

Said Nursi's *Tawhīd*-Centric Worldview and Inner Peace

Zuleyha Keskin

Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation
Charles Sturt University, NSW
Australia

A God-centric worldview is imperative for a life of inner peace according to Said Nursi (d. 1960), a twentieth century Muslim scholar. The prime focus of a God-centric worldview is how life and events are interpreted and what meaning is given to those events. Throughout his writings, Nursi puts great emphasis on the metaphysical dimension of the universe, so much so that it is the basis of his worldview. This worldview could be pinned down to the Qur'ānic verse: "Who has created everything in the best way." According to Nursi, this verse expresses how humankind should view the world as an abode of goodness and beauty outright or through the results it produces. This perspective of life and events transforms the worldview of an individual, leading to a state of inner peace since the individual is now able to give meaning to all life and events in a way that satisfies the heart and mind.

A tawhīd-centric worldview is imperative for a life of inner peace according to Nursi. The prime focus of a tawhīd-centric worldview is how life and events are interpreted and the meaning given to those events. This worldview could be pinned down to the Qur'ānic verse: 'Who has created everything in the best way' (32:7). According to Nursi, this verse expresses how the world should be viewed as an abode of goodness and beauty. Nursi elaborates on this worldview, by emphasising the need to look at life as other indicative (mānā-yīharfī). Nursi explains that, according to the Qur'ānic view, everything in the universe is mānā-yīharfī; it is a mirror to make known the Divine names and attributes of God so that the tawhīd concept is better realised in one's life. This perspective of life and events transforms one's worldview. Such a positive transformation, leads to a state of inner peace as the individual is now able to give meaning to life and events in a way that satisfies the heart and mind.

Keywords: Said Nursi, Islamic spirituality, inner peace, *tawhīd*, Risale-i Nur.

Introduction

Inner peace is a state desired by the natural human disposition. Attaining it has been the ambition of both the religious and irreligious leading to various techniques and methods being put forward to attain inner peace. Muslim scholars are not exempt from posing a method to attaining inner peace. Said Nursi, a twentieth century Muslim scholar, would be one of those Muslim scholars strongly argues that Islam provides a worldview which would help to attain a state of inner peace. Throughout his work, *Risale-i Nur Collection* (Treatise of Light)¹, Nursi provides the details of a worldview in line with the Islamic teachings, which can help one to attain inner peace. This worldview gives meaning to a world of suffering and oppression while emphasising the need to stay firm in one's belief. To better appreciate Nursi's writings, it is important to understand his context. Nursi lived at a time of criticism, positivistic scientism and radical secularism (Özervarli 2010), he felt the effects of these ideologies on the worldview of Muslims. The emerging anti-religious scientific understandings that Muslims were exposed to were leading to secular, materialistic and even atheistic thinking (Hermansen 2008), putting the faith of Muslims at risk. The seeds of atheistic thinking were planted by intellectuals who argued that God cannot exist if there is so much suffering, because if God existed, he would not allow suffering to take place. Such a stance, known as 'protest atheism' (McMichael 2006), denies the existence of God in protest for the suffering and evil that exists in the world.² These challenges that confronted Nursi with regards to belief are still prevalent in the world today, making his arguments highly relevant to the current climate.

¹*Risale-i Nur Collection* is a 6,000 page Qur'ānic commentary (*tafsīr*). While the *Risale-i Nur* is a *tafsīr*, it is not the traditional type of *tafsīr*. According to Nursi, there are two types of *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān: those that expound on the words of the Qur'ān (*lafzi*) and those that focus on the spiritual meaning of the Qur'ān (*manawi*). While more than 350,000 *lafzi tafsīrs* have been written, *manawi tafsīrs* are much more of a rarity. The *Risale-i Nur* is believed to be a *manawi tafsīr*.

² McMichael quotes Walter Kasper's other categories of modern atheism: humanistic atheism denies God for the sake of humanity, especially for the sake of human freedom, and indifferent atheism is a complete lack of regard for the questions posed by religion.

At a time when belief was challenged, Nursi,³ was seeking to highlight the benefits of having belief which included ‘happiness in this life and the hereafter.’ That is, a state of inner peace can be experienced if one had the right perspective, the tawhid-centric worldview, which stemmed from belief in God. Ultimately, one would attain inner peace when they ‘give meaning to life and events in a way that satisfies the heart and mind’ (Keskin 2016, 24) through the lens of *tawhīd* (oneness of God) such that everything in the universe is decoded through the names of God. Thus at the core of this notion is the belief in one God. Nursi’s views on the matter can be summarised through his own words as follows: Be certain of this, that the highest aim of creation and its most important result are belief in God (*iman-i billah*). And the most exalted rank in humanity and its highest degree are the knowledge of God (*marifatullah*) contained within belief in God. And the most radiant happiness and sweetest bounty for jinn and human beings are the love of God (*muhabbatullah*) contained within the knowledge of God. And the purest joy for the human spirit and the sheerest delight for man’s heart are the rapture of the spirit (*lazzat-i ruhaniya*) contained within the love of God. Indeed, all true happiness, pure joy, sweet bounties, and untroubled pleasure lie in knowledge of God and love of God; they cannot exist without them (Nursi 2001, 265).

According to Nursi, a natural progression to believing in God should be knowledge of God, which then leads to love of God. In other words, one’s joy and happiness is dependent on one’s knowledge and love of God that is founded on belief in God. One who has these ‘two life-sweetening realities’ of knowledge and love of God, will be at peace in this life, no matter what experiences are encountered. ‘But, he who lacks them, even if he owns the whole world, cannot find peace within himself and outside, because without faith and knowledge, he feels spiritually and physically weak, vulnerable and helpless’ (Kuşpınar 2000, 46).

This knowledge and love of God then projects into one’s worldview. The Qur’ānic verse which is central to the worldview created by belief in the one God is: ‘Who has created everything in the best way’ (Qur’an 32:7). According to Nursi, this verse expresses how humankind should view the world as an abode of goodness. He expands on this verse as follows; In everything, even the things which appear to be the most ugly, there is an aspect of true beauty. Yes, everything in the universe, every event, is either in itself beautiful, which is called ‘essential beauty,’ or it is beautiful in regard to its results, which is called ‘relative beauty’ (Nursi 1993, 240).

To be able to see the beauty in everything, perspective is important, a tawhid-centric perspective which leads to a tawhid-centric worldview. This article will first explore the perspective by which one should view life and events, focusing on the two terms used by Nursi; meaning by the letter (*mānā-yīharfī*), meaning by the word (*mānā-yīismī*) to explain how the two different perspectives can drastically change the meaning given to life and events. This will be followed by an analysis of suffering in the context of Quran and hadith which will be followed by Nursi’s understanding of it. Finally, a real example of suffering will be provided, natural disasters, with an analysis of Nursi’s response to the destruction, suffering and pain caused by natural disasters.

Mānā-yīHarfī Versus Mānā-yīIsmī

In relation to perspective, in *Mathnawi al-Nuriya* (Seedbed of the Light), Nursi makes a significant proclamation about his lifetime learnings where he explains that during the forty years of his life and thirty years of study, he has only learnt four words or concepts. They are meaning by the letter (*mānā-yīharfī*), meaning by the word (*mānā-yīismī*), intention (*niyyah*) and viewpoint (*nazar*) (Nursi 2003). Each of these concepts are significant to this discussion, but the first two are of particular importance and therefore will be discussed extensively. The third concept, intention, is also a very important principle in Islam as it ‘transforms our everyday, ordinary acts into acts of worship’ (2003, 68), according to Nursi. The last concept, viewpoint, is what this article is seeking to demonstrate; how life and events should be interpreted so that everything is connected back to God. It is about seeing beyond the material causes and meanings so they are perceived in terms of or on account of God to produce knowledge of God (Nursi 2003).

Mānā-yīismī, meaning by the word, is known as the self-referential or nominal meaning of things. It is also described as the physical aspect of a thing that looks to itself. *Mānā-yīharfī*, meaning by the letter, is known as the other indicative meaning of things. It is also described as the metaphysical aspect of a thing that looks to its Creator. These two concepts, which have originated with Nursi, are profound and comprehensive outlooks for understanding the world (Kuşpınar 2000). It was a major finding by Nursi during his intense inner search as the New Said was emerging following World War One.

³Ultimately, Nursi’s objective was to strengthen the foundations of belief – belief in God, belief in the hereafter and belief in the unseen realm since these would significantly affect one’s worldview. Thus, Nursi expends extensive time in his work to prove the existence of God and the existence of life in the hereafter. It is outside the scope of this article to discuss this aspect of Nursi’s work, however, when Nursi describes the Islamic worldview, he does so with absolute conviction that God exists and absolute certainty that there will be life in the hereafter. Furthermore, not only does God exist, but he is a wise, compassionate, merciful and just God. Therefore, Nursi’s explanation of suffering and evil needs to be understood in this context.

Not only are these two concepts mentioned in *al-Mathnawi al-Nuriyya*, but ‘it is one of the pivotal concepts of the *Risale-i Nur*’ (Vahide 2008, 11). Nursi (1999, 351-352) states: Every creature has two aspects: one concerning itself and its attributes, and the other pointing to its Creator and His Names manifested on it. The second aspect is more comprehensive.

Every letter in a book points to itself only as a letter, while in the book it points to and describes its author in many ways. In the same way, every creature, which is a letter from the book of Divine Power, points to itself and its apparent existence to the extent of its size, while pointing to its Eternal Designer in many respects, and sings the praises of His Names manifested on it.

On another occasion, Nursi elaborates on the difference between *mānā-yīismī* and *mānā-yīharfī* through the mirror analogy (Nursi 1994). He explains, if you are to look at the mirror there are two possible primary focuses: you would either look at the mirror and primarily focus on the glass, whereby the reflection becomes secondary, or you would primarily focus on the image reflected within the mirror, whereby the mirror becomes secondary. Nursi explains that objects and events should be viewed as described in the second option so the mirror is *mānā-yīharfī* and is other indicative. That is, the mirror is looked at for a meaning other than itself, which is the reflection. The actual reflection then becomes the *mānā-yīismī*, which means the reflection is indicating a meaning in itself. Nursi explains that, according to the Qur’ānic view, everything in the universe is *mānā-yīharfī* (other indicative); it is a mirror to make known the Divine names and attributes of God. This perspective of the world and events that take place within it, transform the worldview of an individual.

This worldview is achieved through faith, according to Nursi, enabling one to transcend the boundaries of the material world, where everything is considered in its own right as a separate entity, and instead see the world through a spiritual lens, which connects everything to each other and to God. A worldview where each entity and event acts as a letter that tells of a greater story of creation and describes the Creator through the names and attributes of God. According to Nursi, the *harfī* perception is the most accurate way of reading the universe and it is only those whose heart have been filled with faith who can transform ‘their limited mode of thinking into a universal illuminative contemplation’ (Kuşpınar 2000, 49).

When everything is viewed from *aharfī* perspective, everything is seen as a sign (*ayat*) of God. Nursi explains that, in such a state, humankind sees the signs of his Lord everywhere, making him constantly aware of God’s presence (Nayed 2000), since the creation becomes a reminder of the Creator. The signs of the universe are seen to be complementary of the signs (*ayat*) of the Qur’ān. Nursi (1995) describes these signs as the creational signs of the Qur’ān of the universe. This is an important comparison; just as the Qur’ān is believed to be a miraculous book,⁴ the universe is also believed to be filled with multiple miracles such that each creational sign in the universe ‘display miracles to the number of points and letters of those signs’ (Nursi 1995, 405). This is the worldview Nursi is putting forward for how the universe should be perceived; with its miraculous beauties.

Nursi explains this Qur’ānic verse by highlighting that all beings are a manifestations of God’s names so ‘that everything mentions and glorifies its Maker with numerous tongues in numerous ways’ (Nursi 1993, 660). Nursi (1993) bases this argument on the point that many Qur’ānic verses finish by citing specific names of God: ‘And He is the Mighty, the Wise’ (Qur’ān 3:62); ‘And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful’ (Qur’ān 42:5); or ‘And He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful’ (Qur’ān 30:54). In other words, according to Nursi, everything can be explained with the names of God, since everything is a manifestation of God’s names, thus the universe is decoded with the names of God. Seeking to understand life and world events is not exempt from the methodology used by Nursi; decoding events through the names of God enables the viewer to witness the names of God at play within these events, even if they are suffering and calamities. This in turn changes the perception of suffering from being negative and evil, to acts that entail knowledge, wisdom, justice, mercy and other names of God. This will particularly be noted when discussing natural disasters. Until this point, the discussion has been about Nursi’s proposal to view everything as being other indicative, that is, an indicator of the one God.

Suffering

To be able to understand the concept of suffering according to Islam, the belief that nothing happens without the will of God is fundamental. Believing that everything is predetermined by God is instrumental in seeing suffering as good. Since it comes from God, it must be good. This has been the common thinking among Muslim theologians throughout history, generating a vast amount of literature on the concepts of patience, contentment and even pleasure in relation to suffering.

⁴ Nursi focuses on the miraculous aspect of the Qur’ān throughout his writings, but in particular in his book *Miraculousness of the Qur’an* and the Twenty-Fifth Word in *The Words*.

There are famous Islamic poems and phrases that express the acceptance of whatever comes from God. Yunus Emre (d. 1321), a famous poet and Sufi, uttered the famous words ‘your fire is good and so is your light’⁵ and Ibrahim Hakki (d. 1780), a famous Sufi philosopher who also wrote on astronomy, mathematics, anatomy, psychology, tated ‘Let’s see what my Lord does. Whatever he does, he does well.’⁶ These are two of the many examples where pleasure is expressed with all that God decrees.

Phrases of this nature are often used in Islamic poetry and literature, but need explanation. What does it mean to be happy with the fire and light of God – fire (*nar*) suggests burning or suffering, and light (*nur*) suggests blessings or goodness, two states that appear to be on polar ends of the scale? Additionally, what is meant by ‘Let us see what my Lord does. Whatever he does, he does well.’?

While there are indications within the Qur’ān that suffering can be the outcome of sins and misdeeds, it is not seen to be purely an outcome of one’s actions or inactions (Watt 1979), actually far from it. According to *aḥādīth*, ‘If God wants to do good to somebody, He afflicts him with trials’ (Bukhārī, book 75, no. 5). This *ḥadīth* removes any negative undertones that may exist about suffering allowed by God, since God’s affliction of trials is described as Him doing good to the individual.

Even if suffering is experienced due to actions or inactions, there is not necessarily a negative impression given to suffering, as evident from the following *ḥadīth*: ‘Hardships continue to befall a believing man and woman in their body, family, and property, until they meet God burdened with no sins’ (Bukhārī, book 75, hadith no. 1). Therefore, hardships are seen as a cleansing and purifying process to ensure one meets their Lord in a pristine state. An alternative view of suffering is that it is an important means of elevating individuals to higher spiritual degrees (Gülen 2005). Tests and trials become a way to seek out the pious individuals who respond positively to the challenges they encounter. Great reward is promised for those who successfully pass the tests of life. This is described in the Qur’ān as: And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, Who, when disaster strikes them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return’ (Qur’ān 2:155-156).

Therefore, according to Islam, trials and tests are a means to spiritually develop through the attainment of qualities such as patience, servitude and gratitude (Peterson, 2011).

Prophets are considered to be the most patient of humankind . They also experienced the most grievous hardships and suffering (Gülen 2005), even though they were chosen by God to undertake a sacred role of delivering His message . Prophet Muḥammad’s life is often given as a prime example of the hardships faced by a prophet ; he encountered insults, accusations, assaults, embargoes and assassination attempts during his lifetime (Gülen 2009). On a personal level, Prophet Muḥammad also experienced many losses with the deaths of family and friends who were very dear to him; his father died before he was born while his mother died when he was six (2009), making him an orphan at a very young age. He also lived through the death of six out of seven of his children, Fatima being the only child he did not bury (2009). These are just a few of the losses and hardships he endured. Other than losses, there were other difficulties experienced by Prophet Muḥammad, such as poverty and betrayal by close family members.

As can be seen, Prophet Muḥammad’s life was anything but rosy, yet he was known as *ḥabībullah* (the beloved of God) (Adil 2002), a title specially given to him by God. This highlights the point that suffering does not mean one is hated by God. There is a hadith that actually indicates the opposite. On one occasion Prophet Muhammad was asked by one of his companions which people are the most severely tested. The Prophet responded: The Prophets, then the next best and the next best. A person is tested according to his religious commitment. If he is steadfast in his religious commitment, he will be tested more severely, and if he is frail in his religious commitment, his test will be according to his commitment. Trials will continue to afflict a person until they leave him walking on the earth with no sin on him (Ibn Majah, book 36, hadith no. 98).

Thus, according to this hadith, the strongest trials strike those who are the most pious. A correlation is presented here between the level of one’s faith and the severity of the trials and tribulations that will be encountered, once again removing any negative connotation that may exist about suffering. When this perception of suffering is present in one’s heart and mind, there will be an acceptance and even an expectation that suffering will take place. Furthermore, there will be acknowledgement that there is wisdom in suffering. This would not be a pessimistic expectation, but one that would be embraced wholeheartedly, with the anticipation of spiritual growth. With this Islamic understanding of suffering, Nursi goes to great lengths to explain how suffering should be viewed positively. He has two unique contributions to the accepted Islamic understanding of suffering.

⁵ The original Turkish is “Narin da hosnurundahos.”

⁶ The original Turkish is “Mevlâgörelimneyler. Neylersegüzeyleler.”

Nursi on Suffering

Firstly, according to Nursi, the purpose of life is to be perfected by becoming aware of God's blessings and responding to them appropriately, But also to strengthen one's belief and knowledge of God by experiencing the names of God throughout life. Therefore, not surprisingly, the way Nursi deals with explaining calamities is linked to the names of God, which is a unique approach to suffering as will be explored further on.

Secondly, Nursi gives real life contemporary examples of how to deal with suffering. He is asked real questions about suffering and calamities, and he responds with genuine answers. Not only does he respond to others' questions, but he also discusses his own sufferings and how he dealt with them. This is a very powerful approach, since the discussion is practical and therefore applicable, instead of remaining abstract and theoretical. But before discussing some calamities and tests that Nursi focused on, his general perception of calamities and tests needs to be considered. In the Second Flash, Nursi (1995, 23) reminds the reader that 'this worldly realm is the field of testing, the abode of service. It is not the place of pleasure, reward, and requital.' Tests and service are seen to be a means of perfecting one's self through spiritual development. On the other hand, a life that passes by sitting on the couch of ease and comfort is described as 'pure evil' (1995, 23) by Nursi, because such a life of comfort and ease does not allow a person to progress or develop and it would actually lead to a life of regression.

According to Nursi, true misfortune is anything that affects one's religion. Otherwise, they are not misfortunes at all; sometimes they are warning from God like how 'a shepherd throws a stone at his sheep when they trespass on another's pasture, they understand that the stone is intended as a warning to save them from a perilous action; full of gratitude they turn back' (Nursi 1995, 26). Similarly, certain events in life may be a warning about a wrong that a person is doing. They could also be a reminder of one's weakness, 'thus affording him a form of tranquillity' (Nursi 1995, 26) since feeling weak and powerless in the sight of God leads one to submit to the All-Powerful God. This state of submission relieves the person from carrying of a load that otherwise becomes unbearable. By submitting to God, one is in a state of tranquillity and inner peace. Thus, calamities are not actually misfortunes, but a bounty for which one should be thankful, according to Nursi. As a result of belief, such events will 'transform the ugly faces of illnesses and calamities to the beautiful faces of eternal life in the gardens of Paradise' (Altunkaya 2004).

In another section of the Flashes, Nursi talks about the 'Divine Blows Dealt by Compassion' as an explanation of the Qur'anic verse: On the Day when every soul will be confronted with all the good it has done, and all the evil it has done, it will wish there were a great distance between it and its evil. But God cautions you [to remember] Himself. And God is full of kindness to those who serve Him (Qur'an 3:30).

The concept here is similar to what was mentioned above. That is, they are 'the blows (or slaps) dealt by Divine compassion' that can be perceived as suffering and are received as a consequence to faults and mistakes that were committed (Nursi 2005, 69). But they have a positive connotation, since such blows are seen to protect the individual from greater harm. Nursi gives various examples of compassionate slaps, starting with himself, but also includes examples from his students who made wrong decisions or became relaxed in their 'serving of the Qur'an' and therefore received a compassionate slap in return for their errors. In one example, he mentions how HâfizZühtü became preoccupied with attaining a 'worldly stature' and not being satisfied with the spiritual honour of the students he was supervising. As a result, he received an 'awesome slap from Divine compassion. An incident occurred that completely destroyed his family's honour' (Nursi 2005, 75). The point here is that HâfizZühtü should not have been preoccupied with worldly stature. He had a sacred mission to complete, which was far more important than seeking a worldly stature. Through this compassionate slap, it awakened HâfizZühtü to the mistake he had made and was a trigger for him to correct himself.

Nursi then mentions how the younger brother was also affected by the incident, since he is part of the same family, 'although he was not deserving of any slap' (2005, 75). Nursi gives meaning to this undeserving slap received by the younger brother by stating it will be like a beneficial surgical operation on his spiritual heart (2005). The comment on how the incident affected the younger brother is an important one. It shows how individuals can suffer as a result of others' mistakes and therefore highlighting that suffering is not always because of personal mistakes. When one does suffer at the hand of others, there will be great reward for the innocent, according to Nursi. Such suffering will not go unnoticed and will incur great spiritual benefits. This point will be further analysed when discussing natural disasters. In summary, these compassionate slaps, which can also be described as 'wake up calls,' are seen as a blessing from God because they are reminders of one's errors and therefore they are opportunities to rectify mistakes and purify intentions. Ultimately, they are a means to perfect the self. It is worth highlighting that these blows are described as compassionate, stressing the notion that such blows stem from God's compassion, not His wrath or vengeance. Although there may be some negative experiences and emotions felt when such blows are encountered, when there is an awareness that these blows will prevent greater harm or damage, the blows are positively embraced.

Until now, there has been discussion of how suffering can be viewed positively, as explained by Nursi. To truly appreciate Nursi's arguments, it is important to look at a real example. While the nuance details of various types of suffering can be different, there is overall commonality where innocent lives can be lost, children can suffer and what appears to look like punishment can come upon those not deserving of such experiences.

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters, such as earthquakes and other calamities where there is violation of one's rights or even life, are often considered hindrances to inner peace. Such events cause a lot of heartache and pain due to their destructive manner and inability for the individual to make sense of such incidents. The immediate response could be 'I did not deserve that,' expressing the belief that a sense of injustice has taken place. Even if such suffering is not experienced in our own lives, witnessing it in others' lives can be as discomfiting or painful as experiencing it in our own lives. Seeing innocent children suffering due to natural disasters can be heart wrenching and trigger the question of 'if God exists and if He is merciful, how can he allow such suffering to take place?'

When discussing calamities, it needs to be remembered that the realm of creation is a reflection of God's names according to Nursi. All events that take place within this created universe are considered reflections of the names of God with every name having a different reflection. The name *al-Qayyum* (the Sustainer) is reflected in the sustainability of the universe. That is, God is sustaining the universe. If there was to be one second of absence of this name in the universe, it would cause the collapse of the universe (Sartoprak, 2015). The name *al-Shāfi* (the Healer) is reflected when illnesses and sicknesses are healed. For this name to be able to manifest, illnesses that need healing need to be present. If there are no illnesses, this name would not manifest and this goes against the Divine plan. The name *al-Razzaq* (the Provider) is reflected through the provision of sustenance by God for all creation. This name necessitates the existence of hunger for it to manifest (Nursi 2005).

Nursi uses the mirror analogy to further explain the manifestation of God's names in the universe. Nursi explains that the universe has two faces like a mirror. One is its external face, which resembles the coloured face of the mirror, the other is its face which looks to its Creator. This resembles the mirror's shining face. Its external (coloured) face is the arena of opposites. It is where matters like beautiful and ugly, good and evil, big and small, difficult and easy appear (Nursi 1993). Although the shiny face looks to the Creator, it would not reflect unless the mirror has the coloured opaque side. This comes back to the point that God would not be known unless the names of God can manifest in response to events. Natural disaster is one of those events.

Nursi reconciles God's mercy and natural disasters in two ways. Firstly, he suggests a distinction between that which emanates directly from the treasure of God's mercy and beauty and that which results occasionally from His universal laws (Kuşpınar 2000). The former is made up of all that is good and beautiful, which God bestows upon all of his creation, out of His compassion and generosity (2000). With the latter, although they have some minor evils, such as destruction, death and suffering, he explains that these instances of apparent ugliness are a means of showing numerous instances of beauty. Therefore, such calamity and destructions are indirectly an instance of beauty since such ugliness ensures the emanation of the different levels of beauty, just as the degrees of light are known through darkness (Nursi 1998). Nursi (1998) expands on this by explaining that God, the Compassionate Sustainer, hears the individuals who suffer as a result of the constraint of such laws and responds to them with His favours, making Himself loved in special ways.

Nursi explains that these occasional evils and calamities are the result of these universal laws which are needed to preserve and maintain the laws, which are the means to universal benefits. Such universal laws need to take place according to Nursi, where he likens the universe to a palace with the earth being a city in it. This city is constantly being shaken by destruction and reconstruction, agitated by war and emigration, a world that is revolving amid death and life. However, it is such activity that ensures the ongoing functioning of the earth and universe. Nursi, however, paints a positive impression of this change that can sometimes cause destruction, stating there is 'astonishing balance, equilibrium and equilibration' (Nursi 1998, 400), so everything is 'being measured and weighed every moment on the scales of a Single Being Who sees and supervises the whole universe' (1998, 400). Alternatively, Nursi claims, chaos would occur within a day if such changes did not occur. In this context, struggles and clashes of death and life, which would include natural disasters, are discussed collectively along with 'the incomings and outgoings of the seas, the income and expenditure of springs under the earth, the birth and death of animals and plants, the destruction of autumn and the reconstruction of spring' (401). Thus, the 'destruction' observed with natural disasters is considered to be part of keeping that balance. In another section, Nursi (2001, 339) connects the activity and motion found on earth, which sometimes includes calamities, to God's 'sacred compassion and pure love'. Such compassion and love for His creation, argues Nursi (2001), leads to creating opportunities for God's creation, including humankind, to develop its potentialities. Such growth of humankind leads to a sacred proudness and gratification on God's part.

To be able to appreciate Nursi's argument, it is worth considering the cell analogy that he uses. He explains that one who exercises control over a cell should first understand the whole body and only then manage the cell, since the cell is part of the whole body (Nursi 2003). In other words, one needs to consider the various elements for natural disasters rather than looking at the one aspect that looks to the suffering of an individual. 'The function of a natural element cannot be cancelled in order to prevent a possible unwanted result' (Michel 2010, 220). If a natural disaster was inhibited due to its unwanted effects, it would cause the cancellation of much greater good that would come out of the natural disaster taking place, according to Nursi (1998).

It is not necessarily easy to view calamities in this way since it requires a transformation within a person to view events with the worldview of *mānā-yīharfī* (other indicative meaning), as described previously. If natural disasters are approached in this manner, they are given meaning in the context of natural laws, recompense for suffering, life in the hereafter and the many other angles that look beyond an individual. Whereas, if natural disasters are approached with the worldview of *mānā-yīsmī* (meaning by the word), they would be purely evaluated as a calamity that has incurred damage and suffering to an individual.

Answers in Response to a Major Earthquake

On one occasion, Nursi is posed seven questions about a natural disaster that took place during his lifetime. It was a severe earthquake that took place on 27 December 1939 in a city of Turkey, Erzincan. The earthquake registered eight on the Richter scale (Parker 1995) and saw the loss of more than 50,000 lives. It was the most violent earthquake to hit the country (Lee 2008). 'All in all seven major shocks rocked the city, turning it into a tumultuous cemetery' (Lee 2008, 94). The earthquake was followed by a snow blizzard with temperatures reaching below thirty degrees Celsius, contributing to the death of thousands within the city. Nursi responded to the seven questions about the earthquake with seven answers.

Firstly, Nursi (1993) makes the point that the earth shakes, causing earthquakes, as a result of receiving revelation and inspiration from God. He quotes the following Qur'ānic verses in support of his point: 'When the earth quakes with a violent quaking destined for it, and the earth yields up its burdens; and human cries out, "What is the matter with it?" On that day she will recount all its tidings, as your Lord has inspired her to do so' (Qur'ān 99:1-5). Therefore, he concludes, earthquakes and natural disasters are not seen as unconscious coincidental acts driven by nature, rather, they are responding to the command of God. Nursi states, if God wills, He commands the movement of strata and ignites them. In other words, the causes cannot be rejected or ignored. There are physical causes for earthquakes to take place. However, he highlights they are just that, causes and not the Doer. He emphasises that earthquakes happen under the command of God in accordance with His wisdom (Nursi 1993). At this point, an analogy of a man being shot is given – if the gunpowder is to be blamed for the shooting (since the gunpowder caused the death) and not the hand that held the gun, the rights of the victim would be completely violated. Nursi sees the attributing of natural disasters to nature in the same light (1993). The cause is just a means, the intent and purpose behind the cause needs to be understood.

If God is the causer of such natural disasters, what then can be the cause? Nursi gives various reasons for such natural disasters, reflective of God's wisdom. One of the reasons he gives is human actions, by occasionally hinting that disasters that befall people are 'the result of pride and obstinacy, of people thinking they know better than God' (Michel 2010, 220). Certainly, this does not mean that every individual is guilty, but the argument is that if there is a majority of people doing the wrong thing, it can bring down a disaster on a community (Nursi 1993). The social wrongs committed or accepted by a community appear to cause a reaction within the natural world. Therefore, there appears to be a connection between the way humans live as a collective and 'the cosmic forces that sometimes 'rebel' against human obstinacy and assail earthly society' (Michel 2010, 221). However, even with this point, Nursi (1993) explains it is a good work since it facilitates an awakening from heedlessness.

With regards to the innocent suffering at the hands of such collective calamities as a result of natural disasters like earthquakes, Nursi reminds the reader of two things. Firstly, this life is a test and therefore everyone will be faced with tests and challenges in life; secondly, the innocent who do suffer at the hand of such natural disasters will be recompensed for their sufferings.

In relation to the first point, Nursi quotes the Qur'ānic verse 'And fear tumult or oppression, which affects not in particular [only] those of you who do wrong' (Qur'ān 8:25). In other words, innocent people will also be tested; calamities and disasters are not exclusively for wrongdoers and will strike innocent people as well. This is a means of spiritual and moral progress as a result of the striving incurred. If calamities did not touch the innocent, argues Nursi, then the wrongdoers would be good purely for self-interest rather than for the sake of obeying God. In this way, the doers of good and the wrongdoers would not be distinguished.

Secondly, the losses that the innocent suffer in such calamities will be recompensed in the hereafter. The property people lose, such as their homes and livestock, will be considered alms-giving, for which there is abundant reward in the hereafter (Nursi 1993). The transience of the property in this world is highlighted by Nursi. In other words, the property is going to be lost sooner or later when a person dies. Therefore, great wisdom is seen in making such property permanent through sacrificing it in this life for the hereafter.

The suffering that is described as ‘relatively little and temporary difficulty and torment’ (Nursi 1993, 186) is seen as a means of purifying one from their sins to elevate their spiritual state or facilitate their entry into Paradise in the hereafter (1993). The loss of this transient life is seen as a means of gaining a permanent good life in the hereafter. It is interesting to note that the names of God that Nursi chooses to use in this context is the All-Wise and the All-Compassionate, emphasising that destruction and death through such calamities does not go against God’s wisdom and compassion, and in fact are the result of God being wise and compassionate.

From the use of such names in natural disasters that affect masses, a pattern emerges in the way Nursi addresses both the individual and collective groups; both the individual and the collective manifest names of God that can be identified by observing the motion and expressions of activity (‘Awiss 2002). God’s justice has in particular been a large focus. With the two constantly at interplay, a deconstruction of God’s justice needs to take place for greater clarity; how God’s justice manifests on an individual through the human body and life events, but most importantly through the existence of the hereafter. This does not prevent the manifestation of God’s justice on the collective community, which can take place in response to human rebellion as a collective. Understanding how these two intertwine is the key to adapt the worldview that Nursi portrays so that inner peace can be achieved.

Conclusion

A correct perspective of life and positive interpretation of events are the cornerstone of inner peace, based on Nursi’s writings. At the core of Nursi’s life perspective is the notion that everything is beautiful, either in itself or in regards to its results. It is also to recognise the manifestation of God’s names in all of creation. To achieve this purpose, having the correct perspective is essential. Nursi explains that the correct perspective is achieved by viewing everything as *mānā-yīharfī*, which is other indicative, instead of *mānā-yīsmī*, which means the reflection is indicating a meaning in itself. When things are viewed as *mānā-yīharfī* (other indicative), they are a mirror to make known the Divine names of God so everything becomes a construction of the names of God and deconstructing or decoding the events leads to knowledge of God.

This *tawhīd*-centric worldview, changes the way suffering is perceived so events like natural disasters become a means of spiritual growth and remuneration. The fact that prophets endured the most hardships reinforces the notion that suffering should not be seen as a punishment from God, but rather an opportunity to spiritually develop, since prophets did not commit sins for them to be punished with suffering.

Furthermore, the witnessing of God’s names through life events, including those that can be perceived as being negative, becomes an essential means of knowing God. According to Nursi, everything can be explained with the names of God, since everything is a manifestation of God’s names. Therefore, events such as natural disasters and illnesses enable God to be known through names such as *al-Shāfi* (the Healer) and *al-Razzaq* (the Sustainer). If there was no hunger, the Sustainer would not be known; if there was no illnesses, the Healer would not be witnessed. Therefore, these events become an opportunity for knowing God at a deeper level to further enhance a *tawhīd*-centric worldview which is essential to attain inner peace according to Nursi.

References

- ‘Awiss, ‘Abd al-Halim. 2002. “Said Nursi’s Views on Some Critical Questions Related to Civilisation.” In *The Qur’anic View of Man, According to the Risale-i Nur*, translated by ŞükranVahide. Istanbul: SözlereNeşriyat.
- Altunkaya, Emrah. 2004. “A Nursi Reader - A Message for Times of Illness.” *The Fountain Magazine* 47 (July - September 2004), <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/A-Nursi-Reader---A-Message-for-times-of-illness>.
- Adil, Amina. 2002. *Muhammad, the Messenger of Islam: His Life & Prophecy*. Washington, D.C.: Islamic Supreme Council of America.
- Davis, L. A. 2008. *Natural Disasters*. New York: Infobase Publishing.
- Gülen, Fethullah. 2002. *Questions and Answers About Islam*, vol. 2. Somerset, N.J.: Light Inc.
- Gülen, Fethullah. 2009. *The Messenger of God - Muhammad - An Analysis of the Prophet's Life*. Somerset, N.J.: Tughra Books.

- Hermanssen, Marcia. 2008. "Faith Development and Spiritual Maturation." In *Spiritual Dimension of Bediuzzaman's Risale-i Nur*, edited by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', 81-102. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Keskin, Zuleyha Keskin. 2016. "Inner Peace in Islam." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 1(1): 23-38.
- McMichael, R. N. 2006. *Walter Kasper's Response to Modern Atheism: Confessing the Trinity*. New York: P. Lang.
- Kuşpınar, Bilal. 2010. "Justice and Balance in Creation." In *Justice and Theodicy in Modern Islamic Thought*, edited by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', 227-240. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Michel, Thomas. 2010. "God's Justice in Relation to Natural Disasters, Resurrection of the Dead and Final Judgement in the thought of Said Nursi." In *Justice and Theodicy in Modern Islamic Thought*, edited by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', 219-226. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Nayed, Aref Ali. 2000. "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi as Qur'anic Man." In *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risale-i Nur*, 13-17. Istanbul: Sözlür.
- Nursi, Said. 1993. *The Words*. Translated by ŞükranVahide. Istanbul: Sözlür.
- Nursi, Said. 1994. *BarlaLâhikası* [Kastamonu Addition]. Istanbul: EnvarNeşriyat.
- Nursi, Said. 1995. *The Flashes Collection*. Translated by ŞükranVahide. Istanbul: Sözlür.
- Nursi, Said. 1998. *The Rays*. Translated by ŞükranVahide. Istanbul: Sözlür.
- Nursi, Said. 1999. *Epitomes of Light: Mathnawi Al-Nuriya: The Essentials of the Risale-i Nur*. Translated by HüseyinAkarsu. Izmir: Kaynak.
- Nursi, Said. 2001. *The Letters*. Translated by ŞükranVahide. Istanbul: Sözlür.
- Nursi, Said. 2003. *Al-Mathnawi al-Arabi al-Nuri*. Transcribed by Ceylan Caliskan. Istanbul: SözlürNeşriyat.
- Özervarlı, M. Sait. 2010. "The Reconstruction of Islamic Social Thought in the Modern Period: Nursi's Approach to Religious Discourse in a Changing Society." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38 (4): 532-553.
- Parker, Ronald, Alcira Kreimer, and Mohan Munasinghe. 1995. *Informal Settlements, Environmental Degradation, and Disaster Vulnerability The Turkey Case Study*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.
- Michael L. Peterson. 2011. "Religious Diversity, Evil, and a Variety of Theodicies," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, accessed June 15, 2015, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195340136.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195340136-e-12>.
- Sarıtoprak, Zeki. 2015. "Nursi on the Problem of Theodicy." In *God, Man, and Mortality: The Perspective of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, edited by Hasan Hörküç, 133-143. New Jersey: Tugra Books.
- Vahide, Şükran. 2008. "A Survey of the Main Spiritual Themes of the Risale-i Nur." In *Spiritual Dimension of Bediuzzaman's Risale-i Nur*, edited by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', 1-22. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Watt, W. Montgomery. 1979. "Suffering in Sunnite Islam." *Studia Islamica* 50 (1): 5-19.