

HOPE AND DESPONDENCY IN THE LIGHT OF RISALE-I NUR

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DOI: 10.31120/katre.2018.53

Abstract

Despondency and hopelessness has cast its dark clouds on humanity across globe in the modern period. Materialism and Secularization have weakened and severed man's fount of hope—faith in religion. However, action and more intensive and extensive actions have attained the symbol of modernism, but “the positive action for a better world” is yet to be defined and actualized in the contemporary world. World Wars, Cold Wars, Nuclearization, Environmental Pollution, Ecological Crisis, Militarization, Economic and Social Disparities do not speak of positive actions. Bediuzaman Said Nursi keeps up the hope alive in humans through his words—Risale-i Nur and his life—lived through extreme pain, suffering, imprisonment, alienation and exilement. True to the Qur'anic notion of cultivating faith in the Oneness of God and in the Day of Reward-Hereafter. Nursi expounds the Qur'anic theme of ‘the given in this world’ as a test which if appropriated positively could earn blessings for the doer. Hence, even acute crisis one faces is an opportunity for acquiring high moral and spiritual rewards if one takes it as a challenge and restrains his emotions and conducts himself in the worthy manner which is the hallmark of real servants of God. The current global situation, though being very depressing calls for faithful to generate hope and keep it alive, which alone can ensure a positive action for the betterment of the world. Keeping the relevance of the subject in view, the study would be conducted on two referents: one the Qur'anic position and the other Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur along with the contexts he propounded the ideas to fully contextualize the pronouncement on the subject.

Keywords: Hope, Risale-i Nur, Despondency, Said Nursi, Faith

Risale-i Nur Işığında Ümit ve Ümitsizlik

Öz

Umutsuzluk ve ümitsizlik modern dönemde insanlığın üzerine karanlık bulutlar gibi çökmüştür. Materyalizm ve Sekülerleşme insanın ümit kaynağı olan imanı zayıflatıp kesti. Daha yoğun ve geniş çabalar modernizmin sembolüne ulaştı ama günümüz dünyasında “daha iyi bir dünya için müsbet hareket” hâlen tanımlanıp gerçekleştirilmeyi bekliyor. Dünya savaşları, soğuk savaşları, nükleerleşme, çevre kirliliği, ekolojik kriz, askerileşme, ekonomik ve sosyal uyumsuzluklar müsbet hareketten haber vermiyor. Bediüzzaman Said Nursi hem sözleri yani Risale-i Nur ve azami acı, sıkıntı, hapis, yabancılaşma ve sürgünle geçen kendi hayatı vasıtasıyla insanlar arasında ümidi hayatta tutmaktadır. Kur’an’daki tevhide ve ahirete imanı işleme prensibini uygun olarak Nursi Kur’an’daki bu dünyada verilen konusunu iyi değerlendirilirse failine sevab kazandıran bir imtihan olarak tefsir eder. Böylece, eğer onu bir imtihan olarak kabul eder, hissiyatını dizginler ve Allah’ın hakiki kullarının şiarı olan bir tavırla davranırsa, şiddetli bir buhran bile yüksek ahlaki ve manevi mükafatlar kazandıracak bir fırsat olabilir. Hazırdaki global durum çok sıkıcı olsa bile müminleri ümit üretmeye ve onu devam ettirmeye davet eder ki bu tek başına dünyanın ıslahı için müsbet bir harekettir. Meselenin alakasını göz önünde bulundurursak bu çalışma iki kaynak üzerinedir: birisi Kur’an’ın konuya bakışı diğeri konunun beyanı için arz ettiği bağlamlarla Said Nursi’nin Risale-i Nur’udur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ümit, Risale-i Nur, Yeis, Said Nursi, İman

Introduction

Contemporary man is increasingly suffering from despondency and hopelessness, triggering the negative mindset to engage more and more in the destructive actions. The scenario is global and affects whole gamut of human actions- individual, societal and international. Materialistic and secular philosophies have been the hallmark of modernist project which has dominated the human thought and action for the last so many centuries. So called Renaissance and Enlightenment has rendered man myopic, who cannot see beyond matter and is totally immersed in “this world only” syndrome. Man has been cut from his Creator and his own spirit. He has refused to accept the truth of the Divine Oneness and its realization through faith. Material progress alone cannot satisfy man and keep his hopes alive. Rather materialism generates an unsatiated thirst and hunger for more and more. Even scientific progress on an unp-

precedented scale has now fully demonstrated that its benefits are diminished in the light of its negative impacts like loss of ecological balance, environmental pollution and others. Materialist scientific paradigm has cast its harrowing shadow on multiple aspect of human life. Humankind has lost humanity and its attributes which distinguish it from other creations. Man has become a tool in the hands of unbridled passions, greed, and demands of his evil self and consequently a tool in the hands of technology and industry and its institutions, like nations which were produced by the secular project. Hopelessness and despondency is not confined to the so called third world or have-nots but is a global phenomenon. Hence its causes need to be studied and remedies offered. So many projects have been launched globally within the materialist secular matrix to bring man out of hopelessness and despondency but to no avail. It demands serious introspection and out of the box solution. Here comes the relevance of Said Nursi and his Risale-i Nur.

Hope, Faith and Risale-i Nur

In contrast to secular, materialistic philosophies and polytheism, Islam engenders faith in oneness of Allah—the only creator and sustainer of the universe and man. The faith inculcates in man all the positive stimuli necessary for keeping the hope alive and leads him to engage in positive actions only. God, in His ultimate mercy did not leave man alone to decipher the purpose of his life only through his self and universe, which too help him realize His Oneness and His Power and Wisdom. He has sent His messages and messengers who explain the purpose of life and relation between various aspects of life and solve riddles therein. Messengers elucidate the Divine message with their sacred and wise utterances and beautiful and exemplary conduct. Al-Qur'an is the last revealed book and Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), the last messenger to demonstrate the way life is to be lived and its varied dimensions harmonized and channeled to the Divine purposes on individual, societal, economic, political, moral, ritualistic planes, covering both inner and outer life- immersed in the Divine scheme. This life is connected to other life and their appropriate proportion is fixed. This life is for positive thinking and actions, the other is to get its reward. This life is transitory, the other is eternal. The period of this life is limited. The period of tasting its fruits in other life are limitless. On the other hand, the punishment for ignoring and rejecting the Divine truths—thereby negative thinking and actions- is severe. Hence faith (Iman) is fountainhead of all hope, thus source of all positive action. All the messengers of Allah generated hope and assured the believers that their repentance (Taubah) and their faith (Iman) with its concomitant attributes like patience (Sabr), trust (Tawakkul) and others are sure to get them pleasure of Allah and His Paradise,

where they shall dwell forever. Moreover, faith based moral principles generate positive thinking and positive actions among the believers which keep them away from hopelessness and despondency.

Messengers of Allah were embodiments of hope, patience and trust. Most of them encountered stiff resistances, oppression, suppression and worst forms of persecution. Yet they did not lose hope and continued to maintain and sustain it among their followers. True to the teachings of Al-Qur'an and in conformity with the teachings and practices of the Prophet, Ulema and Mujtehideen (Rejuvenators of Faith), have kept the human hope alive and generated positive actions in the people in the face of extreme hopelessness and despondency. Said Nursi and his Risale- i Nur is sought to be posited in this background. The Islamic legacy of Ijtehed and Mujtehedeen has been producing innumerable brilliant stars who shine on the firmaments of sky in various places and times.

Al- Qur'an, Seerah and Hope

Al-Qur'an at numerous instances reveals the attributes of God, among them chiefly are His being Rahman (The Beneficent) and Raheem (The Merciful), Al-Tawwab (The One who accepts Repentance), Ghafir (who forgives); to err is human and to repent and mend is the way, kept open for man by His ultimate mercy. Al-Qur'an is categorical about it:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ
الرَّحِيمُ

Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.

(Al-Quran; 39:53)

One of the illustrious Prophets of Allah, Hazrat Yunus (A.S) is reprimanded by Allah for abandoning his people, when he did not receive positive response from them. Hazrat Nuh (A.S) continued his Dawah for more than nine hundred years. Even Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) is consoled by Allah to remain contended with his communication of Truth, without being over concerned for the results. Thus a strong message and model for consistency, perseverance, patience, trust and hope.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

And We have not sent you (O Muhammad S.A.W) except as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind, but most of men know not.

(Al-Quran; 34:28)

Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) prayed for the people who rejected his message and persecuted him at Taif, and hoped that their next generation may accept the faith. There are innumerable instances in the life of Prophet (S.A.W), Ulema and Mujtehedeen who have kept hope alive in individuals and societies in the face of worst calamities and adversities. Faith cannot flourish if it is not sustained by hope, hope for good, hope for better. Al- Qur'an consoles the Prophet (S.A.W) and believers, thus:

إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

So verily, with the hardship, there is relief.

(Al-Quran; 94:6)

The Prophet (S.A.W), though steadfast in the face of extreme persecution is being reinforced by the Qur'anic glad tidings:

وَلَا خَيْرَ لَكَ مِنَ الْأُولَى

And indeed the Hereafter is better for you than the present (life of this world).

(Al-Quran; 93:4)

Islam does not encourage false whims and wishes rather the same should be subjected to reasonable judgment, as the Quran states:

تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ

These are their own desires. Say: Bring your proof (of what ye state)

(Al-Quran; 2:111)

Hope is generated by reflecting on God's signs, and His power and wisdom. An important dimension of hope is suggested by the Qur'an:

مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَرْجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارًا (۱۳) وَقَدْ خَلَقَكُمْ أَطْوَارًا (۱۴) أَلَمْ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا

“Why do you not hope (tarjauna) for dignity (wiqar) from God when He created you in diverse stages, Don't you see how Allah has created the seven heavens in harmony.”

(Al-Quran; 71:13)

The connotation of this Qur'anic verse is that the contemplation of nature inspires hope. This is resonant with Nursi's repeated evocation of natural phenomena-plants, butterflies and spring itself as representing and inspiring hope.¹ However, it is to make clear that Al-Qur'an generates better hope among people provided they adopt Faith (Iman) and fulfill the demands of oneness of Allah, apostleship of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and the certainty of the Day of Judgment. It only approves human actions based on Faith and attributes positiveness to the actions which are faith based and God-centric. Seeking Allah's pleasure is the ultimate aim of all human actions. It nevertheless warns against false hopes, which are just human wishes and fantasies based not on facts. Hence materialists' and polytheists' hopes are dashed to the ground in the Qur'anic discourse. The Day of Judgment is certainly good and better for those who believe in Islam and fulfill its demands and commands as per its scheme.

Allah created mercy in one hundred parts and sent down to earth only one part. Because of this one part, there is mutual love amongst creation, so much so that an animal will lift up its hoof from its young one, fearing that it might harm it. Allah has reserved the remaining ninety-nine parts of this mercy to favor His believing servants on the Day of Judgment. This Hadith is a source of great hope in that Allah has reserved 99 out of 100 parts of mercy for the Day of Judgment. Now reflect on this: only one part of this 100 is divided among all living creatures on earth, including every single human being. Whatever mercy there is on earth, 99 times of that is with Allah. We cannot even fathom how merciful God is.²

Said Nursi and his Times

Said Nursi (1876-1960) emerged on the scene in Turkey when materialistic and secular philosophies were fast spreading in the world and Turkish people were worst sufferers. Ottoman State was beset with irreversible downfall owing to internal and external factors, greatly related to imperialistic mode of Western civilization. Said Nursi was a witness to the major catastrophes Turkey suffered. One can see in him the heart of a faithful (Momin) and vigor of a Fighter (Mujahid) who attempted in saving the last edifice of Muslim power and grandeur, through advice, persuasion, exhortation, reform and activism. His life is full of hope. He hopes in hopeless situations. His hope is greater than the tragedies; his personal pain is overcome by his concern for the millet (Community of Muslims). He does not and cannot allow the enemies of Islam to make Muslims engage in internecine fights. Even though he disagrees with the policies of the ruling system, he does not engage or allow anybody

1 Abu Rabi, Ibrahim, *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2008, p. 95.

2 Muslim, Book 37, Hadith, 6629-6631.

to revolt, lest Muslim blood is shed and anarchy is created. He does not approve the secular and anti religious policies of the rulers. Yet devised positive action plans for a better change. His fight against Russian invasion and bravery is but a continuation of the same believing spirit which was counseling Sultan Abdul Hamid for adopting better policies. It is the same faith and spirit that denotes his entire energies for cultivating faith and its attributes through explanation of the Qur'anic axioms in the light of self evident proofs and logic. He was hopeful for a positive change and sure that Kemal Ataturk's anti religious policies could not usher better times or better human beings. The materialistic and anti religious West is not the guarantee of a better man and better world, he was convinced. And hopeful that faith based positive actions can usher in a better world to live.

Demolishing False Hopes

Said Nursi considered the Western materialistic and secular philosophies false and wrong basis of the prosperous life. He rightly thinks that prosperity of both the worlds is connected to faith. Rejecting faith cannot even guarantee betterment of this world. Nursi explains:

Know this, O second Europe! You hold a diseased and misguided philosophies in your right hand and a harmful and corrupt civilization in your left, and claim, "Mankind's happiness is with these two!" May your two hands be broken and may these two filthy presents of yours be the death of you!...And so they shall be!³

Said Nursi demolishes the Western pompous culture and civilization as being superficial, inappropriate for providing true happiness to man. Thus, he says:

O you unhappy spirit which spreads unbelief and ingratitude! Can a man who is suffering torments and is afflicted with ghastly calamities in both his spirit and conscience and his mind and his heart be happy through his body wallowing in a superficial, deceptive glitter and wealth? Can it be said that he is happy?⁴

Generating Positive Hope

Said Nursi could see the darkness, *Kufr* bought in the guise of Western materialistic secular philosophies for progress and development. He was sure that it is only Al-Qur'an that can dispel darkness and in the shade of Al-Qur'an, contemporary explanations of it in the form of Risale- i- Nur could rekindle positive hope in mankind, who need to attain true faith in Islam and require necessary qualities as believers,

3 Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, p. 160.

4 Said Nursi, *The Rays*, p. 609.

which could usher a better world here and the hereafter. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi observes:

On seeing the world of humanity in this darkness I was about to cry out with my heart , spirit, and mind, and all my subtle inner faculties, indeed all the particles of my being, when the light and power of belief proceeding from the Qur'an smashed those spectacles of misguidance, giving me insight...It is the truth, of the Qur'an manifested in the Risale-i- Nur that will smash and destroy absolute disbelief and perverse misguidance at this time...All praises be to Almighty God that with its many comparisons, as the perfect remedy for the wounds of his time, the Risale-i- Nur – a miracle of the Qur'an of miraculous exposition proceeding from its effulgence-has rooted even the most worst of those obdurate deniers with the diamond sword of the Qur'an. Its proofs and arguments to the number of atoms of the universe demonstrating Divine Unity and the truths of belief show that in twenty-five years it has not been defeated in the face of severest attacks, but has itself prevailed and been victorious. Yes, with its comparisons of belief and unbelief, and guidance and misguidance, the Risale-i- Nur proves those truths self –evidently.⁵

Inculcating Faith: A Basis for Positive Action

Said Nursi focused his full attention in generating hope in people through cultivating in them a glittering faith (Iman) which enlighten their lives and bring in sweet fruits in their individual and collective existence. Alaaddin Basar is right in comparing the last letter written by Said Nursi to the Farewell Sermon of the God's Messenger (S.A.W), wherein his life mission is succinctly put in these words:

Our duty is to act positively; it is not to act negatively. It is only to serve belief in accordance with Divine pleasure; it is not to meddle in God's business. We are charged with responding with patience and thanks to all the difficulties we may encounter in the positive service of belief which results in the preservation of public order and security."⁶

It is enlightening to see how Alaaddin Basar explains the connotations of Nursi's thoughts. He says that these inklings are used and referred to by Said Nursi in the

5 Said Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, p. 21

6 Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Emirdag Lahikası*, Istanbul, Envar Nesriyat, ii, 241, See also; Vahide, *Jihad in Modern Age*, p. 138; C. Turner, H. Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, pp. 103-4.

following lines:

To work solely for God's pleasure is positive; to struggle hypocritically for self-interest and self- advertisement is negative.⁷

Service of belief is positive; to work for unbelief, misguidance, sin, and vice is negative. Reliance on God is positive; interfering in God's business is negative.⁸

The maintenance of public order is positive; causing conflict and differences, and disturbing public order and security is negative.⁹

Patience and thanks are positive; impatience and rebellion, negative.¹⁰

Nursi further elucidates his mission and its relations with belief and disavows the currents of disbelief in human thought, saying:

It is only to serve belief in accordance with Divine pleasure"... "I am in the current of belief. Opposite me is the current of disbelief, I have no connection with othercurrents.¹¹

After inculcating faith in the people, Said Nursi identifies and saves the people from the factors and sources responsible for their despondency. He warns them that often they lose hope when results are not of their wishes. He cautions faithful that their task is to do their job honestly and faithfully. Results and fruits are to be left with God. Man must realize that there are some areas of his activities and some areas belong only to Allah. While communicating the message of Allah to others is the duty of man, to guide them is the job of Allah. He would often speak about "Not interfering with God's concerns".¹²

This is profoundly explained by Alaaddin Basar:

It is He that grants guidance, just as He provides sustenance. In respect of

7 Said Nursi, *The Letters*, p. 485.

8 Said Nursi, *The Rays*, p. 492.

9 C.Turner, H. Horkuc, *Said Nursi*, p. 101.

10 Said Nursi, *The Rays*, pp. 320, 334.

11 Said Nursi, *The Letters*, pp. 93-4, Sozler 1994

12 Alaaddin Basar, "A Lifelong Principle: Positive Action", in *Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, The Reconstruction Of Islamic Thought In The Twentieth Century And Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, 24th – 26th September, 1995, Istanbul.*

sustenance, we only plant the seed, and having tended it as necessary, we do not interfere in the question of its producing a tenfold a hundred fold or a thousand fold, crop. Just as we only await this from Divine power and mercy, so we do not interfere in the shoots produced by the seeds of truth we have sown in people's hearts. Hearts are in the hand of God's power, and it is only He who bestows guidance. What we have read and explained produce shoots in the hearts of our listeners only through His grace, not through our wills. We turn on the switch, God creates the light. We strike the match, God creates the fire. And it is He Who makes the light of guidance shine in people's hearts, and it is He Who lights the fire of love.¹³

Despair and Despondency

The feelings of downcast, disheartened and hopeless has destroyed our morale. It was only through moral strength which arose from belief, that with little power we emerged as victorious throughout East and West. We lost our morale as our countries resources have been plundered and destroyed by tyrannical foreigners who have made millions of Muslims their captives for the last four hundred years. Sadly, we suffer from despair and despondency. Said Nursi says, "and because of this despair, Muslims even suppose the indifference and despondency of others to be an excuse for their own laziness and say: 'What is it to me?' Saying, 'Everybody is contemptible, like me,' they abandon the courageousness of belief and fail to perform their Islamic duties."¹⁴ The sickness of despair has made us the victim of so much tyranny and is killing us, we shall strive to shatter it with the remedy provided in the Quran:

لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِنْ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ

Do not despair of God's mercy

(Al-Quran; 39:53).

It is also referred to in the Hadith, "Even if a thing is not wholly obtained, it should not be wholly left." Despondency is a most dreadful sickness of communities and nations as a cancer. It is a hindrance to achievement and is opposed to the truth of the Sacred Hadith, "I am with my bondsman who thinks favorably of Me." It is the attribute and excuse of cowards, the base and the impotent. It does not tell of Islamic courage. It cannot be the quality of a people like the Arabs in particular, who among mankind have been privileged with a fine character that is the

13 *Ibid.*

14 Said Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, p. 44.

cause of pride.¹⁵

Conclusion

Contemporary global helplessness and despondency can be overcome with abandoning the obduracy of rejecting the faith in Oneness of Allah and His guidance. Iman in Allah is the basis of a solid foundation for building up the edifice of life, which can ensure man's inner peace and tranquility and outer peace at home, society and world. Faith based actions only guarantee positive mindset and high moral and spiritual activism. It certainly generates a moderate mindset and material development is harmoniously related to moral and spiritual growth. Individual and society are not at cross roads. They are partners for a better world. The world cannot have a crisis of overindulgence, thus economic exploitation, ecological crisis and environmental pollution and division among haves and have-nots. Psychological peace can be achieved if there is spiritual peace. Economic stability with moral goals and considerations shall definitely bridge the gap in communities and societies.

Hence Said Nursi's approach is relevant so far as the need to offer convincing logical and self evident proofs for faith and faith-based life, cosmos and universe can yield a world-view which is Tauheedic and Akhirat-centric. This alone can connect man to God and to his own spirit and soul. This estrangement must end. Affinities developed and faith enlightened saints and seers have a vital role to play not only in rekindling the ever dwindling hope of hopeless but in helping correctly appropriate Divine messages, mercy and blessings for establishing strong united individuals and societies capable of pursuing God-centric lives, which shall guarantee better living here and there.

15 *Ibid.*

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