

Positive Action as a Way to Happiness of Society*

The first topic specified for our journal has been decided as “positive action”. The concept was defined by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in his Risale-i Nur as a method of service towards Iman and the Quran and the foundational principle of his work. He summarises this with the following explanation:-

Our duty is to implement positive action. It is not negative action. It is a service towards Belief solely done for God’s sake alone. It does not try to interfere with the work of God and His Decree. We are charged to endure all hardships with patience and thankfulness through positive faith service which results in protecting the public order.¹

According to the above statement; the main elements of positive action comprise of a level of belief (iman) where things are done solely for God’s sake, where God’s actions are not intervened with and thus accepted and submitted to, where public security is upheld, and an attitude which responds to problems and difficulties with both patience and gratitude amidst service towards God. Concerning this principle we can also include the fact that involvement in politics must be avoided, one should perform his work with fondness, controversy and disputes must be shunned as well as the habit of criticising others. Now, we will give a short summary of these rules as follows:-

1. *Serving God in the cause of Belief solely for His sake:* This is the most important aspect of “positive action”. Serving the cause of Belief and the Quran should solely be done for the sake of God alone, the person must not expect any material benefits and worldly rank. Moreover, those performing this service must not wait for the honor and approval of others or expect it from them - he must avoid the path of vanity and hypocrisy. Bediuzzaman, in respect of this issue has the following to say:-

This world is the realm of service, it is not the realm of recompense or reward. The wages, the fruits and the lights of good deeds are in the intermediate realm and the HereAfter. Those who want to bring the eternal fruits of the Here-After into this world and partake of them here - are essentially treating the Here-After as being subordinate to this world. It means that they are debasing its value.²

Just as the secret of sincerity strongly forbids me from using the service of faith and the Risale-i Nur as tools or means to gain lofty ranks both in this world and in the HereAfter; so does my aversion to allowing Holy Service to become a tool for my own comfort, pleasure and ease in this life.³

Moreover sincerity and adherence to the truth require that one should desire

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1 Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Emirdağ Lâhikası II*, 8. Baskı, 2011, İstanbul, RNK Neşriyat, s. 249.

2 Nursî, *Kastamonu Lâhikası*, 6. Baskı, 2011, İstanbul, RNK Neşriyat, ss. 134-5.

3 Nursî, *Emirdağ Lâhikası II*, s. 11.

the Muslims to benefit from anyone and at any place they can. To think “Let them take lessons from me so that I gain the reward” is a trick of the soul and the ego.⁴

2. Non-intervention towards God's actions: The most desired aspect pertaining to the service of religion is its becoming widespread and developed as quickly as possible. When such a condition is realised, this method of service is generally accepted as appropriate and correct. However, if a long time passes and such a service is not seen to become widespread and developed then such a method is perceived as being an aspect of the lack of such success. In respect of his own circumstances, Said Nursi knew that this method of service and understanding would not possibly produce a large success in a short period, however there is no other form of non-violent service carried out by the prophet's or which is in the teachings and in the spirit of the Quran.. At a time when the government was removing religion from the social life of the people in an organized fashion; rapidly spreading the principles of religious service was not regarded as possible without causing anarchy in the society.

As a result, Nursi frequently warned his students by saying “Our duty is that of service, and final outcome belongs to God. We are certainly obliged to carry out our task”⁵ Referring to this issue, Said Nursi mostly gives examples from Celaleddin-i Harzemsah and some prophets. While on the way to battle - Harzemsah said that he was commissioned to be in charge of his own jihad (struggle) and that the result of the war is dependent on the Will of God. Harzemsah fulfilled all the reasons for his victory and prayed. Yet Nursi reminds that prophet's had the most important task, however some prophet's only had a few believers. Regardless, this result did not downgrade them from the status of prophethood.

3. To maintain and preserve public order: Nursi's most strongly heeded element of service was that of a persons' protection of public order. In his words: “

The Risale-i Nur teaches the lesson of belief through investigation. It restrains its students from all types of harm. It imbues the hearts with righteousness. With the understanding of righteousness such a heart can no longer commit evil. For this reason, today – Risale-i Nur students throughout the country are the spiritual guardians of security and order. Thus far no righteous Nur student has been seen to do harmful action against the public order; rather Nur students are the spiritual helpers of those who police the nation.⁶

Nursi was prepared to sacrifice his life for the happiness of the nation and expressed this as follows:-

4 Nursi, *Lem'alar*, 13. Baskı, 2013, İstanbul, RNK Neşriyat, s. 171.

5 Nursi, *Emirdağ Lâhikası II*, s. 249.

6 Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz*, Çev. Abdülmecid Nursi, 6. Baskı, 2011, İstanbul, RNK Neşriyat, s. 252.

I am ready to sacrifice my life and my honor a thousand times in order to preserve public order and particularly for the happiness of the innocent children, the venerable aged, and helpless people who are sick as well as the poor – both in this world and in the Here-After.⁷

The most important way to protect public order is to keep away from brutishness and harshness. According to Nursi, regardless of the claims and requests of others - the path of the law must be adhered to. If he cannot possibly solve the issue via the way of the law then he does not resort to the use of force from within the country. In such a condition, he must be patient and realise that the right for justice is delayed until the Here-After.

According to Nursi:

It reacts strongly to attacks from outside. But not from those that attack from within. Against those, with positive action and via the secret of sincerity it works against the forces of spiritual destruction. Excluding another jihad, interior jihad is different.⁸

4. Keep away from political activity: Said Nursi was not against serving the nation via political institutions or the way of politics. However, because the foundation of Nursi's mission was to serve the Way Of Belief he considered an active involvement in politics at that time to eventually do harm to his cause. Essentially Nur students can enter politics but cannot do so in the name of serving Belief. If they wish to enter politics it should be on one's own account only.

Nursi gave some particular reasons for not entering politics under the name of Service to Belief (hizmet) and shunning it:

a. Regarding the issue of biased political partisanship and those involved in the discord of party politics:

During the years of Said Nursi's youth his relationship with politics was a good one, he summarised such a situation as follows: "A case worthy of notice: I once saw, as a result of biased partisanship, a pious scholar of religion going so far in his condemnation of another scholar with whose political opinions he disagreed as to imply that he was an unbeliever. He also praised with respect a dissembler who shared his own opinions. I was appalled at these evil results of political involvement. I said: "I take refuge with God from Satan and politics," and from that time on withdrew from politics."⁹

b. "Active involvement in politics may cause a danger of using Nur service as a tool for worldly benefits. Belief service and the truths of belief are above all

7 Nursî, *Emirdağ Lâhikası I*, s. 31.

8 Nursî, *Emirdağ Lâhikası II*, s. 250.

9 Nursî, *Mektûbat*, 13. Baskı, 2013, İstanbul, RNK Neşriyat, s. 286.

things in this universe; they neither be instruments of anything or contingent upon anything”¹⁰

c. Because of the misunderstandings that partisan politics can create; it may result in a constricted and limited path for the service of Belief. If a person enters politics in the name of service, those people who don't vote for that party many not complement or look approvingly to the Risale-i Nur. However,

To learn and acquire Belief does not involve looking on others with prejudice. There is no distinction between perceived friends or enemies that are studying the Risale. Yet, political prejudice harms the spirit of sincerity.¹¹

No side or group should cast aspersions on or hold back from the lights of the Qur'an that are held up, or from the teachings of the Qur'an, which are far superior to all political currents and partisanship and are exempt from and free of all their biased considerations. Only satans in human form or animals in human dress would do so since they imagine irreligion and atheism to be politics and support them.¹²

d. A Nur students' active and busy involvement in politics can result in the lowering of the value of the lofty truths carried by the Risale-i Nur. In this respect, Nursi says:- But if you ask why service of the Qur'an and belief prohibit me, I would say this: the truths of belief and the Qur'an are each like diamonds. If I were polluted by politics, the ordinary people who are easily deceived, would wonder about those diamonds I was holding:

Aren't they for political propaganda, to attract more supporters?" They might regard the diamonds as bits of common glass. Then, by being involved with politics I would be wronging the diamonds by as though reducing their value.¹³

All praise be to God, because I withdrew from politics, I did not reduce to the value of glass fragments the truths of the Qur'an, which are as precious as diamonds, and leave myself open to accusations of political propaganda.¹⁴

5. An attitude which responds to problems and difficulties with both patience and gratitude: Those who embark on the path of service in Belief can suddenly and unexpectedly be exposed to injustices. If such injustices are responded to in the same manner in which they were inflicted then this will can result in the disruption of public order and a serious setback for the service of Belief. Said Nursi advised his students to offer patience and gratitude in the face of anguish and hardship just as he did as a manifestation of "positive action":

Doing positive action, and not doing negative action and abstaining from in-

10 Nursî, *Kastamonu Lâhikası*, s. 138.

11 Nursî, *Emirdağ Lâhikası II*, s. 35.

12 Nursî, *Mektûbat*, s. 50.

13 Nursî, *Mektûbat*, s. 65.

14 Nursî, *Mektûbat*, s. 50.

terfering in God's Decree and in upholding the Truth - I reciprocated against those who worked against me by holding steadfast to patience and restraint. As Prophet Cercis and as those who had a big punishment in Bedr and Uhub, I welcomed with patience and acceptance.¹⁵

I advise my students to persevere for the sake of the Risale-i Nur in the face of hardship and oppression and for them to prevent the desire to cultivate even one iota of vengeance within their hearts.¹⁶

6. In his business he must act with love: Bediuzzaman gives great weight to the importance of this attitude stating its importance as follows:

We are the guardians of love, we have no time for enmity.¹⁷

Love, friendship, and affection is the bond that connects us - it is the character of Islam.¹⁸

The true skill is that when one sees his brother in a bad situation, he does not abandon him, but strengthens their brotherhood and tries to reform him. This is the mark of the loyal and faithful.¹⁹

Among us there can be no enduring partisanship or ill-feeling due to our friendship which concerns the HereAfter.²⁰

There are many groups that have appeared in service to the cause of Islam. In order not to sew discord among them, Nursi defines some principles that need to be followed as part of serving Belief with love and affection. It is possible to summarise those shortly as follows:

a. Each group must act with affection and love in their own works; they must not construct their actions on the basis of hatred of others, and should not be busy paying attention to the flaws and deficiencies of others.

b. Each group has a different position and this should not be of concern. Groups must become happy allies under the uniting roof of Islam, many reasons exist to implore people to join alliances with others.

c. Each groups may say "My way is the truth" or "My way is more beautiful". Groups who say those words do not employ the habit of bothering others or criticising others and as a result of this attitude they form alliances on the Way. However, no group can say "My way is the only truth" or "Only my way is beautiful". If such a thing is said, then injustice will be wrought and a prospect of unity with others will likely be disrupted.

15 Nursî, *Emirdağ Lâhikası II*, s. 249.

16 Nursî, *Emirdağ Lâhikası II*, ss. 83-4.

17 Nursî, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 11. Baskı, 2013, İstanbul, RNK Neşriyat, s. 60.

18 Nursî, *Uhuvvet Risalesi*, 2011, İstanbul, Sözlere Neşriyat, s. 43.

19 Nursî, *Şuâlar*, 12. Baskı, 2013, İstanbul, s. 324.

20 Nursî, *Şuâlar*, s. 500.

d. Each of those who unite with people who do righteousness; they should regard it as constituting God's assistance as well as a requirement of religious honour.

e. Those who commit errors and those who do injustice attack the collective personality of those who strive to do righteousness. It is thought that against such an assault, even the most strongest of individuals is insufficient; however - in the face of those who commit errors and perversions a strong collective personality must act to preserve and protect righteousness from the assaults of the West. Everybody's egoistic and incorrect manners of thinking as well as their competitiveness must be abandoned. Instead, the mission should solely be for the cause of God and together honor him.²¹

7. *Avoid issues of dispute and quarreling:* In a scientific sense all subjects are debatable. To research and investigate a disputed or controversial topic is the most important way to help solve it. However, if the investigation of the topic reaches the point of heated disputation over who is wrong and who is right then this will result in disunity and enmity. Therefore, Said Nursi avoids raising controversial issues or discussing such things in a heated or argumentative manner. This is because of the fact that he declares it as contrary to the principle of "positive action". Concerning this issue he had the following explanation:-

Since at this time irreligion and those who deviate from the path of truth - they take advantage of disunity, they confuse those who follow Islam and ruin the acts of worship - and against Iman there are strong forces, for sure against this awesome force the door of even small dispute and disunity must not be opened.²²

Regard it as your primary duty – one on which your state in the hereafter depends – to abandon internal dissension when attacked by an enemy from the outside, and thereby to deliver the people of truth from their abasement and humiliation! Practise the brotherhood, love and co-operation insistently enjoined by hundreds of Qur'anic verses and traditions of the Prophet (UWBP)! Establish with all of your powers a union with your fellows and brothers in religion that is stronger than the union of the worldly!²³

Finding ourselves in these strange and difficult times - we shall avoid arguing with those who have Belief but have strayed somewhat from the Straight Path of Truth, neither should we find reason to argue with the Christians who know God and accept the reality of the HereAfter. Our work and our sacred service necessitates this. And, Risale-i Nur students are obligated to act with tolerance in order not to put social or political barriers in front of the flourishing of the Risale-i Nur in the muslim world.²⁴

21 Nursî, *Lem'alar*, s. 170.

22 Nursî, *Emirdağ Lâhikası II*, s. 213.

23 Nursî, *Lem'alar*, s. 175.

24 Nursî, *Kastamonu Lâhikası*, s. 247.

8. *Abstaining from criticism:* Just as Bediuzzaman does not want points of dispute and disunity to arise, he also does not welcome the habit of criticising the faults and errors of people. Here the aim rather is to criticise those who intentionally do wrong. The criticism of such persons' is done in a manner where the person is dissuaded from bad thoughts and actions and thus counters rising hatred and hostility. Bediuzzaman also did not want politicians unnecessarily criticized (in respect of the lesser of two evils) and he made the following warning to his students:

My fellow Nur students and brothers of the HereAfter – those who regard somebody as a “Lesser of Evils” should not attack such a wretched persons' errors. Rather, they must continuously act with positively. Our mission does not include acting in a negative way because domestically such action is not allowed. Since some of the politicians do not inflict harm on the Risale-i Nur – they are a little tolerant and so let us look at this in terms of the “Lesser Evil”. To avoid greater harm do not harm them, but instead you should help and advise any of them.²⁵

Nursi's disapproval of criticism is actually confined to those whose intention is to criticise in a scornful or hateful manner. Bediuzzaman says that those who admit or who have been proven to commit injustices against the students of the Risale-i Nur will have their actions and injustices evaluated within the scope of the law. He also expressed that his students must not be like those who complain with the aim and intention of creating attrition with the government; stating as follows:- “But this Risale-i Nur is not for criticism of or conflict against the government, though it is likely against those particular officials in the government who wish me direct harm”²⁶

According to Nursi - such actions of unnecessary criticism lead to the breaking of the bonds of unity in society and disturbs the peace. It kills the spirit of co-operation and assistance. Therefore, one must not open the door of criticism:

Life is the fruit of unity and oneness. If harmony and unity disappear then so does the spiritual life”. “If solidarity is broken, the essence of the community is lost”. “Beware, do not open the door of criticism and dispute between each other!”²⁷

Additionally, Nursi never steered clear from constructive criticism and in order to prevent people falling into error and for correcting mistakes he advocated that form of criticism. Thus, Nursi warned his students to keep away from all types of conducts contrary to those which instill positive action and advised them to keep away from actions that create controversy and produce discord. At the same time,

25 Nursî, *Emirdağ Lâhikası II*, s. 217.

26 Nursî, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, s. 227.

27 Nursî, *Uhuvvet Risalesi*, ss. 45-6.

he said that he would be thankful of being notified of his own errors and faults, moreover as a requirement of friendship he elaborated as follows:

In the first place, the Risale-i Nur teaches us to have real sincerity and to restrain ones' egoistic tendencies and to be constantly aware of one's own personal faults in order to prevent venturing down the path of self-centredness. We are not demonstrating these as individuals, but instead we show the collective personality of the Risale-i Nur to the people of faith. We are thankful to those people who see and show our true faults (albeit those faults must be genuinely real) and we ask that God be pleased with them. If there is a scorpion near our neck and if we manage to escape from a bite, then we become very happy; we accept our faults and thus we can be truly thankful and appreciative. We do this on condition of avoiding obstinacy and animosity and not helping those who introduce negative innovations and those who stray from the Straight Path.²⁸

This is therefore a summary of Said Nursi's comments on "positive action". In this volume, the authors have examined some aspects of this issue in detail.

Apart from our peer-reviewed journals we have a useful and beneficial article that you can find in "The Thought", in "The Place" there is an important introduction of a place with respect to Said Nursi, in "The Meeting" there is a presentation of an academic meeting on Said Nursi and the Risale-i Nur, in "The Student" there is an introduction to one of the foremost students of Said Nursi, in "The Book" there is an introduction to important works that have been written about Said Nursi and the Nur community.

As well as the general topical issues we also sometimes include exceptional articles outside the subject-area. An example of the sort of articles excepted is one by Dr. Ahmet Yıldız titled "Conception of God-man vs the Exemplary Man as an Ethical Ideal: The Tradition of the Prophethood vs the Tradition of the Philosophy with special reference to Said Nursi".

The articles produced by the authors are composed entirely of their own views and their thoughts are not necessarily representing the position of The Istanbul Foundation For Science and Culture. In this article we have revealed many quotes from Said Nursi which summarise his views on "positive action". We would like you to look at the articles in this issue from this perspective.

Now we leave you with the articles and hope to meet you in the next issue with the topic of the "Miraculousness of the Quran".

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28 Nursi, *Denizli ve Emirdağ Lâhikaları*, (Mektup sırası 26), s. 93, Çevrimiçi: nur.gen.tr, 02.11.2015.