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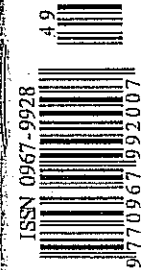
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A NURSI READER

Love:

the Reason for the Creation of the Universe

■ By Zeki Saritoprak, Ph.D.

Said Nursi frames his treatise of the Twenty-Fourth Word in his collection of words on a well known Qur'anic verse that discusses God's beautiful names. *God, there is no god but He; His are the Most Beautiful Names* (20:8). Using the metaphor of a tree with branches, Nursi divides his interpretation of this verse into five branches. In this article the fifth branch, love and worship, will be focused on and some other writings of Nursi will be referred to while exploring the theme of love.

The fifth branch is that of love and fear, worship and imitation of the Prophet. The addressee is first Nursi's own soul, and secondly "his friend who loves the worldly life." In the first statement, Nursi wants to direct the love of humans to Almighty God, who deserves the utmost love.

"Love is the universe's *raison d'être*, the bond between all things, the light

and life of existence. Since we are the most comprehensive fruit of existence, a love so overflowing that it can invade the universe has been included in that fruit's heart (its seed or core). One who deserves such an infinite love can only be one with infinite perfection";¹ this is God.

"According to Nursi, human nature has been endowed with two tools: love and fear. Both of these senses inevitably will be directed to the Creator or the created. Fear of the created or blind love of the created are both dreadful calamities according to Nursi; because people become afraid of people and created things that do not show mercy toward them. As for a love of creatures, Nursi explains that many of them do not understand love and do not acknowledge us. One may love a beautiful panorama, but the panorama does not acknowledge a person; one may love the stars of night, but the stars do not acknowledge a person. Many of



these beloveds leave us without ever saying goodbye, like our youth or wealth—either they leave us, or we leave them.

According to Nursi, ninety-nine percent of lovers complain about their beloved. The reason for this is that the inner heart is a mirror of God, the Self-Sufficient Who needs no one and Whom everyone else needs. And the heart can only be satisfied with His love. After mentioning this, he makes his point as follows: "So turn your fear and love toward such a One so that your fear will be a pleasant humility and your love a happiness free of humiliation."

For Nursi, to fear God means to take refuge in his mercy. Fear is a motivator that throws a person on God's mercy just as a child, when threatened, takes refuge in the arms of their mother. "... maternal care and compassion for all living beings is only a ray from His Compassion." If fear of God is so joyful, then how does the love of God compare? There is great joyfulness in the love of God. For Nursi, even the love of creatures is joyful since it is for His sake. "Only when you can assign that love to its rightful owner can you love, for His sake and as mirrors to Him,

all things without pain or trouble. Such love must not be assigned directly to existence for the sake of existence itself. Otherwise, while being a most pleasurable Divine grace, this love will become a most painful ailment."

According to Nursi, the human soul is prone to love itself above everyone and everything else. In fact, it should not do so; the soul does not deserve such a love, as it is not the source of the beauty of the universe. "Your intense self-love is nothing but your innate love for His 'Essence', which you unconsciously carry in yourself and wrongly appropriate for your self. Tear apart the 'I' in yourself and show the 'He'." Underneath your ego you will find God. "All the love you divide among other beings is nothing but the love implanted in your being for Him."

For Nursi, the whole beauty of paradise, with all varieties of beauty, is the result of such a love from Him. "However, the universe cannot compensate for even one particular manifestation of His love. Given this, listen and obey the following eternal decree, which the Eternal, Beloved One made His beloved (Prophet Muhammad) declare: If you really

love God, follow me [so] that God may love you (3:31)."

Although early Islamic mystics totally rejected love for the world, Nursi found a new way of interpreting the concept of love toward the world. He says, "The world has three faces." The first two faces of the world are admirable and desirable. The first states that the world is a place where God's names are reflected. The world is a place where a believer can contemplate them. The world is a fair for the exhibition of God's names. From this perspective, the world is desirable. One has to think in order to understand God in this world.

The second state of the world, according to Nursi, can be understood by the analogy that the world is a field for the afterlife. This face is also desirable, since individuals must sow in order to reap for the afterlife. Without this world, there would be no results for actions in the afterlife. There would be no place to sow, and thus no fruit. By making such distinctions, Nursi gave a new interpretation of love toward the worldly life.

The third face of the world is the one that the Sufism avoids. This face, Nursi said, is the world as a place of entertainment for those who indulge in worldly desires. This is the face which all Sufis reject. By generalization, it is understood that all parts of the world were not desirable, and thus people generally chose to leave the world. People should not connect their hearts to this world. "It is necessary to abandon the world heartily, not physically." People have to abandon the world from the heart, not the limbs. Individuals should not abandon their studies or other aspects that are necessary in this world for this life.

One said, "I love my life, I love my youth, I love spring, I love this world, I love all beautiful things. How can I leave all of these things for God?" Nursi says, in answer to this question, "However involuntary loving is, you can direct it to a certain object. For example, by convincing yourself that something beloved is ugly, or an obstacle to or only a mirror for an object worthy of true love, this feeling of love can be diverted to the true object of love." Nursi thus says, "I do not tell you not to love

what you have enumerated; but I tell you to love them in the name of God, and in the name of the love of God. Love the beautiful fruit as a bounty from God, the Merciful and Compassionate One. When you love this, you love the Merciful and the Giver of the Bounties, al-Mun'im. This love is a collective thankfulness. To love these things is good. Love your mother and father, because they helped you when you were young. When you love them in the name of God, your love for them, in fact, is love for God. When your parents are old, you love them more; thus one loves for the sake of God. Love your children in the name of God, as they are gifts from God. Be patient if they die, and do not be without hope; you should say that they were a gift from my Lord to me, and they were His creatures. . . . He took them to a better place. If I had one share in them, He had a thousand shares." It is thus important to submit to the will of God. Nursi says, "Life is the most beautiful bounty that God has given you. When you love your life, you should know that this life is a gift from God, and you love it in the name of God. Loving your spouse is a gift, and your love should not be based on apparent beauty, because when they are old, that beauty will not last. Love should not be based on physical beauty, but on spiritual beauty, or ethical beauty. This beauty continues to the end of life. The criterion of your love for them for the sake of God is that when they lose their physical beauty, they will need you more, and you will continue in your love for them."

In this way, the world is a reflection of God, and by loving the world, one will be led to loving God. Nursi concludes this concept with the following statement, "Love the world and what is in it, with *mana-i harfi*,² that is to love it not for itself, but for God, and to say how beautifully it has been created, not how beautiful it is. Do not put the love of anything in the depths of your heart, because the innermost heart is the mirror of God, and it belongs to Him." Nursi ends with this prayer, "O Lord, bestow upon us your love, and the love of things that make us close to you."

Nursi also speaks of *ubudiyya*, or worship of God. According to him, when people pray

they do not pray for future rewards, because as humans we have been given our reward. "Oh my soul, worship is not the beginning of future bounties; it is the result of previous ones. Yes, we have already received our wages. Accordingly, we are asked to worship and serve."

Nursi says that our individual existence is a bounty, and being a human is another bounty—existence is pure goodness compared to non-existence. Food is also a bounty from God prepared for the needs of our stomach. The created world is another bounty which is adored through our eyes and ears. After mentioning this, Nursi says, "Oh my soul, you have already received this wage. You are asked to fulfill worship, which is joyful and easy for the body. Despite that, you are lazy. Even if you perform some kind of worship, you ask for something more, as if the previous bounties were not enough. And you even complain, asking why your prayer has not been accepted. Yes, your duty is not to complain, but to continue praying. Almighty God gives you Paradise and eternal bliss merely as a result of His Grace and Mercy. You constantly take refuge in His Mercy and Grace. Trust in Him and listen to His divine command. 'Say, Oh Muhammad, let them be happy for what God has given them through His Grace and Mercy. That is better than what they have collected'" (10:58).

Nursi goes on to say that the one person's worship is not enough to repay the bounties of God. Nursi quotes a saying of the Prophet, "the intention of a believer is higher than their action," which means that, by performing an action, an individual may have a limited amount of worship, but by making an intention one can have a limitless amount of worship. When a person says in their daily prayers "O Lord, to you alone we worship and to you alone we ask for help," they introduce the worship of all creatures to God. This makes the amount of worship limitless and makes them the representative of all creatures speaking and presenting their worship to God. Nursi refers to this statement, saying "O Lord, we glorify you with the glorification of all your creatures."

Nursi finishes this section by restating the

importance of love for God and not for the universe. He says, "If a human is deceived by indulging in the world of multiplicity through the love of the world and is drowned, they will most certainly suffer unlimited loss. They will execute themselves collectively. If humans raise their heads and listen to the language of the Qur'an through the ears of the heart and direct themselves to unity, they then can ascend the ladder of worship, approaching the throne of perfection and then can become an eternal human."

Nursi believes that there are two paths in front of all individuals. On one path they can use this capacity of love for transient things and, in the end, will certainly lose. On the other path, they will be aware of their importance and their unlimited capacity of love and goodness and, being a candidate of eternal bliss, they will successfully, through their trust in God, gain it.

Finally, Nursi refers to Prophet Abraham's story, as narrated in the Qur'an. In order to make his people see the truth, when he sees a star he says: "This is my lord (according to your claims)." When the star sets (fades), he says "I do not love those that set." When he sees the Moon, he says "This is my lord (according to your claims)." When he finds it fading, it becomes obvious that it cannot be his lord. When he sees the Sun, he says "This is my lord; this is larger." When it sets, he says "O, my people, I am innocent of what you associate (with God)." The Qur'an speaks of his famous statement, "I do not love those that set" (6:76). Nursi says, referring to this story, "O my soul, since the truth is this, and since you are from the nation of Abraham, peace be upon him, be like Abraham and say that I do not love those that set and turn your face to the eternal Beloved." ■

Footnotes

- 1 The quotes in this article are taken from the Turkish *Sözler* by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (Nesil Yayinlari, Istanbul: 1996) v. I, pp. 156-60; 292-93. For the English translation of the book see *The Words*, Nursi, S., Kaynak, İzmir:1997.
- 2 Nursi refers to a grammatical rule in the Arabic language which indicates that a letter by itself has no meaning. In order to have a meaning it has to rely on something else.