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**THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMIC
THOUGHT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
AND BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI**

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by Şükran Vahide

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Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Views on the Theory of Knowledge

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1.

Today on the threshold of the 21st century, Muslims find themselves in an age in which they are deafened by the clamour of the many new ideas, cultures and sciences. For due to their neglect and idleness, the spirit of criticism and bias which these bring with them have just about made the Muslims lose the ability to discriminate and judge between them and clarify their ideas. In the face of this fearful intellectual turmoil they have come close to being broken off from the roots of their own beliefs. The principal reason for this is the absence of a powerful 'theory of knowledge' which might overcome the obstacles and allow the possibility of responding to the doubts and scepticism of the age with unshakeable intellectual and moral principles.

A person seeking solutions for these difficulties in which Muslims find themselves has first of all to take note of the following questions: How is it possible for Muslims to acquire the knowledge necessary for true belief? How can they attain belief in and knowledge of God? Or to put it more clearly, how can they find a way from belief to knowledge of God, and from knowledge of God to belief?

Serious studies have been carried out answering these questions —from the

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Bediuzzaman and the Torch of Belief in the Midst of Denial; The Movement of History; The Ascension and the Risale-i Nur; Bediuzzaman and the Power of Knowledge.

advent of Islam to the present— numerous Islamic scholars and thinkers have produced hundreds of books, studies, and articles, and all of them in their own fields have discussed the conformity between the truths of Islam and the scientific facts discovered in the modern age in particular, and the close and profound inward tie between the truth of religious thought and the truth of man's thought, when untainted by falsehood and delusion.

Regretably, these endeavours to set forth Islamic thought, which no one doubts are worthy of commendation, are scattered and disparate; they have not been brought together; no tie has been made between their various strands; they have not produced definitions of knowledge which would provide Muslims with the key of "knowledge and belief" (*ma'rifat imāniya*) with which they might withstand the assaults this age, both intellectual assaults, and assaults on belief.

The cultural tendencies this age demand that thinkers set in order the terminology and details of thought within the framework of a single theory; these tendencies necessitate that thinkers come up with ideas that will tie the various strands together, bring them to a single way of knowledge, establishing mental connections that will make it possible to know the reality and basis of the ideas that will emerge as a result of this.

As is understood from the above, this age is an age of theories, equations, laws, symbols, and numbers, which emerge from the totality of human behaviour, knowledge, cultures, and sciences.

So long as intellectuals and thinkers continue to lose themselves in the welter of details, terminology, and particulars among ideas, the necessary effort will not be made to classify those disparate ideas within a complete and satisfactory line of knowledge.

2.

Bediuzzaman's endeavours in this field are reflected in the *Risale-i Nur*, and are some of the most successful. The treatises he wrote number one hundred and thirty in all. His works form an extensive, firm basis for 'the knowledge necessary for true faith.' The more we can absorb them, the more we may experience satisfaction of the both the mind and the conscience, and acquire the strength to counter the intellectual difficulties, and those of the conscience, that confront us in the modern world.

The 'knowledge and belief' that Bediuzzaman outlined shows that he had a good understanding of the following verse:

We shall show them Our signs in the furthest horizons and in themselves, so that it will become clear to them that this [Qur'an] is indeed the Truth.¹

Bediuzzaman discusses points in the light of this verse which in regard to the question of knowledge many other scholars have not noted. He considered at a basic level and made a threefold classification of knowledge:

i. Knowledge of the universe, which includes sciences concerning the heavens and earth, and the beings between them and under the earth.

1. Qur'an, 41:53.

ii. Knowledge of human beings, which includes man both individually and as humankind, and all matters related to man's outer self and inner self.

iii. Knowledge of God, which concerns the Divine existence, and His dominicality and acts connected with His creatures.

These three areas of knowledge necessitate one another, support one another, and prove one another. They form an inseparable whole, and there is no area of knowledge outside these.

My being a believer necessitates that I have knowledge (*'ārif*), because knowledge (*ma'rifa*) informs in powerful manner why I have to be a believer. Deepening and expanding knowledge, and righteousness, will take me to knowledge of God, the highest level of knowledge. As a human being, despite man's smallness in the universe, studying his situation, make-up, being, and conduct, and discovering the secrets of his inner self, will take me to knowledge of the Creator of man and all things.

3.

The above-mentioned three areas of knowledge are interconnected like the sides of an equilateral triangle. On one side is knowledge of the universe, on another is knowledge of man, while at their tip is knowledge of God. From whichever angle of the triangle we look, we can always look upwards to the peak, and we may look downwards from the peak to the bottom. This means that we may know man and the universe by way of belief, or may make belief the starting-point to know them. Whichever of them we take as our starting-point, we reach the conclusion that neither of the other two forms of knowledge is impossible. It is as though these three forms of knowledge make up a single form of knowledge, just like an equilateral triangle gives rise to a single mathematical form.

In questions of religion, culture, and science, we have to avoid separatist and isolationist views, for we have seen many who have fallen by the wayside due to them. Such points of view negate efforts to develop a satisfactory theory of knowledge.

A comprehensive, composite view is necessary to construct such knowledge. Fragmentation is opposed to the principle of composition, on which the universe is based. Fragmentation is destruction, not construction; while composition is not destructive but constructive. If we consider this more deeply, our tie with the universe arises from our being an inseparable part of it. It is unthinkable for us to remain outside the law of composition or depart from the relevant laws if we turn from multiplicity to unity, or from particulars to universals. On the contrary, when giving form to perceptions, knowledge, and ideas, we have to express our ideas within the framework of these laws.

4.

The Muslim thinker has to have the insight and capacity to absorb various points of knowledge, to digest them, and give them a universal unified form with his pen. There is a great difference between what a person writes who can

produce only limited solutions to intellectual problems which are specific to the past, and the writings of someone who has a conception of a mature civilization based on religious belief which he wants to situate in a new context, who wants to be saved from the sense of a petrified, lifeless civilization, to apply himself zealously to action, and to fathom the infinite depths of his being.

Firstly there is a half-way stage at which the thinker does not have comprehensive, all-embracing ideas, is not saved from particulars and details, and is preoccupied with individual parts rather than the whole.

At the second stage, however, he speaks with the tongue of an absolute universal civilization together with all its elements and parts, and does not fall when engaging in the contemplative thought of belief into the error of fragmentation and piecemeal thinking, which is considered to be superficial and a fault.

In his works, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi describes the belief which is part of Islamic civilization, as he discovered it when travelling through the outer and inner worlds. He pulls away the barriers separating the universe, man, and the Divine. He points out that these three elements start from the Muslim's conscience, continue with the knowledge of his intellect and spirit, and extend to the inner depths of all beings.

5.

In modern times, the strength to revive Islamic civilization has pretty well dwindled to nothing; its spirit is overcome with weariness; its senses are deadened; its veins are frozen; its mind and heart have sickened; its inside has been smothered with the fatal empty desires of the times; it has grown distant from the idea of civilization. In the face of the assaults of the deaf, soulless materialists, little remains of the vast civilized spirit of Muslims, who in the past never lost their freedom even if their bodies were imprisoned, and drew their strength from the energy of belief, which scattered light and guidance, —in the face of those petrifying, cruel assaults, the Muslim's spiritual energy, which struck lightning into minds and hearts, is experiencing ever-increasing pangs of death. These are manifested as gradual change in the course of time.

This pessimistic picture reflects the situation in which we find ourselves, and our lack of hope that we ourselves will be able to renew our civilization, and that a thinker of sufficient breadth and capacity will emerge who will penetrate the past and remove one by one all the factors pushing us outside history and time.

It is not difficult to understand the reasons for our decline at such a juncture: our problem is that there is a dichotomy in our minds between knowledge of God, knowledge of man, and the physical and natural sciences. It is therefore the duty of modern thinkers to tie together intellectually man and the universe on the one hand, and Divine will and the other two on the other, so as to arouse the Umma slumbering oblivious to civilization, and stir it into action.

6.

Our minds quite simply come to a standstill on reading Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. For he displayed the ability to present in wonderfully concise fashion his comprehensive ideas concerning the Divine, human, and universal realities; that is, he did not deal with only man and the universe and their truths, and ignore the Divine truths.

We may give a number of examples which give a hint of Bediuzzaman's comprehensive thought. For example, after quoting the Divine decree,

*"Glorify the Name of your Sustainer, the All-Highest, * Who has created, and given order and proportion, * And Who has determined [the nature of all things] and guided [them towards their fulfilment], (87:1-3) he says:*

"According to the meaning of this verse, all things, and especially living creatures, have been given a form and well-ordered proportions in accordance with wisdom as though they have emerged from a mould. And there are intricate extremities in those measured proportions for various purposes and uses. And the form of their clothes and their proportions, which they change throughout the periods of their lives, are each immaterial and well-ordered and measured, and are composed of the appointed events of their lives, again in a wise and purposeful fashion. This shows clearly that those innumerable creatures, whose forms and proportions have been planned in the sphere of determining of an All-Powerful One of Glory, an All-Wise One of Perfection, and who have been given forms fashioned in the workshop of Divine power, point to that Being's necessary existence and testify to His Unity and perfect power with endless tongues. Look at your own body and its members and the fruits of its intricate and complex places! See the perfect power within the perfect wisdom!"²

7.

On acquiring spiritual profundity, a Muslim continues to be an element of the universe, even if he passes outside time and history. If he does pass beyond time and history, he will find the opportunity to claim his true place, which he had lost. He will then be able to remove all the obstacles preventing him being part of the pulse of time and heart beat of history.

The fear of losing temporal and historical weight is only one of the many anxieties enfolding his spirit in the vacuum of non-existence in which he is imprisoned. Due to it, he will feel that he is again being poured again into the river of history in which nations, communities, and civilizations come face to face with death.

The knowledge that in the flux of history man is in a constant state of change, in both his inner being and outer being, confirms that he is connected with the dynamics and movement of the universe. For man is a part of it. To remain frozen in one state means that the change which draws out the potentialities concealed in the depths of his being has ceased. And it is change which reveals the best aspects of his life and his profoundest thought, and purest actions. He

2. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Sözler*, İstanbul, Sözlür Yayınevi 1980, 618 / *The Words* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Sözlür Publications 1992, 693.

should know that in this change of his, strength and weakness, expansion and contraction, help and sufficiency, are found together. He may then see clearly the contradictions and deficiencies in himself, and as a result acquire the strength to govern himself and control his rebelliousness.

"Know, O friend! Man's mind is so far-ranging, it cannot be contained. Yet it is so small, it is narrower than a needle. Yes, sometimes its turns within an atom, swims in a droplet, is imprisoned in a dot. And sometimes it takes the world in its hand like a water-melon, receives the universe as a guest and entertains it in the room of its thoughts. At other times, it oversteps its bounds to such a degree, and aspires to such heights, that it tries to see the Necessarily Existent One. But then too it shrinks to become an atom. Sometimes, too, it expands as far as the heavens. Then at others it enters a droplet. And sometimes it encompasses all creation."³

8.

Man is a being we might describe as being unique in the world, with thoughts and acts that cannot be explained by the laws of causality. Causality may have something to say about his physical being within the framework of particular laws and principles, but it is powerless to make any pronouncements on his inner being. Man's inner world is his true world, and it defies causality. This aspect of him is the motive power of his existence, and beyond the universe and nature, is the dynamo of his life. This power is the energy the prophets employed to transform their ideas into action. Such actions have no connection with causality whatsoever.

Certainly the discovery of the laws of causality and gravity opened up the way to great scientific conquests. Through them scientists were successful in solving many vital problems connected with the natural world. But we have to admit that with time, causality and the laws of gravity obstructed the mind and conscience in the fields of religious and spiritual thought, hampering mental and spiritual activity. It became impossible for all aspects of man, such as the Divine law of change, to be discussed or interpreted in the light of laws of nature.

The rigidity of causality and the pressure it brings to bear on the mind forces man's conscious and intuitive powers to cease functioning, —from the extremities of the world, where it is felt to an excessive degree, to man's infinite senses; and from things considered to be relative to the absolute, which with regard to thought and belief are unlimited to an extent that cannot be reckoned. After numerous difficulties and obstacles, the doors of learning would have been finally closed, which ensure that man grasps through his consciousness and intuition the beauty of many truths, but which the 'causal mind' is unable to perceive. The excesses of causality and its method have dominated numerous modern day thinkers; it has tried to take over man and his conscience, and has restricted all his activities to a narrow, closed emotional field. This narrow mould can only be smashed by those with powerful, purified souls.

Fearful, hesitant souls take refuge, again in bewildered fashion, in the network

3. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Mesnevi-yi Nâriye*, İstanbul, Sözlür Yayınevi 1980, 85.

of causes, for they are impotent to stand aloof from it, and therefore be saved. This is the basic reason for the observable waning of conquests by belief in the face of the dominance of the causality preached by Western thinkers and scholars. Because of the blunting of our insight, we are regrettably unaware that under the veil of causality they want to distance us from our faith as far as they can, and submerge us in misguidance.

Bediuzzaman analyzes the 'causal mind,' criticizing it mercilessly:

"Similarly, if each being is ascribed directly to the Single and Eternally Besought One, everything necessary for each being can be conveyed to it through a connection and manifestation with an ease and facility that is at the level of necessity. If the connection is severed and each being reverts from its position as an official to being without duties, and is left to Nature and its own devices, it then becomes necessary to suppose that, with a hundred thousand difficulties and obstacles that reach the degree of impossibility, blind Nature possesses within it the power and wisdom to create and administer the universe so that it might bring into existence the wonderful machine of the being of an animate creature like a fly, which is a tiny index of the universe. This is impossible not just once but thousands of times over."⁴

9.

I want to stress that here Bediuzzaman is criticizing severely the causal understanding which intentionally or unintentionally attributes some of the attributes of dominicality, with respect to creation, to causes. Essentially, in the view of causality, the universe is a citadel in which one may take refuge. It has fastened itself to it, and tried to remove all the causes that would sever man from it. While its basis in fact consists of miraculous Divine acts beyond the universe, which have been included in the world of existence.

From the point of view of some of its rules connected with life, a believer's faith does not prevent him relying on causality. On the other hand, this reliance does not prevent him saving his ideas connected with belief from the cage of causes and smashing its stout walls. This field of action stretches as far as posterity in a way that includes listening to messages addressing the spirit and conscience which causality cannot reach and so suffices without them.

Man may open his embrace to that limitless, eternal world, accepting it with a voracious consciousness. For as Bediuzzaman said, the veil of this world will be folded back by Divine will in response to the entreaties man makes verbally and by state in accordance with his essential nature. And just as this applies to all living creatures, which will be transposed from death to the realm of life, so it will be bestowed on man after death, as a mark of dignity and familiarity.

Bediuzzaman does not observe this dense Manifest World with a view that has lost the power of its spiritual percipience and therefore cannot penetrate the World of the Unseen beyond the universe; he sees it as an altogether miraculous tableau; it has been inscribed by an All-Powerful Creator and Giver of Form and created in the most excellent way. But this Manifest World is a shadow, a hint, a

4. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Lem'alar*, Sözlür Yayınevi 1986, 175-6 / *The Flashes Collection* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Sözlür Publications 1995, 240.)

sign; it is the shadow and sample of an infinite, eternal world which is more beautiful, sacred, and wondrous, and which awaits the captivated, yearning gazes of believers.

We possess an innate familiarity with, and longing to observe, beauty, and at the same time feel attracted towards those who bear this quality. Essentially, beauty itself inspires us with enthusiasm and pleasure. Purity of soul is necessary for the yearning observers who are captivated by beauty and afford it its worth, and purify their senses and emotions through it.

Similarly, the one possessing beauty wants always to see it and display it. And this demands the existence of the hereafter. For a permanent beauty is not content with a passing, temporary admirer. It wants the admirer's permanence, and this requires the hereafter.

Similarly, as all His actions indicate, this world's owner possesses vast munificence, and has endless treasures like the suns spreading light and effulgence and trees bearing fruits. This infinite munificence and boundless wealth necessitate an eternal feasting-place and the permanent existence of those needy for them. For infinite generosity and wondrous munificence want always to bestow favours and bounties. And this necessitates the permanent existence of those needy and grateful for the bounty and bestowal.⁵

10.

It is in truth unfortunate if the believer's soul sets up barriers between the Divine truths and those of the universe and man, and the truths of belief and Divine Unity. The mental element based on the formation of a compound of Divine Unity around a single theory of knowledge is an element sufficiently powerful to cause vast impotence, and the expending of energy in the matter of the various particulars of belief. This situation destroys the courage of ordinary Muslims, so that they do not attempt any experiment concerning belief which they have not previously undertaken.

Thus, Bediuzzaman made it a condition for himself that he would assist those whose capacity for belief had not yet been awakened and who did not yet perceive Divine Unity, and did not carry out the religious obligations. By means of his writings, he urged and encouraged them to enter the bounds of belief in God and knowledge of God, and he opened up the way for a *jihad* which would bring this about. And while doing this, he did not fail to set up barriers between these and means of misguidance and denial.

The *jihad* that Muslims would wage to open up this way of knowledge, would be established —as Bediuzzaman proposed— on *jihad* against the things they consider to be abhorrent, such as disbelief, vice, and sin. For in order to carry out the *jihad* for the things they loved, they had first to fight against those things that were abhorrent. Precipitateness on this way meant success would elude them. Since they would try to overcome all the stages that had to be traversed in one go, first of all signs of weariness would appear; without experiencing the period

5. *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 37.

of youth and vitality, they would be overcome by old age and its difficulties, and they would gradually lose the power of belief without reaching their goal. Such people would resemble the person God's Messenger (Upon whom be blessings and peace) described, who overloaded his donkey and so lost both his load and the donkey.

A Risale-i Nur student wrote the following about belief supported by knowledge of God and the knowledge of God that receives support from belief:

"I felt a terrible emptiness of spirit, and while searching for a book to read, came across the Risale-i Nur. When I started to read it, I could not put it down. I felt that it was answering the great need of my heart. I found in it the reasoned proofs of belief which dispelled doubts about both belief and science. I was thus delivered from the doubts that had been troubling me. I understood from this that the Risale-i Nur had been written for us, that is, the people of this age."⁶

11.

A person does not fall into the pit of atheism and non-existence for only one reason, besides the sickness of egotism. That illness causes the sources of the certainty and consciousness of the conscience behind the world of the senses to dry up. A dense and coarse feeling comes to dominate the soul, and the person starts to deny the truths of which he is aware beyond this world. He will say that the world is nothing more than "formation." Not going beyond this standpoint, having lost both himself and his clarity of vision, he will see he is being resurrected from a new viewpoint. He will experience mental upheaval. There will be instability in his understanding, and he will start slowly to understand the mysteries of existence, and its meaning and purposes, which he previously thought were confined to death and extinction. He will be impotent to observe the extraordinary outflow of meaning from the world beyond the universe. He will see that all beings are above the meanings of which they are in need. In this way, meaning has filled the universe and captured the world of existence. There will be meaninglessness only in the imaginations of those who are sick and fancy themselves, and as a result load on themselves their overwhelming responsibility towards themselves, the universe, and life, and towards the Creator of themselves, the universe, and life.

If for some of them the fear of death and transience induces belief, it will drive them to investigate all the ways taking them to eternity and immortality. Some of them will try to suppress these fears, masking them with some nihilistic atheistic ideas, and will suppose death is where life is concluded and is an end. They will not grasp the meaning of death with their abbreviated intellects. But those who do come to their senses with a spectacular awakening, will give up their false beliefs and turn to religion, in which they can find the answers to all the problems and difficulties that float round their minds.

This is the pitiful state of atheists. As stated in the passage by a Risale-i Nur student quoted above, the true reason for the emptiness and loneliness experienced in life arises from this.

6. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Şualar*, İstanbul, Çeltut Matbaası 1960, 461.

12.

When individuals, communities, and peoples reflect in the mind and conscience in a composite way, from the outset they have to be firmly attached to well-founded principles of civilization so that they may achieve their goals. If, in order to become reacquainted with the roots that nourish the tree of belief which they possess, and preserve it from death and ultimate dispersal, they turn to their psychological history, it will be possible for them to choose the most suitable language of inviting those they address, who heed and understand them.

The historical compound is for the Muslim like an Islamic city in his psychological and mental make-up. Through it, he becomes like an element of unity stretching from pre-eternity to post-eternity within the concept of Qur'anic time. This concept is an element of unity in Divine knowledge, and so it will continue.

Just like mountains, which prevent the swelling, breaking sea overrunning the land and flooding the valleys, the Qur'an stretches in a sublime unbroken unity from pre-eternity to post-eternity.

The Qur'an speaks of things that have been as though they were happening today and are happening and will continue to happen. It speaks too of things that will happen as though they were happening today. When giving news of the Worlds of the Unseen and the Manifest World, it is as though the Unseen is like the Manifest, and the Manifest like the Unseen. As though they were not two different worlds, but a united whole.

It is because of this that when we look at the line of knowledge in Bediuzzaman's works, we see that the plurality of the two worlds, that is, this world and the hereafter, has been removed. The worldly realm is merely a door opening onto the hereafter; there is nothing to prevent one entering the latter other than imaginary and subjective impediments. When the hereafter, our last stop, assumes its form, those things we do not know about the two miraculous worlds will become as clear as daylight.

Qur'anic Islam demands that the two worlds are embraced together and that the bounds of knowledge are expanded so as to include the two. When worldly life is contained in such an understanding, and everything that is apparently relative, limited, and transitory is observed from above, certain truths become apparent. Through the light of the Qur'an, it may afford an infinity, unlimitedness, and eternity to things that are transitory, limited, and relative. In this way, thanks to belief, the Muslims transform their own worlds into a small Paradies without reaching the Greater Paradise. Bediuzzaman alludes to the truth as follows:

"Life has two faces, one black—it looks to this world, and the another transparent, which looks to the hereafter. The soul inclines to its black face, and wants eternal happiness, which comprises its transparent face."⁷

Man's soul was created with a love of immortality and eternity; it desires these earnestly and longingly. It embraces passionately those things it imagines possess an aspect of permanence. It seeks to attribute immortality to the world

7. *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 181.

and the things in it that afford it pleasure. Bediuzzaman mentions this fact, which is accordance with the nature of things:

"Know, O friend! The greatest desire of the articulate soul is permanence and immortality. In fact, it can receive no pleasure if it does not deceive itself with imaginary permanence..."⁸

13.

Good tidings of the World of the Unseen have been given by all religions, together with its eternity and permanence; so too the Manifest World has a permanence and eternity, even if it is only allusive and shadowy. Relations exist between the two worlds and an interconnectedness, and in the universe, which is the Manifest World are mirrors of the vast world of eternity which reflect some of the tableaux of Beauty and Glory and display its lights and colours. For through its qualities, beauty shows symbolically some of the meanings of eternal, sacred beauty.

Bediuzzaman is of the view that immortality continuously conquers transience. In so far as they manifest immortality, things have value, otherwise they are doomed to death and extinction. Having discussed many aspects of this subject, he states the following truth, which establishes that transience is only superficial and subjective:

"...This world was not created as an eternal abode. It is only a hostel and waiting-room for the creatures to gather who are invited to the Abode of Peace of Almighty God, which will last for all eternity...

"For example, take a look at this rose created by Pre-Eternal Power; meanings of it to the number of minds that behold it will persist, just as with God's permission a million samples of a spoken word persist in ears, and on paper, and in books, even though the word itself is apparently immediately lost.

"Likewise, the rose withers and dies after a brief span as soon as its duty is complete, but its meanings endure in the memories of all the people who have seen it, and its form in its seeds, pregnant with its progeny. That is to say, it is as though both the seeds of the rose and the memories are cameras recording and preserving the flower's form, adornment, and dwelling-place, and each is a dwelling for its immortality."⁹

Here, Bediuzzaman is forcing us to understand a boundless arena which encompasses the World of the Unseen, and stirring into action the potentiality that everyone possesses to reach out to eternity from this beautiful world, and to advance as far as those elevated, luminous expanses of belief. He wants us to be saved from the emotional strains of the present, which limit our mental and spiritual horizons. He fires us with enthusiasm so that the springs of the conscience will continue to burn with passion for immortality.

Man is condemned to live between two worlds of the Unseen. These are the past and the future. For this reason, there is no purpose in the changes of something if it is repeated in the sliver of time in which man lives. The present leaves

8. *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 168.

9. *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 40.

no trace of it and absorbs all the water of its existence. He has to summon all his strength therefore, in order to penetrate the present, plunge into the depths of history of the past, and turn to the unseen future. For in the event of the present on the one hand not supporting the foundations of the past, and on the other, not stretching out its hands to the future, it will be superficial, without meaning and value, and subject to being dispersed and scattered.

In its third dimension, history dressed man in the best possible garment, the 'I', in order to preserve his form and his being from transience and death. With its awesome energy, man's 'I' or ego is a hidden power filling all times with the will to bring about events.

There are powerful relations in respect of knowledge between man's ego and the ego of time or history, which bind their feelings to one another. Their pulses are the same; one hears immediately the cries of the other. In order to realize his own self and discover the essence within him, man has to confront himself with 'the historical act.' He will thus find himself assistance within history, and the world will be swathed in a shadow-like, imaginary garment of eternity.

By contrast, 'the insight of history' affords man sufficient strength to stir into action any idle time, and the energy to perpetuate any action. It guarantees the continued revolution of the wheel of time. Thus, there can be no history without man, and no man without history. If we look closely at history and plunge into its depths, we reach the conclusion that its events did not occur only at man's hand. Just as Bediuzzaman said, both man's hand and the hand of Divine power (or Determining) are present in all events.¹⁰

The human acts within historical events are merely a veil concealing the acts of Divine Determining and cosmic acts.

Human will cannot pass directly from the potential within himself to the actual in history outside himself. But if it is delivered from the pressure of centres of power opposite to it and opposed to it, dominate them completely and subdue them, then it may pass from the potential to the actual in history. There is therefore the condition of not opposing the will of the cosmos, which is represented by its laws and principles. For they cannot be opposed or conquered. In addition to all these, it has also to be in conformity with the will of Divine Determining, which is above all wills.

According to Bediuzzaman's theory of knowledge, Divine will, cosmic will, and man's will came together in history. Just as they came together in connection with man and his knowledge.

14.

This world contains sufficient energy to fill all the emptiness of infinite time and space. Similarly, the world of man's psyche is abounding in sufficient energy of will to fill all history and time.

The marks of will are reflection, intuition, and consciousness, which are formed in the world of the psyche, of its loftiest parts and most elevated

10. See, *Kastamonu Lahikası*.

elements. Just as no conceptual thought can comprehend these, so they cannot be measured by instruments, brought closer by lenses, or balanced on scales; they cannot be investigated by methodical scientific study.

The eye most certainly cannot see what insight sees. The things our senses perceive do not resemble what our consciousness perceives. The personality may be subject to comparison; it is not something that cannot be measured and compared. We can see our own persons as refuges for elevated meanings, pertaining both to the Unseen worlds and the Manifest World. For sure we inhabit our beings, but we cannot perceive the dimensions of the meanings outside the degree that the names recall to us.

The names are signs or symbols of the meanings, and keys to them. They afford forms to the truths, which are of a sensual or spiritual nature. They express the distinguishing characteristics the being possesses in relation to other beings, and that a truth possesses relatively to other truths.

A thing or a meaning that has no name remains vague and shadowy. Such a thing cannot exist in our minds; it cannot exist at all. It is suspended between existence and non-existence until it is defined through a name. Hopefully, the following verse alludes to this truth: "*He taught Adam the Names, all of them.*"¹¹ That is, man had knowledge of the forms of things before the first man was sent down to the earth. And he acquired the ability to distinguish their existence and use the names, which express ideas and meanings, in so far as they were revealed to him.

The first stage of knowledge of the universe necessitates obtaining the meanings of beings, which the names allude to, and are learnt through experiment and experience.

The first stage of knowledge of God necessitates observing the Divine Names which are manifested in the universe, in man, and in life, and discovering their activity and effects. In this way, man will encounter the cosmic and Divine truths in the world of the Names. We may see what Bediuzzaman says on this subject:

"... Each creature in the book of Pre-Eternal Power points to itself in one respect and to the extent of its own body, but it points to the Pre-Eternal Inscraper in numerous ways; it recites a lengthy ode out of the Names manifested on it."¹²

15.

Without doubt, Bediuzzaman set in order these two armies of the spirit which embrace the whole of existence, and directed them forcefully towards the lengthy inner process of perfection. He realized this through a comprehensive theory embracing the experiences of belief, and the cosmic, human, and Divine truths. Also, feeling himself responsible for those who had deviated into misguidance within those meanings and were suffering ghastly torments in the depths of their egos, he held out a helping hand to them, to save them from the prison of the blind soul, and open up a way for them to again attain to belief. He

11. Qur'an, 2:21.

12. *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 216.

did not leave them to their own devices; by dispelling their doubts, the true reason for their bewilderment and hopelessness, he raised up their souls, which resembled black spots plunging the whole world into darkness, to being light-filled light-scattering points. In this way, such people developed the certainty that takes one to the profoundest meanings. In the face of all the assaults which open up the way to mental and spiritual sterility, they took refuge in the citadel of the world of Divine unity and knowledge.

When the ego ceases being the source of blindness and darkness and becomes a light-scattering centre relying on the Divine Name of Light, it begins to discover even the invisible laws of life, the universe, and man; expending great effort, the person easily understands scarcely perceptible truths. In this way, thought remains bound to his being, and is continuously nourished. Here, we can understand clearly why Bediuzzaman gave the name of *Risale-i Nur* to the works he wrote, indicating the Divine Name of Light, which ensures the emergence of sun-like truths and the illumination of beings.

If reality is blended with Divine Beauty and Glory, a work is produced out of the majesty and awesomeness of Glory and the familiar Beauty. Man, whose origin is earth, turns his face to these two truths and speaks of them. He will either crumple up before the Glory or go into ecstasy before the Beauty. As a mercy to man, he can only allude to those truths. If they are veiled, he may arrive at them only allusively and symbolically. He gives his mind and imagination free rein to decipher the allusions behind them. He researches the truths behind the obscure veils.

The 'obscure matters' in Qur'anic verses and Hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH) may be seen from this point of view. Just as there 'obscure' matters and 'incontestable' matters in the Qur'an, so there are in Hadiths, as Bediuzzaman stated. The Hadiths in particular allude to circumstances that were to occur in the future in the world at large and in the Umma in particular. Things like the Mahdi and Dajjal, the Coming of Christ at the end of time and his destroying the cross and killing the pig, and other signs of the last times and obscure events.

If for whatever reason religious thought weakens and starts to decline and dry up, parallel to this, the power of conceptual thought weakens and is lost. When this happens, people lose the ability to discover the principles which the above-mentioned two truths allude to, as a result of which they adhere to the apparent meanings of the sacred texts, the literal rather than the intended meanings; comprehension diminishes, there are errors in understanding, ideas are restricted to particular subjects, and thought narrows. Due to emphasis on the literal, external meaning, people become unable to penetrate to the profundities; they deviate into the emotional idolatry that Islam rejects utterly; even, exegesis of the aims and meanings of the revealed text are confined to a framework of specified rules.

Bediuzzaman criticized the literal method of exegesis of the sacred texts, and for the purpose of the knowledge of belief, employed his own method to expound many Hadiths about the future, which consists of reaching the truth by means of signs and indications. This method is indeed appropriate in this field, for it would not be right if all Muslims were to interpret these directly according to their own comprehension. However, it is permissible for those qualified to

employ reason to decipher these texts and their aims and purposes. For numerous truths, including material ones, lie concealed beneath the allusive statements. Powerful encouragement and recommendations are directed to understanding these, to taxing the brain in order to rend the veils concealing them, to reveal the hidden meanings, and discover the hidden meanings in the dry allusions, in order to confront the assaults at Islam in this field.

Both religious and scientific currents flow through man's psyche in a single deep channel. This channel feels love for knowledge, enmity towards ignorance, and curiosity about concealed truths. However different are these two ways, both currents flowing in a single channel means that they flow together into the sea of knowledge of God, which is the final aim of all knowledge.

Bediuzzaman was of the opinion that the day was close when the different worlds of knowledge would meet and combine to form a single world of knowledge, which with its light would demolish the walls between the universe, life, and man. And so, after this century, which has been called "the age of European enlightenment," in the abandoned dwelling of the believers' spirits, weary and suffering doubts, they would be reunited with science. They would leave the journey they have been pursuing ignorantly and beset by doubts through the world from minute particles to the galaxies; deepening their belief and in profound awe and humility, they would affirm the sacred truth of the verse "*those of His servants who fear God most are those with knowledge.*"

To Conclude:

Although in respect of a theory of knowledge and belief, Bediuzzaman defined a general approach and broad limits, he did not claim that the conclusion he reached was perfect or that his theory could not be further developed or added to. For it was his opinion that it was impossible to restrict the human mind within specific limits. At the same time, he directed his gifted students and readers to develop his theory or to add to it in a way that would strengthen and further establish it.

Nevertheless, Bediuzzaman did not utilize all his knowledge. For no one could realize such a thing. There is speech of sufficient strength to carry him in this ocean of silence. The flashes and gleams of truth have the most brilliant clarity in this silence, between those closed lips, unfolding to the greatest degree. If those truths had emerged from those lips, they would have been contained by phrases and sentences. He said he was nothing other than someone bringing the truths of belief to Muslims, who were in expectation for them. But he was at the same time a discoverer and pioneer. Bediuzzaman addressed those who read his writings:

"Friend! I am digging around something big with these confused writings of mine. But have I been able to discover it, I don't know? Or perhaps it will unfold later. Or it will become clear finally, and I am only opening up a way to its discovery."¹³

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13. *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 122.