁶ Such descriptions serve a purpose from an Islamic perspective, helping one to identify their level of *nafs* in contrast to the purer levels to which it can ascend. The writings of Nursi do not contradict the descriptions that are commonly found in the traditional literature.⁴⁸⁷ However, as we have seen, Nursi goes beyond these descriptions and focuses on the philosophy of the *nafs*; its purpose, how it transforms and its potential for good and evil in the context of today's circumstances. There are two important contributions by Nursi here. Firstly, he uses analogies to describe a complex concept, such as the *nafs*, which makes this information accessible to the layperson. Secondly, Nursi explains the *nafs* in a way that a person of today can use as a means to transform themselves, particularly at a time when the *nafs* is so much at the forefront.

Ultimately, the *nafs* becomes a source of knowledge of the self. This self-knowledge then becomes a source of knowledge of God. The more self-awareness one has, the more one gets to know their Lord, which then leads to inner peace. However, knowing the self leads to inner peace through another path as well and that is through realising one's true value.

3.3 Belief and Self-Evaluation

Nursi explains that humankind seeks to be valued, an innate need found within every individual. When measuring the value of humankind, the metaphysical and spiritual aspect can easily be neglected, with the focus becoming the physical component of humanity. Nursi sees this as a serious problem and argues that the metaphysical aspect of a human being should be the real focus. However, to have such a focus, there needs to be belief in God so the creation can be connected to the Creator and gain its true value. "Belief connects man to the All-Glorious Maker; it is a relation. Thus, man acquires value by virtue of the Divine art and inscriptions of

⁴⁸⁶ Frager, *Heart, Self & Soul* is an example of a book that provides a detailed description of the seven levels of the *nafs* commonly discussed in Sufism.

⁴⁸⁷ Ismail Killioglu, "The Concept of the 'I' in the Establishment of Nature," *Nur Web Pages*, April 18, 2006, http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/The_Concept_of_the_I_and_Nature_in_Bediuzzaman_179

the dominical Names which become apparent in him through belief.”⁴⁸⁸ That is, through belief, all the artwork of God becomes legible on humankind, so that humankind states, “I am the creature and artefact of the All-Glorious Maker. I manifest His mercy and munificence.”⁴⁸⁹ By seeing the inscription of God’s Mercy in one’s self, for example, it means one is able to connect the creation to the Creator, increasing the value of the creation as a result.

On the other hand, if there is no belief, according to Nursi, then a human being is evaluated based on their physical composition, severing the relationship between humankind and the Creator. Their value then is only in respect to the matter of their physical being.⁴⁹⁰ “And since this matter has only a transitory, passing, temporary animal life, its value is virtually nothing.”⁴⁹¹

A believer not only sees the connection between humankind and God, and therefore gives it greater value, but a believer also acknowledges the existence of the metaphysical world. Therefore, the ‘jewels’ of humankind are believed to “come from the World of Spirits, some from the World of Similitudes and the Preserved Tablet, and others from the world of the air, the world of Light, and the world of the elements.”⁴⁹² In other words, it is not the physical component of humankind that contains the ‘jewels’ that enrich a human being, it is the spiritual or the metaphysical components that contribute to the real value inherent within humankind.

Nursi uses the analogy of artwork to further elaborate on this point. If an artwork is attributed to an accomplished artist, it may be sold for a million dollars at the antiques market because the purchaser is able to make the connection between the artwork and the artist. Conversely, if such an artwork was taken to the scrap dealers where the artist was not known, the money received

⁴⁸⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 319.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, 320.

⁴⁹⁰ Bilal Kuşpınar, “The Chief Characteristics of Spirituality,” in *Spiritual Dimension of Bediuzzaman’s Risale-i Nur*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 141.

⁴⁹¹ Nursi, *The Words*, 319.

⁴⁹² Nursi, *The Flashes*, 184.

would be for the materials used to make the artwork, which could be a few cents worth of iron.⁴⁹³

Similarly, through belief, humankind attains their true value, states Nursi, because “belief, which consists of being connected to the Maker, makes apparent all the works of art in man,”⁴⁹⁴ so all the “significant inscriptions that are hidden in him become readable and meaningful with that light.”⁴⁹⁵ The human being is now seen as a mirror to God, manifesting the names of God that would otherwise be left in darkness. “In this respect insignificant man becomes God’s addressee and a guest of the Sustainer worthy of Paradise superior to all other creatures.”⁴⁹⁶

Nursi asserts that if one does not have belief, a diamond is being transformed into coal by not realising one’s potential.⁴⁹⁷ Although diamonds and coal are made up of the carbon element, their values are vastly different. Similarly, a believer and non-believer comprise the same elements, but their value in the sight of God is very different. It is faith, Nursi underscores, that makes man a true human and even a sultan.⁴⁹⁸

The portrayal of humankind based on belief and non-belief are vastly different according to Nursi. While belief makes you a “jewel worthy of eternity and Paradise,” non-belief “reduces you to a valueless, perishable stone devoid of most sublime feelings and virtues.”⁴⁹⁹ No doubt, these two perceptions will affect one’s state of being. Feeling valued, being connected to an Almighty Creator and being worthy of eternity and Paradise will generate a state of inner peace in an individual since it provides greater meaning and purpose in life. On the contrary, feeling temporary perishable existence as experienced by the physical body, will lead to misery and unhappiness since “the aim and fruit of his physical being is only to pass a brief and partial life

⁴⁹³ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 184.

⁴⁹⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 319.

⁴⁹⁵ Kuşpınar, “The Chief Characteristics of Spirituality,” 141.

⁴⁹⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, 320.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, 353.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, 323.

⁴⁹⁹ Nursi, *al-Mathnawi al-Nuriyya*, 112.

as the most impotent, needy, and grieving of animals.”⁵⁰⁰ Such a perception of the self can be very disheartening and depressing to say the least.

In summary, belief in God immensely elevates the value of human beings. This then becomes a source of inner peace since human beings innately yearn to be valued. Realising one’s potential also increases the value of human beings. The next section will discuss how realising one’s potential becomes a source of peace and happiness.

3.3.1 Realising One’s Potential

The value attained by belief is great, according to Nursi. It is far greater than the value attained through physical development. This puts spiritual development at the core of growth. According to the Qur’ān, the potential for an individual to develop is vast, “Verily We have created man in the fairest of forms, then sent him down to the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good deeds.”⁵⁰¹ The verse makes the point that human beings are created in the ‘fairest forms’, making it clear the potential is there for all of human beings to grow. Human innate nature has been created in such a way that it can move its way up from the “lowest of the low” to express the “fairest form” in which it has been created.

The description of fairest form has been understood in different ways by *tafsīr* scholars. According to Ṭabarī, humankind has been created in the best character and in a beautiful shape.⁵⁰² Rāzī (d. 925) has a similar understanding, describing the fairest form to be inner and outer beauty.⁵⁰³ Both these explanations stress the beauty found within human beings. Bursawi focuses more on the value of human beings rather than their beauty when commenting on this verse. He upholds the value of human beings to such a point that he states nothing is more

⁵⁰⁰ Nursi, *The Words*, 320.

⁵⁰¹ Qur’ān 95:4-6.

⁵⁰² Muḥammad ibn Jarir Ṭabarī, “Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī” [Tafsīr of Ṭabari], accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=95&tAyahNo=4&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁵⁰³ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad Rāzī, “Mafatih Al-Ghayb” [The Keys to the Unseen], accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=4&tSoraNo=95&tAyahNo=4&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

valuable on earth than human beings.⁵⁰⁴ Therefore, all the *tafsīr* scholars identify the great value inherent in human beings, whether it be physical or spiritual. However, that value needs to be realised so the fairest form is unravelled, moving the individual from the lowest of the low to its peak.

Nursi uses the tree analogy to describe this potential found within human beings, “Yes, however many degrees there are from a seed to a huge tree, the abilities lodged in human nature are more numerous. There are degrees from a minute particle to the sun.”⁵⁰⁵ When the levels of development that take place before a seed becomes a tree are considered, the vast potential found within human beings can somewhat be appreciated. Similarly, the huge difference and possible levels between a minute particle and the sun is very impressive. Through these two analogies, Nursi is able to clearly and visually express the vast potential human beings have for development.

The tree analogy is also used by Ibn ‘Arabī, where the tree denotes the universe.⁵⁰⁶ This does not contradict Nursi’s comparison of humankind being like a tree, since Nursi also states that humankind is a miniature universe.⁵⁰⁷ This resonates with Qurtubī’s *tafsīr* of the Qur’ānic verse, which describes human beings to be created in the fairest form. Qurtubī describes human beings to be like a small universe to highlight the potential inherent within them.⁵⁰⁸ Therefore, a strong connection between God, humankind and the universe is identified with many scholars citing this connection. Having such a strong connection and relationship with God and the universe is in itself a strong indication of the vast potential found within human beings, since physically human beings are barely comparable to the universe and non-comparable to God. Yet, it seems

⁵⁰⁴ Bursawi, “Rūḥu’l-Bayān,” accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=36&tSoraNo=95&tAyahNo=4&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁵⁰⁵ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 104.

⁵⁰⁶ Said Mentak, “The Tree,” in *Islamic Images and Ideas: Essays on Sacred Symbolism*, ed. John A. Morrow (USA: McFarland & Inc. Company Publishers, 2014), 128.

⁵⁰⁷ Nursi, *The Letters*, 275.

⁵⁰⁸ Qurtubī, “al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān,” accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=5&tSoraNo=95&tAyahNo=4&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

that human beings have a spiritual composition that can bring them into the same arena of discussion as God and the universe, even if in an absolutely minute manner.

Nursi uses the seed analogy regularly,⁵⁰⁹ a powerful analogy that indicates the possibilities that lie within all of humankind; the potential has been set and embedded, now requiring the correct environment and proper nourishment to allow the seed to rupture and grow into a vast tree. Such a process necessitates realisation of potential, which is a great source of happiness and peace for human beings. This concept of realising potential is not exclusive to Nursi. Ibn ‘Arabī also refers to it:

“Realization” is the full actualization of human status, and “the realities” are things as they truly are, that is, as they are known by God. To be given realization through the realities means to understand the realities for what they are and to respond to them in the appropriate manner. Realization, in other words, demands both knowledge and works.⁵¹⁰

This description of realisation resonates with the way Nursi understands the concept. However, as with other concepts, I would argue that Nursi’s approach is much broader and more appropriate for contemporary times with a particular focus on the need for belief for one to realise their potential. Thus, Nursi emphasises the importance of getting the fundamentals correct, something that would have been taken for granted during Ibn ‘Arabī’s time.

Not only does Nursi have a comprehensive approach to explaining how humankind can realise their potential, he goes a step further and states this potential is not exclusive to humankind, but also includes all animate and inanimate beings. That is, all of creation goes through the process of realising their potential, “expanding from the potential to the actual through great effort and exertion.”⁵¹¹ This principle of realising potential is seen in the whole universe and referred to as the “Divine Practice.” Important to this discussion is the point that, in the natural duty of all

⁵⁰⁹ Some examples are Nursi, *The Words*, 599; *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 102; *The Flashes*, 385.

⁵¹⁰ William Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 13.

⁵¹¹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 171.

creation, there is an eagerness and pleasure.⁵¹² The pleasure experienced by all beings, animate and inanimate, is due to the pleasure they find in performing their duty through the potential that has been instilled within them, and by doing so, following the commands of their Creator. It is like a “wage” given to all beings that makes them eager and motivated to fulfil their duties.⁵¹³

Nursi gives many examples, such as the coconut tree that would prefer to give its milk to the fruits on its branch, while it is happy to suffice with muddy water.⁵¹⁴ That is, the coconut tree is happy to make such a sacrifice for it to fulfil its duty of producing fruit since it would be realising its potential through the process. Such a sacrifice in the name of realising its potential brings great pleasure to the tree, according to Nursi. Another example provided is that of a hen that is happy to sacrifice its life for its chicks, throwing itself in front of a dog or going hungry so its chicks can eat.⁵¹⁵ Despite such life-threatening dangers, the hen will experience great pleasure in fulfilling its compassionate motherly duty.⁵¹⁶ The hen would rather experience pangs of hunger and lose its life instead of having a comfortable selfish but safe life, because a comfortable selfish life would necessitate negligence of its duty and the latency of its potential.

Nursi explains that even seeds have a longing to fulfil their duty by sprouting and germinating; “Like someone imprisoned in a constricted place longs to go out into a garden or open space, such a longing, such a joyful state, is also apparent in seeds, in their duty of sprouting.”⁵¹⁷ Through these examples, Nursi is explaining the “Divine Law” where great pleasure is experienced by creation in fulfilling the duty it has been given, whether that may be germinating of a seed, having motherly compassion or offering fruits on its leaves.

⁵¹² Nursi, *The Flashes*, The Seventeenth Flash, 171.

⁵¹³ Cüneyt Şimsek, “The Problem of Animal Pain: An Introduction to Nursi’s Approach,” in *Justice and Theodicy in Modern Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’ (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 121.

⁵¹⁴ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 171.

⁵¹⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 336.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 171.

It could be argued or even criticised that these are mere speculations. How would Nursi know what a seed would feel, does it even feel? How can he be certain that a hen feels pleasure in protecting its chicks? In answer to these questions, Nursi's use of proofs in making claims or posing theories is important to consider. "Nursi's reasoning usually takes the form of a series of closely interconnected arguments"⁵¹⁸ that are based on assumed knowledge and belief in God. Mark Richardson points out that, just as Catholic theologian David Burrell reached certain conclusions after examining the cosmological arguments of Aquinas, it is possible to reach certain conclusions with regards to Nursi.⁵¹⁹ In other words, Nursi's proofs and arguments stem from a particular reading of the universe, which is based on belief.

Another important observation to point out about Nursi's style of writing is that he brings all animate and inanimate objects to life through the emotions and thoughts he instils into them. All of a sudden, one is able to resonate with a seed that longs to sprout and is overjoyed when it does, since humankind is also overjoyed when they 'sprout' with their skills and potentials. This portrayal of animate and inanimate objects has had a significant positive impact on the way the environment and animals are perceived, building a relationship between humankind and all that surrounds it. It is therefore of no surprise that many papers have been written about the protection of the environment and animal rights using the *Risale-i Nur* as the primary source.⁵²⁰

According to Nursi, humans are not exempt from the "Divine Practice" mentioned above; experiencing eagerness and pleasure when fulfilling one's duty through which one realises their potential. Nursi states that idle and lazy people who live in comfort and ease are actually

⁵¹⁸ Turner, *Qur'an Revealed*, 10.

⁵¹⁹ Richardson, "Resurrection in the Writing of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," 85.

⁵²⁰ Some examples are: Salih Yücel, "Said Nursi's Approach to the Environment: A Spiritual View on the Book of Universe," *Quarterly Insights* 4 (2009): 77-96; Davud Ayduz, "The Approach to the Environment Question of the Qur'an and its Contemporary Commentary, The Risale-i Nur," *Nur Web Pages*, April 26, 2006, http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Approach_to_the_Environment_Question_of_the_Quran_249; Ibrahim Özdemir, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to the Environment," in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'ān: The Example of the Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 2000).

unhappy, while those who work hard and strive in life are happy because they are fulfilling their duty,⁵²¹ and by doing so, fulfilling a “Divine Practice.”

According to Nursi, human beings need to nurture the seed of their “abilities with the water of Islam and light of belief under the soil of worship and servitude to God.”⁵²² Human beings also need to conform to the commands of the Qur’ān, and turn their faculties towards their true aims.⁵²³ For Nursi, in this brief description lies the formula to grow that seed into a tree. The different elements mentioned for the ‘growth of the seed,’ which are a combination of belief, knowledge and acts (including worship), are mentioned in different parts of this thesis; therefore, it will not be discussed in this section. It suffices to say that Nursi does not leave any room for speculation to what will ‘grow the seed.’ The point that needs to be emphasised here is that creation realises its potential by fulfilling the duties given to it by God. Fulfilment of such duties is the source of pleasure and happiness for creation. Conversely, not fulfilling one’s duties means misery, unhappiness and unrealised potential. Nursi articulates this very well in the following passage:

In each pleasure he (man) receives is the trace of thousands of pains. The pains of the past and fears of the future and the pain at each pleasure’s passing spoil the enjoyment to be had from them, and leave a trace in the pleasure. But animals are not like that. They receive pleasure with no pains. They take enjoyment with no sorrow.⁵²⁴

In the context of inner peace, by comparing man to animal, Nursi is drawing attention to the vast differences in what is expected from human beings compared to animals due to their purpose of creation and therefore their potential. The great potential in human beings necessitates the fulfilling of many duties so the inherent potential can be realised. Such potential

⁵²¹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 171.

⁵²² Nursi, *The Words*, 331.

⁵²³ Musa al-Basit, “The Risale-i Nur’s View of the Model Human Being Centred on Divine Unity in the Light of the Qur’an,” in *The Qur’anic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat, 2002), 95.

⁵²⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 333.

is not linked to the physical make-up, but rather the spiritual. Nursi asserts the wrong focus, that is, focusing on the physical, will result in pain and suffering, but will also be a deterrent from realising one's potential. This does not mean that physical needs need to be fully negated, but instead to stay within the parameters set by the religion. This in a sense is being frugal through contentment, a way of living that leads to happiness and pleasure.⁵²⁵ It also allows spiritual growth by not damaging one's potential.

Nursi reinforces his comments by explaining a vision he had that illustrates the state of a person who focuses on worldly pleasures and by doing so, abandons his potential. In the vision, Nursi sees himself in a train going towards a tunnel. As he travels in the train, he sees attractive flowers and enticing fruits. He stretches his hand and tries to pick them. Because they were covered in thorns, when he touches them, they tear at his hands making them bleed. With the movement of the train, his hands get lacerated at being parted from them.⁵²⁶ This is a very graphic but effective description by Nursi, of the pain that is experienced when one reaches out to illicit pleasures and forbidden amusements. The pain and laceration of the heart, he states, is the result of the fact it is illicit, but also because the ending of the pleasure causes pain. The train analogy is very powerful as it suggests how fast this life passes by and how important it is to remain within the parameters of the religion for happiness in this life and the hereafter.

Realising one's potential not only leads to happiness and pleasure, but it also leads to perfection (*insan-i kamil*):

Man came to this world to be *perfected* by means of knowledge and supplication. In regard to his nature and abilities everything is tied to knowledge. And the foundation, source, light, and spirit of all true knowledge is knowledge of God, and its essence and basis is belief in God.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Singh, "Contentment in Search of Inner Peace."

⁵²⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, 336.

⁵²⁷ Ibid, 324.

Thus, the possible outcomes between the two paths are vastly different: a decayed seed rotting under the soil or a huge luminous fruit bearing tree that has used all the nourishments offered to it, both underground and above ground. These two different pathways and possible outcomes are emphasised in many parts of the *Risale-i Nur*. While it seems the biggest loss in wasting such potential will be felt in the hereafter, Nursi does not neglect to remind of the great loss that will be felt in this life as well. The misery and unhappiness that will be experienced due to wasting such potential is great. However, the happiness and inner peace that will be experienced with the realisation of one's potential is immense. An important means of realising one's potential is using the human faculties for their correct purpose.

3.4 Proper Use of Faculties and Emotions

While some human faculties and senses are mentioned by Nursi, there are many others to which he only alludes. Nursi states, "In addition to these (five senses) there are many others that are like opened windows looking out onto the world of the unseen."⁵²⁸ This makes the point that human beings have many senses and faculties that are unknown to the individual. Nursi refrained, however, from discussing these senses or faculties in detail because he considered them too esoteric to be helpful to the majority of people.⁵²⁹

Once again, this shows that Nursi knew his time well. Nursi is aware that Muslims as a collective are struggling to keep their main faculties functioning healthily, let alone being able to nourish the subtle faculties, an act that needs high levels of faith, knowledge and devotion. Therefore, Nursi focuses on advising on the health and proper functioning of the fundamental faculties, such as the *nafs* (ego), *qalb* (heart) and '*aql* (intellect). He also cautions of the potential risks when the faculties are used wrongfully, warning "they will decay and decompose

⁵²⁸ Said Nursi, "Preface to the *al-Mathnawi al-'Arabi al-Nuri*," trans. Redha Ameer, in *Islam at the Crossroads*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 347.

⁵²⁹ Marcia Hermanssen, "Faith Development and Spiritual Maturation" in *Spiritual Dimension of Bediuzzaman's Risale-i Nur*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 86.

for an insignificant pleasure in a short life amidst hardships and troubles.”⁵³⁰ The three mentioned faculties will now be discussed with a focus on their proper use.

3.4.1 The *Nafs*

The *nafs* has been written about extensively, but more often than not, it is portrayed as a faculty that should be observed carefully and suspiciously. For example, al-Nawawī⁵³¹ (d. 1277) describes the *nafs* as something that needs to be cured.⁵³² It is common among scholars to compare the *nafs* to a wild animal. Ali Hujwiri (d. 1077), a well know Sufi, compares the *nafs* to a wild horse or dog that needs to be trained.⁵³³ The comparison to a snake is also common, “but this serpent (*nafs*) can be turned into a useful rod, just as Moses transformed serpents into rods.”⁵³⁴ This comparison implies the *nafs* cannot develop into anything more than a rod, making the *nafs* harmless at its best. This is a point that Nursi would disagree with, since he sees the *nafs* as having the potential to extend to the line of prophethood to produce “angelic kings and just rulers.”⁵³⁵

It would be unfair to these scholars to assume they could not see the potential good within the *nafs*. They may actually agree with Nursi in that the *nafs* can be transformed and illumined so that spiritual elevation takes place through it. Nevertheless, the fact they have not articulated the potential good of the *nafs* in detail, as Nursi has, can leave doubts and questions in the mind of the reader in today’s world.

There are similarities and differences in the way Ghazzālī and Nursi describe the *nafs*. While they both discuss the potential good and corruption of the *nafs*, Ghazzālī does not provide an absolute picture of how destructive the *nafs* can be if it attributes God’s kingdom to the self –

⁵³⁰ Said Nursi, *The Words*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu, (Somerset, N.J.: Light, 2005), 338.

⁵³¹ Famous scholar well known for his writings on *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*.

⁵³² Al-Nawawī, *al-Maqasid: Nawawī's Manual of Islam*, trans. M. Keller (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 2002).

⁵³³ Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabī, Gender, and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 37.

⁵³⁴ Schimmel and Ernst, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 112.

⁵³⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 561.

where one can become pharaoh-like.⁵³⁶ I would argue this is due to the different times and social, religious and historical contexts Ghazzālī and Nursi lived in. Based on Ghazzālī's writings, the *nafs* was not at the forefront as much as it is today and it certainly was not putting one's belief at risk by claiming dominicality or God-like qualities, at least not among those who claimed to believe. Whereas, Nursi sees the great dangers believers are faced with today due to their *nafs* distributing God's sovereignty between the self and causes.⁵³⁷

The analysis of the different scholars' explanations of the *nafs* highlights the importance of Nursi's writing in understanding the *nafs* in today's time. Understanding the state of humankind today, Nursi widens the spectrum of the *nafs*, compared to other scholars, so its dangers reach as far as *shirk* (associating partners with God), while its potential good reaches as far as prophet-like qualities. The danger and potential good of the *nafs* are relevant and applicable to today's time, providing the direction needed for one to transform their *nafs* into a seed of the Tuba tree, which is needed to be in a state of inner peace, as mentioned previously.

3.4.1.1 Levels of *Nafs*

The different descriptions of the *nafs* by various scholars can all be inserted into the spectrum found within the three levels of *nafs* mentioned in the Qur'ān⁵³⁸. This again is a good indication of which part of the *nafs* spectrum certain scholars focused on, depending on the context they lived in. Nursi's description of the *nafs* encapsulates the whole spectrum, demonstrating the far reaching good and far reaching evil possible in individuals of today.

Al-nafs al-'ammārah (the evil-commanding *nafs*) is mentioned in the Qur'ān in a quote from Prophet Joseph⁵³⁹: "Yet I do not claim myself free of error, for assuredly the human carnal soul always commands evil, except that my Lord has mercy. Surely my Lord is All-Forgiving, All-

⁵³⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, 561.

⁵³⁷ Ibid, 560.

⁵³⁸ While seven levels of the *nafs* are commonly listed by scholars, only three levels are mentioned in the Qur'ān.

⁵³⁹ There are many exegetes who say this expression comes from the wife of Potiphar (Zalikhah or Zuleykha). Either way, it does not take away from the way the Qur'ān describes the *nafs* at this level.

Compassionate.”⁵⁴⁰ These words display the awareness of a prophet who knew well that it is not possible to find the right way and be steadfast without God’s help.⁵⁴¹

The evil-commanding *nafs* is known to always command evil. Therefore, it is also known as the tyrannical *nafs* since the “negative tendencies can dominate our lives like an absolute tyrant.”⁵⁴² The main characteristic of this level of the *nafs* is that it is driven by animalistic desire, with no awareness of spiritual needs. The conscience is also not functional, which means there is no guilt in over-indulgence. Nursi often refers to the evil commanding *nafs*, particularly when he seeks to warn against its dangers and the misery it causes.⁵⁴³

Al-nafs al-luwwāmah (the self-accusing *nafs*) is mentioned in the Qur’ān as a pledge, “And I swear by the self-accusing human soul. Does human think that We will never assemble his bones (to resurrect him)?”⁵⁴⁴ This verse reminds the *nafs* that it will need to account for its deeds in the hereafter and therefore should be conscious of its actions. An individual at this level of the *nafs* would be ready to respond to such a warning since there is a sense of responsibility felt at this level.

After experiencing an awareness of God and seeing the need to enter into a path of spirituality, a person at this level commits to a way of life (or religion) and tries to control their actions for the better. It is considered the level of awakening since such a person has not mastered their own helm as yet, they stumble along the way. They criticise their self for not being true to their commitments, they learn from their experiences and resolve to a renewed commitment.⁵⁴⁵

This level of the *nafs* offers a greater level of inner peace than the evil commanding *nafs*, since an awareness of God is developing. At the same time, there is also distress as one continues to

⁵⁴⁰ Qur’ān 12:53.

⁵⁴¹ Ünal, *The Qur’an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, 491.

⁵⁴² Frager, *Heart, Self & Soul*, 3.

⁵⁴³ Some examples are, Nursi, *The Words*, 566, 673; *Al-Mathnawi al-Nuriyya*, 160, 303.

⁵⁴⁴ Qur’ān 75:2-3.

⁵⁴⁵ Ünal, *The Qur’an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, 1193.

make mistakes that trigger criticism of the self. However, this process of faltering and rectifying leads to spiritual growth, which in itself generates a sense of peace and satisfaction.

Al-nafs al-muṭma'innah (the *nafs* at peace) is the level of the *nafs* at which peace and tranquillity is attained. The Qur'ān mentions this level of the *nafs* as: “O you soul at rest (content). Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with Him), and well-pleasing to Him. Enter, then, among My servants (fully content with servanthood to Me)! And enter my Paradise!”⁵⁴⁶ Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) explains in his *tafsīr* that God is talking to the *nafs* at peace directly as he talked to Moses. This is considered a great honour for the *nafs* and therefore a significant outcome of the purification process it has been through.⁵⁴⁷ It is also a good indication of the closeness to God that one has achieved, deserving to be spoken to directly by God. Bursawi highlights the point that the level of peace will increase as the level of knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) contained within the *nafs* increases.⁵⁴⁸ Therefore, a clear association is made between knowledge of God and the purity of the *nafs*. Rāzī asserts, at the level where the *nafs* is at peace, it means it is at a level of knowing God in this world. That is, true knowledge of God has been attained when one's *nafs* is at the level of *muṭma'innah*. Such a *nafs* has calmness and certainty, according to Rāzī.⁵⁴⁹

When *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* is reached, the *nafs* is at the station of resignation (*riḍā*). This state of *riḍā* provides a sense of contentment, acceptance and peace for a person who is at this level of the *nafs*. Gülen states that *riḍā* (resignation) means “showing no rancor or rebellion against misfortune, and accepting all manifestations of Destiny without complaint and even peacefully. In other words, one should welcome all things and events, even those normally

⁵⁴⁶ Qur'ān 89:27-30

⁵⁴⁷ Zamakhsharī, “Al-Kashshāf,” accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=2&tSoraNo=89&tAyahNo=27&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁵⁴⁸ Bursawi, “Rūḥu'l-Bayān,” accessed July 29, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=36&tSoraNo=95&tAyahNo=4&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁵⁴⁹ Rāzī, “Mafatih Al-Ghayb,” accessed July 29, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=4&tSoraNo=89&tAyahNo=28&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

associated with distress and terror.”⁵⁵⁰ Thus, there is no complaint and no distress at this level, there is only peace.

At this level, belief paints one’s worldview with a positive brush so everything is seen to be good. According to Nursi, this is mainly achieved through the greater meaning given to life and events. That is, when one reaches this level, they realise that beings are not working for themselves, but instead they are under the instructions of God.⁵⁵¹ In turn, everything is seen as a mirror to the most beautiful names of God.⁵⁵² Thus, by connecting everything to something greater, the witnessing of something more Beautiful becomes the source of reaching a state of contentment (*iṭmīnān*). This in turn “finds a way leading to the Almighty God in everything,”⁵⁵³ according to Nursi. Therefore, the greater meaning given to events and experiences is essential to attain inner peace and this can only be achieved by purifying the *nafs* and not attributing to itself what it does not own. Only then is the *nafs* being used the way it was meant to be used.

3.4.2 The Heart and Mind

While the proper use of the *nafs* is essential, the proper use of the *qalb* (heart) and ‘*aql* (intellect) are just as important. Just as the proper use of the *nafs* leads to happiness and peace, the proper use of the *qalb* and the ‘*aql* also lead to happiness, while their improper use is the cause of misery and pain.

But first, what is meant by the heart in Islamic literature and therefore in Nursi’s writings? The heart is commonly described as being the entity to which the body surrenders. The fleshy heart positioned on the left side of one’s chest is essential to the physical existence of humankind. Not only is it a vital organ to the physical being, but it is also the spiritual centre of the body,

⁵⁵⁰ Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, vol. 1, 104.

⁵⁵¹ Nursi, *The Words*, 494.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

including the “emotions and (intellectual and spiritual) faculties, such as perception, consciousness, the senses, reasoning, and willpower.”⁵⁵⁴

The spiritual heart is incorporeal in nature and connects the individual to God. Many Muslim spiritualists prior to Nursi focused on the heart in detail, developing profound mystical theories on it.⁵⁵⁵ Some of these books are studied even today. *Purification of the Heart*⁵⁵⁶ which is a translation and commentary by the contemporary scholar Hamza Yusuf of Imam Mawlud’s *Matharat al-Qulub* (literally means purification of the heart), is one such example. Ghazzālī also focuses on the purification of the heart in his *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences).

Nursi once again has a unique approach to the heart. He develops his own conceptions of the heart, which is an “elaborate synthesis of the previous conceptions, concentrating more on the spiritual function of it rather than its nature.”⁵⁵⁷ In this way, he does not completely negate the traditional understanding, but he also does not negate the focus and elaboration that is needed in today’s inquisitive times; an in-depth description of the way things function in a language that can be understood by the contemporary mind. This makes Nursi’s approach to such concepts practical.

There are two central verses in the Qur’ān that help one to appreciate the importance of the heart; “A day in which neither wealth nor children shall be of any benefit, except one who comes to God with a sound heart.”⁵⁵⁸ This verse underlines the importance of having a sound heart (*qalb-i salīm*); on the day of judgement, it is the state of one’s heart that will be the ultimate checking point for one’s final destination. Children, wealth and basically any material possessions that one had before they died, would become insignificant.

⁵⁵⁴ Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, vol. 1, 22.

⁵⁵⁵ Kuşpınar, “The Chief Characteristics of Spirituality,” 127.

⁵⁵⁶ Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart*.

⁵⁵⁷ Kuşpınar, “The Chief Characteristics of Spirituality,” 127.

⁵⁵⁸ Qur’ān 26:88-89

Ṭabarī explains the sound heart to be a sincere heart that has no *shirk* in it (does not associate any partners with God).⁵⁵⁹ Rāzī describes such a heart to be one that is purified from ignorance and immorality or bad character. If the heart is sound, then all other organs will be sound as well.⁵⁶⁰ Bursawī, on the other hand, explains a sound heart to be one that it is in its primordial state,⁵⁶¹ which means it has angelic qualities. Thus, a sound heart can be attained through the right beliefs and practises that brings it to its primordial state.

The second central verse in the Qur’ān is, “...Be aware that it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find rest and contentment.”⁵⁶² This verse is not only central to the understanding of the heart, but is also central to this chapter. If there is a word that means inner peace in the Qur’ān, it would be the word that is used to describe the state of the heart in the above verse: *tatma-innu*, which means rest, calm and contentment. Qushayrī (d. 1074) a famous scholar who wrote on Sufism, explains that the heart finds contentment with remembrance of God, but adds that the soul enjoys such remembrance with great happiness as well.⁵⁶³ Therefore, according to this Qur’ānic verse, a state of peace is only possible through the remembrance of God.⁵⁶⁴ However, according to Nursi, it is essential for that heart to know God for the remembrance of God to be effective, since belief in God would lead to knowledge of God, which in turn leads to love of God,⁵⁶⁵ as explained in Chapter 2.

⁵⁵⁹ Ṭabarī, “Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī,” accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=26&tAyahNo=88&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁵⁶⁰ Rāzī, “Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb,” accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=4&tSoraNo=26&tAyahNo=88&tDisplay=yes&Page=4&Size=1&LanguageId=1>.

⁵⁶¹ Bursawī, “Rūḥu'l-Bayān,” accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=36&tSoraNo=26&tAyahNo=89&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁵⁶² Qur’ān 13:28.

⁵⁶³ Qushayrī, “Laṭā’if al-Isharat,” accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=31&tSoraNo=13&tAyahNo=28&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁵⁶⁴ This was discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

⁵⁶⁵ Nursi, *The Letters*, 265.

Additionally, remembrance of God assumes that faith and knowledge are put into practice in all facets of life. Thus, it is also the spiritual advancement that comes with living out such remembrance, which leads to the joy of the spirit and satisfaction of the heart.⁵⁶⁶

In addition to the heart, the mind or intellect (‘*aql*) is also discussed in the *Risale-i Nur* with a particular emphasis on a straightforward thinking mind (‘*aql-i mustaqīm*). The intellect is considered important because it seeks to understand God intellectually. Like the heart, there are different ways that the intellect has been understood; where it is located, what its actual function and relation is to other faculties such as the heart and the *nafs*. While Ghazzālī explains intellect to be “the knowledge of the true nature of things, which is seated in the heart”⁵⁶⁷ Nasr, a contemporary scholar, explains that the ‘*aql* is a door to higher spiritual realities. “In the event that the ‘*aql* is preoccupied by passions or *nafs*, the veils that hide man from the Divine won’t be lifted and this will lead him astray.”⁵⁶⁸ Therefore, just as the heart can be diseased and thus lose its proper functioning mechanism, the intellect can be negatively affected by the *nafs*, which causes it to become deviated.

Nursi’s description of the heart and mind is aligned with the traditional understanding; the intellect as a faculty of reasoning and reflective thinking (*tafakkur*), while the heart works as a mirror for contemplation (*mushahada*) and spiritual witnessing (*kashf*). However, Nursi emphasises the importance of the two faculties functioning harmoniously together in a complementary but also synergistic manner, which should ultimately be led by the heart. Additionally, the heart and mind are seen as representing two major pathways and therefore Nursi “praised the union of prophecy with philosophy in the highest possible terms.”⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ Yetkin Yildirim, “Filling the Heart with Love of God,” in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen-Marie Yust (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2006), 70.

⁵⁶⁷ Abu Hamid Ghazzālī, *Wonders of the Heart*, trans. W. J. Skellie (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007), 9.

⁵⁶⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972), 55.

⁵⁶⁹ Leo D. Lefebure, “Faith, Reason, and Science in the Modern World,” *Nursi Studies*, <http://www.nursistudies.net/teblig.php?tno=561>

Prophecy representing faith and philosophy representing reason, needed to work together, with philosophy being obedient to prophecy. When this happened in history, they were considered times of brilliant happiness.⁵⁷⁰ This marriage or union between the heart and mind was Nursi's life philosophy.

The religious sciences are the light of the conscience. The modern sciences of civilisation are the light of reason. The truth is manifested through the combining of the two. With those two wings the students' endeavour will take flight. When they are separated, it gives rise to bigotry in the former and doubts and trickery in the latter.⁵⁷¹

This approach is seen as the approach of the Qur'ān by Nursi⁵⁷², but is it also seen as essential for spiritual perfection and “for the honest interpretation and appropriate comprehension of the wisdom of God.”⁵⁷³ In other words, these two faculties (along with all the other senses and faculties) have a prescribed role to play in one's life. The role of the intellect is to know God, while the role of the heart is to love God.⁵⁷⁴ Nursi explains that ultimately these faculties have been included so that one “might perceive His (God's) bounties and recognize His Names' manifestations”⁵⁷⁵ and see the “Originator's perpetual bounties, everlasting mercy, and eternal love.”⁵⁷⁶ This can only happen if faith touches both the mind and heart, according to Nursi.⁵⁷⁷ When the heart and mind are touched by faith, humankind will seek refuge in God's mercy and rely on His power. “The desolate world will turn into a place of recreation and pleasure, it will become a place of trade for the hereafter.”⁵⁷⁸

It is in the context of such knowledge and love of God that Nursi quotes the *ḥadīth qudsī*: “The heavens and the earth contain me not; Yet, how strange! I am contained in the hearts of

⁵⁷⁰ Nursi, *The Words*, 561.

⁵⁷¹ Said Nursi, *Münazarat* (Istanbul: Sinan Matbaası, 1958), 72.

⁵⁷² Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 34.

⁵⁷³ Kuşpınar, “The Chief Characteristics of Spirituality,” 127.

⁵⁷⁴ Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 347.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ian Markham, “Grounded Spirituality,” in *Spiritual Dimension of Bediuzzaman's Risale-i Nur*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 61.

⁵⁷⁸ Nursi, *The Letters*, 265.

believers.”⁵⁷⁹ Ghazzālī explains it is the knowledge of God that descends into the heart⁵⁸⁰ so that humankind is able to know and love God like no other creation in the heavens and the earth. However, Nursi explains that inner peace is only possible if the intellect is used to know God and the heart is used to love God,⁵⁸¹ since there is conformance with the purpose of creation when these two major faculties are used in this way.

Thus, all three faculties, *nafs*, *qalb* and *‘aql*, need to be used properly for one to attain inner peace. The purified *nafs* attains the level of *al-nafs al-mutmai’nnah* (the peaceful nafs) becoming a source of peace. The *nafs* at this level also helps one to see everything as a mirror to the names of God, so everything brings one closer to God. The *qalb* that has been purified from all diseases becomes the seedbed for love of God and the purified *‘aql* becomes a tool for knowing God. The proper use of each faculty leads one to inner peace. A key part of using these faculties properly is the proper use of the emotions.

3.4.3 Emotions

Emotions are an important part of human nature, which must be used for their correct purpose, according to Nursi. In the context of how emotions should be used, Nursi explains that this world should be seen as a guest-house. Only then will a person not give “the price of a lasting diamond for something of the value of glass that will be broken. He will pass his life uprightly and with pleasure.”⁵⁸² In other words, one would invest their emotions in this world relative to the importance one gives to this world.

Emotions are a part of a human being that cannot be suppressed or negated. According to Nursi, advice and admonitions such as “Don’t be ambitious! Don’t display greed! Don’t hate! Don’t be obstinate! Don’t love the world!” are not effective because they go against one’s innate

⁵⁷⁹ *Ḥadīth* as cited in Nursi, *The Words*, 141.

⁵⁸⁰ A.H al-Ghazzālī, and Nabih Amin Faris. *The Mysteries of Purity, Being a Translation with notes of the Kitāb Asrār al-tTahārah of al-Ghazzālī's Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*. (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1966), 3.

⁵⁸¹ Nursi, *Al-Mathnawī Al-Nuriyya*, 347.

⁵⁸² Nursi, *The Letters*, 51.

nature⁵⁸³ and therefore are counterintuitive.⁵⁸⁴ What needs to be advised instead is to channel those emotions towards beneficial things, change their direction or channel.⁵⁸⁵

Nursi highlights that the real purpose that emotions have been created for is, “to gain matters of the hereafter,”⁵⁸⁶ since the matters of the hereafter have the value of diamonds. If they are not used for their true purpose, they are being wasted on this transient world to which Nursi gives the value of glass – a substance with little value that will eventually break. In other words, the emotions found within human nature are intended for this world, but more importantly, in preparation for the hereafter.

Nursi explains there are thousands of emotions of which there are two degrees; one metaphorical (*majazi*) and the other true (*haqiqi*). When emotions are used for this world, they are metaphorical because of the transient nature of this world. The true emotions are the ones that are used to gain the matters of the hereafter.⁵⁸⁷ The two degrees of the emotions will be explained with different emotions with examples.

3.4.3.1 Anxiety, Ambition and Stubbornness

Nursi mentions anxiety as an emotion found within humankind that is often misused. All individuals experience anxiety about the future; however Nursi reminds the reader that the future of this life is brief compared to an eternal hereafter. Therefore, becoming too anxious about the future of this world is discouraged. Nursi often compares the length of this life to the hereafter to emphasise the briefness of this life and the importance of putting things in perspective accordingly. Additionally, he highlights the reality that one may not reach the future that one is anxious about, whereas the future relating to the hereafter is long-lasting and definite.

⁵⁸³ Ibid, 52.

⁵⁸⁴ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 447.

⁵⁸⁵ Nursi, *The Letters*, 52.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid, 51.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

Therefore, the emotion of anxiety should be steered towards that future.⁵⁸⁸ In other words, being anxious about the hereafter ensures that responsibilities and duties are fulfilled.

Ambition for possessions and status is seen as problematic as well. Possessions of this world are transient; therefore, the effort to temporarily obtain such possessions for a short period of time is not worth intense ambition. Nursi explains the ambition for status is also problematic, explaining that having worldly positions can be dangerous and lead to hypocrisy.⁵⁸⁹ Instead, he advises that one should be ambitious about attaining a high spiritual rank, which means closeness to God. Ambition should also be to build true property in the hereafter by doing good deeds in this life, according to Nursi.⁵⁹⁰

Showing great stubbornness for matters of this world is also seen as destructive. Using energy and effort in being stubborn about something for a year when it is not even worth being stubborn over for one minute is considered a waste. Nursi explains that, if the emotion is used for wrong purposes, it can put the individual in even more danger.⁵⁹¹ When there is realisation that this emotion was not put in humankind for transient purposes, it is transformed into its true form, leading to “ardent steadfastness and constancy in what is right, a fine and good quality.”⁵⁹²

Enmity is another emotion often experienced by individuals. Again, with enmity, Nursi explains that, if one is to feel enmity, then it should be towards the enmity in one’s heart: “Be an enemy to your evil-commanding soul and its caprice and attempt to reform it.”⁵⁹³ Thus, Nursi warns that enmity is much more detrimental to the individual than the one for which enmity is shown.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 51.

⁵⁸⁹ Nursi is explaining here the excessive attachment to worldly ambitions by heart and neglecting duties and good deeds that look to the hereafter.

⁵⁹⁰ Nursi, *The Letters*, 51.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, 52.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Nursi, *The Letters*, 314.

⁵⁹⁴ Asma Afsaruddin, “Reconciliation and Fraternal Love in Islamic Thought,” in *Knowledge, Faith, Morality and the Future of Humanity* (Istanbul: Istanbul Offset, 2000), 76.

Through these three examples, Nursi provides guidelines on how emotions should be used, with the basis of the guidelines being the length and value of this life in comparison to the life in the hereafter. In other words, if emotions are used to feed the temporal *nafs*,

They become the means to base morality, wastefulness, and futility. But if he expends the lesser of them on the matters of this world and the more intense of them on spiritual duties and duties pertaining to the hereafter, they become the source of laudable morals and the means to *happiness* in this world and the next in conformity with wisdom and reality.⁵⁹⁵

This approach can be taken with all emotions since they all can potentially be misused. However, it is worth discussing the emotion of love separately since it is one of the most misused emotions. Nursi also discusses love extensively.

3.4.3.2 Love

Humankind's ability to love is like no other creation; therefore, the correct use of the heart to love in a way that brings inner peace is essential, according to Nursi. If human love is directed to the wrong place, it will cause pain and suffering. This point is alluded to by Freud when he states "We are never so defenceless against suffering as we love, never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love."⁵⁹⁶ However, Islam goes a step further and explains that God is the only object worthy of love and when love is directed towards God, it removes pain and suffering. Nursi expands on this point in the following manner:

Love is the cause of the universe's existence, and what binds it; and it is both the light of the universe and its life. Since man is the most comprehensive fruit of the universe, a love that will conquer the universe has been included in his heart, the seed of that fruit. Thus, only one possessing infinite perfection may be worthy of such an infinite love.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁵ Nursi, *The Letters*, 52.

⁵⁹⁶ Sigmund Freud cited in Jon G. Allen, *Coping with Depression: From Catch-22 to Hope* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc., 2006), 63.

⁵⁹⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, 367

No doubt, humankind has great potential to love. Therefore, it is believed that “all the varieties of love and intense attachment a believing human being has for his life, immortality, and existence, his world, his self, and other beings, are droplets of his capacity to love God.”⁵⁹⁸ Therefore, the love given to humankind to love things other than God are “droplets” or “distillations” of one’s ability to love God.

Nursi argues that humankind very often misuses the love they have the opportunity to experience at a deep level. “All your loves dispersed through the universe are a love given for His Names and attributes. You have used it wrongly and you are suffering the penalty.”⁵⁹⁹ This approach once again reinforces Nursi’s point that, if any of the faculties or emotions are misused, it will lead to pain and suffering; whereas, if human nature, and in this case love, is directed towards what it was created for, it leads to happiness and inner peace.

If the love is misdirected, “the one you love will either not recognize you or will depart without bidding you farewell.”⁶⁰⁰ Therefore, there are two issues with directing one’s love towards humankind; firstly, it will not be appreciated by the one who you love, they may even despise you for your love and this will result in pain and heartache for you. Secondly, the one you love will separate from you eventually, since everything is temporary but God. This will also be the cause of pain. Even those cherished moments with loved ones can cause pain and suffering, according to Nursi, since there is certainty of separation eventually. Therefore, those cherished moments will be overshadowed with a feeling of pain.⁶⁰¹

The sun analogy is used here to emphasise the inappropriate action of humankind in misdirecting love to the wrong places. In the analogy, God is the sun and humankind is the mirror that reflects the light that comes from the sun. Based on this analogy, individuals can

⁵⁹⁸ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 90.

⁵⁹⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 369.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, 367.

⁶⁰¹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 30.

fall into the trap of giving all their love to the reflection in the mirror, forgetting it is merely a reflection and not the actual sun. Nursi expresses his frustration at the misdirected love; “O my heart! The most stupid person is he who does not recognise the sun while he sees its image in a mirror, and loves only the mirror and tries to preserve it passionately with the aim of holding on to the sun permanently.”⁶⁰² It seems the reality of the situation is so apparent to Nursi and he desperately wants it to be understood by others and therefore poses the question, why would one fall in love with the mirror when it is merely a reflector? “The problem begins when the mirror is smashed to pieces, taking the reflection with it”⁶⁰³ since the object of love is now gone.

While this can be an opportunity to direct one’s love to the correct Object, nevertheless, this is not an easy task. When one reflection goes, another reflection seems to become the focus so easily, whether it be the self, relatives, a country or other living creatures.⁶⁰⁴ “Infinite love directed to finite things can only bring sorrow, so that the pain of separation and the despondency of unfulfillment increase accordingly.”⁶⁰⁵

Nursi argues that humankind should love the One who truly deserves to be loved and that is God the Eternal. Often love is connected with eternity because when one loves something, one imagines it to be eternal. This is because the human heart cannot love anything but the eternal.⁶⁰⁶ To love God the Eternal is considered an antidote for the wounds of separation. Nursi interprets this outlook in the following way: “Since You are Enduring, that is sufficient, You take the place of everything. Since You exist, everything exists.”⁶⁰⁷ There is a satisfaction present in loving and attaching to the One that is most worthy of that love and attachment. With such a realisation that everything is temporary but God, it seems impossible to give excessive love to temporary existence, according to Nursi, such that he “affirms that within the Love of God there

⁶⁰² Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 214.

⁶⁰³ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 445.

⁶⁰⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 368.

⁶⁰⁵ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 446.

⁶⁰⁶ Umeyye Isra Yazicioglu, “The Purpose of Life According to the Risale-i Nur,” in *Knowledge, Faith, Morality and the Future of Humanity* (Istanbul: Istanbul Offset, 2000), 287.

⁶⁰⁷ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 30.

is the promise of an Enduring Love, a love that cannot be found in the worldly shadows alone.”⁶⁰⁸

Does this mean one cannot love creation at all, such as a partner, child or parents? They certainly can be loved, but in Nursi’s view, one needs to be careful when loving things other than God “because the things that attract his love are many, his love for them needs to be rightly guided.”⁶⁰⁹ That is, they need to be loved for the right reasons. Loving them should be based on the love of God and not for its own material sake.

For example, Nursi explains that a husband or wife should be loved as a “companionable and gracious gift of divine mercy,”⁶¹⁰ which means that God should be in the love triangle. When someone is loved for the sake of God in this way, it means the love is generated through the witnessing of the names of God on the person, such as compassion, generosity and patience. If they are loved for the right reasons, they would be loved for qualities that remain with them until their last days. Otherwise, they are being loved for material and transient qualities that will wither away in time.

Nursi continues his instructions on love and describes how parents, children, friends, prophets and saints, life, youth, spring and even the world should be loved. When describing the love for the world, he explains:

And to love this world as being the tillage for the hereafter, as a mirror of the Divine Names and a missive of God Almighty, and as a temporary guest-house, on condition that the evil commanding soul does not interfere, is to do so for God Almighty’s sake.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁸ Michael David Graskemper, “Reflections on the Third Flash of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.” *Nur Web Pages*, April 18, 2006, http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Reflections_on_The_Third_Flash_of_Bediuzzaman_99

⁶⁰⁹ Ibrahim Canan, “Love According to Bediuzzaman,” in *The Qur’anic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat, 2002), 449.

⁶¹⁰ Nursi, *The Words*, 669.

⁶¹¹ Ibid, 670.

Once again, Nursi emphasises that the love of the world should be for the sake of God, not for the sake of the *nafs*. “In this way, the world is a reflection of God, and by loving the world, one will be led to loving God.”⁶¹² It is in this love of God that “the purest joy for the human spirit and the sheerest delight for man’s heart are experienced.”⁶¹³

3.5 The Gap

The prime focus of this chapter has been the importance of knowing one’s self so that inner peace can be attained. The significance of realising one’s potential has also been emphasised, particularly since human beings have been created in the ‘most excellent of patterns’:

Since man has been created on the most excellent of patterns and has been given most comprehensive abilities, he has been cast into an arena of trial and examination in which he may rise or fall to stations, ranks, and degrees from the lowest of the low to the highest of the high, from the earth to the Divine Throne, and from minute particles to the sun.⁶¹⁴

However, Nursi never ceases to emphasise that this growth and development to perfection cannot be attributed purely to the individual; there are constant reminders of the weakness and impotence of humankind. Despite these weaknesses, there is a wanting embedded within humankind for things that are beyond their reach. “Just as he wants a flower, so he wants the spring. Just as he desires a garden, so does he also desires everlasting Paradise. Just as he longs to see a friend, so does he long to see the All-Beauteous One of Glory.”⁶¹⁵ Nursi makes it clear that such needs cannot be met by the self, but at the same time, those needs are always there and seem endless.

Being conscious of one’s desires and wants, but at the same time struggling to attain them, leads to a feeling of impotence (*ajz*) and poverty (*faqr*). Therefore, a gap is felt between what one

⁶¹² Zeki Sarıtoprak, “Love: The Reason for the Creation of the Universe,” Nur Web Pages, March 26, 2006, http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Love_the_Reason_for_the_Creation_of_the_Universe_102

⁶¹³ Nursi, *The Letters*, 265.

⁶¹⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 328.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

seeks and what one can achieve. This gap is intentional, according to Nursi, as it leads to the seeking of the All-Powerful One, the One “Who sees all things, and is present everywhere, who is beyond space, exempt from impotence, free of fault, and far above all defect.”⁶¹⁶ By turning to God after one realises their weakness, a person is considered to be on their path to ascent.

Nursi highlights there are many paths to God, but some are safer and easier than others and

to undertake a journey on the Sufi path is highly mysterious and fraught with difficulties. Because of its immense hardships, some of the people who travel on this path are sometimes drown, sometimes become harmful, and sometimes mislead others. Above all, it is a long, narrow, and very dangerous way.⁶¹⁷

As mentioned previously, Nursi sees the difficulty of the Sufi way being followed in today’s world where Muslims would struggle with the requirement of being part of a Sufi order.

The path that Nursi encourages instead consists of four progressive stages, beginning with the realisation of impotence or inability (*ajz*), then moving on to two intermediate stages of poverty (*faqr*) and compassion (*shafqat*), and coming to the end of the journey with reflection (*tafakkur*).

Each stage is also regarded by Nursi as an independent path leading to one particular aspect of God; impotence and inability leads to His all-encompassing love; poverty leads to the divine name of All-Merciful; compassion leads to the name All-Compassionate; and reflection leads to the name All-Wise.⁶¹⁸ This path with four stages differs, as Nursi indicates, from other Sufi paths, the silent (*khafī*) paths that perform inaudible remembrance of God, comprise ten stages. There are also the vocal (*jahri*) paths, who practice audible remembrance and comprise seven stages. Therefore, the path proposed by Nursi is different to the classical Sufi paths. “Because

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Bilal Kuşpınar, “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Evaluation of Sufism” Nur Web Pages, http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Bediuzzaman_Said_Nursi_s_Evaluation_of_Sufism_187.

⁶¹⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 491.

of its difference as such, Nursi considers it not a Sufi order but a reality and a sort of expression of the Shari'a, aiming essentially to show one's inability, poverty and faults before God."⁶¹⁹ Thus, a clear distinction is made between Nursi's way and the Sufi way.

While the current social norms would discourage an individual from feeling 'unable' and 'poor', this is the very thing Nursi is saying must be done. What is meant by inability is, knowing that one does not have enough power to face life and its challenges simply by relying on the self and the power of the self. As discussed in Chapter 2, the power of a human being is considered limited and dependent on the power of God. On the other hand, experiencing poverty is to know that the true owner of everything, including the human body, belongs to God. "The Lord of All Dominion has disposal over His dominion as He wishes."⁶²⁰ Nursi emphasises that one should see their weaknesses, poverty and faults in the sight of God, and not display it to others.⁶²¹

So, how does feeling weak and poor lead to happiness? It is through the realisation, according to Nursi, of one's weakness and poverty that a person is able to tap into the power and mercy of God. Thus, a person's weakness becomes their strength; their poverty becomes a means of richness. A compelling example is given with a soldier; one soldier can drive out all the inhabitants of a town if he acts in the name of a government. In such a case, none of the inhabitants would try to harm the soldier, even though there may be one hundred or one thousand inhabitants.⁶²² Since the soldier represents a mighty powerful government, the inhabitants would fear the backlash if they were to harm the soldier. Similarly, when an individual takes refuge in God, they are tapping into an infinite source of power and protection.

⁶¹⁹ Kuşpınar, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Evaluation of Sufism."

⁶²⁰ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 23.

⁶²¹ Nursi, *The Words*, 491.

⁶²² Ibid, 16.

The analogy of the soldier is very powerful in humbling the *nafs*, who would otherwise like to attribute great achievements to itself. While the soldier cannot deny that he would not be able to move a single person if it was not for his government position, Nursi implies that humankind would not be able to move a finger without the will and power of God. To further emphasise this point, Nursi gives the example Nimrod's and the Pharaoh's end. Nimrod and Pharaoh were well known for using their power in evil ways. Therefore, they were not figures who could be brought down very easily because of the power they held and abused. However, "at the command of the Monarch of Pre-Eternity and Post-Eternity (God), a fly did away with Nimrod, and an ant destroyed Pharaoh's palace, razing it to the ground, and a fig-seed bears the load of a fig-tree."⁶²³ Nursi tells of these events to make the point that if a fly and an ant can achieve such outcomes, it can only be with the will and power of God. In this way, describing away tasks achieved by human beings becomes easier for Nursi. According to Nursi, achievements cannot be attributed to power because if that was to be done, a fly could not destroy Nimrod nor could an ant ruin Pharaoh. Therefore, the achievements of human beings cannot be attributed to anyone but God. Such lessons greatly humble the individual, which is what Nursi is trying to do.

Nursi uses another analogy to explain how realising one's impotence helps to realise God's greatness. Nursi explains the darkness of the night is a perfect mirror for displaying the electric light, "so man's vast impotence and poverty have the reverse function of allowing man to act as an extensive mirror"⁶²⁴. Therefore, by seeing one's weakness, God's power, knowledge, wisdom and so on become the lights that shine through. Humankind's weakness and impotence becomes the means for "the innumerable manifestations of the All-Powerful and Compassionate One Whose power is infinite, the All-Generous and Rich One whose wealth is

⁶²³ Ibid, 305.

⁶²⁴ Vahide, "A Survey of the Main Spiritual Themes of the Risale-i Nur," 10.

boundless.”⁶²⁵ In other words, until one is able to realise their weakness and poverty in the sight of God, one cannot appreciate and be in awe of God’s grandiosity.

The analogy of the mirror is used extensively, along with other analogies, throughout the *Risale-i Nur*⁶²⁶. The mirror analogy in this context helps to appreciate how realising one’s weakness and impotence is a means to knowing God’s names; “Through its impotence, weakness, poverty, and need, my life acts as a mirror to the power, strength, wealth, and mercy of the Creator of life.”⁶²⁷ An important aspect of this phrase is that the more one feels the reality of their impotence, weakness, poverty, and need, the more God’s power, strength, wealth, and mercy are felt.

Nursi also humbles the *nafs* by stating that beings have been subjugated to humankind by Divine mercy due to humankind’s innate weakness and impotence, not because of human power and dominance.⁶²⁸ Nursi also argues that humankind’s progress and civilisation is not the result of humankind conquering them, but because humankind has been assisted by Divine mercy and compassion due to their impotence and because of their need for it.⁶²⁹ Thus Nursi is emphasising the importance to say “God is enough for us, for He is the Best Disposer of Affairs.”⁶³⁰

Thus, the “pleasure of feeling one’s poverty and impotence before the Almighty is much greater than that of being apparently rich and powerful,”⁶³¹ since the feeling of poverty and impotence leads to trusting in the All-Powerful and the All-Merciful leading to a state of inner peace. In such a state, a person no longer needs to rely on others for assistance, according to Nursi; one’s weakness becomes one’s strength in the court of God.

⁶²⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 330.

⁶²⁶ Jane I. Smith, “At the Heart of the Matter,” in *Spiritual Dimension of Bediuzzaman’s Risale-i Nur*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 70.

⁶²⁷ Nursi, *The Rays*, 81.

⁶²⁸ Ibid, 65.

⁶²⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 337

⁶³⁰ Qur’ān 3:173.

⁶³¹ Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 308.

This gap that Nursi discusses can appear to be a paradox to the section earlier in this chapter where human being's value was discussed. In that section, the great value of human beings was emphasised and how this could be a source of inner peace since human beings seek to be valued. While in this section, the weakness and impotence of human beings is at the fore of the discussion. How can these two opposing views of human beings be reconciled?

The two explanations are not a paradox when they are studied closely. When Nursi elaborates on the value of human beings, it is the value one attains through association. That is, by connecting the creation to the Creator, the creation's value elevates. In this situation, there is no achievement by human beings, the elevation in value is based purely on association and the implications of that association. He does make the point that the association is made when there is belief. This is why belief increases the value of a person.

When there is a realisation in potential, the growth of an individual can be significant. But in the way Nursi explains spiritual growth, God does not become redundant as one spiritually grows. It is actually an inverse relationship. The more a person spiritually grows and elevates, the more there is the awareness of one's weakness and impotence. When Nursi discusses the weakness and impotence of human beings, it may be understood to be physical weakness and impotence, since Nursi often highlights the physical weakness of human beings in comparison to animals. For example, Nursi highlights how humans cannot even physically compete with the most inferior sparrow,⁶³² since a sparrow can fly whereas humans cannot.

But the weakness and impotence of human beings should not just be understood as physical weakness. Although Nursi acknowledges the spiritual growth of human beings, he highlights on many occasions that human beings cannot be any more than a mirror. Therefore, human's value is "by virtue of being a mirror to the Eternally Besought One"⁶³³ mirroring His names in

⁶³² Nursi, *The Words*, 35.

⁶³³ Ibid, 320.

various ways. Therefore, the more a person realises they are a mirror, the more they spiritually grow. Additionally, the more one realises they are a mirror, the more one realises they can never be the sun (God), but merely reflect the sun's rays. This is the gap that Nursi is highlighting.

Although this discussion simplifies complex matters, it helps to understand how it is that human beings can be described as absolutely weak and impotent, but at the same time have great value as a human being so much so that human beings are the fruit of the universe,⁶³⁴ as described by Nursi. Through the realisation of the gap, worship becomes the natural outcome, according to Nursi.

3.5.1 Worship; the Natural Outcome of Self-Awareness

Nursi portrays worship in an important way in the context of inner peace. For him, worship is something that comes naturally for someone who truly knows themselves. This is an important approach, since Nursi is addressing an audience for whom everything needs to have a logical explanation, as well as offer great pleasures and benefits.

Thus, Nursi explains that worship is the natural outcome of knowing the self. He compares this natural inclination to other natural inclinations; just as one naturally wants to eat when they are hungry or sleep when they are tired, when a person feels their weakness and impotence, they naturally want to worship the All-Powerful and All-Merciful.⁶³⁵ Scholars would normally discuss worshipping as something that has to be done, an obligation that needs to be fulfilled, threatening an individual with punishment if it is not. Whereas Nursi encourages a person to understand their natural state and then respond to it *naturally* with worship. While different types of worship are discussed in the *Risale-i Nur*, supplication (*du'ā*) is one that is touched upon frequently.

⁶³⁴ Ibid, 360.

⁶³⁵ Nursi, *The Rays*, 81.

Supplication is an important practice in Islam as it is considered a form of worship. It is an appeal, an earnest request to God and a request from the created to the Creator. It is not only an acknowledgement of one's neediness, but it is also an acknowledgement that those needs can be met by God only. Supplication is of such importance in Islam that the Qur'ān states "Say, 'What would my Lord care for you if not for your supplication?'..."⁶³⁶ Ibn 'Arabī explains that supplication is what distinguishes humans from other creations; humans have free will and a sense (emotion) of asking.⁶³⁷ Bursawi notes that asking from God is an honour for humankind. He narrates Ibn 'Abbās' words who says "making *du'ā* is the purpose of human being's creation."⁶³⁸

Additionally, there is a Qur'ānic verse that states, "Pray to Me and I will answer your prayer."⁶³⁹ There are also many *ḥadīth* that highlight the pivotal role that supplication has in the life of a Muslim such as "Supplication is the essence (lit. brain) of worship (*ibadah*)"⁶⁴⁰ and "God casts His anger on those who do not make supplicate to Him."⁶⁴¹ As these Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* highlight, supplication is expected from a Muslim.

"For Nursi, supplication is crucial to the illumined life."⁶⁴² Nursi states that belief necessitates that one supplicates to attain certain outcomes.⁶⁴³ If one has belief, it is only natural that one would supplicate, since it has many implications: belief in the existence and oneness of God who has power over all things; awareness of God's closeness and His ability to hear and respond

⁶³⁶ Qur'ān 25:77

⁶³⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, "Tafsīr al-Qur'ān" [Tafsīr of Qur'ān], accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=33&tSoraNo=25&tAyahNo=77&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁶³⁸ Bursawi, "Rūḥu'l-Bayān," accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=36&tSoraNo=25&tAyahNo=77&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁶³⁹ Qur'ān 40:60.

⁶⁴⁰ Tirmidhī, Aḥmad, Bukhārī.

⁶⁴¹ Reported by Imam Aḥmad, Ibn 'Abī Shaybah, and Al-Bukhārī in *Adab al Mufrad*, Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah and Hakim on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, *Ḥadīth* 3295.

⁶⁴² Lucinda Mosher, "The Spirit of Worship and the Result of Sincere Belief," in *Spiritual Dimension of Bediuzzaman's Risale-i Nur*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 108.

⁶⁴³ Nursi, *The Words*, 327.

to what is being requested; consciousness of one's servanthood; and awareness of one's limitations and weaknesses and the greatness of the One supplicated to.

When explaining the different types of supplication, Nursi explains there are two types of supplication for humanity; "one is active and by disposition, and the other, verbal and with the heart."⁶⁴⁴ While active supplication is the one involving acts with causes, such as ploughing the soil and planting seeds to obtain certain crops, the second type of supplication done by humanity is the one done with the tongue and heart. This type of supplication generates peace and reassurance in one's heart, since there is a feeling of being heard and understood by one who can respond to the needs and requests; "The one who offers the supplications knows that there is Someone Who hears the wishes of his heart, Whose hand can reach all things, Who can bring about each of his desires, Who takes pity on his impotence, and answers his poverty."⁶⁴⁵

Nursi highlights that supplication is an act of worship where one is seeking the pleasure of God alone, trusting in His Wisdom and the outcomes that He provides. With this mindset, comes inner peace as one accepts all that happens as the best possible outcome, acknowledging God's mercy and wisdom.⁶⁴⁶ This supplication brings inner peace to a person, not because their worldly requests have been fulfilled, although this can be one of the outcomes, but because one has sought the pleasure of God by worshipping Him through making supplication, a duty that is the natural outcome of the circumstances one faces combined with human nature. This in turn brings one closer to God. In addition, supplication helps a person to deal with one's limitations and weaknesses in a manner that is noble and acceptable to the Creator as well as the person. Rather than feeling hopeless at times of desperation, supplication provides hope to the weak and impotent.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid, 326-327.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, 327.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid, 326.

3.6 Conclusion

Knowing the self plays a critical role in the inner peace process in three ways. Firstly, according to Nursi, there is a strong correlation between knowing the self and knowing God; as one knows the self, knowledge of God increases in proportion. As knowledge of God increases, inner peace is attained.

Secondly, truly knowing the self means knowing that God created the self. This realisation by default increases the value of the self through the connection made to the Creator. This is a source of peace and happiness as human nature seeks to be valued. According to Nursi, realising one's potential also brings great pleasures with it, since humankind came to earth to be perfected. As one draws closer and closer to becoming that perfect being (*insan-i kamil*), the more one feels the pleasures of growth and development.

An important means to realise one's potential is to use one's faculties in the correct manner. According to Nursi, the *nafs*, *qalb* and *'aql* are core faculties of a human being that must be used for their purposes for one to have inner purpose, otherwise their misuse causes nothing but pain and suffering. Their correct use also means the correct use of the emotions. Keeping in mind the temporal nature of this world, Nursi warns against investing the emotions too greatly in this world, stating they should be steered towards matters of the hereafter instead, since the hereafter is a life of eternity. When the faculties and emotions are steered towards their purpose of creation, it ensures optimal functioning of the human being. With this comes great peace.

Knowing the self also means knowing one's weakness and impotence, realising the vast gap between what one can achieve and what one desires. This naturally leads a person to worship God since only He can fulfil the infinite needs of a human being, according to Nursi. It is this natural drive that causes a person to experience inner peace when they worship God.

What is particularly important in Nursi's approach to the self, is that he does not approach the *nafs* as a negative entity which must be eradicated, as Sufi scholars would often approach it. Instead, Nursi gives legitimacy to the *nafs* as he would be aware of the difficulties of negating the *nafs* in today's time where the *nafs* is so much at the forefront. However, legitimacy is granted to the *nafs* with the intent of directing it towards positive development and using it as means of growth.

Now that the relationship between God and humankind has been established, the next step is to understand how this relationship affects how life and events are perceived, particularly events that can appear to be negative or destructive.

CHAPTER 4: *TAWHĪD*-CENTRIC WORLDVIEW AND INNER PEACE

4.1 Introduction

The journey of inner peace starts with knowledge and belief in God, as expressed by Nursi. Knowledge of God, which is embedded in belief in God, provides inner peace through the decoding of the universe through the names of God, so that what once appeared to be a chaotic and somewhat obscure environment now becomes a protective and familiar environment. Also, knowledge of God generates love of God, according to Nursi, which develops the ultimate state of inner peace; “Indeed, all true happiness, pure joy, sweet bounties, and untroubled pleasure lie in knowledge of God and love of God; they cannot exist without them.”⁶⁴⁷

An important part of the inner peace journey is to know one’s self. Firstly, to be able to know God, one needs to know one’s self. Therefore, through self-knowledge, knowledge of God is enhanced. Secondly, knowing one’s self means there is an awareness of the faculties embedded within human nature. These faculties can then be used and developed as they were intended for the prime outcome in this life and the hereafter. Finally, knowing one’s self means knowing one’s weaknesses and shortcomings. Such an awareness leads to a closer relationship with God; since God is the only one who can fulfil those needs, according to Nursi. This leads to seeking those needs from God through servitude in the form of worship, which is the source of inner peace.

The next level of awareness that Nursi addresses is having the correct perspective of life. The prime focus here is how life events are interpreted and what meaning is given to those events. To have the correct perspective of life, in the way Nursi portrays it, there is an assumption that one believes in God, which results in belief in the hereafter. The perspective of life, as portrayed

⁶⁴⁷ Nursi, *The Letters*, 265.

by Nursi, only makes sense if these two beliefs are embedded within the individual. Otherwise, the worldview put forward would not hold in the mind or the heart.

Since Nursi lived at a time of criticism, positivistic scientism and radical secularism,⁶⁴⁸ he felt the effects of these ideologies on the worldview of Muslims. The emerging scientific understandings that Muslims were exposed to were leading to secular, materialistic and even atheistic thinking,⁶⁴⁹ putting the faith of Muslims at risk. The seeds of atheistic thinking were successfully planted by intellects who argued that God cannot exist if there is so much suffering, because if God existed, he would not allow suffering to take place. Such a stance, known as “protest atheism,”⁶⁵⁰ denies the existence of God in protest for the suffering and evil that exists in the world.⁶⁵¹ These challenges that confronted Nursi with regards to belief are still prevalent in the world today, making his arguments highly relevant to contemporary times.

Ultimately, Nursi’s objective was to strengthen the foundations of belief – belief in God, belief in the hereafter and belief in the unseen realm since these would significantly affect one’s worldview. According to Ozdemir, “Nursi lays greater stress on the metaphysical dimension of the universe than on anything else, and it forms the basis of his world-view.”⁶⁵² Thus, Nursi expends extensive time seeking to prove the existence of God and the existence of life in the hereafter. It is outside the scope of this research to discuss the evidence posed by Nursi, however, when he describes the Islamic worldview, he does so with absolute conviction that God exists and absolute certainty that there will be life in the hereafter. Furthermore, not only

⁶⁴⁸ M. Sait Özervarli, “The Reconstruction of Islamic Social Thought in the Modern Period: Nursi’s Approach to Religious Discourse in a Changing Society,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38 (2010): 534.

⁶⁴⁹ Marcia Hermansen, “Said Nursi and Maulana Ilyas: Examples of Pietistic Spirituality among Twentieth-Century Islamic Movements,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 19 (2008): 76.

⁶⁵⁰ Ralph N. McMichael, *Walter Kasper's Response to Modern Atheism: Confessing the Trinity* (New York: P. Lang, 2006), 123.

⁶⁵¹ McMichael quotes Walter Kasper’s other categories of modern atheism: humanistic atheism denies God for the sake of humanity, especially for the sake of human freedom, and indifferent atheism is a complete lack of regard for the questions posed by religion.

⁶⁵² Özdemir, “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Approach to the Environment,” 688.

does God exist, but he is a wise, compassionate, merciful and just God. Therefore, Nursi's explanation of suffering and evil needs to be understood in this context.

While having a strong conviction in the existence of God is essential, it is also essential to build that conviction with knowledge of God and knowledge of one's self, as discussed previously. However, if it was to stop there and one did not know how to interpret life events and know one's purpose in life, it would be an unfinished story or it would be like identifying the building blocks needed in life, but then not using those building blocks for the purpose they were created. Therefore, it is essential to study all of Nursi's works collectively to ensure his approach to inner peace is not half understood or even misunderstood.

The definition of inner peace, as stated previously, is "a state which is attained when an individual is able to give meaning to life and events in a way that satisfies the heart and mind,"⁶⁵³ which in essence is a *tawhīd*-centric view of life. This chapter is the most important chapter in addressing this definition, since it brings together the previous discussion to give meaning to life and events. It cannot be emphasised enough that it would not be possible to arrive at this stage of insight without the previous two chapters, which are essential in understanding this chapter.

In this third stage, inner peace is attained by being able to give meaning to real life events through the lens of *tawhīd*. The core principle of this chapter could be pinned down to the Qur'ānic verse: "Who has created everything in the best way."⁶⁵⁴ According to Nursi, this verse expresses how humankind should view the world as an abode of goodness. He expands on this verse as follows;

⁶⁵³ As defined in the Introduction of this thesis, p. 49.

⁶⁵⁴ Qur'ān 32:7.

In everything, even the things which appear to be the most ugly, there is an aspect of true beauty. Yes, everything in the universe, every event, is either in itself beautiful, which is called ‘essential beauty,’ or it is beautiful in regard to its results, which is called ‘relative beauty.’⁶⁵⁵

Nursi elaborates on this perspective throughout his writings, which will be discussed in detail in this chapter. To reach such a state of seeing the beauty in everything, one’s perspective and worldview needs to be aligned with the way Nursi portrays it and this requires a comprehensive approach to life. To do this, it is key to understand one’s purpose of life as explained by Nursi. Thus, this chapter will first discuss the purpose of life as posed by Nursi to give an appreciation of how life should be approached in general. This will be followed by a discussion of the perspective one should have of life with a particular emphasis on how life and events should be approached as other indicative. According to Nursi, this is the correct perspective to have.

Next, Nursi’s explanation of suffering will be analysed. This is a core component of the discussion since suffering needs to be understood to be able to have inner peace. To understand suffering, the concept of good and evil needs to be unpacked so Nursi’s philosophy that “although some things may appear to be evil, they are not really evil” and “acquisition (*kasb*) of evil, that is, the desire for evil, is evil, but the creation of evil is not evil” can be understood.

Finally, certain events will be considered where the studied principles will be applied. Natural disasters, illnesses, old age and death will be scrutinised through the constructed *tawhīd*-centric worldview. The first step in achieving a *tawhīd*-centric life is to have the correct purpose of life.

4.2 Summary of the Purpose of Life

Nursi explains the purpose of life through a powerful analogy. The analogy is about a King, who represents God. The King had various treasures, great skills and encompassing knowledge. According to Nursi, every possessor of beauty and perfection wants to see and

⁶⁵⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 240.

display their own beauty and perfection.⁶⁵⁶ Nursi continues to explain that beauty and perfection wants to be witnessed. The first way of beholding such beauty and perfection is through one's own discerning eye and the other is through the perspective of others.⁶⁵⁷ It is like an artist who paints. Not only does the artist want to see their painting from their own perspective, but they also wants to see it through others.

The analogy continues with the creation of a vast beautiful palace (the universe), which comprises a banquet; people are invited to come and experience the jewels and ornaments of the palace, and enjoy the banquet. Later, a Supreme Commander (Prophet Muḥammad) is provided to them as a teacher to make known to them the wisdom of the palace and contents within it. The key aspect of his message was that God created all these blessings in the palace as an expression of His love for humankind. In return, He wants Himself to be known and loved, expressing that love by worshipping Him.⁶⁵⁸

Some people had self-knowledge, were intelligent and their hearts were in the right place (believers), so they reflected with amazement at what they saw and sought to find out more about the King who designed and built it, knowing all this had not been created in vain. Realising the Master and Instructor (Prophet Muḥammad) had insight to the creation and the Creator, they asked him for details and listened carefully. They then acted as the King wanted, which greatly pleased the King. As a result, they were invited to another special place, which made them permanently happy.⁶⁵⁹

Then there was a second group who were the non-believers. "Because their minds were corrupted and their hearts extinguished, when they entered the palace, they were defeated by their evil-commanding souls and took notice of nothing apart from the delicious foods."⁶⁶⁰ They

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid, 133.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid, 134.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

stuffed themselves like animals and sank to sleep. They drank elixirs that they were not supposed to and they started disturbing others. So, the soldiers of the palace's owner arrested them and cast them into a prison.⁶⁶¹

Through this analogy, Nursi is able to address many questions that arise about the purpose of existence and the purpose of life. Firstly, it explains the purpose of creation; the beholder of beauty and perfection wants to see its beauty and perfection with their own eyes and through other discerning eyes. Therefore, by creating the universe, there is an aspect that looks to God and there is an aspect that looks to creation. Since humankind is the most comprehensive creation, it has the potential to know God like no other creation. This is achieved through observation of the universe, through knowing one's self and through the instructions of the Prophet.

The believers are mentioned as having "self-knowledge, were intelligent, and their hearts were in the right place." This demonstrates the importance of self-awareness and developing the faculties, especially the heart and mind. When these faculties are functional, they serve their purpose of knowing God, which leads to love of God and becomes a source of inner peace.⁶⁶²

Whereas the non-believers are described as having three features: minds that are corrupt and hearts that are extinguished, which led them to being defeated by their evil-commanding souls when they entered the palace (the universe). In other words, if human nature has not been cultivated, and the faculties and the potential are used for the sake of the *nafs*, "they will decay and decompose for an insignificant pleasure in a short life amidst hardships and troubles."⁶⁶³ This will result in misery in this life and the hereafter, according to Nursi.⁶⁶⁴ This reinforces the

⁶⁶¹ Ibid, 135.

⁶⁶² Nursi, *The Letters*, 265.

⁶⁶³ Nursi, *The Words*, 338.

⁶⁶⁴ Some examples are, Nursi, *The Words*, 566, 673; *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 160, 303.

notion that the *nafs* needs to be purified and reach the level of *al-nafs al-mutma'innah* (the *nafs* at peace) moving away from *al-nafs al-'ammārah* (the commanding *nafs*).

In summary, the purpose of life is explained as being two things; firstly to become aware of all the bounties that God has provided, which should lead to thanking and worshipping God. This necessitates the knowing of God and the self. Secondly, to recognise the manifestation of God's names within the universe and to experience them, and by experiencing them, believing in them.⁶⁶⁵ This has been termed as the decoding of the universe through the names of God, which can only happen if one has a *tawhīd*-centric view of life. As was demonstrated in chapter 2, *tawhīd* is a pivotal part of inner peace.

However, the universe can only be decoded if there is grounded knowledge of God and if the faculties in the human body are used for their true purpose. Nursi states that humans are perfected through these two abovementioned steps, which provide “true meaning of your life, and its perfect happiness.”⁶⁶⁶ In other words, ultimately, a state of inner peace is achieved through believing in God, a conviction that is strengthened by reading the names of God in the universe and the self, and by responding to those blessings with thankfulness and worship.

Therefore, the visible realm (*alami shahadat*) is like a full length mirror in which the hidden treasure, that is God, manifests Himself in order to contemplate His own beauty and perfection.⁶⁶⁷ “While on the level of divine essence, this act of contemplation is self-reflexive, on the level of divine acts, contemplation is mediated through creation, at the pinnacle of which stands man.”⁶⁶⁸ Humankind is not only given the most capability to read the names of God in the universe, but to also be a mirror to the names of God:

Now the true meaning of your life is this: it is acting as a mirror to the manifestation of Divine oneness and the manifestation of the Eternally Besought One. That is to say, through a

⁶⁶⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 139.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid, 140.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid, 134.

⁶⁶⁸ Turner, “The Six-Sided Vision of Said Nursi,” 28.

comprehensiveness as though being the point of focus for all the Divine Names manifested in the world, it is its being a mirror to the Single and Eternally Besought One.⁶⁶⁹

If the purpose of life is to mirror the names of God, then perfection of life is to love the depiction of God's names in one's life.⁶⁷⁰ Although this may appear to be a purpose applicable at the individual level only, it is not so. Seeing God's blessings and reading the names of God at the grand scale are just as important for inner peace since events that happen in one's surroundings affect one's state of being. One needs to be able to witness the names of God in all events, even those that may appear to be negative or undesirable. The manifestation of God's names is the mirroring of God's Oneness so *tawhīd* becomes the focus within the multiplicity.⁶⁷¹

According to Michel, Nursi promotes a God-centred life. He describes this God-centred life as “to put God at the heart of one's human consciousness and at the center of one's hopes and aspirations.”⁶⁷² Michel's description is suggestive of the concept known as *ihsān*. The definition of *ihsān* is often given by citing the *ḥadīth* that describes it: “*Ihsān* is to worship God as though you see Him, and if you do not achieve this state of devotion, then (take it for granted that) God sees you.”⁶⁷³ It is a state where one is always conscious of God's existence and that God can see everything that one does. This results in complete alignment with what God desires from His creation. In such a state, “one is focused sincerely on God and on doing everything to please God.”⁶⁷⁴

Thus, the God-centred term that was coined by Michel is a significantly different notion from the *tawhīd*-centric worldview term presented in this thesis. While a *tawhīd*-centric worldview also encompasses a state of God-conscious, it more specifically focuses on reading God's names in all of creation and giving them meaning through this perspective. It is a means of

⁶⁶⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 141.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Michel, *Insights from the Risale-i Nur*, 126.

⁶⁷³ Bukhari, book 65, *ḥadīth* no. 4777.

⁶⁷⁴ Michel, *Insights from the Risale-i Nur*, 132.

decoding the universe through God's names, which then enhances the understanding of God (*tawḥīd*). Thus, a *tawḥīd*-centric worldview is just that, a worldview where God is witnessed in all of creation through His names, but it is also a means to view the world and give it meaning. The way to achieve this *tawḥīd*-centric worldview will be explored in the next section when discussing the life perspective one should have, as presented by Nursi.

4.3 Perspective

At the core of Nursi's life perspective is the notion that everything is beautiful, either in itself or in regards to its results:

In everything, even the things which appear to be the most ugly, there is an aspect of true beauty. Yes, everything in the universe, every event, is either in itself beautiful, which is called 'essential beauty,' or it is beautiful in regard to its results, which is called 'relative beauty.'⁶⁷⁵

The Qur'ānic verse from which this principle stems is "Who has created everything in the best way."⁶⁷⁶ Many *tafsīr* scholars have commented on this verse. Ṭabarī explains this verse to mean that, not only did God create everything perfectly, but everything is also perfectly calculated with a measure that demonstrates complete knowledge.⁶⁷⁷ In relation to this Qur'ānic verse, Ṭabarī focuses on the notion that everything is created beautifully, with his focus being the perfection in design, symmetry and measure – the physical beauty of creation. Ibn Kathir has a similar focus. He explains that God is informing humankind of how He has created everything well and formed everything in a goodly fashion. He quotes Zayd bin Aslam's⁶⁷⁸ (d. 754) comments regarding this verse, who said: "Who made everything He has created good" means "He created everything well and in a goodly fashion."⁶⁷⁹ Once again, the focus seems to be the

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid, 240.

⁶⁷⁶ Qur'ān 32:7.

⁶⁷⁷ Ṭabarī, "Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī," accessed June 20, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=32&tAyahNo=7&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁶⁷⁸ Zayd bin Aslam is a scholar and *Tabi'* (third generation after Prophet Muḥammad). He narrated many *ḥadīth*.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibn Kathir, "Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm" [Tafsīr of the Qur'ān], accessed June 20, 2015, http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1805&Itemid=88.

form in creation and how the form has been physically well-created, rather than the beauty in the meaning of events.

Zamakhsharī's comments resonate with Nursi's perspective to a larger degree. He explains that everything is created with wisdom and for a purpose. "Whatever God created, He surely made it beautiful," explains Zamakhsharī.⁶⁸⁰ The wisdom in creation can be understood in various ways. It can either suggest that creation has been created wisely and therefore everything serves multiple roles, which means it has been created with a good purpose. Or it can suggest that everything has been created with wisdom and therefore there must be good in all of creation. The first explanation seems more likely for Zamakhsharī, since he states "everything has been created with wisdom and for a purpose."⁶⁸¹ That is, the focus is purposeful creation rather than good creation.

The greatest similarity with Nursi in the interpretation of this Qur'ānic verse is with Baqliyyi. Baqliyyi explains that God created everything in a beautiful way. The things that look indecent or ugly are created as a test, according to Baqliyyi, because anything that God created cannot be ugly or indecent since creating an ugly thing is ungodly.⁶⁸² When studying this commentary, it is important to point out that the focus of creation is not only the creation of entities, but also creation of events. Although events may appear ugly or evil, there is good in the outcome they produce, since they are a test.

Thus, there are different ways in which the Qur'ānic verse "Who has created everything in the best way"⁶⁸³ has been understood by *tafsīr* scholars. While some have focused on the physical form of creation, others have focused on the wisdom of creation. Overall, a common thread that

⁶⁸⁰ Zamakhsharī, "Al-Kashshāf," accessed June 20, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=2&tSoraNo=32&tAyahNo=7&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

⁶⁸² Baqliyyi, "Araisu'l Bayan fi Haqaiqi'l Qur'ān" [Muses of Explanation in the Truths of the Qur'ān], accessed June 20, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=32&tSoraNo=32&tAyahNo=7&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

⁶⁸³ Qur'ān 32:7.

is evident with all the *tafsīrs* is the proclamation that, if God created everything (which there is the conviction that He did), then it cannot be anything but beautiful. Nursi expands on this notion of everything being beautiful throughout his writings. To be able to see the beauty in everything, perspective is important.

4.3.1 *Mānā-yī Harfī* Versus *Mānā-yī Ismī*

In relation to perspective, in *Mathnawī al-Nuriya* (Seedbed of the Light), Nursi makes a significant proclamation about his lifetime learnings where he explains that during the forty years of his life and thirty years of study, he has only learnt four words or concepts. They are meaning by the letter (*mānā-yī harfī*), meaning by the word (*mānā-yī ismī*), intention (*niyyah*) and viewpoint (*nazar*).⁶⁸⁴ Each of these concepts are significant to this discussion, but the first two are of particular importance and therefore will be discussed extensively. The third concept, intention, is also a very important principle in Islam as it “transforms our everyday, ordinary acts into acts of worship,”⁶⁸⁵ according to Nursi. The last concept, viewpoint, is what this chapter is seeking to demonstrate; how life and events should be interpreted so that everything is connected back to God. It is about seeing beyond the material causes and meanings so they are perceived in terms of or on account of God to produce knowledge of God.⁶⁸⁶

Mānā-yī ismī, meaning by the word, is known as the self-referential or nominal meaning of things. It is also described as the physical aspect of a thing that looks to itself. *Mānā-yī harfī*, meaning by the letter, is known as the other indicative meaning of things. It is also described as the metaphysical aspect of a thing that looks to its Creator. These two concepts, which have originated with Nursi, are profound and comprehensive outlooks for understanding the world.⁶⁸⁷

It was a major finding by Nursi during his intense inner search as the New Said was emerging

⁶⁸⁴ Nursi, *al-Mathnawī al-Nuriyya*, 67.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid, 68.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ Kuşpınar, “The Fusion of Faith and Knowledge,” 49.

following World War One. Not only are these two concepts mentioned in *al-Mathnawî al-Nuriyya*, but “it is one of the pivotal concepts of the *Risale-i Nur*.”⁶⁸⁸ Nursi states:

Every creature has two aspects: one concerning itself and its attributes, and the other pointing to its Creator and His Names manifested on it. The second aspect is more comprehensive. Every letter in a book points to itself only as a letter, while in the book it points to and describes its author in many ways. In the same way, every creature, which is a letter from the book of Divine Power, points to itself and its apparent existence to the extent of its size, while pointing to its Eternal Designer in many respects, and sings the praises of His Names manifested on it.⁶⁸⁹

On another occasion, Nursi elaborates on the difference between *mānā-yî ismî* and *mānā-yî harfî* through the mirror analogy.⁶⁹⁰ He explains, if you are to look at the mirror there are two possible primary focuses: you would either look at the mirror and primarily focus on the glass, whereby the reflection becomes secondary, or you would primarily focus on the image reflected within the mirror, whereby the mirror becomes secondary. Nursi explains that objects and events should be viewed as described in the second option so the mirror is *mānā-yî harfî* and is other indicative. That is, the mirror is looked at for a meaning other than itself, which is the reflection. The actual reflection then becomes the *mānā-yî ismî*, which means the reflection is indicating a meaning in itself. Nursi explains that, according to the Qur’ānic view, everything in the universe is *mānā-yî harfî* (other indicative); it is a mirror to make known the Divine names and attributes of God. This perspective of the world and events that take place in it, transform the worldview of an individual.

This worldview is achieved through faith, according to Nursi, enabling one to transcend the boundaries of the material world, where everything is considered in its own right as a separate entity, and instead see the world through a spiritual lens, which connects everything to each other and to God. A worldview where each entity and event acts as a letter that tells of a greater

⁶⁸⁸ Vahide, “A Survey of the Main Spiritual Themes of the *Risale-i Nur*,” 11.

⁶⁸⁹ Nursi, *al-Mathnawî al-Nuriyya*, 351-352.

⁶⁹⁰ Said Nursi, *Barla Lâhikası* [Kastamonu Addition] (Istanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 1994), 348.

story of creation and describes the Creator through the names and attributes of God. According to Nursi, the *harfî* perception is the most accurate way of reading the universe and it is only those whose heart have been filled with faith who can transform “their limited mode of thinking into a universal illuminative contemplation.”⁶⁹¹

When everything is viewed from a *harfî* perspective, everything is seen as a sign (*ayat*) of God. Nursi explains that, in such a state, humankind sees the signs of his Lord everywhere, making him constantly aware of God’s presence,⁶⁹² since the creation becomes a reminder of the Creator. The signs of the universe are seen to be complementary of the signs (*ayat*) of the Qur’ân. Nursi describes these signs as the creational signs of the mighty Qur’ân of the universe.⁶⁹³ This is an important comparison; just as the Qur’ân is believed to be a miraculous book,⁶⁹⁴ the universe is also believed to be filled with multiple miracles such that each creational sign in the universe “display miracles to the number of points and letters of those signs.”⁶⁹⁵ This is the worldview Nursi is putting forward for how the universe should be perceived; with its miraculous beauties.

At this point, it is interesting to note that Nursi starts almost all his writings with the Qur’ânic verse “And there is nothing but it glorifies Him with praise,”⁶⁹⁶ including letters he wrote to his students and the anecdotes he included. When asked why he did this, he explains that this verse is the first door that opened to him from the sacred treasures of the Qur’ân so the truths of this verse became apparent to him. He notes that it is these truths that pervade most parts of the *Risale-i Nur*.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹¹ Kuşpınar, “The Fusion of Faith and Knowledge,” 49.

⁶⁹² Aref Ali Nayed, “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi as Qur’anic Man,” in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur’an: The Example of the Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Sözlük, 2000), 15.

⁶⁹³ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 405.

⁶⁹⁴ Nursi focuses on the miraculous aspect of the Qur’ân throughout his writings, but in particular in his book *Miraculousness of the Qur’an* and the Twenty-Fifth Word in *The Words*.

⁶⁹⁵ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 405.

⁶⁹⁶ Qur’ân 17:44.

⁶⁹⁷ Nursi, *Barla Lâhikası*, 335.

On another occasion, Nursi explains the truths of this Qur’ānic verse by highlighting that all beings are a manifestations of God’s names so “that everything mentions and glorifies its Maker with numerous tongues in numerous ways.”⁶⁹⁸ Nursi bases this argument on the point that many Qur’ānic verses finish by citing specific names of God:⁶⁹⁹ “And He is the Mighty, the Wise;”⁷⁰⁰ “And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful;”⁷⁰¹ or “And He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful.”⁷⁰² In other words, according to Nursi, everything can be explained with the names of God, since everything is a manifestation of God’s names. This is why I state that the universe can be decoded with the names of God. Seeking to understand life and world events is not exempt from the methodology used by Nursi; decoding events through the names of God enables the viewer to witness the names of God at play within these events, even if they are suffering and calamities. This in turn changes the perception of suffering from being negative and evil, to acts that entail knowledge, wisdom, justice, mercy and other names of God.

4.4 Suffering

Suffering is a part of life that has been sought to be understood by humankind throughout the ages by theologians, philosophers, scientists, atheists and even the layperson. Trying to not only endure suffering, but to make sense of the suffering that one witnesses every day in a way that satisfies the heart and mind is an integral part of having inner peace. If the world is viewed in a pessimistic manner or events are judged based on their ‘face value’, numerous unpleasant experiences can be identified everywhere, so oppression, famine, corruption, violation of rights, natural disasters and conflict become all that one sees in this world. In addition to the suffering at the communal level, it seems that individuals suffer within; suffering from the pain of

⁶⁹⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 660.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ Qur’ān 3:62.

⁷⁰¹ Qur’ān 42:5.

⁷⁰² Qur’ān 30:54.

separation when loved ones die, suffering from illnesses and other calamities experienced at the personal level.

Suffering has been tackled by all belief systems. Buddhism often comes to mind when suffering is thought of since the “Four Noble Truths” that were the first teachings of Buddha after his ‘enlightenment’ address suffering.⁷⁰³ The First Noble Truth teaches that the world is diagnosed as a place immersed with suffering in every aspect of life; “Birth is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering, separation from the beloved or pleasant condition is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering.”⁷⁰⁴ Therefore, suffering has an individualistic cause, according to Buddhism, such that suffering is seen as the result of cravings, and the only way to overcome the suffering is to overcome those cravings. In Buddhism, this is something that is achieved through a rebirth (rebirth without dying) process where all cravings are overcome so nothing is craved anymore, which then leads to enlightenment.⁷⁰⁵

Judaism approaches suffering from individual and collective perspectives. “One important strand of Old Testament thought is that God sends suffering as a punishment for sin, and this may be either the sin of the individual or of his society, or even of his ancestors.”⁷⁰⁶ The prophets believed that the suffering of the Jews leading up to the Exile⁷⁰⁷ was caused by the nation’s worship of false gods in previous generations, and to some extent, it was still continuing.⁷⁰⁸ The story of Job is often discussed in the Judeo-Christian tradition when discussing the notion of suffering with the anticipation that his suffering can be understood in the context of God’s justice. Job’s friends insisted that he must have been imposed with suffering because of some

⁷⁰³ Lobsang Gyatso, *The Four Noble Truths*, trans. Sherab Gyatso (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1994), 15.

⁷⁰⁴ Revatadhamma Dhamma, *The First Discourse of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997), 17-18.

⁷⁰⁵ Công Tiến Trần, *The Buddha and Way to Happiness* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing.com, 2004), 103-106.

⁷⁰⁶ W. Montgomery Watt, “Suffering in Sunnite Islam,” *Studia Islamica* 50 (1979): 5

⁷⁰⁷ The Torah explains that the Jews were enslaved in Egypt after the death of Joseph and were eventually exiled from Egypt.

⁷⁰⁸ Watt, “Suffering in Sunnite Islam,” 5.

sin he committed, which may have escaped his notice, urging him to examine himself for this sin and confess it.⁷⁰⁹ A clear correlation is made between sins and suffering, even with the prophets of God.

Similar to Buddhism, and Judaism, Christianity also attributes suffering to actions so moral misdeeds that tend to accumulate and proportionally increase are considered the true causes of suffering.⁷¹⁰ Nevertheless, there is also an understanding that suffering is not always linked to one's misdeed or sins. An incident is explained in the Gospel of John about a man who was born blind. The disciples ask whether the blindness was caused by his sins or his parents – since he was born with the blindness.⁷¹¹ Jesus replies that it is neither, that it was so that God's power is manifest. But Jesus did leave the link between sin and suffering open in the Book of Luke by “warning his hearers that they were all liable to perish unless they repented of their sins.”⁷¹²

The concept of original sin is also important in the context of suffering within Christianity, since there is an understanding that Eve's deception by the serpent led to the eating from the forbidden tree, which was the cause of the downfall of Adam and Eve.⁷¹³ As a result of this sin and the resultant downfall, God condemns Eve to suffer from childbirth and is made subordinate to her husband.⁷¹⁴ God also condemns the man to a life of toil on ground now cursed because he had listened to his wife's voice and disobeyed God. Only thorn and thistles would grow for him and he would need to sweat to earn a living.⁷¹⁵ As a result of these Biblical events, a

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁷¹⁰ Hervé Barreau, “The Meaning of Suffering in Buddhism and Christianity,” in *Life Interpretation and the Sense of Illness within the Human Condition*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka and Evandro Agazzi (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 196.

⁷¹¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Christian Interpretation of Suffering,” in *Life Interpretation and the Sense of Illness within the Human Condition*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka and Evandro Agazzi (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 210.

⁷¹² Watt, “Suffering in Sunnite Islam,” 6.

⁷¹³ Genesis 3:1-6.

⁷¹⁴ Genesis 3:17.

⁷¹⁵ Genesis 3:17-19.

correlation is made between the sin of the first man and woman, and the suffering imbued into the life of humanity.⁷¹⁶

It is now timely to explain suffering from an Islamic perspective. What is the perception of suffering in Islam? To be able to understand the concept of suffering according to Islam, the belief that nothing happens without the will of God is fundamental. Believing that everything is predetermined by God is instrumental in seeing suffering as good. Since it comes from God, it must be good. This has been the common thinking among Muslim theologians throughout history, generating a vast amount of literature on the concepts of patience, contentment and even pleasure in relation to suffering. There are famous Islamic poems and phrases that express the acceptance of whatever comes from God. Yunus Emre (d. 1321), a famous poet and Sufi, uttered the famous words “your fire is good and so is your light”⁷¹⁷ and Ibrahim Hakki (d. 1780), a famous Sufi philosopher who also wrote on astronomy, mathematics, anatomy, psychology, stated “Let’s see what my Lord does. Whatever he does, he does well.”⁷¹⁸ These are two of the many examples where pleasure is expressed with all that God decrees.

Phrases of this nature are often used in Islamic poetry and literature, but hardly are they explained or comprehended. What does it mean to be happy with the fire and light of God – fire (*nar*) suggests burning or suffering, and light (*nur*) suggests blessings or goodness, two states that appear to be on polar ends of the scale? Additionally, what is meant by “Let’s see what my Lord does. Whatever he does, he does well.”?

While there are indications within the Qur’ān that suffering can be the outcome of sins and misdeeds, it is not seen to be purely an outcome of one’s actions or inactions.⁷¹⁹ According to a *ḥadīth*, “If God wants to do good to somebody, He afflicts him with trials.”⁷²⁰ This *ḥadīth*

⁷¹⁶ Barbara F. Stowasser, “Theodicy and the Many Meanings of Adam and Eve,” in *Justice and Theodicy in Modern Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’ (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 6-9.

⁷¹⁷ The original Turkish is “Narin da hos nurunda hos.”

⁷¹⁸ The original Turkish is “Mevlâ görelim neyler. Neylerse güzel eyler.”

⁷¹⁹ Watt, “Suffering in Sunnite Islam,” 11.

⁷²⁰ Bukhārī, book 75, no. 5.

removes any negative undertones that may exist about suffering allowed by God, since God's affliction of trials is described as Him doing good to the individual.

Even if suffering is experienced due to actions or inactions, there is not necessarily a negative impression given to suffering, as evident from the following *ḥadīth*: "Hardships continue to befall a believing man and woman in their body, family, and property, until they meet God burdened with no sins."⁷²¹ Therefore, hardships are seen as a cleansing and purifying process to ensure one meets their Lord in a pristine state.

An alternative view of suffering is that it is an important means of promoting people to higher spiritual degrees.⁷²² Tests and trials become a way to seek out the pious individuals who respond positively to the challenges they encounter. Great reward is promised for those who successfully pass the tests of life. This is described in the Qur'ān as:

And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, Who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return."⁷²³

Therefore, according to Islam, trials and tests are a means to spiritually develop through the attainment of qualities such as patience, servitude and gratitude.⁷²⁴

Prophets are considered to be the most patient of humankind. They also experience the most grievous hardships and suffering,⁷²⁵ even though they were chosen by God to undertake a sacred role of delivering His message. Prophet Muḥammad's life is often given as a prime example of the hardships faced by a prophet; he encountered insults, accusations, assaults, embargoes and

⁷²¹ Bukhārī, book 75, *ḥadīth* no. 1.

⁷²² M. Fethullah Gülen, *Questions and Answers About Islam*, vol. 2 (Somerset, N.J.: Light Inc, 2005), 24.

⁷²³ Qur'ān 2:155-156.

⁷²⁴ Michael L. Peterson, "Religious Diversity, Evil, and a Variety of Theodicies," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, January 2011, accessed June 15, 2015, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195340136.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195340136-e-12>.

⁷²⁵ Gülen, *Questions and Answers About Islam*, 24.

assassination attempts during his lifetime.⁷²⁶ On a personal level, Prophet Muḥammad also experienced many losses with the deaths of family and friends who were very dear to him; his father died before he was born while his mother died when he was six,⁷²⁷ making him an orphan at a very young age. He also lived through the death of six out of seven of his children, Fatima being the only child he did not bury.⁷²⁸ These are just a few of the losses and hardships he endured. Other than losses, there were other difficulties experienced by Prophet Muḥammad, such as poverty and betrayal by close family members.

As can be seen, Prophet Muḥammad's life was anything but rosy, yet he was known as *habibullah* (the beloved of God),⁷²⁹ a title specially given to him by God. This highlights the point that suffering does not mean one is hated by God. There is a *ḥadīth* that actually indicates the opposite. On one occasion Prophet Muhammad was asked by one of his companions which people are the most severely tested. The Prophet responded:

The Prophets, then the next best and the next best. A person is tested according to his religious commitment. If he is steadfast in his religious commitment, he will be tested more severely, and if he is frail in his religious commitment, his test will be according to his commitment. Trials will continue to afflict a person until they leave him walking on the earth with no sin on him.⁷³⁰

Thus, according to this *ḥadīth*, the strongest trials strike those who are the most pious. A correlation is presented here between the level of one's faith and the severity of the trials and tribulations that will be encountered, once again removing any negative connotation that may exist about suffering.

⁷²⁶ M Fethullah Gülen, *The Messenger of God - Muhammad - An Analysis of the Prophet's Life* (Somerset, N.J.: Tughra Books, 2009), 40-41.

⁷²⁷ Ibid, 15.

⁷²⁸ Ibid, 89.

⁷²⁹ Hajjah Amina Adil, *Muhammad, the Messenger of Islam: His Life & Prophecy* (Washington, D.C.: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2002), xii.

⁷³⁰ Ibn Mājah, book 36, *ḥadīth* no. 98.

When this perception of suffering is present in one's heart and mind, there will be an acceptance and even an expectation that suffering will take place. Furthermore, there will be acknowledgement that there is wisdom in suffering. This would not be a pessimistic expectation, but one that would be embraced wholeheartedly, with the anticipation of spiritual growth. With this Islamic understanding of suffering, Nursi goes to great lengths to explain how suffering should be viewed positively. He has two unique contributions to the accepted Islamic understanding of suffering.

Firstly, as mentioned previously, according to Nursi, the purpose of life is to be perfected by becoming aware of God's blessings and responding to them appropriately, but also to strengthen one's belief and knowledge of God by experiencing the names of God throughout life. Therefore, not surprisingly, the way Nursi deals with explaining calamities is linked to the names of God, which is a unique approach to suffering. This approach will become more crystallised as different types of suffering are discussed in this chapter.

Secondly, Nursi gives real life contemporary examples of how to deal with suffering. He is asked real questions about suffering and calamities, and he responds with genuine answers. Not only does he respond to others' questions, but he also discusses his own sufferings and how he dealt with them. This is a very powerful approach, since the discussion is practical and therefore applicable, instead of remaining abstract and theoretical.

But before discussing some calamities and tests that Nursi focused on, his general perception of calamities and tests needs to be considered. In the Second Flash, Nursi reminds the reader that "this worldly realm is the field of testing, the abode of service. It is not the place of pleasure, reward, and requital."⁷³¹ Tests and service are seen to be a means of perfecting one's self through spiritual development. On the other hand, a life that passes by sitting on the couch of

⁷³¹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 23.

ease and comfort is described as “pure evil”⁷³² by Nursi, because such a life of comfort and ease does not allow a person to progress or develop and it would actually lead to a life of regression.

In the context of misfortunes, Nursi also highlights that humankind has been given enough patient endurance to be able to overcome all misfortunes. However, his condition for this stance to hold is that one does not waste that patient endurance on the past or the future.⁷³³ If a misfortune was experienced in the past, one should see it as something that has passed and just remember there will be reward for it. Therefore, Nursi’s advice is that “One should not resent misfortune, but love it. The transient life of the past comes to be counted as an eternal and blessed life because of misfortune.”⁷³⁴ Thus, previous sufferings become an investment for which one will be rewarded in the hereafter. As a result of this perspective, rather than feeling anguish when reflecting on past sufferings, according to Nursi, one should feel happiness. Similarly, endurance should not be wasted for the future since those illnesses and misfortunes have not yet come. Worry for future events is compared to someone who eats and drinks for tomorrow and the day after because of concern they may go hungry on those days.⁷³⁵ Experiencing anxiety for problems that have not yet been encountered seems meaningless and an exhaustion of valuable energy. Through such advice, Nursi is emphasising the importance of living the moment, instead of living in the past or future.

According to Nursi, true misfortune is anything that affects one’s religion. Otherwise, they are not misfortunes at all; sometimes they are warning from God like how “a shepherd throws a stone at his sheep when they trespass on another’s pasture, they understand that the stone is intended as a warning to save them from a perilous action; full of gratitude they turn back.”⁷³⁶ Similarly, certain events in life may be a warning about a wrong that a person is doing. They

⁷³² Ibid.

⁷³³ Ibid, 25.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ Ibid, 26.

could also be a reminder of one's weakness,⁷³⁷ "thus affording him a form of tranquillity,"⁷³⁸ since feeling weak and powerless in the sight of God leads one to submit to the All-Powerful God. This state of submission relieves the person from carrying of a load that otherwise becomes unbearable. By submitting to God, one is in a state of tranquillity and inner peace. Thus, calamities are not actually misfortunes, but a bounty for which one should be thankful, according to Nursi. As a result of belief, such events will "transform the ugly faces of illnesses and calamities to the beautiful faces of eternal life in the gardens of Paradise."⁷³⁹

In another section of the *Flashes*, Nursi talks about the "Divine Blows Dealt by Compassion" as an explanation of the Qur'ānic verse:

On the Day when every soul will be confronted with all the good it has done, and all the evil it has done, it will wish there were a great distance between it and its evil. But God cautions you [to remember] Himself. And God is full of kindness to those who serve Him.⁷⁴⁰

The concept here is similar to what was mentioned above. That is, they are 'the blows (or slaps) dealt by Divine compassion' that can be perceived as suffering and are received as a consequence to faults and mistakes that were committed.⁷⁴¹ But they have a positive connotation, since such blows are seen to protect the individual from greater harm. Nursi gives various examples of compassionate slaps, starting with himself, but also includes examples from his students who made wrong decisions or became relaxed in their "serving of the Qur'ān" and therefore received a compassionate slap in return for their errors.

In one example, he mentions how Hâfiz Zühtü became preoccupied with attaining a 'worldly stature' and not being satisfied with the spiritual honour of the students he was supervising. As

⁷³⁷ As discussed in Chapter 3, remembering one's weakness and impotence is a means to inner peace.

⁷³⁸ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 26.

⁷³⁹ Emrah Altunkaya, "A Nursi Reader - A Message for Times of Illness," *The Fountain Magazine* 47 (July - September 2004), <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/A-Nursi-Reader---A-Message-for-times-of-illness>.

⁷⁴⁰ Qur'ān 3:30.

⁷⁴¹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 69.

a result, he received an “awesome slap from Divine compassion. An incident occurred that completely destroyed his family’s honour.”⁷⁴² The point here is that Hâfiz Zühtü should not have been preoccupied with worldly stature. He had a sacred mission to complete, which was far more important than seeking a worldly stature. Through this compassionate slap, it awakened Hâfiz Zühtü to the mistake he had made and was a trigger for him to correct himself.

Nursi then mentions how the younger brother was also affected by the incident, since he is part of the same family, “although he was not deserving of any slap.”⁷⁴³ Nursi gives meaning to this undeserving slap received by the younger brother by stating it will be like a beneficial surgical operation on his spiritual heart.⁷⁴⁴ The comment on how the incident affected the younger brother is an important one. It shows how individuals can suffer as a result of others’ mistakes and therefore highlighting that suffering is not always because of personal mistakes. When one does suffer at the hand of others, there will be great reward for the innocent, according to Nursi. Such suffering will not go unnoticed and will incur great spiritual benefits. This point will be further analysed when discussing natural disasters.

In summary, these compassionate slaps, which can also be described as ‘wake up calls,’ are seen as a blessing from God because they are reminders of one’s errors and therefore they are opportunities to rectify mistakes and purify intentions. Ultimately, they are a means to perfect the self. It is worth highlighting that these blows are described as compassionate, stressing the notion that such blows stem from God’s compassion, not His wrath or vengeance. Although there may be some negative experiences when such blows are encountered, when there is an awareness that these blows will prevent greater harm or damage, the blows are positively embraced.

⁷⁴² Ibid, 75.

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

Until now, there has been discussion of how suffering can be viewed positively, as explained by Nursi. However, suffering cannot be fully grasped until the concepts of good and evil are understood as explained by Islam. After all, the perception of what is good and evil determines what suffering is. Conversely, when the wisdom behind suffering can be understood, it leads to the evolution of how good and evil are perceived.

4.4.1 Concept of Good and Evil

Before exploring Nursi's approach to theodicy in which is embedded the concept of good and evil, it is important to see the historical approach to the topic. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (d. 1716), a famous philosopher, first coined the term theodicy in 1710 and described it as "the attempt to demonstrate that divine justice remains uncompromised by the manifold evils of existence."⁷⁴⁵ However, theodicy had been discussed by Muslim scholars many centuries before the word first appeared, with Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) tackling the topic in depth. His main conclusion, after complex theological explanations, was that the world ultimately is a good world, a notion that was supported by Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240).⁷⁴⁶ When discussing the topic of theodicy, Ghazzālī's work cannot be avoided. In Ghazzālī's words, "there is nothing in the realm of contingency better than what is."⁷⁴⁷ Though there are a number of significant differences, Leibniz's understanding of theodicy is very similar to Ghazzālī and Nursi: this world is the best of all possible worlds.⁷⁴⁸

The notion that the world is ultimately good, or even the best it could be, is an important stance, especially in light of how other religions perceive evil and suffering. According to Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, the world is evil and a place of suffering, such that life's mission is

⁷⁴⁵ Eric L Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute Over Al-Ghazālī's "Best of All Possible Worlds"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3.

⁷⁴⁶ Mohammed Ghaly, *Islam and Disability: Perspectives in Theology and Jurisprudence* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 22.

⁷⁴⁷ Abu Hamid Ghazzālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* [Revival of the Religious Sciences] (Cairo: Matbaat al-Estigama, 1968), 321.

⁷⁴⁸ Mehmet S. Aydin, "The Problem of Theodicy in the Risale-i Nur," in *Islam at the Crossroads*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 216.

to overcome the sufferings posed by the world's evils. Whereas, according to Islam, the world is good.⁷⁴⁹ No doubt, evil exists, as will be explained later, but the world is viewed to be inherently good. This difference in perspective of what is evil stems from the belief that evil does not originate with Satan, an 'outside force' created by God, but with the tendencies of the human being to do evil.⁷⁵⁰

Even with its human capabilities, humankind has the potential to attain angelic qualities, but it is a state that necessitates striving to achieve. There are many Qur'ānic verses that state Satan does not actually have a forcing power (sovereignty) on people.⁷⁵¹ This is reinforced by the Qur'ānic verse that states, "... Indeed, the plot of Satan has ever been weak."⁷⁵² The Qur'ānic verse that comes to mind in this context is "Know that evil is from yourself, and good is from God."⁷⁵³ This verse will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, but at this point it suffices to say that this verse sets the paradigm that the world God created is a good one.

If all good is from God, how can the human acts of evil be reconciled with God's goodness? This question has been tackled by Ash'arī (d. 941) and Māturīdī (d. 944), two Muslim theologians from the tenth century who have left their mark until today through the establishment of the two main theological schools of thought that have been named after them. They were the first to lay the foundations of the Islamic concept of God, forming the two mainstream theological schools of thought within the Islamic tradition.⁷⁵⁴ With regards to theodicy, the kind of questions they addressed are: 'Who is responsible for evil?' and 'Who creates an evil act?' Much literature has been devoted to discussing the commonalities as well

⁷⁴⁹ Jonathan Brockop, "Islam," in *Evil and Suffering*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1998), 135.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁵¹ For instance, Qur'ān 14:22; 15:42; 16:99; 17:65; 34:21.

⁷⁵² Qur'ān 4:76.

⁷⁵³ Qur'ān 4:79.

⁷⁵⁴ Sad al-Din Al-Taftazani, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani on the Creed of Najm al-Din al-Nasafi*, trans. Earl Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), xix.

as the differences between the two theologians, which have subtle implications on how good and evil is understood.

Mainstream scholars argue that, while Ash'arī and Māturīdī are accepted as being within the parameters of the Islamic teachings, as determined by the Qur'ān and Sunnah, Mu'tazilites and Jabriyya's are not.⁷⁵⁵ Mutazilite comes from the word *i'tizal*, which means departed and implies they have departed from mainstream Islam.⁷⁵⁶ Mutazilites denied Divine determining stating that God neither determined nor created sins like disbelief, evil, tyranny and wrongdoing.⁷⁵⁷ In other words, humankind creates evil acts independently of God. This was the Mutazilite's way of defending God's justice.⁷⁵⁸ They did not see it fitting for God to create humankind's evil acts, which led to them giving creative powers to humankind. Jabriyya hold the opposite view to Mutazilite's, where they stated that humankind has no will or option, everything is willed and done by God, and human beings are compelled to those actions.⁷⁵⁹ Jabriyya considered the Mutazilite view to be negligent:

With the intention of declaring God to be free of all partners and to be in no way impotent, the followers of this school ascribes all of man's voluntary actions, whether good or evil, to Divine Determining and claimed that man's will and power of choice were ineffective.⁷⁶⁰

It is ironic that both schools seek to protect God: Mutazilites try to protect God from being 'guilty' of creating evil, while Jabriyyas try to protect God from being powerless. Therefore, although the objective of the two schools may have been good, they were not in line with the way God made Himself known through the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

⁷⁵⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 482.

⁷⁵⁶ Mehmed Kırkinci, *Divine Determining: (Fate and Destiny) and Man's Will in Islam* (Istanbul: Sözler, 1993), 78.

⁷⁵⁷ Tarif Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1985), 82-86.

⁷⁵⁸ George Walsh, *The Role of Religion in History* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 93.

⁷⁵⁹ Siddık GümüŖ, *Islam's Reformers* (Istanbul, Turkey: Hakikat Kitâbevi, 2005), 15.

⁷⁶⁰ Kırkinci, *Divine Determining*, 78.

Nursi explains that the two accepted Sunni schools, Māturīdī and Ash'arī, were able to solve the dilemmas experienced by Jabriyyas and Mu'tazilites with an explanation that was more in line with the Islamic teachings without making God appear evil for creating evil and without making God powerless.⁷⁶¹ There are differences found between the Ash'arī and Māturīdī schools in details, but they are on secondary and minor matters.

The Māturīdī school is that of those who believe and follow Abu Mansur Muḥammad Māturīdī. Firstly, Māturīdī acknowledged that humankind has the will and power to either do or not do a thing. However, humankind's will is different to God's will; when human beings exercise their will, it is described as a 'wish', 'desire', 'inclination' or 'acquisition' (*kasb*), which God responds to by creating the desired thing.⁷⁶² Whereas, when God wills something, there is creation (*khalq*). Both *kasb* and *khalq* are described as actions, actions that are the result of exercising power.⁷⁶³ The coming together of the two powers results in God creating what the human being willed. Approaching the matter in this way ensured the principle of "God creates all" is not violated.

The Ash'arī school is that of those who follow Abu'l-Hasan Ash'arī. Ash'arī was first a Mutazilite, but then returned to the mainstream way of thinking, after which he wrote many books on the subject.⁷⁶⁴ Ash'arī defines performing actions as bringing something into existence, something that human beings cannot do. Therefore, only God performs actions.⁷⁶⁵ Hence, when human beings desire an act, God creates it without human power having any effect.

⁷⁶¹ Nursi, *The Words*, 482.

⁷⁶² Kırkıncı, *Divine Determining*, 90.

⁷⁶³ Shams Al-Din Ahmad, "The Disagreements Between the Ash'aris and Maturidis," *Muslim Answers*, accessed June 25, 2015, <https://muslimanswersfiles.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/the-disagreements-between-the-ash28098aris-and-maturidis.pdf>.

⁷⁶⁴ Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of Its Genres and Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61.

⁷⁶⁵ Shams Al-Din Ahmad, "The Disagreements Between the Ash'aris and Maturidis."

Thus, the commonality between the two schools is that human beings have free will and they have the ability to exercise that free will. In both cases, God is the one who has the creative powers to create the outcome desired by the human being. The difference is mainly on what is understood by the word “action.” Ash’arī held that the word “action” is literal when applied to God since He is the doer, and is figurative when applied to human beings. Māturīdī held that the word “action” is also literal when applied to human beings.

While some deem Nursi as “neo-Ash’arite”⁷⁶⁶ in his general theological approach, an examination of the *Risale-i Nur* also reveals close alignments with the Māturīdī perspective. For the purpose of this discussion, the nuance differences are not important. However, similar to the Ash’arī and Māturīdī thinking, Nursi believes that humankind has free will and, if one chooses to do something, God will create it. Therefore, while humankind is responsible for the choice, whether it is good or bad, the creative powers lie with God. Sometimes Nursi suggests that all humankind needs to do is desire it (Ash’arī) and other times he suggests that humankind has minute will (*juz’i irada*) (Māturīdī). Either way, as Nursi expresses it, God in effect is saying: “My servant! Whichever way you wish to take with your will, I will take you there. In which case the responsibility is yours!”⁷⁶⁷

Nursi gives an analogy to explain how human free will and God’s power work together. It is like a child who is put on the shoulders of an adult. The adult tells the child that they will take them wherever they want to go. The child wants to go to a high mountain, so the adult takes them there, but they either catch a cold or falls.⁷⁶⁸ In this case, it is appropriate to hold the child responsible for the bad choice they made, according to Nursi, and for the carrier to reprimand the child. “Thus, Almighty God, the Firmest of Judges, makes His servant’s will, which is utterly weak, a condition, and His universal will follows it.”⁷⁶⁹ Just as the child is responsible

⁷⁶⁶ Turner, “Bediuzzaman and the Concept of ‘Adl,” 556.

⁷⁶⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, 483.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

for the outcome of what they willed, Nursi is arguing that human beings are responsible for what they will, even if it is God's will that made human will possible. Based on this explanation, God is not responsible for evil.

It is now timely to discuss how evil should be understood. Nursi's starting point to the discussion of evil is worth noting and also different to many other scholars' approaches. Rather than trying to work out who evil should be attributed to, Nursi first presents the definition of evil. "Nursi, throughout his works explicitly defines evil and gives rational reasons for its existence."⁷⁷⁰ One of the definitions he provides is: "existence is pure good and light, while non-existence is pure evil and darkness."⁷⁷¹ From this, Nursi means "all instances of good, beauty, and pleasure arise from existence, and that all evils and bad, calamities, suffering, and even sins are attributable to non-existence."⁷⁷² What does Nursi mean by existence and non-existence?

Nursi sees non-existence as preventing an act or not doing an act that is needed for a good outcome. The action is often something one is responsible for. Therefore, neglecting such an action could be "one command pertaining to non-existence and one condition being spoilt."⁷⁷³ Nursi gives many examples of how such non-existence leads to destruction. Two examples will be analysed to examine the relationship Nursi establishes between evil and non-existence. In the first analogy, Nursi gives the example of a helmsman of a large ship. By abandoning his duty, "the ship may sink and the labour of all those employed on it go for nothing; all those instances of destruction will result from a single instance of non-existence."⁷⁷⁴ With this example, non-existence, that is, not fulfilling one's duty, leads to destruction. Whereas, if the helmsman did not abandon his duty, the ship would not sink and the labour of all those working

⁷⁷⁰ Tubanur Yesilhark, "The Existence of *Sharr* and its Implications According to Bediüzzaman Said Nursi," *Nursi Studies*, 2010, accessed January 2, 2014, <http://www.nursistudies.net/teblig.php?tno=543>.

⁷⁷¹ Nursi, *The Rays*, 89.

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 107.

⁷⁷⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 479.

on the ship would not be wasted. Through this example, Nursi highlights the magnitude of destruction that can be caused when one single duty is neglected.

Nursi sees disbelief and actions of disbelief to be the greatest causes of non-existence and therefore evil.⁷⁷⁵ This is because disbelief severs the connection that exists between all of creation and the Creator. “Unbelief is an evil, a destruction, an absence of affirmation. But that single evil comprises insulting the whole universe, belittling all the Divine Names, and abusing all humanity.”⁷⁷⁶

To further clarify good and evil, Nursi gives the example of a garden where a man’s responsibility is to open the water canal so everything can be watered. Negligence of this role (negligence of one’s duty), leads to non-existence of bounties since everything dies. However, the existence of the garden’s bounties is dependent on hundreds of conditions besides the man’s duty and the bounties come into being through dominical will and power, which are the true cause.⁷⁷⁷

This analogy and all that has been said so far, explains the Qur’ānic verse that Nursi often quotes: “Know that evil is from yourself, and good is from God”⁷⁷⁸ That is, if an evil takes place, it is because you, someone else or a group of people (community) have not fulfilled their duty in some way, like opening the water canal: “evil is from yourself.” However, if the water canal is opened and plants grow, the act cannot be attributed to an individual, as explained above. It must be attributed to God, since this “good is from God.”

In Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* of this Qur’ānic verse, he attributes difficulties and dislikeable acts to the self or the sins committed by the self while all goodness and blessings are attributed to God.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁵ For example Nursi, *The Rays*, 21 and 90; *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, 82.

⁷⁷⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, 229.

⁷⁷⁷ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 182.

⁷⁷⁸ Qur’ān 4:79.

⁷⁷⁹ Ṭabarī, “Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī” accessed June 20, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=4&tAyahNo=79&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

Therefore, a strong correlation is made between wrong or sinful acts and the difficulties encountered as a result. Rāzī interprets this verse to mean that all evil is because of human actions,⁷⁸⁰ which is very similar to the way Zamakhsharī explains the verse. Maḥallī and Suyūṭī expand on the verse a little more, but the evil is once again attributed to the sins committed: “Whatever good (*hasana* means *khayr*) befalls you, O man, it is from God, it has come to you from His bounty; whatever evil, misfortune, befalls you is from yourself, it has come to you as a necessary consequence of sins you have committed.”⁷⁸¹

Qushairi mentions that any evil that befalls a person is acquired (*kasb*) by that person, but any good that befalls a person is a bounty from God. He then states that both are created by God.⁷⁸² As can be seen, Qushairi takes a more theological approach to the Qur’ānic verse. This could be explained by the mere fact that Qushairi was the student of Ash’arī⁷⁸³ and therefore lived at a time when free will in relation to God’s creative powers was being heavily debated.

Nursi’s unique approach is evident through the various examples he provides. Although committing sins is destructive and therefore evil, as explained by Nursi, the concept of evil is much broader and more comprehensive than the evil of personal sins. Nursi has extrapolated a universal principle from this Qur’ānic verse; if a contributing part of a system is removed or made dysfunctional, it will cause some type of destruction. This is the case in the spiritual, mental, physical, social and every other domain. Nursi applies this principle to almost everything. The existence of a building is through the existence of all its parts. “Since evils are destructive, man may perpetrate much destruction with a single evil act, like burning down a house with one match”⁷⁸⁴ The functioning of the universe is based on good, because it means

⁷⁸⁰ Rāzī, “Mafatih Al-Ghayb,” accessed June 20, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=4&tSoraNo=4&tAyahNo=79&tDisplay=yes&Page=3&Size=1&LanguageId=1>.

⁷⁸¹ Maḥallī and Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 203.

⁷⁸² Qushayrī, “Latā’if al-Isharat,” accessed June 20, 2015, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=108&tSoraNo=4&tAyahNo=79&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>.

⁷⁸³ Allen, *Arabic Literary Heritage*, 61.

⁷⁸⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 478.

existence in an orderly manner. If that functioning is in any way tampered with, it means the removal of something (the non-existence of something), which leads to evil.

This leads to two main principles about evil that expand on what has been said thus far; “Although some things may appear to be evil, they are not really evil” and “Acquisition (*kasb*) of evil, that is, the desire for evil, is evil, but the creation of evil is not evil.” These two principles will be discussed in the next section.

4.4.1.1 Although Some Things may Appear to be Evil, They are not Really Evil

Nursi goes to great lengths to explain how some things that appear to be evil are not actually evil. He explains how humankind wrongfully identifies some things as evil when it is not: “Divine Determining looks to the true causes and acts justly. Men construct their judgements on causes which they see superficially and fall into error within the pure justice of Divine Determining.”⁷⁸⁵ To explain this statement, Nursi gives the example of an individual who has been sent to jail for theft. That individual did not commit that theft, but he had committed a murder. Divine justice prevailed by imprisoning the individual, even though it appears as though injustice has occurred. Nursi concludes by stating that Divine determining and creation are exempt from evil, ugliness and tyranny.⁷⁸⁶

This portrayal of multiple causes also helps to identify the sometimes narrow view of the world by humankind. To further elaborate on the multiple causes that may lead to an event, Nursi highlights there are thousands of wisdoms for events taking place that may be contrary to what an individual may desire. When considered in the scheme of things, the desires of an individual are likened to a grain found within a heap of wheat.⁷⁸⁷ Nursi gives many examples, such as the thorns on plants and trees, which may be perceived as harmful and meaningless but they are in fact “well-equipped heroes of the grasses and trees. And for example, hawks harrying sparrows

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid, 478–479.

⁷⁸⁷ Said Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi al-Arabi al-Nuri*, trans. Ceylan Caliskan (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat, 2003), 483-4.

is apparently incompatible with mercy, but through this harrying, the sparrow's abilities unfold."⁷⁸⁸ The list of examples goes on to events that may appear to be ugly only because humankind considers the results, which look to one's self only and therefore judges it to be ugly or evil when there good be a thousand good in that event that humankind is oblivious to. Keeping this in mind, it begs an individual to try to appreciate a matter outside the scope of one's personal aspirations and needs.

Even the creation of Satan is not evil according to Nursi. It is through Satan's existence that humankind develops; strengthening one's willpower to be able to resist temptations.⁷⁸⁹ Through this process, humankind spiritually elevates to higher levels of existence; through the attainment of qualities that did not exist before, such as patience, humility and wisdom. Thus, Nursi argues, the creation of Satan is not evil, but is actually good when viewed in this respect.⁷⁹⁰ The connection often made between evil and non-existence can be seen through this example as well. If Satan did not exist, humankind would not be able to strengthen its willpower or other skills for that matter. For this reason, Nursi states, "Life led monotonously on the couch of ease and comfort resembles not so much the pure good that is being, as the pure evil that is non-being; it tends in fact in that direction."⁷⁹¹

Nursi argues that the torment of non-believers in hell is not evil either, "since through their unbelief they have transgressed the rights of all beings and insulted their honour."⁷⁹² In various parts of his writings, Nursi explains what a big crime denial of God is, as it negates the connection of all of creation to the Creator. Therefore, the punishment of such a denial is not evil. This stance is not an easy one to digest. The fact there are so many religions that negate

⁷⁸⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 241.

⁷⁸⁹ Fethullah Gülen, *Questions and Answers about Islam* (Virginia: The Fountain, 2000), 104.

⁷⁹⁰ Nursi, *The Rays*, 40.

⁷⁹¹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 23.

⁷⁹² Nursi, *The Rays*, 40.

the existence of hell would be an indication of this. However, this dilemma can be addressed as well. Nursi explains that human nature has an innate desire for immortality.

It might even be said that a reason for the existence of the eternal realm and everlasting Paradise is the intense desire for immortality arising from that passionate love of immortality, and from the innate and general prayer for immortality.⁷⁹³

Also, as has been mentioned in many parts of Nursi's writing, existence is better than non-existence. Based on these principles of Nursi, it can be argued that an individual would rather be eternally in hell than not existing at all.

Gülen (b. 1938), a contemporary leading scholar who could be considered the successor of Nursi's work, often elaborates on Nursi's writings so they are better understood in today's world. He also often adds a more practical and real life dimension to the discussions. Gülen refers to Nursi's writings in one way or another in almost all his writings and sermons. In one of his books, *Prizma*, he is asked "What if humans were not going to be resurrected after they die? It is not such an impossible idea..." His response is, "Eternal non-existence is pure evil; even if a person is being punished, they would rather exist."⁷⁹⁴ As evident already, Gülen's approach is similar to Nursi, seeing non-existence as pure evil. Gülen continues to explain that anyone who listens to their conscience would hear it say "Eternity, Eternity!" Therefore, he argues it is definite that non-existence is pure evil. He adds that humankind would rather be in hell and suffer torment, "because they would suffer torment whilst existing and they would be content with that."⁷⁹⁵

Gülen continues the discussion by giving the example of someone with a life sentence in prison; he explains they would much rather have a life sentence in prison than capital punishment (a level of non-existence). He states that, "even if a person suffers torment (in prison) they would

⁷⁹³ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 31.

⁷⁹⁴ Fethullah Gülen, *Prizma 5* (Istanbul: Nil Yayınları, 2007), 223.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 227.

rather exist.” Gülen continues with a personal experience where he was the assigned imam to talk to two men before they were hung⁷⁹⁶. Gülen states about one of them, “Even though he had nothing left in life that would smile at him, he would have preferred this uncomfortable lifelong jail to ‘non-existence’ (being hung)...”⁷⁹⁷

I would think that Gülen’s view resonates with Nursi’s line of thinking, which is why Nursi sees the existence of life to be such a huge blessing. Once it has been experienced, one would rather suffer than return to non-existence.

4.4.1.2 Acquisition (*Kasb*) of Evil, that is, the Desire for Evil, is Evil, but the Creation of Evil is not Evil⁷⁹⁸

Nursi attributes evil to the human being stating “it is man’s soul that wants them, either through capacity or through choice.”⁷⁹⁹ However, although humankind chooses the evil, God creates the evil since humankind has no creative powers; all creative powers belong to God, but it is in response to the wanting of humankind.⁸⁰⁰

Even when such ‘evil’ is created, it is seen to have numerous benefits or goodness within that creation. Nursi gives the example of rain, stating that if a lazy man was to receive damage from rain, would that mean rain is a bad thing? Could he say “I wish rain did not exist”? Since rain comprises many instances of good, rain is not seen as an evil creation. “To abandon that good for a minor evil becomes a greater evil. Therefore, a minor evil becomes like good.”⁸⁰¹ Other examples can also be used to appreciate this concept; such as, the existence of fire. People can be burned with fire so there is minor evil, but there are numerous benefits of having fire, such as cooking food and keeping warm. Its absence would be evil to the masses.

⁷⁹⁶ Before a criminal was hung in Turkey, they were given a session with a government-assigned religious leader (imam) who plays a role similar to a priest. The imams also had the role of pastoral care.

⁷⁹⁷ Gülen, *Prizma* 5, 225.

⁷⁹⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 478.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

In a similar way, Nursi argues that all the apparent evil in the universe is due to the work of humankind who tampers with the perfect creation or its understanding. Nursi often gives examples regarding environmental ethics:

And the cleanliness and purification proceeding from the Name of Most Holy cleans and makes beautiful all the beings in the universe. So long as man's dirty hand does not interfere, there is no true uncleanness or ugliness in anything.⁸⁰²

Without humankind, the universe has a number of systems in place that will keep itself clean. However, the moment humankind disturbs the systems through actions, such as the emission of greenhouse gases, pollution or cutting down trees, the system is disturbed and the world is faced with environmental problems, such as climate change.

As can be seen, the way evil is explained by Nursi greatly affects one's perception of God; 'evil' is witnessed all around us. It somehow needs to be reconciled with the belief that God is All-Powerful, All-Just and All-Compassionate. A question that is often asked is "why does God allow suffering to take place?" Understanding that God does not endorse evil, but allows it to take place so an individual has the opportunity to develop themselves or to redeem an individual for their sins, creates a positive image of God. In the context of inner peace, one needs to make sense of such apparent evil and give it meaning that satisfies the heart and mind. Nursi's explanation of evil achieves this. If this evil is attributed to God, then God cannot be All-Just. If that evil is attributed to man, without taking away from God's creative powers, it leads to the conclusion that God is All-Just. The need for evil is also appreciated when one understands the purpose of creation; being a testing ground, the world needs evil to be able to witness good, since it is a world of opposites and the need for evil to be able to develop one's faculties and

⁸⁰² Nursi, *The Flashes*, 402.

skills in this life. Looking at specific case scenarios in the next section will shed further light on Nursi's words "There is no evil or ugliness in Divine creation."⁸⁰³

4.5 Natural Disasters

Natural disasters, such as earthquakes and other calamities where there is violation of one's rights or even life, are often considered hindrances to inner peace. Such events cause a lot of heartache and pain due to their destructive manner and inability for the individual to make sense of such incidents. The immediate response could be "I did not deserve that," expressing the belief that a sense of injustice has taken place. Even if such suffering is not experienced in our own lives, witnessing it in others' lives can be as discomforting or painful as experiencing it in our own lives. Seeing innocent children suffering due to natural disasters can be heart wrenching and trigger the question of "if God exists and if He is merciful, how can he allow such suffering to take place?"

When discussing calamities, it needs to be remembered that the realm of creation is a reflection of God's names according to Nursi. All events that take place within this created universe are considered reflections of the names of God with every name having a different reflection. The name *al-Qayyum* (the Sustainer) is reflected in the sustainability of the universe. That is, God is sustaining the universe. If there was to be one second of absence of this name in the universe, it would cause the collapse of the universe.⁸⁰⁴ The name *al-Shāfi* (the Healer) is reflected when illnesses and sicknesses are healed. For this name to be able to manifest, illnesses that need healing need to be present. If there are no illnesses, this name would not manifest and this goes against the Divine plan. The name *al-Razzaq* (the Provider) is reflected through the provision

⁸⁰³ Nursi, *The Words*, 478.

⁸⁰⁴ Zeki Sarıtoprak, "Nursi on the Problem of Theodicy," in *God, Man, and Mortality: The Perspective of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Hasan Horküç (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2015), 135.

of sustenance by God for all creation. This name necessitates the existence of hunger for it to manifest.⁸⁰⁵

Nursi uses the mirror analogy to further explain the manifestation of God's names in the universe. Nursi explains that the universe has two faces like a mirror. One is its external face, which resembles the coloured face of the mirror, the other is its face which looks to its Creator. This resembles the mirror's shining face. Its external (coloured) face is the arena of opposites. It is where matters like beautiful and ugly, good and evil, big and small, difficult and easy appear.⁸⁰⁶ Although the shiny face looks to the Creator, it would not reflect unless the mirror has the coloured opaque side. This comes back to the point that God would not be known unless the names of God can manifest in response to events. Natural disaster is one of those events.

Nursi reconciles God's mercy and natural disasters in two ways. Firstly, he suggests a distinction between that which emanates directly from the treasure of God's mercy and beauty and that which results occasionally from His universal laws.⁸⁰⁷ The former is made up of all that is good and beautiful, which God bestows upon all of his creation, out of His compassion and generosity.⁸⁰⁸ With the latter, although they have some minor evils, such as destruction, death and suffering, he explains that these instances of apparent ugliness are a means of showing numerous instances of beauty. Therefore, such calamity and destructions are indirectly an instance of beauty since such ugliness ensures the emanation of the different levels of beauty, just as the degrees of light are known through darkness.⁸⁰⁹ Nursi expands on this by explaining that God, the Compassionate Sustainer, hears the individuals who suffer as a result of the constraint of such laws and responds to them with His favours, making Himself loved in special ways.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁵ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 23.

⁸⁰⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, 547.

⁸⁰⁷ Kuşpınar, "Justice and Balance in Creation," 234.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁹ Nursi, *The Rays*, 39.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid, 40.

Nursi explains that these occasional evils and calamities are the result of these universal laws which are needed to preserve and maintain the laws, which are the means to universal benefits. Such universal laws need to take place according to Nursi, where he likens the universe to a palace with the earth being a city in it. This city is constantly being shaken by destruction and reconstruction, agitated by war and emigration, a world that is revolving amid death and life. However, it is such activity that ensures the ongoing functioning of the earth and universe. Nursi, however, paints a positive impression of this change that can sometimes cause destruction, stating there is “astonishing balance, equilibrium and equilibration,”⁸¹¹ so everything is “being measured and weighed every moment on the scales of a Single Being Who sees and supervises the whole universe.”⁸¹² Alternatively, Nursi claims, chaos would occur within a day if such changes did not occur.

In this context, struggles and clashes of death and life, which would include natural disasters, are discussed collectively along with “the incomings and outgoings of the seas, the income and expenditure of springs under the earth, the birth and death of animals and plants, the destruction of autumn and the reconstruction of spring.”⁸¹³ Thus, the ‘destruction’ observed with natural disasters is considered to be part of keeping that balance.

In another section, Nursi connects the activity and motion found on earth, which sometimes includes calamities, to God’s “sacred compassion and pure love”⁸¹⁴. Such compassion and love for His creation, argues Nursi, leads to creating opportunities for God’s creation, including humankind, to develop its potentialities. Such growth of humankind leads to a sacred proudness and gratification on God’s part.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹¹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 400.

⁸¹² Ibid.

⁸¹³ Ibid, 401.

⁸¹⁴ Nursi, *The Letters*, 339.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

To be able to appreciate Nursi's argument, it is worth considering the cell analogy that he uses. He explains that one who exercises control over a cell should first understand the whole body and only then manage the cell, since the cell is part of the whole body.⁸¹⁶ In other words, one needs to consider the various elements for natural disasters rather than looking at the one aspect that looks to the suffering of an individual. "The function of a natural element cannot be cancelled in order to prevent a possible unwanted result."⁸¹⁷ If a natural disaster was inhibited due to its unwanted effects, it would cause the cancellation of much greater good that would come out of the natural disaster taking place, according to Nursi.⁸¹⁸

It is not necessarily easy to view calamities in this way since it requires a transformation within a person to view events with the worldview of *mānā-yī harfī* (other indicative meaning), as described previously. If natural disasters are approached in this manner, they are given meaning in the context of natural laws, recompense for suffering, life in the hereafter and the many other angles that look beyond an individual. Whereas, if natural disasters are approached with the worldview of *mānā-yī ismī* (meaning by the word), they would be purely evaluated as a calamity that has incurred damage and suffering to an individual.

On one occasion, Nursi is posed seven questions about a natural disaster that took place during his lifetime. It was a severe earthquake that took place on 27 December 1939 in a city of Turkey, Erzincan. The earthquake registered eight on the Richter scale⁸¹⁹ and saw the loss of more than 50,000 lives. It was the most violent earthquake to hit the country.⁸²⁰ "All in all seven major shocks rocked the city, turning it into a tumultuous cemetery."⁸²¹ The earthquake was followed

⁸¹⁶ Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi al-Arabi al-Nuri*, 483-4.

⁸¹⁷ Thomas Michel, "God's Justice in Relation to Natural Disasters, Resurrection of the Dead and Final Judgement in the thought of Said Nursi," in *Justice and Theodicy in Modern Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 220.

⁸¹⁸ Nursi, *The Rays*, 39.

⁸¹⁹ Ronald Parker, Kreimer Alcira and Munasinghe Mohan, *Informal Settlements, Environmental Degradation, and Disaster Vulnerability The Turkey Case Study* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), 1995), 16.

⁸²⁰ Lee A. Davis, *Natural Disasters* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), 94.

⁸²¹ Ibid.

by a snow blizzard with temperatures reaching below thirty degrees Celsius, contributing to the death of thousands within the city. Nursi responded to the seven questions about the earthquake with seven answers.

Firstly, Nursi makes the point that the earth shakes, causing earthquakes, as a result of receiving revelation and inspiration from God.⁸²² He quotes the following Qur'ānic verses in support of his point: “When the earth quakes with a violent quaking destined for it, and the earth yields up its burdens; and human cries out, ‘What is the matter with it?’ On that day she will recount all its tidings, as your Lord has inspired her to do so.”⁸²³ Therefore, he concludes, earthquakes and natural disasters are not seen as unconscious coincidental acts driven by nature, rather, they are responding to the command of God. Nursi states, if God wills, He commands the movement of strata and ignites them. In other words, the causes cannot be rejected or ignored. There are physical causes for earthquakes to take place. However, he highlights they are just that, causes and not the Doer. He emphasises that earthquakes happen under the command of God in accordance with His wisdom.⁸²⁴ At this point, an analogy of a man being shot is given – if the gunpowder is to be blamed for the shooting (since the gunpowder caused the death) and not the hand that held the gun, the rights of the victim would be completely violated. Nursi sees the attributing of natural disasters to nature in the same light.⁸²⁵ The cause is just a means, the intent and purpose behind the cause needs to be understood.

If God is the causer of such natural disasters, what then can be the cause? Nursi gives various reasons for such natural disasters, reflective of God's wisdom. One of the reasons he gives is human actions, by occasionally hinting that disasters that befall people are “the result of pride and obstinacy, of people thinking they know better than God.”⁸²⁶ Certainly, this does not mean

⁸²² Nursi, *The Words*, 185.

⁸²³ Qur'ān 99:1-5.

⁸²⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 188.

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ Michel, “God's Justice in Relation to Natural Disasters,” 220.

that every individual is guilty, but the argument is that if there is a majority of people doing the wrong thing, it can bring down a disaster on a community.⁸²⁷ The social wrongs committed or accepted by a community appear to cause a reaction within the natural world. Therefore, there appears to be a connection between the way humans live as a collective and “the cosmic forces that sometimes ‘rebel’ against human obstinacy and assail earthly society.”⁸²⁸ However, even with this point, Nursi explains it is a good work since it facilitates an awakening from heedlessness.⁸²⁹

With regards to the innocent suffering at the hands of such collective calamities as a result of natural disasters like earthquakes, Nursi reminds the reader of two things. Firstly, this life is a test and therefore everyone will be faced with tests and challenges in life; secondly, the innocent who do suffer at the hand of such natural disasters will be recompensed for their sufferings.

With regards to the first point, Nursi quotes the Qur’ānic verse “And fear tumult or oppression, which affects not in particular [only] those of you who do wrong.”⁸³⁰ In other words, innocent people will also be tested; calamities and disasters are not exclusively for wrongdoers and will strike innocent people as well. This is a means of spiritual and moral progress as a result of the striving incurred. If calamities did not touch the innocent, argues Nursi, then the wrongdoers would be good purely for self-interest rather than for the sake of obeying God. In this way, the doers of good and the wrongdoers would not be distinguished.

Secondly, the losses that the innocent suffer in such calamities will be recompensed in the hereafter. The property people lose, such as their homes and livestock, will be considered almsgiving, for which there is abundant reward in the hereafter.⁸³¹ The transience of the property in this world is highlighted by Nursi. In other words, the property is going to be lost sooner or

⁸²⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, 748.

⁸²⁸ Michel, “God’s Justice in Relation to Natural Disasters,” 221.

⁸²⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 749.

⁸³⁰ Qur’ān 8:25.

⁸³¹ Nursi, *The Words*, 184.

later when a person dies. Therefore, great wisdom is seen in making such property permanent through sacrificing it in this life for the hereafter.

The suffering that is described as “relatively little and temporary difficulty and torment”⁸³² is seen as a means of purifying one from their sins to elevate their spiritual state or facilitate their entry into Paradise in the hereafter.⁸³³ The loss of this transient life is seen as a means of gaining a permanent good life in the hereafter. It is interesting to note that the names of God that Nursi chooses to use in this context is the All-Wise and the All-Compassionate, emphasising that destruction and death through such calamities does not go against God’s wisdom and compassion, and in fact are the result of God being wise and compassionate.

From the use of such names in natural disasters that affect masses, a pattern emerges in the way Nursi addresses both the individual and collective groups; both the individual and the collective manifest names of God that can be identified by observing the motion and expressions of activity.⁸³⁴ God’s justice has in particular been a large focus. With the two constantly at interplay, a deconstruction of God’s justice needs to take place for greater clarity; how God’s justice manifests on an individual through the human body and life events, but most importantly through the existence of the hereafter. This does not prevent the manifestation of God’s justice on the collective community, which can take place in response to human rebellion as a collective. Understanding how these two intertwine is the key to adapt the worldview that Nursi portrays so that inner peace can be achieved.

4.6 Illnesses

When illnesses are mentioned, Prophet Job often comes to mind, a Prophet who was tested with numerous wounds and sores for a long period of time, such that his illnesses brought him face

⁸³² Ibid, 186.

⁸³³ Ibid, 184.

⁸³⁴ ‘Abd al-Halim ‘Awiss, “Said Nursi’s Views on Some Critical Questions Related to Civilisation,” in *The Qur’anic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat, 2002), 77.

to face with death. He is known as the prophet of patience in Islam for enduring the suffering of his illness with great patience. In the Qur’ān, it states, “Indeed, We found him patient, an excellent servant. Indeed, he was one repeatedly turning back [to God]”⁸³⁵. Nursi, discusses the story of Prophet Job in the Second Flash of *The Flashes*. The events in the life of Prophet Job are briefly described as follows: Prophet Job is afflicted with various wounds and sores for a long period of time to which he shows utmost patience. When the worms that arose from his wounds penetrated his heart and tongue, “the seat of the remembrance and knowledge of God, he feared that his duty of worship would suffer,”⁸³⁶ so he prayed to God to have the affliction removed. The prayer is quoted in the Qur’ān: “O my Sustainer! Indeed harm has afflicted me, and You are the Most Merciful of the Merciful.”⁸³⁷ Nursi interprets Prophet Job’s prayer as follows: “O Lord! Harm has afflicted me; my remembrance of You with my tongue and my worship of You with my heart will suffer.”⁸³⁸ It is described as a sincere, not having self-interest and devout supplication.

The way Nursi relates Prophet Job’s illness to the illnesses of humankind today is quite intriguing. He explains, “If our inner being was to be turned outward, and our outer being turned inward, we would appear more wounded and diseased than Job”⁸³⁹ such that the spiritual heart would be in danger of being destroyed rather than the physical heart, as was the case with Prophet Job. Such a comparison, where physical illnesses are compared to spiritual illnesses, is done with the intention of highlighting how much more destructive spiritual illnesses are; while physical illnesses threaten the worldly life, the inner wounds (spiritual illnesses) threaten one’s infinitely long eternal life.⁸⁴⁰ In this way, Nursi is redefining what an illness actually is, moving away from the traditional understanding of illness to the spiritual understanding. This change

⁸³⁵ Qur’ān 38:44.

⁸³⁶ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 21.

⁸³⁷ Qur’ān 21:83.

⁸³⁸ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 21.

⁸³⁹ Ibid, 22.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

in perspective to illnesses can have a significant positive impact on how physical illnesses are perceived.

Nursi explains that illnesses will be counted as worship if one endures the suffering patiently, thinks of the reward that will be received for the illness and is thankful as a result. It would be such a valuable worship, according to Nursi, as each hour that is spent in this way would be equivalent to a whole day spent in worship.⁸⁴¹ Nursi makes an interesting interpretation here. He explains how it is commonly said that misfortune is long-lasting. But this is not because of the suffering it causes, according to Nursi, but it is long-lasting “because it yields vital results just like a long life.”⁸⁴²

Nursi also notes that physical misfortunes grow when they are seen to be large. It is compared to a dream, so the more the dream is thought about, the more it grows in one’s mind. On the other hand, if it is not given any attention, it disappears.⁸⁴³ Therefore, the more importance that is given to physical misfortunes, the more they will grow. This will cause it to move from the physical body and strike the heart. This will lead to an inward spiritual affliction from which the physical misfortune sustains itself.⁸⁴⁴

Finally, Nursi explains that in the current age, misfortune has changed its form. In such times, misfortune is actually a Divine favour, since misfortunes actually bring people closer to God. Particularly youth, who are afflicted with illnesses, are more concerned with their religious duties and the hereafter, according to Nursi.⁸⁴⁵ When illnesses are considered from this perspective, the suffering experienced in this short transient life seems to be extremely minor compared to the benefits it offers for one’s eternal life.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid, 24.

⁸⁴² Ibid.

⁸⁴³ Ibid, 27.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid, 28.

It becomes evident over and over that Nursi evaluates the benefits of everything in relation to how it affects the hereafter. At the same time, he does not negate this life either and therefore seeks to show the benefits of events for this life as well. But no doubt, there is a strong lenience towards the hereafter. This includes one's perception of natural disasters, calamities and illnesses. It is this aspect that one can grapple with. How easy is it for individuals to be so conscious about the hereafter, particularly in today's time when so much is about this very moment and the remembrance of the hereafter seems to rare, even among those who believe in the hereafter.

It could be said that Nursi has various approaches to disasters, illnesses and calamities, offering different methods to respond to such painful experiences. Having said that, all methods are based on belief in God. According to Nursi, the only way to make sense of life experiences, and therefore have inner peace, is by having belief in God. From this belief, stem different coping mechanisms. They are: consciousness of the hereafter, awareness that through struggles one realises their potential and the manifestation of God's names through these incidents which result in a connection with God and trusting that there is wisdom in the event, even if one is unable to see it.

4.7 Old Age

Old age is often filled with challenges, as the signs of old age start to kick in, such as the slowing down of bodily functions and the increase of illnesses and ailments. While being independent in their younger days, the elderly often lose this independence as they age, which can often hurt their pride as they look to their children or carers for assistance in fulfilling the basic needs of life. Such difficulties can be rather confronting for the elderly as they feel the "cold breath of death close at hand."⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁶ Muhittin Akgul, "Qur'anic Solutions for Man's Problems," in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 2000), 56.

Nursi consoles the elderly in the Twenty-Sixth Flash by offering advice on how to deal with old age.⁸⁴⁷ Nursi labels each advice as a hope. This approach is significant and reflective of Nursi's approach to life, where he seeks to instill hope into anyone who is suffering. In a broader context, Nursi diagnoses the Muslim world with six sicknesses which he believes has caused the decline of the Muslim world. The first sickness he mentions is despair and explains that hope is the cure for this sickness. Nursi expends the most time on discussing this sickness within the sermon,⁸⁴⁸ highlighting the importance of hope in today's time, but yet the lack of it. Despair at old age is particularly destructive, according to Nursi and therefore he exerts great effort to instill hope into the elderly.

To demonstrate how one can transform despair into hope, Nursi first explains the mind frame he was in as an elderly person; he describes his initial feelings of sadness and despair, and explains how these feelings transform to peace, happiness and hope. Nursi shares his changing emotions intentionally to "show the extraordinary efficaciousness of the remedies proceeding from the All-Wise Qur'ān"⁸⁴⁹ to treat his problems. It gives the reader insight into his thought process and the opportunity to understand how Nursi is able to transform his feelings from negative ones to such positive ones.

In one way or another, he attributes the transformations to belief in God. In the Seventh Hope, for example, Nursi identifies four or five layers of darkness that create a most grievous, piteous and melancholy state. At that point, Nursi explains how the lights of belief came to his assistance, such that the past, which appeared to be a vast grave comprising his father and forefathers, became a familiar enlightened gathering of friends and the future, which was seen as a grave for himself, his contemporaries and future generations, was transformed into palaces of bliss and the present, which appeared to him as his coffin with a half-dead, suffering and

⁸⁴⁷ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 286.

⁸⁴⁸ Thomas Michel, "Said Nursi's the Damascus Sermon," in *The Qur'anic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat, 2002), 325.

⁸⁴⁹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 286.

desperately struggling corpse, became “a place of trade for the Hereafter and a glittering guest-house of the All-Merciful One.”⁸⁵⁰ Nursi explains how in belief are found “many luminous, pleasurable, agreeable, and gratifying treasures,”⁸⁵¹ which help to deal with old age and what it brings. Since old age impels one to the contents of the treasures even more, according to Nursi, the elderly should offer endless thanks to God.

Nursi uses an interesting argument to demonstrate the benefit of old age: “Since for most people youth is harmful, we elderly people should thank God that we have been saved from its dangers and harm.”⁸⁵² He portrays youth as potentially the most destructive years of one’s life. He does note, if youth is used properly, the outcome is extremely positive. However, if youth is misspent, as it often is, it not only damages eternal happiness, but it also causes a lot of harm to the life of this world. “Indeed, in return for the pleasures of one or two years’ youth, it causes many years of grief and sorrow in old age.”⁸⁵³ Based on his explanation used to console the elderly, Nursi’s positive approach to life and matters is evident as he seeks to see the positive in all situations. He could have wished to be young so he could have more energy and good health to worship God, but knowing he cannot be young again, he seeks to see the positives of his situation and be grateful for them.

Nursi was so content with his old age that, near the end of his life,⁸⁵⁴ he declared, “I would not exchange this most distressing year of my old age for ten of the happiest years of my youth.”⁸⁵⁵ Nursi was conscious of the rewards he would receive for the challenges he endured as a result of old age. This made him thankful and gave him peace at a stage of life that is often considered the most difficult.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid, 294.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid, 296.

⁸⁵² Ibid. 298.

⁸⁵³ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁴ Michel, *Insights from the Risalei-i Nur*, 131.

⁸⁵⁵ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 332.

The most powerful aspect of Nursi's writings about old age is that he was old, well over the age of eighty, when he discussed the blessings of old age. It is easy to hypothetically explain the benefits of a difficult scenario, but not so easy when one is experiencing those difficulties, particularly since Nursi was experiencing old age and the hardships of imprisonment at the same time. However, these did not seem to be obstacles to his state of peace. It seems Nursi had internalised the Qur'ānic verse "Who has created everything in the best way"⁸⁵⁶ and was able to view everything in life through its lens.

4.8 Death

The thought of this life ending generates great fear in hearts. Humankind generally "hates death and decline because of the enticements and pleasures of this world."⁸⁵⁷ There is a yearning to live forever, and often there is a desire for that life to continue on this earth, which is the residence of familiarity. Due to the negative associations about death, which means the ending of all that is known in this life, humankind seeks to forget death and pretend it will not happen to them. This usually continues until a loved one dies, after which death becomes more real. Grappling with the concept of death then commences, often generating inner turmoil, stripping any inner peace that one may have had. After all, it is death that causes the complete realisation that one is not inviolable.⁸⁵⁸ Facing this helplessness can generate great fear in a heart that is not at peace.

Although having some fear of death is to be expected and considered normal, according to Islam, having great fear of death to the point that it is abhorred or resented is considered a

⁸⁵⁶ Qur'ān 32:7.

⁸⁵⁷ Wahba al-Zuhayli, "Man in the Qur'an from the Viewpoint of the *Risale-i Nur*," in *The Qur'anic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlere Neşriyat, 2002), 27.

⁸⁵⁸ Ruqaiyah Waris Maqsood, *After Death, Life: Thoughts to Alleviate the Grief of All Muslims Facing Death and Bereavement* (Lahore: Talha Publication, 2001), 15.

disease of the heart in Islamic literature,⁸⁵⁹ since such abhorrence and fear of death can lead to denying the reality of death, according to Imam Mawlud.⁸⁶⁰

Death has been approached differently by various Islamic scholars. Al-Ghazzālī's famous book "The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife," which is part of *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), talks of death in a way that can be rather confronting. Al-Ghazzālī explains that "death is a terrible and most perilous thing."⁸⁶¹ In remembering death, al-Ghazzālī encourages the remembering of friends who have died, contemplating on how their body would have dissolved under the ground, how the beauty of their previous form no longer exists and how their body parts have been scattered in the grave.⁸⁶² Although al-Ghazzālī paints a scary picture of death, he mentions that gnostics actually look forward to death as it means a union with the Beloved, God.⁸⁶³

Such a gnostic would be Rabi'a al-Adawiyyah (717-801), who is known for her fervent love for God, which has become famous within Islamic tradition. It is inconceivable that such a person would fear death, since death meant union with God to Rabi'a.⁸⁶⁴ Rūmī is another Sufi mystic who is known for his poems on death in which the presence of the joy and excitement in returning to God is evident.⁸⁶⁵

Nursi also has a positive approach to death although it certainly is not at the level of the Sufi mystics. This is because the audience he was addressing was not mystics, but laypersons. Nevertheless, for Nursi, death became a "major source of inspiration while writing the central parts of the Risale."⁸⁶⁶ Death is something to look forward to, "it is merely a transformation, a

⁸⁵⁹ Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart*, 134-157.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid, 134.

⁸⁶¹ Abu Hamid Ghazzālī, and Timothy John Winter, *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife = Kitāb Dhikr Al-Mawt Wa-Mā Ba'dahu: Book XL of The Revival of the Religious Sciences, Ihyā' 'ulūm Al-Dīn*. (Cambridge, U.K.: Islamic Texts Society, 1989), 12.

⁸⁶² Ibid, 13.

⁸⁶³ Ibid, 8.

⁸⁶⁴ Margaret Smith, *Rābi'a the Mystic & Her Fellow-Saints in Islām* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 40.

⁸⁶⁵ Can, *Fundamentals of Rumi's Thought*, 86-88.

⁸⁶⁶ Abu-Rabi', "How to Read Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur," 71.

being transposed to a more perfect and higher world.”⁸⁶⁷ A number of bounteous aspects of death are provided:

- 1 Death is a great bounty because it is being freed from the duties and obligations of life, which have become burdensome after a certain age. It is a door through which to join and be united with the great majority of our friends who have already traveled across the boundary of death.
- 2 It is a release from the narrow, irksome, turbulent, and agitated prison of this world into an expansive, joyful, trouble-free immortal life. It is to enter the sphere of mercy of the *Eternally Beloved One*.
- 3 There are numerous factors like old age, disease and hardships that make the conditions of life arduous. Death heralds the beginning of an eternally youthful and superior form of life. Without death the earth would be full of ancient human beings and animals trapped in a never-ending agony for the conditions of life becomes a source of torment after certain age.
- 4 Just as sleep is a comfort mercy and rest for those who are tired and particularly for those who are afflicted by disaster and illness, so too is death, a pure bounty and mercy for those struck by disaster, suffering and tribulations.⁸⁶⁸

In point 4, Nursi mentions that for people of misguidance, death is pure torment and affliction just like this life is, but he ends the point by saying it is outside the discussion in this section. This is an important acknowledgement made by Nursi, otherwise to suggest that death is “all good for all” would be dismissing the many Qur’ānic verses and *ḥadīth* that mention the fearful aspect of death to which Ghazzālī and many other scholars allude. However, Nursi’s approach is to focus on the positive aspect of matters, which does not mean he is negating what he has not focused on.

The positive approach to death could be misinterpreted as being the result of him following the Sufi way, since many Sufis scholars like Rabi’a al-Adawīyyah and Rumi have a positive

⁸⁶⁷ Mustafa Binhamza, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi’s Philosophy of Death*, April 18, 2006, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://nursistudies.com/teblig.php?tno=291>.

⁸⁶⁸ Nursi, *The Letters*, 25.

approach to death. But Nursi was not a Sufi, at least not in the traditional sense.⁸⁶⁹ Therefore, his approach to death cannot be attributed to Sufi ideology. Nursi's positive approach is in response to the despair he saw among Muslims, as mentioned previously, and therefore he sought to instil hope in Muslims, even when it came to the discussion of death. In other words, Nursi "intends to provide cures without opening up the wounds,"⁸⁷⁰ as Nursi witnessed the manifestation of many faith-related wounds.

With this positive approach to death in mind, Nursi consoles a father who has lost his son. He includes five points that are intended to be consolation for parents who need to deal with the death of a child. While with the elderly, belief in God is emphasised, in this case, belief in the hereafter is at the fore of the discussion. This could be because of the parents' desire to be with their child who they have been separated from. Belief in the hereafter reassures parents that they will once again be reunited with their child; "And, since separation is not forever, in the future, both in the Intermediate Realm and in the hereafter, he will be met with."⁸⁷¹ If the child dies before the age of fifteen, he will return to the embrace of his parents in the hereafter as a child, which means that parents will experience the joy of parenthood in Paradise as well.⁸⁷²

An important aspect of human nature that Nursi addresses is humankind's yearning for eternity; "humankind has intense, unshakeable and constant desire for immortality, with hopes and dreams that extend to eternity."⁸⁷³ According to Nursi, the thought of extinction is extremely painful for humankind. Belief in eternity therefore becomes a saviour to the sorrow that one may experience at witnessing death. It should then be of no surprise that Nursi extensively focuses on eternity in his writings, explaining that the desire for immortality "can be fulfilled

⁸⁶⁹ There are different views on whether Nursi was a Sufi or not. Although he was influenced by Sufi scholars, the general consensus is that he is not. Refer to Muhammad Machasin, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Sufi Tradition," *Al-Jami'ah* 43, no. 1 (2005): 1-21.

⁸⁷⁰ Dilek, "The Risale-i Nur's Method and Aim," 118.

⁸⁷¹ Nursi, *The Letters*, 102.

⁸⁷² Nursi, *The Words*, Thirty-Second Word, 678.

⁸⁷³ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 291.

only through the realisation that the everlasting cannot be gained from the evanescent.”⁸⁷⁴ Seeking the infinite from the finite is doomed to failure. Whereas being connected to the Creator – The Eternal One – draws out the anguish and pain that arises from realising one’s mortality and finiteness.⁸⁷⁵ Only when one realises that ‘God suffices’ will the pain of death disappear according to Nursi.

Thus, humankind’s desire for eternity is mediated through the name of God, “The Everlasting (The Enduring One)” (*al-Baqi*).⁸⁷⁶ Nursi focuses on the two phrases “The Enduring One, He is the Enduring One!”⁸⁷⁷ which is based on the Qur’ānic verse “Everything shall perish save His countenance; His is the command, and to Him shall you return.”⁸⁷⁸ He explains that the first utterance of “The Enduring One! He is the Enduring One!” is a surgical operation, while the second utterance is a salve and an antidote.⁸⁷⁹ That is, there is a realisation that everything is mortal but God and therefore everything is loved with God’s love. God becomes sufficient, since he is seen as the source of beauty, bounty and perfection to which humankind is drawn to, while the creation is considered pale shadows of them; “indeed, they are the shadows of the shadows of the manifestations of His Most Beautiful Names.”⁸⁸⁰ As a result, creation is viewed in the context of the Creator.

In this way, all of creation is viewed as acting as a mirror that is temporary and will come to an end, while the Creator is the Pre-Eternal and Post-Eternal One⁸⁸¹ and therefore will always exist. Through the anticipation for an eternal life and the appropriate attachment to God the Eternal, not only is a life of eternal bliss anticipated, but death and separations are embraced.

⁸⁷⁴ Turner, *The Qur’an Revealed*, 488.

⁸⁷⁵ Mahsheed Ansari, “Man’s Struggle for Mortality and his Quest for Rediscovering God,” in *God, Man and Mortality*, ed. Hasan Hörküç (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2015), 76.

⁸⁷⁶ Colin Turner, “Nursi and Immortality: A Beckerian Perspective,” *Nursi Studies*, 2010, accessed January 2, 2014, <http://www.nursistudies.net/teblig.php?tno=520>.

⁸⁷⁷ Because of the significance of this phrase, the Naqshibandi order has a supplication with this phrase.

⁸⁷⁸ Qur’ān 28:88.

⁸⁷⁹ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 30.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid, 325-326.

By explaining the various consolations for death and old age, Nursi portrays death as something to look forward to because of the pleasures and beauties one will experience in the hereafter. Other times, death becomes tolerable because it is seen as a temporary separation since a reunion with loved ones is awaiting when one dies. Nursi's approach towards death helps an individual to cope with the death they see around them all the time, whether it be family members or the death of innocent people on the other side of the world. Ultimately, death is portrayed as evidence for the existence of the hereafter, as a gate to that world. Through his analysis of death, Nursi is able to reconcile a person with death.⁸⁸²

4.9 Conclusion

A correct perspective of life and positive interpretation of events are the cornerstone of inner peace, based on Nursi's writings. At the core of Nursi's life perspective is the notion that everything is beautiful, either in itself or in regards to its results. But to truly appreciate this, the purpose of life as described by Nursi needs to be understood, which is to become aware of the bounties provided by God, which should lead to thanking and worshipping God (this was mainly discussed in chapter 3). It is also to recognise the manifestation of God's names within the universe. To achieve this purpose, having the correct perspective is essential. Nursi explains that the correct perspective is achieved by viewing everything as *mānā-yī harfī*, which is other indicative, instead of *mānā-yī ismī*, which means the reflection is indicating a meaning in itself. When things are viewed as *mānā-yī harfī* (other indicative), they are a mirror to make known the Divine names of God so everything becomes a construction of the names of God and deconstructing or decoding the events leads to knowledge of God.

With this *tawhīd*-centric worldview, the principles surrounding good and evil are understood, which then changes the way suffering is perceived so events like natural disasters and illnesses become a means of spiritual growth and remuneration. The fact that prophets endured the most

⁸⁸² Jamal al-Marzuqi, "Moral Philosophy in the Qur'an from the Viewpoint of the Risale-i Nur," in *The Qur'anic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat, 2002), 288.

hardships reinforces the notion that suffering should not be seen as a punishment from God, but rather an opportunity to spiritually develop, since prophets did not commit sins for them to be punished with suffering.

Furthermore, the witnessing of God's names through life events, including those that can be perceived as being negative, becomes an essential means of knowing God. According to Nursi, everything can be explained with the names of God, since everything is a manifestation of God's names. Therefore, events such as natural disasters and illnesses enable God to be known through names such as *al-Shāfi* (the Healer) and *al-Razzaq* (the Sustainer). If there was no hunger, the Sustainer would not be known; if there was no illnesses, the Healer would not be witnessed. Therefore, these events become an opportunity for knowing God at a deeper level. This then feeds back into the first step of inner peace, which is that belief in God leads to inner peace. After all, knowledge of God is an essential component of belief in God, according to Nursi.

Now that the inner peace process has been completed, it is timely to study inner peace in the life of Nursi to see whether what he prescribed for one to attain inner peace was applied in his own life.

CHAPTER 5: INNER PEACE IN THE LIFE OF SAID NURSI

5.1 Introduction

A powerful message is one that is lived rather than merely talked about and the message of how inner peace can be attained is not exempt from this principle. As the author of the *Risale-i Nur*, it is important to understand how Nursi perceived his life of turbulence and challenge. The insight will put his writings into perspective and provide a greater appreciation for his positive approach to a life filled with hardships. Additionally, seeing the theory complemented with the practical or the lived experience will bring the theory to life. Of particular importance is to understand how Nursi interpreted negative events in his life that caused him suffering. How did he interpret the exiles he was sent on? What was his reaction to imprisonment? How did he respond to the death of loved ones in his life?

Another reason why Nursi's life is important in the context of inner peace, particularly in regards to suffering and evil, is the criticism often attributed to optimists for their lack of appreciation for the real suffering taking place within the world. Critics of optimists or positivists often claim the optimists do not know what it means to suffer, arguing they are protected from such severe challenges and therefore live in a delusional world of bliss. These sentiments are expressed by the words of Schopenhauer (d. 1860), a German philosopher:

If we were to conduct the most hardened and callous optimist through hospitals, infirmaries, operating theatres, through prisons, torture chambers, and slave hovels, over battlefields and to places of execution; if we were to open to him all the dark abodes of misery, where it shuns the gaze of cold curiosity, and finally were to allow him to glance into the dungeon of Ugolino where prisoners starved to death, he too would certainly see in the end what kind of a world is this *meiller des mondes possibles*. For whence did Dante get the material for his hell, if not from this actual world of ours!⁸⁸³

⁸⁸³ Schopenhauer as cited in Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 10.

Potentially, this could be considered a valid point; how can the world be viewed positively when someone is aware of such sufferings? How can horrific incidents be explained in such a positive way that it satisfies the heart and mind? Particularly so, if one has experienced the reality and pain of such sufferings.

When Nursi's life is considered as a whole, it appears he experienced almost all the sufferings mentioned by Schopenhauer. Nursi explains his personal experiences as:

In my 80 or so years of life I have known nothing of worldly pleasure. My entire life has been spent on battlefields, in prison camps, or in the jails and court rooms of my country. There is no suffering or torment to which I have not been subjected. I have been treated like a monster by military courts, and exiled from place to place like a vagabond. I have been condemned to months of solitary confinement in the country's prisons. I have been poisoned many times, subjected to all forms of insult...⁸⁸⁴

In addition to personal sufferings, Nursi was also feeling the pain of the blows he believed Islam was receiving and its implication for his people. On one occasion, he explains "I can bear my own sorrows, but I have been crushed by the sorrows and grief of Islam. I feel each blow delivered at the world of Islam to be delivered first at my own heart."⁸⁸⁵ The personalisation of the problems of the Muslim world, which were extensive during his lifetime, no doubt added to Nursi's hardships. It was an extra weight he needed to carry and deal with in his own world. Thus, Nursi endured a lot of suffering through his life, mentally and physically, making his response to suffering an essential tool to understand how one can attain inner peace despite all the challenges and suffering that may be encountered.

Nursi explains how he intentionally expresses his own sufferings so he can demonstrate how his *tawhīd*-centric approach to life becomes a remedy:

⁸⁸⁴ Nursi, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 604.

⁸⁸⁵ Vahide, *An Intellectual Biography*, 143.

Also, my purpose in showing my worst wound in an extremely grievous and unpleasant way which may upset you unduly and put you off, is to demonstrate what a wondrous remedy and brilliant light is the sacred antidote of the All-Wise Qur’ān.⁸⁸⁶

A common trait one sees in Nursi is his ability to give meaning to events, whether they are personal, communal or global. There seems to be no event that confused him or left him at a loss. He had an interpretation and explanation for all events and more importantly, his explanations would console his heart and mind. His explanations were *tawhīd*-centric, with a strong focus on the names of God, which were a means for him to decode events. This chapter will provide insight to the life of Said Nursi, after which some of the major challenges in his life will be studied with a particular focus on how he responded to them.

5.2 Said Nursi’s Life in Brief



Diagram 3: Map of Turkey showing places associated with Said Nursi⁸⁸⁷

Nursi was born in 1877 in the village of Nurs in the province of Bitlis, which is currently located in south-east Anatolia. The village of Nurs, which is where Nursi gets his surname from, had become a centre of knowledge and wisdom during Nursi’s time with the educational services it provided to its community.⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁶ Nursi, *The Rays*, 314.

⁸⁸⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/books/article/viewFile/385/3435>.

⁸⁸⁸ Mustafa Balci, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi “Wonder of the Age”* (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2011), 3.

Nursi displayed an extraordinary intelligence and ability to learn from an early age, completing the normal course of *madrasa* (traditional religious schooling) education at the age of fourteen, when he obtained his *ijaza* (diploma).⁸⁸⁹ Nursi was well-known for his immaculate memory. As a result of such extraordinary qualities, Nursi was given the nickname Bediüzzaman, which means “wonder of the age.”⁸⁹⁰

Through his studies at different *madrasas*, Nursi saw a problem in the education system as *madrasas* refused to teach modern sciences and secular schools started to emerge in large numbers. Nursi argued it was imperative the *madrasas*, *maktabs* (new secular schools) and *tekkes* (Sufi establishments) reconciled and become one educational system.⁸⁹¹ “He believed the divergence and even conflict between the three to be a major cause of the backwardness of Islamic civilization.”⁸⁹² This thinking triggered the initiation of a university called Medresetü’z-Zehra in the Eastern provinces resembling Al-Azhar University⁸⁹³ in Egypt. It was this plan that took Nursi to Istanbul in 1907, but the university was never completed due to the breaking out of the Balkan War.

The years up to the end of the First World War saw the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. This period of Nursi’s life, which he refers to as ‘Old Said’ was a period when he was “actively engaged in social and political life and hoped to use politics as a way to serve the religion of Islam.”⁸⁹⁴ With the commencement of the war, he took an active role as he commanded the militia forces on the Caucasian Front against the invading Russians. In March 1916, he was taken as a prisoner of war and taken to Russia for two years, before escaping in early 1918.⁸⁹⁵ This was followed by the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, leading to the occupation of Istanbul

⁸⁸⁹ Şükran Vahide, “The Life and Time of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi,” *The Muslim World* LXXXIX (July-October 1999): 209.

⁸⁹⁰ Balci, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, 18.

⁸⁹¹ Vahide, *Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi*, 45.

⁸⁹² Ibid, 215.

⁸⁹³ Nursi, *The Rays*, 493.

⁸⁹⁴ Saritoprak, “Islam and Politics in the Light of Said Nursi’s Writings.”

⁸⁹⁵ Ian S. Markham, *Engaging with Bediüzzaman Said Nursi A Model of Interfaith Dialogue* (Farnham: Ashgate Pub, 2009), 4.

and parts of Turkey by foreign forces such as England, Greece and Italy.⁸⁹⁶ However, there was a change in the tide and the Turks won the war of independence in 1923. Although this victory boosted the morale of the Turks, he was disillusioned by what he saw within Turkey. He explains how “an abominable current of atheism was treacherously trying to subvert, poison and destroy”⁸⁹⁷ the minds of his people. Nursi had well and truly seen the dangers faced by people of faith. Furthermore, Nursi went to Ankara after receiving an invitation, to meet the members of the national government. Spending eight months in Ankara, he realised the course that was being taken by the current government was not in line with Islam and its teachings. He also knew he could not change things and neither could he work with them.⁸⁹⁸

Disappointed with what he saw, he took a train from Ankara to Van in April 1923, where his focus completely changed. Later on, realising how the return to Van had been an important turning point, Nursi called this the “transitional journey.”⁸⁹⁹ In hindsight, the struggles he experienced led to the crystallisation of his ideas⁹⁰⁰ so the ‘New Said’ was born. The New Said turned his back on politics and saw the solution to the Muslim world’s problems to be in “saving and strengthening religious belief, which would form the basis of renewal and reconstruction.”⁹⁰¹ He also came to realise the inadequacy of the ‘human’ sciences and philosophy that he had studied as a means of reaching the truth. This led him to take the Qur’ān as his ‘sole guide.’⁹⁰² There was also change in Nursi’s personal life as he was noted for dedicating much time to worship, spending his nights in prayer and his days in reflection (*tafakkur*).⁹⁰³

⁸⁹⁶ Balci, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, 77-78.

⁸⁹⁷ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 233.

⁸⁹⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 154.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁰ Vahide, “The Life and Time of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” 215.

⁹⁰¹ Vahide, *An Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi*, 177.

⁹⁰² Nursi, *The Letters*, 418-419.

⁹⁰³ Vahide, *An Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi*, 178.

Although Nursi settled into his new quiet and solitary life, he was not left alone by the authorities. The Shaykh Said Piran (d. 1925) uprising in 1925 in the Eastern province of Turkey against the Ankara government would affect Nursi even though he opposed the uprising. As a precaution, Nursi was sent in exile to Western Anatolia, spending the next thirty-five years of his life in exile.⁹⁰⁴ Despite the challenges faced during this period, Nursi wrote a large portion of his work during these exiles and imprisonments.⁹⁰⁵

While Nursi was moving from location to location, either due to exile or imprisonment, he also witnessed the mark left on Turkey by secularisation; *tekkes* and *madrasas* were closed down. No books, could be read in Arabic, including the Qur'ān; the new Latin letters had to be used. People even looked different as it became a criminal offense to wear any headgear except the European style hat. This meant the wearing of the turban or fez, a traditional Ottoman hat, was considered a crime and punishable.⁹⁰⁶ It could be argued that Nursi witnessed the greatest revolutions, “not only in Turkish history, but in the history of mankind” during his lifetime.⁹⁰⁷

Thus, the identity of Turkey was changing very quickly. Not only was Nursi in exile from his family, friends and village, but his country was also becoming a stranger to him. After twenty-five years of exile, prison and oppression, Nursi reached the age of seventy-three. He had become frail through old age and the hardships he was exposed to. The last ten years of Nursi's life saw an easing in conditions, although he still faced difficulties from security officials.⁹⁰⁸ He died on 25 March 1960 at the age of eighty-three. The government felt Nursi was still a threat, even after his death, and so removed his corpse from his grave and relocated it to an undisclosed location.⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁴ Andrew Rippin, *The Islamic World* (London: Routledge, 2008), 398.

⁹⁰⁵ Safa Mursel, “Opening Address,” in *Panel I* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 20-21.

⁹⁰⁶ Vahide, *An Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi*, 190-191.

⁹⁰⁷ Canan, “The Chief Questions Facing the Islamic World,” 78.

⁹⁰⁸ Ian S. Markham, and Suendam Birinci Pirim, *An Introduction to Said Nursi Life, Thought and Writings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 16.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid.

5.3 Reflection on Nursi's Life

If Nursi's life was scanned with a superficial eye, there would not be a true appreciation for his life struggles. This necessitates focussing on some of his life experiences to see how he interpreted difficulties and challenges. It is not possible to encapsulate all the difficulties Nursi encountered in this research. Such an effort would take volumes of books. However, it is possible to identify key events in Nursi's life, to analyse and find a pattern among them. The events that have been chosen are ones that are normally perceived to be 'negative'. This is because it is these kind of events that are an obstacles to a *tawhīd*-centric understanding of inner peace, since they can raise questions about God's justice, wisdom and so on.⁹¹⁰

The analysis of Nursi's life will be done in the context of the inner peace definition developed in this research; inner peace is attained when the world is decoded through the names of God, so that life and events can be given meaning in a way that satisfies the heart and mind. Also more briefly known as "the giving of *tawhīd*-centric meaning to life and events."

As mentioned previously, it is of great benefit to this thesis that Nursi wrote of his thoughts and feelings in his works. This provides the opportunity to analyse his thought process when he faced challenges in life. The next section will focus and analyse four major challenges in Nursi life: the decline of the Muslim world, the exiles he was sent on, his imprisonments and the death of his spiritual son.

5.3.1 The Decline of the Muslim World

Nursi was born during an era that was devastating for the Muslim world. The Ottoman Empire, a civilisation that had been a superpower for hundreds of years, was collapsing while it watched Europe advance in every possible way. "Indeed, up to 1869 the Islamic world could hardly conceive of assuming a subordinate position with respect to Europe."⁹¹¹ Yet, that was exactly

⁹¹⁰ Refer to Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on 'good and evil'.

⁹¹¹ Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World*, 15.

what was now happening. The Ottomans were losing land day by day, with the speed of loss increasing in the late eighteenth century. In 1900, when Nursi was 13 years old, 160 million Muslims were under colonial power while only 41 million Muslims made up the independent states of the Islamic world.⁹¹² To put it differently, all the Muslim countries, other than Iran and the lands left under Ottoman rule, were under the occupation of non-Muslim nations.⁹¹³

These world events could not be ignored by Nursi, as they were changing the fate of the Muslim world. As mentioned previously, Nursi was feeling crushed under the sorrows and grief of Islam so he felt like the blows to the Muslim world were blows to his own heart.⁹¹⁴ How did he respond? Nursi gives meaning to these changes to the Muslim world through the universal laws (*'adat Allah*)⁹¹⁵ that have been put in place by God for the proper functioning of the universe.⁹¹⁶

Indeed, consider this: time does not run in a straight line so that its beginning and end draw apart from one another. Rather, it moves in a circle like the motion of the globe of the earth. Sometimes it displays the seasons of spring and summer as progress. And sometimes the seasons of storms and winter as decline. Just as every winter is followed by spring and every night by morning, mankind, also, shall have a morning and a spring.⁹¹⁷

Acknowledging that progress and decline are cyclic helps one to accept decline as being 'part of life'. This understanding then helps one to cope with the challenges faced when the cycle is at its low. Nursi felt he came during the 'winter,' but he also could foresee the spring on the rise. After all, for Nursi, winter had to be followed by spring, as this was only natural.

However, Nursi's consciousness of the decline was more than identifying a pattern in the cycle of the world, since the world was bound by causes that one needs to work with.⁹¹⁸ He knew

⁹¹² Ibid, 25.

⁹¹³ Hüseyin Celik, "Bediuzzaman and the Ideal of Islamic Unity," in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 248.

⁹¹⁴ Vahide, *An Intellectual Biography*, 143

⁹¹⁵ Kuşpınar, "Justice and Balance in Creation," 234.

⁹¹⁶ Refer to Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of *'adat Allah*.

⁹¹⁷ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 39.

⁹¹⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 323.

there were causes for the decline and he also knew there were solutions. That is, he was able to give meaning to the events taking place. In his famous Damascus sermon, delivered in 1911 at Umayyad Mosque, Nursi identifies “six sicknesses” that caused the decline of the Muslim world; despair and hopelessness, the death of truthfulness, love of enmity, not knowing the luminous bonds that bind believers to one another, despotism and restricting endeavours to what is personally beneficial.⁹¹⁹ By understanding the cause of the decline, he was able to make sense of the situation. This was empowering for Nursi, who was grappling with the changes taking place in his world. It also meant he was able to identify solutions to the diagnosis. He was convinced that Islam offered powerful and unshakable ways and means for the material and moral progress of the Muslim world.⁹²⁰ In his mind, the solutions were so clear and achievable that “the road to future happiness has been opened up like a railway.”⁹²¹ This brought with it hope and anticipation for the good that was to come. It also fuelled his enthusiasm to bring about the positive change. This, in turn, made it easier to endure the hard times that were being experienced.

On another occasion, the conversation between Nursi and his nephew, Abdurrahman, is captured regarding this very topic. Seeing Nursi’s shaken state regarding the state of Turkey, his nephew asked what it is that shook him so much, to which Nursi mentioned the blows the Muslim world was receiving. However, despite the sadness he was engulfed in, he was able to view the situation with hope. “But I see a light; it will cause all these sorrows to be forgotten, God willing.”⁹²² Even in this shaken state, at a time when the Ottoman Empire had crumbled and the Muslim world had been divided up among other nations, Nursi had hope that things would get better.

⁹¹⁹ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 16-17.

⁹²⁰ Mim Kemal Oke, “Said Nursi and Britain’s Psychological Warfare Against Ottoman Turkey, 1909-1922,” in *Panel I* (Istanbul: Sözlük, 1993), 35.

⁹²¹ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 39.

⁹²² Vahide, *An Intellectual Biography*, 143.

Nursi places great emphasis on hope throughout his writings; according to him, what plays the greatest part in decline and disaster is despair.⁹²³ Nursi compares despair to cancer with its ability to spread and destroy, as he believes despair destroyed the Muslim world.⁹²⁴

Therefore, he believed the Muslim world's salvation was tied to casting away despair and raising hope to life again among Muslims.⁹²⁵ Was this an unrealistic hope – to hope that a crumbled civilisation would flourish once again? Some individuals criticised Nursi to his face, accusing him of exaggerating, showing the delusional to be the truth and insulting them with being ignorant. Such individuals believed things would actually get worse.⁹²⁶ Nursi did not agree. In his mind, their pessimism and despair was the problem. He was convinced the Muslim world would become a great civilisation again, maintaining he came in winter while the future generations would come in paradise-like spring.⁹²⁷ Nursi believed his generation's task was to plant the seeds of light (belief), while the next generation would see the flowering of the seeds.⁹²⁸ This gave Nursi purpose, meaning and above all hope.

In Nursi's mind, this hope was grounded in the religion of Islam. He offered compelling material, moral and spiritual evidence for the reason of his hope.⁹²⁹ Therefore, he had a well-thought out hope that was realistic. But even more important to Nursi was that his source of hope was God as he quoted the Qur'ānic verse "Do not despair of God's mercy."⁹³⁰ Thus, God's name the All-Merciful was the source of hope in such situations. To emphasise the importance of relying on God's Mercy, Nursi quotes the *ḥadīth qudsī* "I am with my servant who thinks

⁹²³ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 26.

⁹²⁴ Ibid, 44.

⁹²⁵ Ibrahim Canan, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's View of Civilisation," in *Panel I* (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1993), 68.

⁹²⁶ Nursi, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 84.

⁹²⁷ Ibid, 85.

⁹²⁸ Ibid.

⁹²⁹ Canan, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's View of Civilisation," 70-75.

⁹³⁰ Qur'ān 39:53.

favourably of Me.”⁹³¹ Therefore, believing that God is the all-Merciful and He would come to the assistance of those in trouble, will mean it would happen.

On another occasion, Nursi provides an interesting analogy to describe the state of the Muslim world; just as one does not fear a roaring train when standing right next to it, one should not fear the roaring events, such as the decline of the Muslim world. He explains how the train has a set system that it follows (railway lines) and a driver who is driving it. Similarly, world events have a system they follow, set by God, and the events are driven by God. Such a realisation leads to submission to Divine determining and decree that arises from belief, which leads to worldly happiness and a Paradise-like state in place of terror, according to Nursi. In this discussion, God’s name All-Wise is mentioned as Nursi describes the worldview of a believer, “They observe the planning and will of an All-Wise Maker within the sphere of His wisdom and are saved from delusion and fears.”⁹³²

Overall, the way Nursi gives meaning to the decline of the Muslim world, is an important part of his ability to be at peace with what he saw. It empowered him to act and hope for a positive future. The hope he acquired stemmed from the Qur’ānic verse “Do not despair of God’s Mercy,”⁹³³ making him realise how important it was to not be in despair. Focusing on God’s wisdom also helped Nursi recognise the order, regularity, wisdom and purpose⁹³⁴ in all chains of events. By being able to give meaning to the decline of the Muslim world, Nursi had hope and peace, which empowered him to act.

5.3.2 Exiles

When reading the *Risale-i Nur*, it becomes apparent very quickly that exiles are a common theme in the text as a result of the various exiles faced by Nursi. However, as Nursi described

⁹³¹ Cited in Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 44.

⁹³² Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 59-65.

⁹³³ Qur’ān 39:53.

⁹³⁴ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 64.

it, the exiles and imprisonments imposed by the government were based on “unfounded suspicions and utilizing ‘possibilities’ instead of facts.”⁹³⁵ From 1925 to 1935, Nursi was kept under strict control at Barla, a very small, mountainous district to the West of Lake Egirdir, and forced to live alone. From 1936, at the age of fifty-nine, a seven-year exile began in Kastamonu, where he spent the first three months at a police station after which he was transferred to a house opposite the police station. He remained in this house until the Denizli trials⁹³⁶ and imprisonment from 1943 to 1944,⁹³⁷ after which he was exiled to Emirdag until October 1951, except for the twenty months he spent at Afyon prison. From 1950 to 1960, a close eye was kept on Nursi at all times, not giving him the freedom to move around freely.

Exile (*ghurbah*) is an important theme in *tasawwuf*. Literally, it means the state of being a foreigner, homeless, separated and being a stranger in one’s own land.⁹³⁸ In *tasawwuf*, *ghurbah* (separation) has been defined as renouncing the world with the charms to which one feels attachment on the way to God, or living a life dedicated to the hereafter, even though one is surrounded by this world and its charms.⁹³⁹ Therefore exile, with its challenges, is considered to be an important part of spiritual growth in Islam as it becomes a means to rely on no one but God, which then bring one closer to God.

There is a famous *ḥadīth* that states “Islam began as something strange (*ghariban*) and will go back to being strange, so glad tidings to the strangers.” When Prophet Muḥammad was asked who the strangers were, he replied: “Strangers who have left their families and tribes.”⁹⁴⁰ Therefore, there is an indication there is a special place for those who experience exile. However, the key to benefitting from exile is to be able to appreciate it for what it can offer.

⁹³⁵ Nursi, *The Rays*, 404.

⁹³⁶ Nursi’s court trials and imprisonments will be discussed in the next sections.

⁹³⁷ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 250.

⁹³⁸ Fethullah Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*, vol 2. (Lanham: Tughra Books, 2007), 70.

⁹³⁹ Ibid, 70.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibn Mājah, book 36, *ḥadīth* no. 62.

The special place of exile would be due to the closeness to God one achieves through exile. Such an outcome is achieved by the loneliness and alienation experienced with exile; it “sets a paradigm for survival, for seeking solace and affirmation from God by attempting to dwell in His presence. In the process, the experience of *ghurba*, estrangement, is transformed into *uns*, companionship.”⁹⁴¹ It forces a person to rely solely on God, since there is no one else to rely on in such a state.

On one occasion, Nursi mentions how he experienced five levels of exile.

The first: due to old age, I was alone and a stranger away from the great majority of my friends, relations, and those close to me; I felt a sad exile at their having left me and departed for the Intermediate Realm. Then another sphere of exile was opened within this one: I felt a sad sense of separation and exile at most of the beings to which I was attached, like last spring, having left me and departed. And a further sphere of exile opened up within this, which was that I had fallen apart from my native land and relations, and was alone. I felt a sense of separation and exile arising from this too. Then through that, the lonesomeness of the night and the mountains made me feel another pitiable exile. And then I saw my spirit in an overwhelming exile, which had been prepared to journey to eternity both from this exile and from the transitory guest-house of this world. I said to myself suddenly, My God, how can these exiles and layers of darkness be borne?⁹⁴²

Nursi’s state sounds very dismal, as he questions how he will bear such exiles filled with layers of separation and isolation. At that moment of distress, Nursi explains how the “light of belief, the effulgence of the Qur’ān, and the grace of the Most Merciful”⁹⁴³ came to his aid. As with other occasions, Nursi draws strength from his belief, he sees it as a saviour that gets him through difficult times. The Qur’ān being his reference point is where he looks for guidance, seeking to find a Qur’ānic verse that would help him change the way he views the situation so the suffering eases and the turmoil becomes peace. However among all this, Nursi believes this

⁹⁴¹ Haddad, “Ghurba as Paradigm for Muslim Life,” 247.

⁹⁴² Nursi, *The Letters*, 42-43.

⁹⁴³ Ibid, 43.

positive change in his state would not happen without the grace of God, referring to God's mercy in this respect.

At a difficult moment when the distress could have led to despair, Nursi finds himself reciting the Qur'ānic verse "God is enough for us, and He is the best disposer of affairs,"⁹⁴⁴ which is a verse that focuses on the name of God, *al-Wakīl* (the Trustee).⁹⁴⁵ Trusting his affairs on the *al-Wakīl* was transforming for Nursi so he felt the door of light (happiness) open and all his worries and despairs disperse.⁹⁴⁶ It was as though Nursi had found God at a deeper level as he contemplated how the one who finds God finds everything, while the one who does not find God, can find nothing.⁹⁴⁷ Therefore, being separated from everyone no longer worried him because he had just found God to be his true companion. He states that he even understood the meaning of the *ḥadīth* "Glad tidings (happiness) to the strangers (*ghurbah*),"⁹⁴⁸ since he could now feel the happiness found within exile.

Despite the difficulties that exile brought with it, Nursi "channelled the feelings that arose in exile into an immense spiritual and moral force."⁹⁴⁹ They were a means of bringing him closer to God. This was made possible by the meaning Nursi gave to the exiles and used this meaning as a source of inspiration.⁹⁵⁰ Therefore an 'exile' was what was made of it, the meaning it was given. Nursi used his exiles as an opportunity to write a large portion of the *Risale-i Nur*. This was enhanced through the various treehouses he had made during his exiles, in spots favourable for "reading the book of the universe."⁹⁵¹ These were perfect spots for inspiration for his writings.

⁹⁴⁴ Qur'ān 3:173.

⁹⁴⁵ The name of God *al-Wakīl* (the Trustee) is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

⁹⁴⁶ Nursi, *The Letters*, 44.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁸ Ibn Mājah, book 36, *ḥadīth* no. 63.

⁹⁴⁹ Abu-Rabi', "How to Read Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*," 70.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁵¹ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 179.

Thus, for Nursi, the exiles were an opportunity for him to become accustomed to rely on no one but God, which was an important means for spiritual growth. Nursi found a deeper connection with God as a result of the exiles as he realised that by finding God, he had found everything. Nursi's *tawhīd*-centric view of life inspired him to remember that God is his Trustee (*Wali*), which provided him with the reassurance his heart needed.

5.3.3 Imprisonments

The *Risale-i Nur* became the cause of imprisonment of Nursi and his students on three occasions. The charges were several, such as the exploiting of religion for political ends “with the idea of political reaction” and organising a group that might disturb public order.⁹⁵²

In 1935, he was arrested along with 125 of his students and tried at Eskisehir Criminal Court. Nursi was imprisoned for eleven months, while fifteen of his students were imprisoned for six months. The remaining students were acquitted.

In 1943, Nursi and his leading students were arrested once again. While their hearing continued at Denizli Criminal Court, they remained imprisoned at Denizli prison. “If conditions had been bad in Eskisehir Prison, in Denizli they were worse. Nursi said he suffered in one day in Denizli the distress he suffered in a month in Eskisehir.”⁹⁵³ However, Nursi and his students were acquitted on 16 June 1944.⁹⁵⁴

The final arrest took place in 1948 for twenty months. This was the “third and worst large-scale imprisonment of Nursi and his students.”⁹⁵⁵ Now seventy-two, Nursi endured solitary confinement in a cell with broken windows that were not fixed during the two harsh winters he stayed there.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵² Ibid, 219.

⁹⁵³ Ibid, 257.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid, 266.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid, 281.

⁹⁵⁶ Nursi, *al-Mathnawi Al-Nuriyya*, xvii.

Despite the imprisonments and court cases, other than two or three matters, six courts were unable to find anything contrary to the law in the *Risale-i Nur*.⁹⁵⁷ Eventually on “June 1956, Afyon Court cleared the *Risale-i Nur* completely and ruled that all the confiscated copies should be returned to their owners.”⁹⁵⁸ In Nursi’s words, the exiles and imprisonments were an unprecedented wrong and illegal since they were undertaken without reason.⁹⁵⁹

Nursi often talks of his imprisonments in his writings, reflecting on his own experiences and those of others. While he does not omit to mention the harsh conditions faced by him and his students, he also puts great emphasis on the positive aspects. No doubt, Nursi was tested by the unjust imprisonments, it was not all calm and glory while he was in prison. The numerous poisoning attempts that brought him close to death on many occasions, the solitary confinements as well as the harsh conditions tested him greatly.

Quite often in his writing, Nursi consoles others about their imprisonment and by doing so, consoles himself. The most important aspect of the imprisonment for Nursi, is the meaning given to the situation; if one was to be bitter about it, the time in prison would be painful and tormenting. Whereas, if one sees the opportunities in prison, it provides peace and comfort in a situation that would otherwise cause great inner turmoil. Through this change in perspective, prison could be transformed into a blessed garden that raises seedlings of good character, according to Nursi.⁹⁶⁰ The meaning given to the situation is at two levels; personal and communal.

At the personal level, Nursi explains that imprisonment can be a protection from the negativities of the outside world. He explains a person would “probably be happier staying in prison than being free, for outside he is confused and subject to the assaults of sins from all sides.”⁹⁶¹ When

⁹⁵⁷ Nursi, *The Rays*, 404.

⁹⁵⁸ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 301.

⁹⁵⁹ Nursi, *The Rays*, 404.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 222.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid*.

prison is viewed from this protective perspective, Nursi explains it can become like a rest-house.⁹⁶²

Nursi believed he and his students should offer thanks to God for the situation they found themselves in, since he saw the time spent in prison as a most rewardable investment; he describes each fleeting hour passed in prison as the equivalent of eternal hours passed in worship.⁹⁶³ This was very reassuring for Nursi and his students, giving them the strength to patiently endure the hardships that they believed to be extremely profitable.⁹⁶⁴

It was Nursi's belief in the hereafter that helped him to see the prison as a profitable place to be in. Otherwise, he explains how being imprisoned unfairly for one day would have been as grievous as death. However, knowing that he and his students would be rewarded in the hereafter for any unjust treatment, was extremely consoling for Nursi. He reflects; "Light and strength of belief in the hereafter afforded me the patience, endurance, solace, and steadfastness; indeed, it filled me with enthusiasm to gain greater reward in the profitable, instructive exertions of this ordeal."⁹⁶⁵ Thus, belief in the hereafter is an extremely important part of being able to peacefully endure calamities and suffering. The belief that justice will prevail in the hereafter and that one will be rewarded for any injustices endured in this life becomes a great source of comfort, according to Nursi.⁹⁶⁶

At the communal level, the key to seeing the positive in the situation, again was dependent on the ability to turn what appears to be calamity to be an opportunity, in this case, an opportunity for learning and growth of the other inmates.⁹⁶⁷ As a result of this approach, Nursi named the prison environments as *Medrese-i Yusufiye* (School of Yusuf),⁹⁶⁸ comparing his and his

⁹⁶² Nursi, *The Words*, 162.

⁹⁶³ Nursi, *The Rays*, 478.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid, 245.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁶ Refer to chapters 2 and 4 for further discussion of belief in the hereafter.

⁹⁶⁷ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 497.

⁹⁶⁸ Nursi, *The Rays*, 246.

students' imprisonment to Prophet Yusuf's (Joseph) experience. According to the Qur'ān, Yusuf was imprisoned for years after the false accusations of the minister's wife against him.⁹⁶⁹ Although the imprisonment was unjust, this did not phase Yusuf who took the opportunity to teach those in prison so many accepted monotheism.⁹⁷⁰ Besides, it was in the prison that Yusuf's spiritual gifts were discovered by the world of man,⁹⁷¹ which then allowed him to have a greater spiritual influence on society as a prophet when he was released.

Nursi was following in the footsteps of Yusuf by seeing the imprisonments as opportunities. After the third imprisonment, he writes to his students, "I offer you not my condolences but my congratulations."⁹⁷² He was congratulating them on their imprisonment since imprisonment meant opportunities. This is of no surprise since Nursi was convinced he was put in jail multiple times to reach out to people who he would otherwise would not have been able to contact, telling his students that "our new brothers here in this School of Joseph are in more need of the solace of the *Risale-i Nur* than anyone."⁹⁷³ Reflecting back on the three long imprisonments he had endured, Nursi was of the view that, without the horrors of Eskisehir, Denizli and Afyon, the beauties of the *Medrese-i Yusufiye* might never have come into existence.⁹⁷⁴

Nursi's ability to change his perception of a calamity into an opportunity was firmly based on his faith, which offered him a *tawhīd*-centric view of life. For Nursi, enjoyment, pleasure and happiness had nothing to do with being in prison, but it had everything to do with belief, as he expressed the following while in prison, addressing those in prison; "I am seventy-five years old, and I know with utter certainty from thousands of experiences, proofs, and events that true

⁹⁶⁹ Chapter 12 of the Qur'ān provides a detailed explanation of Prophet Joseph's experiences.

⁹⁷⁰ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 497.

⁹⁷¹ Ayize Jamat-Everett, "Prison is a Hell for the Unbeliever," in *Islam at the Crossroads*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 116.

⁹⁷² Nursi, *The Rays*, 478.

⁹⁷³ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁴ Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 500.

enjoyment, pain-free pleasure, grief-free joy, and life's happiness are only to be found in belief and in the sphere of the truths of faith."⁹⁷⁵

As a result of his strong belief, Nursi trusted that there must be wisdom in the situation he found himself in, expressing it as a "wisdom of Divine Determining."⁹⁷⁶ To have a greater appreciation of this comment, it is important to refer to Nursi's view of Divine determining where he states "Divine Determining looks to the true causes and acts justly"⁹⁷⁷ concluding that Divine determining is exempt from evil, ugliness and tyranny.⁹⁷⁸ He also noted it was Divine favour that manifested on him and his students the meaning of the verse, "It is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you."⁹⁷⁹ Nursi truly believed there must be good in the situation he found himself in, allowing him to embrace it, which then allowed him to view prison as a "School of Joseph."

5.3.4 The Death of his Spiritual Son

One of the most difficult news that Nursi had to grapple with was the death of his nephew, who he considered to be his spiritual son, most self-sacrificing friend and bravest friend.⁹⁸⁰ Living in Barla had taken its toll on Nursi; he was suffering from ill health and old age, and was feeling extremely lonely and isolated. During such a time, Nursi reflects on his state and accepts the loss of his native land, friends and relatives, but there is one person he is not able to forget and that is his nephew Abdurrahman.⁹⁸¹ Soon after, he gets the news of the death of his nephew, which shakes him even five years after receiving the news, so much so that Nursi states "Half of my private world had died with the death of my mother, and now, with Abdurrahman's death, the other half died."⁹⁸²

⁹⁷⁵ Nursi, *The Rays*, 477.

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid, 478.

⁹⁷⁷ Nursi, *The Words*, 478

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid. Refer to Chapter 4 for further discussion of Divine determining in relation to good and evil.

⁹⁷⁹ Qur'ān 2:216.

⁹⁸⁰ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 310.

⁹⁸¹ Ibid, 311.

⁹⁸² Ibid.

It was while Nursi was feeling the sorrow of such a great loss that the meaning of the following verse unfolded to him, becoming a source of consolation: “Everything shall perish save His countenance; His is the command, and to Him shall you return.”⁹⁸³ This made Nursi realise that everything and everyone was to experience death, including Abdurrahman and himself. Nursi further noted the verse “But if they turn away, say: ‘God is enough for me! There is no deity save Him. In Him have I placed my trust, for He is the Sustainer, in awesome almightiness enthroned.’”⁹⁸⁴ Nursi understood this to mean that if God exists, He takes the place of everything. Since He is enduring, He is surely sufficient. Thus, the name of God *al-Baqi* (the Enduring One) was his consolation during this difficult time. Nursi adds that the Qur’ānic verse that commences with “Everything shall perish save His countenance...” saved him from the most grievous and sad state he was in.⁹⁸⁵

Through belief in God, Nursi was able to give meaning to the death of Abdurrahman and everything else that will die, including himself, realising that those who die have completed their duties and departed for other worlds. Thus, Nursi’s positive view of death played a significant role in helping him to be at peace with incidents that were otherwise very painful for him.⁹⁸⁶

In addition to the solace Nursi received from these Qur’ānic verses, he adds that God replaced his nephew with thirty Abdurrahmans, referring to his committed and hard working students. From this, the principle Nursi draws is, if God had healed the most serious of his spiritual wounds, which he did, then he would heal all the spiritual afflictions that he faces.⁹⁸⁷

⁹⁸³ Qur’ān 28:88.

⁹⁸⁴ Qur’ān 9:129.

⁹⁸⁵ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 312.

⁹⁸⁶ Refer to Chapter 4 for a discussion on Nursi’s perspective of death.

⁹⁸⁷ Nursi, *The Flashes*, 314.

5.4 Conclusion

Through his reflection on his personal thoughts and emotions, Nursi provides insight to how he responded to afflictions in his life. Firstly, he would identify and express the matter that was distressing him. Secondly, he would scan the Qur'ān to find a verse relevant to his situation, a remedy from the pharmacy of the All-Wise Qur'ān.⁹⁸⁸ Thirdly, he would apply these verses to his situation, which would give meaning to the difficulties he was enduring. Through this process, Nursi was able to respond to all the hardships he endured with a heart filled with peace and solace.

Not only did Nursi give meaning to events that took place in his life, but he also gave meaning to his life overall. He explains the unfolding of events in his life in the following way:

I am now certain that my life has passed in such a way, beyond my will and power, consciousness and planning and has been given so strange a course, that it might yield the result of these treatises to serve the All-Wise Qur'ān. It is quite simply as though all my scholarly life has been an introduction to them and in preparation of them. It has passed in such a way that the exposition of the Qur'ān's miraculousness through *The Words* [the *Risale-i Nur*] would be its result.⁹⁸⁹

This is very significant since Nursi believed all sufferings, challenges and events needed to take place to produce this great outcome in his life: the writing of the *Risale-i Nur*. This suggests that, if events did not unravel in his life the way they did, the *Risale-i Nur* may not have come to exist, leading to the acknowledgement of the importance of those events, as difficult as they were to endure. This enabled him to be at peace with his sufferings and even have an appreciation for them. Ultimately, he gave them meaning in a way that made him offer one hundred thousand thanks to God and utter the words:

All this oppression and tyranny of theirs is like pieces of wood for the fire of ardour and endeavour which illuminates the lights of the Qur'ān; it makes them flare up and shine. And

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁹ Vahide, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, 223.

those lights of the Qur'ān, which have suffered this persecution of theirs and have spread with the heat of endeavour, have made this province, indeed, most of the country, like a madrasa in place of Barla. They supposed me to a prisoner in a village. On the contrary, in spite of the atheists, Barla has become the teaching desk, and many places, like Isparta, have become like the madrasa...⁹⁹⁰

⁹⁹⁰ Nursi, *The Letters*, 427.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Concluding Remarks

According to Nursi, inner peace is a state aspired by all individuals. As a result, there is much that has been written on the topic. Yet, literature on inner peace from an Islamic perspective is extremely limited. This, however, does not mean that Islam does not offer inner peace. I would argue that scholars have not talked about this aspect of Islam because they assumed Muslims would have inner peace as a result of their faith. However, Nursi did not make such assumptions, just as he did not make assumptions about other matters of faith. For example, Nursi did not assume all Muslims have a strong conviction that resurrection will take place, even though belief in resurrection is a core belief of Islam. Instead, he exerted great effort to prove that resurrection would occur. Similarly, Nursi went to great effort to demonstrate that Islam provides inner peace and he used many arguments to demonstrate this important point.

The reason for Nursi's approach to these topics is because he knew his times well. He knew the state of the Muslim world had deteriorated intellectually and spiritually and therefore was greatly affected by the onslaught of materialism, nationalism and ultra-secularism. These changes brought with them despair and the questioning of faith by Muslims. Science was being used as a tool to discredit religion and materialist philosophy was seeking to change the lifestyle of Muslims to one that was foreign to Islam. It was this state of the Muslim world that inspired Nursi to write the *Risale-i Nur*, a spiritual commentary of the Qur'ān, which was a "short way to obtain firm faith and a complete understanding of Islam that would not be shaken by the attacks of the numerous damaging currents."⁹⁹¹

Core to this thesis is Nursi's view that the popularity of the *Risale-i Nur* was due to its ability to show how belief is a source of peace and happiness in this life as well as in the hereafter.⁹⁹²

⁹⁹¹ Mustafa Sungur, in Şahiner, *Said Nursi ve Nurculuk Hakkında Aydınlar Konusuyor*, 399.

⁹⁹² Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 18-19.

Nursi achieves this objective by demonstrating the paradise-like state that is experienced with Islamic belief. Put differently, Nursi was addressing an audience that was seeking immediate benefits to belief, an audience that did not want to wait for the hereafter to enjoy the pleasures of belief. Nursi was able to successfully offer to his audience what they were seeking through the *Risale-i Nur* by explaining the multiple benefits of having belief. When the benefits of belief are evaluated and analysed, it becomes evident that inner peace is at the core of what belief offers.

While the notion that belief in God leads to inner peace may seem logical or an easy point to argue, a simple reflection of our surroundings shows us that this is not the case at all. Therefore, the contribution of Nursi in this area should not be under-estimated. His ability to convincingly argue that a *tawhīd*-centric worldview leads to inner peace along with its full details is not an easy task. It is a task that had not been successfully undertaken before, even though there is such a great need for it. But yet, Nursi was able to convincingly explain and instil the worldview needed for a person to be in a state of peace. Furthermore, he provided all the building blocks needed to achieve such a state, providing a step by step guidance.

Not only is Nursi's method in line with the traditional understanding of Islam but it is also in line with the contemporary understanding of Islam and the contemporary needs of Muslims. Thus his outreach was the lay person; one did not need to be a Sufi saint to reach a state of inner peace, nor did they need to abandon this life and live a fully ascetic life. It seems Nursi made the impossible possible. That is, he was able to formulate steps for one to attain inner peace, while the individual is still fully immersed in the every day activities of this life. He was able to prescribe a *tawhīd*-centric worldview in a world which is so immersed in materialism. He was able to instil hope and peace into individuals in a world which is filled with so much pain and suffering at the individual level and the global level.

6.2 Findings

6.2.1 Summary of Findings

The definition of inner peace as established by the conceptual framework is: inner peace is attained when the world is decoded through the names of God, so that life and events can be given meaning in a way that satisfies the heart and mind. Briefly, this is described as giving a *tawḥīd*-centric meaning to life and events.

Before this definition was elaborated upon in this thesis, a general discussion of inner peace was provided in Chapter 1. This provided a context for where inner peace was placed in Islam and became evident that inner peace was an inherent part of the Islamic faith. Through the analysis of Islamic literature, it became clear there were many concepts that are strongly associated with inner peace. Concepts such as *riḍā* (contentment), *sakīna* (serenity), *īmān* (peace) and *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive opinion) had been written about extensively. These concepts strongly resonate with inner peace. However, it was apparent these are manifestations or expressions of inner peace, not the process of inner peace. This made the analysis of the process of inner peace even more essential, since the ‘how’ is very important for this topic.

Chapter 1 also reconciled inner peace with negative emotions to highlight that having inner peace does not mean one will never experience sadness, frustration, anxiety and other common negative emotions. However, what it does mean is that these negative emotions are kept in check when one has inner peace so they become bearable, manageable and even meaningful. The emotions were noted to serve an important purpose of spiritual growth, making it easier to embrace and endure such negative emotions. The role of these negative emotions was analysed in the life of Prophet Muḥammad to demonstrate he was in a state of inner peace despite the great hardships he endured. The conclusion that was drawn is that inner peace can be reconciled with negative emotions so one can be in a state of inner peace even when experiencing negative emotions, but inner peace keeps negative emotions in check.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that the process of inner peace commenced with belief in God, which leads to knowledge of God. Nursi's main approach to knowledge of God was explained to be by reading the names of God in the universe, or as I describe it, decoding the universe through the names of God. Nursi portrays the universe as a mirror, with all objects within it reflecting and manifesting God's names, making the universe an important means to knowing God. At the same time, Nursi's emphasis on *tawhīd* (oneness of God) was observed. It was seen that Nursi goes to great length to prove the oneness of God and he also emphasises the need to view the world through this *tawhīd* lens.

Furthermore, Nursi's emphasis on belief in God for one to attain inner peace was noted, an approach that is unique since the benefits of belief have traditionally been discussed in relation to the hereafter. Nursi's strong stance that nothing in this world but belief will make an individual happy or content, neither material possessions nor physical pleasures, was noted. Thus, the need for a *tawhīd*-centric approach to life and events, while at the same time, the importance of decoding the universe through the names of God was identified.

By decoding the universe through the names of God, the conclusion drawn was that there are as many means to inner peace as the names of God that are known. Three names of God were used to argue this point, demonstrating how each name is a source of inner peace. The name *al-Qādir* (the All-Powerful) was understood to be a source of security, *al-Raḥmān* (All-Merciful) a source of comfort and hope and *al-'Adl* (All-Just) a source of reassurance. Just as these three names are a means to inner peace, it was argued that all names of God are a pathway to peace in their own way through the meaning they gave to life and events.

With belief in God being the gateway to inner peace, Chapter 3 tackled the importance of knowing the self to further develop inner peace. Four ways were identified in which knowing the self leads to inner peace. Firstly, knowing the self was identified as leading to knowing God. The greater self awareness one has, the more knowledge one has of their Creator. A direct

relationship was noted between the two types of knowledge. The knowledge of God attained through this method then feeds back to Chapter 2.

Secondly, self-awareness was seen to generate a feeling of being valued physically but more importantly, spiritually. Self-awareness also means being aware of one's potential. This was recognised to be the first step in realising the potential. As one unravels their potential, there is great satisfaction experienced, according to Nursi. Thirdly, it was understood that knowing the self meant channelling the faculties and emotions to their correct use, which meant alignment with human nature. This alignment was noted to be a source of inner peace. Fourthly, as a result of knowing one's self, the existence of a gap was identified between what humankind is and what humankind wants. While this gap appears negative and disheartening at first glance, once analysed, it was seen that this was not a bad thing at all. It was concluded that the more one feels the reality of their impotence, weakness, poverty and need, the more God's power, strength, wealth and mercy are felt, generating a sense of peace. The gap was also explained to be the natural driving force to worship God, since God is recognised as the One who could address the needs of humankind.

Chapter 4 demonstrated that when belief in God and self-awareness are established, a *tawḥīd*-centric worldview is established according to Nursi. A key part of this worldview is one's perspective. The correct perspective is achieved by viewing everything as *mānā-yī harfī*, which is other indicative, instead of *mānā-yī ismī*, which means the reflection is indicating a meaning in itself. The *mānā-yī harfī* perspective was explained to provide the true meaning of matters, which helped to give meaning to life and events.

Another important aspect of a *tawḥīd*-centric worldview was identified to be the existence of two principles about good and evil: "although some things may appear to be evil, they are not really evil" and "acquisition (*kasb*) of evil, that is, the desire for evil, is evil, but the creation of evil is not evil." These two principles were used to better understand the concept of evil and

reconcile it with God's justice. These principles and the discussed life perspective were then used to explain incidents that are often viewed as negative due to the suffering they caused. This then changed the way suffering was perceived so events like natural disasters and illnesses were seen as means of spiritual growth and remuneration.

Through the *tawhīd*-centric worldview, it also became apparent that life events, including those that can be perceived as being negative, are essential means of knowing God. Events such as natural disasters and illnesses enabled God to be known through names such as *al-Shāfi* (the Healer) and *al-Razzaq* (the Sustainer). Thus, these events were understood to be opportunities to know God in a more comprehensive manner.

A connection then became apparent between a *tawhīd*-centric worldview (Chapter 4) and belief in God (Chapter 2): by witnessing events through the names of God, belief and knowledge of God increased, which meant the inner peace process was feeding back to step 1 from step 3. This demonstrated the inner peace process is cyclic, spiralling upwards as one develops.

Since inner peace was defined according to the *Risale-i Nur*, studying inner peace in the life of Nursi was an important part of this thesis. This was particularly the case because Nursi would often talk about his personal experiences, particularly his hardships. Chapter 5 studied the life of Nursi to see how he responded to these hardships such as exiles, imprisonments and the death of loved ones. Analysing Nursi's life in this manner not only increased the understanding of the inner peace process through real examples, but it also allowed for the theory to come to life. It further reaffirmed that the process was realistic as it had been successfully lived out in Nursi's life.

6.2.2 Measures for Soundness of Framework

There were three measures put in place in the introduction to test the soundness of the conceptual framework in this thesis. This was particularly important since there are no other

conceptual frameworks for inner peace from an Islamic perspective for this framework to be compared to. Therefore, it was important to have some checks and balances in place to ensure that a conceptual framework was successfully developed.

6.2.2.1 The First Measure – The Logical Flow of the Thesis

The logical strength of the conceptual framework was the first measure identified in the introduction. In reviewing the thesis with this lens, a clear flow is evident between the three steps of inner peace that make up the three key components of the conceptual framework. It is possible to justify how one step leads to the next as there is an apparent sequence present between the steps. This is also reaffirmed by the observation that step 2 would not have the strength it has if it was not built on step 1 and step 3 would not have the validity it has if it was not built on step 1 and 2. That is, to know the self (step 2), one needs to know God (step 1) and, to have a *tawḥīd*-centric worldview, one needs to know God and one's self.

A common thread is also apparent between the three steps, which was *tawḥīd*. The concept of *tawḥīd* is a strong and recurring theme in all three steps; the theme starts strong with the belief in one God (*tawḥīd*) being the first step and finishes strong with the *tawḥīd*-centric worldview being the last step. Therefore, it can be concluded there is a clear logical flow within the conceptual framework. It should be of no surprise that *tawḥīd* is the common thread in the three steps of inner peace, since *tawḥīd* is the cornerstone of Islam. However, the way Nursi is able to make *tawḥīd* a lived experience is exemplary, and the way he is able to add the colour of *tawḥīd* to all his writings is noteworthy.

6.2.2.2 The Second Measure – The Support of the Theory by Islamic Tradition

The second measure identified was whether the conceptual framework is supported by the Islamic teachings. It was demonstrated to be strongly supported by the Islamic tradition through the presence of Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* throughout the thesis. Key Qur'ānic verses made up the key points in each of the steps of the inner peace process, as highlighted below.

Step 1: “I have not created the jinn and humankind but to (know and) worship Me (exclusively).”⁹⁹³ This verse provided the ultimate purpose of humankind’s creation, which is belief and knowledge of God. It was then easy to see how fulfilling this ultimate purpose naturally leads to inner peace.

Step 2: “And be not like those who forgot God, so He made them forget their own souls...”⁹⁹⁴ This verse was key in demonstrating the relationship between knowing God and knowing one’s self. It supported the notion that the next step to inner peace after belief and knowledge of God is knowledge of the self.

Step 3: “Who has created everything in the best way.”⁹⁹⁵ This verse is at the core of the worldview portrayed by Nursi where everything is explained to be beautiful outright or through the results it produces. God is seen to be central to this beauty, which means one should have a *tawhīd*-centric worldview.

While these Qur’ānic verses formed the key point in each of the chapters, there were various other verses and *ḥadīth* that supported the discussions within the thesis. There are too many to list all of them here. However, their presence is easily noticeable throughout the thesis.

Further evidence that demonstrates the conceptual framework is supported by Islamic teachings is the fact there are very close ties between Islamic concepts that have been extensively discussed, such as *riḍā* (contentment), *sakīna* (serenity), *iṭmīnān* (peace) and *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive opinion), and inner peace. These Islamic concepts were explained to be manifestations of inner peace. It could be concluded the conceptual framework is supported by the Islamic teachings.

⁹⁹³ Qur’ān 51:56.

⁹⁹⁴ Qur’ān 59:19.

⁹⁹⁵ Qur’ān 32:7.

6.2.2.3 The Third Measure – The Support of the Theory by the *Risale-i Nur*

The third measure identified was how well the conceptual framework is supported by the *Risale-i Nur*. It is timely to quote the key words of Nursi that initiated this research. It is also the response Nursi gave when he was asked why the *Risale-i Nur* is so popular and why it has been embraced by so many people like no other book:

The *Risale-i Nur* demonstrates that, in disbelief, there is a sort of spiritual Hell in this world, while in belief is a sort of spiritual Paradise. It points out the grievous pains in disbelief, sins, bad deeds, and forbidden pleasures. At the same time, it proves that in belief, good deeds, virtues and the truths of Islam are to be found pleasures like the pleasures of Paradise.⁹⁹⁶

Thus, throughout the *Risale-i Nur*, there is an ongoing message that Islamic belief leads to inner peace, since Islam provides a *tawhīd*-centric worldview. The citing of the *Risale-i Nur* throughout the thesis is evidence that the framework of this thesis is supported by it.

Furthermore, all the scholars who are experts in the *Risale-i Nur* have been extensively referenced in this thesis: Şükran Vahide, Colin Turner, Ibrahim Abu-Rabi‘, Zeki Sarıtoprak, Hasan Hörküç and Thomas Michel. Their analyses and discussions of the *Risale-i Nur* have played an important role in developing and fleshing out the concepts discussed in the thesis. Vahide’s and Turner’s insights into belief and knowledge of God were an important component of Chapter 2. Abu-Rabi‘’s discussion of Nursi’s life and analysis of Nursi’s worldview was important for chapters 4 and 5. Sarıtoprak’s writings were important in understanding Nursi’s works in the context of today’s world. While their contributions were valuable and incorporated, each of their contributions was to specific sections of this thesis.

In conclusion, the thesis successfully fulfilled the three measures put in place for this thesis. Thus, it successfully fulfils the criteria put forward for its soundness.

⁹⁹⁶ Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 19.

6.3 Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations I would like to make as this research comes to an end. It seems, this is just the beginning of a journey that involves the study and analysis of inner peace from an Islamic perspective. Thus, most of the recommendations made are in relation to the fact that inner peace from an Islamic perspective is a fairly new discourse. The recommendations made below have also incorporated the limitations of this particular thesis.

6.3.1 More Literature on Inner Peace

Through the literature review, it became apparent that there is minimal Islamic literature which addresses the needs of contemporary Muslims in attaining inner peace. I would recommend that more articles and books be written on inner peace from an Islamic perspective. The Western context should be kept in mind when writing on the topic so it is on par with sources written about inner peace from different religious and ideological perspectives.

I believe Islam has a lot to offer in this area, as does other religions. Sharing this aspect of Islam with the Western world would be a breath of fresh air for all. Rather than trying to defend Islam, as many authors do by trying to demonstrate that Islam is not a terrorist religion, that Islam does not oppress women, that Shari'ah is not bad, etc., it is time to focus on the positive aspects of the religion, in a way that can be understood by the West. This means keeping the Western culture and values in mind.

There are various approaches that can be taken when doing this:

- Deeper analysis of the Qur'ānic verses in relation to the topic. There are many verses identified in this thesis that relate to inner peace. A deeper study of these verses would be extremely valuable.
- Deeper analysis of the life of Prophet Muḥammad in the context of this topic. The life of Prophet Muḥammad was touched upon very briefly in this thesis and much more

could have been said. His life could be studied in more detail to have greater insight into his perspectives of inner peace. This would also be a nice difference to the vast number of sources on the life of Prophet Muḥammad, which are predominantly chronological biographies.

- Deeper analysis of classical and contemporary scholars' opinions in relation to this topic. Many scholars have alluded to inner peace in their writings. Further analysis of these sources would greatly enrich the understanding of inner peace from an Islamic perspective.

I have suggested deeper analysis when suggesting the various research possibilities because each of the suggested analyses were undertaken in this thesis. However, due to the limited space that could be allocated to these areas, an in-depth analysis was not possible.

Once there is more literature available, then comparative analysis between the different theories and definitions can take place. Currently, there is very little that can be compared; however, a comparative analysis is essential to further develop the understanding of inner peace.

6.3.2 Further Analysis of Nursi's Work

Since the *Risale-i Nur* has a significant amount of content related to inner peace, my recommendation would be for others to develop a conceptual framework on inner peace based on their understanding of the *Risale-i Nur*. This would then give the opportunity for two, three, four or more conceptual frameworks to be compared. Such a comparison should not prove too difficult, since the source of the frameworks would be the same.

Futhermore, like other edited books on the *Risale-i Nur* that focus on a particular theme such as theodicy, interfaith dialogue and spirituality, producing an edited book on the topic of inner peace would have much to offer. Having different authors approach the topic from different angles would add great value to the topic and be very enriching for the reader.

I would also like to see my conceptual framework tested by others to see if it holds. Until something is tested and critically analysed, it is not possible to check its accuracy or soundness. I would argue that my conceptual framework is sound because of the many years I have researched to put it together, but for obvious reasons, I have my biases on this matter and therefore would want to see the framework tested by others.

6.3.3 Interfaith Comparative Study

In a world of diversity, I would recommend a comparative study on the understanding of inner peace from various faith and ideological perspectives. As highlighted by the name, ‘interfaith comparative study,’ this study should be done in the spirit of interfaith dialogue so there is respect, empathy and an effort to demonstrate the commonality among humanity rather than seeking to disprove or degrade another religion’s understanding on a topic that is so close to the heart. While there are differences in the way religions and ideologies approach inner peace, I do believe there are significant commonalities between them. It would be of great benefit to identify these commonalities and discuss them.

There is a need more than ever before to bring people together on common grounds. To provide research and findings on such comparative studies would be very insightful for all of humanity. At the minimum it would emphasise the need felt by all human beings to attain inner peace. Additionally, best practise models may be identified which can benefit individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds.

6.3.4 Cross-Disciplinary Studies

Inner peace can cross over to various disciplines when being studied. As was seen in chapter 2 when reconciling inner peace with negative emotions, depression, anxiety and other psychological conditions easily become the discussion point when considering inner peace from this perspective. Through this limited discussion, it became apparent that there is great potential to discuss and consider these psychological conditions from an inner peace perspective.

Studying these conditions in the context of inner peace may provide new strategies and approaches to dealing with them.

This thesis also has a strong theological focus as evident from the *tawhīd*-centric worldview it poses. Therefore, more discussion and analysis of the relationship between theology and inner peace would be of great value to the framework developed in this thesis. It would provide a greater understanding of how a *tawhīd*-centric worldview leads to inner peace.

6.3.5 Deconstructing the Inner Peace Process

Since my view of inner peace is that it is a process, I see it as a spectrum (like a light spectrum) when flattened out from its three-dimensional cyclic form with the three steps running across it.⁹⁹⁷ The different definitions of inner peace focus on different parts of the spectrum, such as focusing on (God's) compassion is at the beginning of the spectrum (step 1), 'the realising of one's potential,' is about halfway on the spectrum (step 2), and 'giving meaning to life and events,' is towards the end of the spectrum (step 3), and so on. But I would argue that they are all part of a spectrum. While they all individually contribute to inner peace, the process of inner peace needs to be completed for one to fully experience inner peace. That is, one needs to have belief and knowledge of God, one must know the self and then one must have a *tawhīd*-centric worldview to be in a state of inner peace. However, this notion would need to be studied further to see whether zooming in on certain parts of the inner peace spectrum is sufficient for one to experience inner peace.

The opportunities and possibilities for further research on inner peace from an Islamic perspective are vast and exciting. I hope this thesis triggers more literature to be written in this much needed topic area.

⁹⁹⁷ Refer to Diagram 1 in the Introduction.

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