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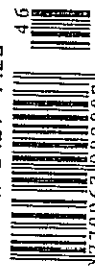
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“Be Kind to Your Parents”

O you, who are immersed in earning your livelihood! Know that your disabled relative whom you regard as unbearable in your house is, in fact, the means of blessing and abundance.

In this series of articles, A Nursi Reader, the aim is to present the thoughts of the famous Islamic scholar Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960) on a variety of topics, using his own writings. As a prolific writer, Nursi has written on numerous topics—a rough count illustrates that he has written on at least five hundred topics. This series of articles will present Nursi's views on some of these subjects through direct quotations from his magnum opus, the Risale-i Nur Collection.

Family relations and respect for parents and elders are considered among the universal values of humanity. In this modern day, the importance is ever more evident. Almost all religious traditions share in these values—one need not look far to find Judeo-Christian or Islamic references to this. The Judeo-Christian tradition posits this value among its Ten Commandments and there are many Qur'anic and Hadith references to this in the Islamic tradition. It is interesting to see in all of these addresses that Nursi uses general terms to refer to all humans, not only Muslims. In many cases, this mimics the Qur'anic method.

Nursi frames his discussion of honoring one's parents by making use of a Qur'anic verse, which is as follows:

Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and to be kind to your parents. If either of them or both reach old age with you, do not say to them “Fie,” nor rebuke them, but say to them kind words. And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say: “Lord, have mercy on them, as they took care of me when I was a child.” Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts. If you are righteous, He is All-Forgiving to those who repent. (17:23-25)

Nursi is most concerned with those who are heedless in their observance of this duty—those who house their parents or other rela-

tives reluctantly or without honoring them. He writes:

“O you, who are unaware of the filial responsibility towards parents, in whose house is an old parent, or a helpless, invalid relative or brother-in-religion unable to make a living! Heed the verses quoted above and see how they insist in five different ways on the affection to be shown to parents!”¹

He continues:

“Of course, paternal affection for children is one of the sublime realities of worldly life and, in turn, filial gratitude to them is a most urgent and heavy duty to be performed. Parents sacrifice their lives lovingly for their children, and if this is so, what falls to a child who has not lost his humanity and transformed into a monster of ingratitude, is to show sincere respect for them, to serve them willingly, and to try to gain their approval.

“With regard to filial respect and service, uncles and aunts are like parents.”²

Nursi emphasizes one of the problems which modern humanity faces; the busy, fast-paced lifestyle and the financial burdens involved in maintaining a modern standard of living. In response to those who justify their reluctance to care for elderly relatives based on these terms, Nursi contends:

“O you, who are immersed in earning your livelihood! Know that your disabled relative whom you regard as unbearable in your house is, in fact, the means of blessing and abundance. Never complain that you can scarcely make a living (that your means of subsistence are strained), for were it not for the blessing and abundance bestowed on you, you would have to face even more difficulties in making your living. This is an undeniable reality, which I could prove to you except that I would like to keep this letter brief. Believe me, I swear by God that this is an established reality to which

even my satan and evil-commanding self have yielded.”³

Nursi compares the caring of elderly relatives to that of young children in the following:

“Indeed, as is witnessed by the whole of existence, when the generous, majestic Creator, Who is infinitely merciful, compassionate, gracious and munificent, sends children to the world, He sends them together with their sustenance which He abundantly provides through the breasts of mothers. In the same way, He sends in the form of blessing and unseen, immaterial abundance, the sustenance of the old, who are like children and even more worthy and needy of compassion than children. He does not load their sustenance onto mean, greedy people.”⁴

Following this quote, Nursi refers to two Qur’anic verses, which are, respectively:

Surely, God is the All-Provider, the Mighty One, the Strong. (51:58)

How many a beast does not bear its provision, yet God provides for it and for you. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (29:60)

According to Nursi, not only do humans receive their sustenance through God’s grace, but animals do as well. He writes:

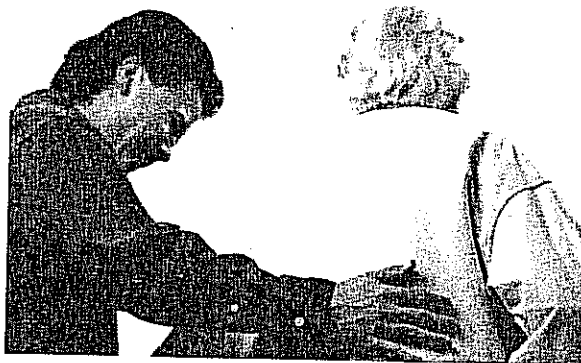
“So, not only the sustenance of old relatives, but also that of pets, like cats, which are created as friends to human beings and usually live on food from human beings, is, again, sent in the form of blessing. I have personally observed this:

“Some years ago, my daily ration consisted of half a loaf of bread. Since the loaf was very small, I barely managed with it, until four cats became my everyday guests. No sooner did they begin sharing my bread, than the same ration was always enough for all of us.

“I witnessed this so often that it convinced me that I benefited from the blessing coming through the cats. I openly declared that I was rather indebted to them, and not they to me.”⁵

Nursi addresses all humans in general terms, writing:

“O man, a human being is the most esteemed, noble and most worthy of respect among creatures; among human beings, the believers are the most perfect. Among the believers, the helpless, old people are those who are the most worthy and needy of respect and compassion. Among the old, the relatives deserve affection, love and service more than the others, and among the relatives, parents are the most truthful confidants and most intimate companions. Now, O man, if an animal becomes the means of blessing and abundance when it stays as a guest in a person’s house, then



you can conclude how invaluable a means of blessing and mercy parents are in a house and, additionally, as stated in the hadith ‘But for the old bent double, calamities would be pouring down upon you,’ what an important means for the removal of calamities they are.”⁶

In the following excerpt, Nursi makes a fitting comparison to the prospect of one becoming an elder in need of compassion and service oneself. He cites a statement from Islamic culture that holds that “punishment is based on the nature of one’s actions.” Thus, if one does not offer respect to his or her parents, then one’s children will, in turn, not respect or provide service in the future. By extension, if one wants the compassion of the Most Merciful, one need be merciful to those entrusted to one’s household and care. It is interesting that Nursi notes that whatever one lives for, either worldly desires or the afterlife, such compassion and service are requisites for attaining any future goals.

In further writings on the sick and infirm, Nursi speaks of those who care for these patients. He says:

“Indeed, there is significant reward for believers for looking after the sick. Enquiring after their health and visiting the sick—on condition it does not tax them—is Sunna and also atonement for sins. There is a Hadith which says, ‘Receive the prayers of the sick, for their prayers are acceptable.’”

Especially when the sick are relations, in particular parents, looking after them is important worship, yielding significant reward. To please a sick person’s heart and console him or her, is comparable to significant alms-giving. Fortunate is the person who pleases the easily touched hearts of their father and mother at the time of illness, and receives their prayer.⁷ ■

Footnotes

¹ Nursi, S., *The Letters*, Vol. 2, Twenty-first Letter, Kaynak A.Ş., Izmir, 1997, p. 53.

² *ibid.*, 53-54. ³ *ibid.*, 54. ⁴ *ibid.* ⁵ *ibid.*, 55. ⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Nursi, S., *The Flashes Collection*, Seventeenth Remedy, Sözler Publications, Istanbul, 2000, p. 278.