

From the Risale-i Nur Collection

ON ILLNESS

Remedies for the Sick

Bediüzzaman
Said Nursi

Translated by
Colin Turner

From the Risale-i Nur Collection,
The Twenty-Fifth Flash of *The Flashes*

ON ILLNESS: Remedies for the Sick

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Translated from the Turkish
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About the Book

However clichéd it may sound, illness always has the potential to be a blessing. For like all forms of communication from our Creator, illness is telling us certain things in certain ways. It may be telling us to slow down and to live life less hectically. It may be telling us that we are not eating healthily, or sleeping enough, or getting the amount of exercise that we need to remain healthy. Depending on its seriousness, it may be telling us that a complete 'life overhaul' is necessary. But whatever it is telling us on the level of specifics, there is a general message that comes with all illness, and that message is, quite simply, that we are, at base, impotent beings who are at every instant dependent on God's grace and loving attention for the continuation of our existence. For the weakness that we experience during illness is only a reflection of our existential weakness. Illness comes with the reminder that everything we are, and everything we have, depends on His love and generosity: who we are, and what we appear to possess, depends solely on His will. Illness helps us understand this by reducing us to a childhood state of utter neediness and dependence on others, for it is this state only that can help us reconsider whether we are living our lives with the recognition of our

impotence or not. For we are impotent whether we are well or whether we are ill; it is just that it's harder to realise this when everything in the garden is rosy, so to speak. Illness, therefore, can be a blessed wake-up call, halting us in our tracks in order to give us the time and situation necessary for stock-taking and worshipful reflection of our life situation and its attendant duties. Illness, seen as a blessing, inevitably turns out to be such. This treatise shows us a number of reasons why this is so.

Colin Turner
Durham, August 2020

ON ILLNESS

Remedies for the Sick

This treatise consists of twenty-five ‘remedies’. It is in effect a kind of ‘spiritual sticking plaster’, designed to help those who are ill. Or you could see it as a prescription for the sick, written to console them and to wish them a speedy recovery.

The reader should be aware, however, that this treatise was written at great speed, and was read through only once upon completion.¹ In other words, it is still very much in first draft form, which is regrettable. However, while the treatise is not as polished as I might have hoped, it does reflect the manner in which inspiration came upon me, and I felt that to polish it too much would be to detract from the treatise’s freshness and spontaneity. Please accept my apologies if, as a result of its not being edited carefully, anything untoward has crept into my writing. Any mistakes or infelicities are mine, and I ask the reader to forgive and pray for me.

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

¹ This treatise was written in four and a half hours. Witnessed by: Rüştü, Ref’et, Hüsrev and Said.

Those who say when afflicted by calamity, *To God do we belong and to Him is our return (2:156), And it is He Who gives me food and drink, and when I am ill it is He Who cures me (26:79-80)*

In this 'Flash' we describe in brief twenty-five remedies which may offer true consolation and a merciful remedy for those who are sick or afflicted by disaster, of whom at any one time there are countless millions.

First Remedy

To those who are ill and unhappy because of their illness, I say: Have patience and try not to be anxious. Your illness is in reality not a misfortune for you. In fact, it is not an illness at all, as such: it is a kind of remedy. For life is like capital: it goes quickly, and if it yields no fruits, it is a total waste. And if life passes in ease and in heedlessness, it passes even more quickly. Now, illness makes that capital of yours yield huge profits. Furthermore, it does not allow your life to speed by; rather, it restrains and prolongs it, allowing it to depart only after it has yielded fruit. One indication that your life is lengthened by illness is the proverb, "The duration of calamity is long; the duration of happiness is extremely short."

Second Remedy

To those who are ill but lack patience, I say: be patient and offer thanks! For your illness may transform each minute of your life into the equivalent of an hour spent in worship.

There are two kinds of worship. The first is the active kind, such as the five daily prayers or the act of supplication (*du'a*). The second is the passive kind, such as being patient in the face of illness or adversity. It is by means of this second kind of worship that people come to realise their weakness. Illness or adversity pushes the afflicted to beg the All-Compassionate Creator for some kind of resolution; it is an opportunity for them to take refuge in Him and to offer up worship that is sincere and untainted by hypocrisy. In fact there is a sound Tradition which states that a life passed in illness is counted as a life passed in worship, so long as it is the life of a believer and on condition that he or she does not complain about God. It has been established by sound Traditions and also by those who are able to uncover the realities of creation that if a believer is ill, a single minute of illness becomes the equivalent of an hour's worship, so long as he or she is completely patient and thankful. And for certain spiritually perfected individuals, a minute of illness

will be counted as the equivalent of a whole day's worship.

Thus you should not complain about illness, for it has the potential to transform a minute of your life into a thousand minutes, gaining you long life in the process. Not only should you not complain, but you should offer thanks.

Third Remedy

To those who are ill and who are impatient as a result, I would say this: we see all the time that those who come to this world must inevitably leave it, while those who are young inevitably grow old. Death and separation are a constant fixture of human life, and this shows quite clearly that we did not come to this world in order simply to receive pleasure and enjoy ourselves. Furthermore, humans are the most perfect, the most elevated, of all living beings. With regard to the organs, members, senses and faculties that we have been given, of all creatures we are the best endowed. One could even say that we are the rulers of all animate beings. However, since we dwell on past pleasures and future pains, we often live grievous, troublesome lives that are worse than that of any animal. This shows that human beings did not come to this world in order to live the

high life, or to pass their days in ease and pleasure. Humans possess huge assets and a vast capital, and they come to this world in order to work and trade for an eternal life in the hereafter.

The capital given to humankind is life itself. Without illness, constant good health and well being would have caused humans to neglect their duty; they would have turned the world into a pleasure dome, causing the next world to be forgotten. Good health and wellbeing do not want humankind to remember death and the grave, and so they impel us to squander our life's capital on trivia. Illness, however, opens the eyes of human beings and says to them, "You are not immortal. You have not been left to your own devices. You have a duty. Stop being so proud! Instead, think of the One who created you. For one day you will die and enter the grave, so it's best that you prepare yourself accordingly." From this perspective, illness is like a guide sent to warn us; it is a truthful adviser who will never lie to us or act deceitfully. For this reason, we should not complain about illness; in fact, we should be thankful for it. And if it is particularly severe, we should pray for the patience to endure it.

Fourth Remedy

To those whose illnesses cause them to complain, I say this: You have no right to complain; your duty is to offer thanks and to be patient. For your body and its organs, members and faculties do not belong to you. You neither made them yourself nor bought them from elsewhere. This means that they are someone else's property, and their true owner has the right to do with his property exactly as he wishes.

As we have seen in the *Twenty Sixth Word*, a very wealthy and skilful fashion designer, for example, wishes to showcase both his wealth and his artistic skill, and to this end employs someone to model clothes for him. For an hour or two, the model is paid to wear the designer's beautifully tailored, diamond-studded garment while the designer alters it. In order to demonstrate his art, the designer cuts and trims, altering the length, lowering the hem, taking the garment in at the waist, and so on. Does the model have the right to say to the designer, "You are giving me grief with all this cutting and trimming; you are wearing me out and you are making me look stupid. I'm tired of turning this way and then that, just so that you can alter what I'm wearing!" Does the model have the right to tell that designer that he is spoiling the model's look by insisting on all these alterations? Does the model have the right to complain in this way? Clearly not.

So to the sick person who complains of his pains, I would say this: Don't be like the designer's model in the example. The All-Glorious Maker has designed for you a body that is beyond compare, bejewelled with faculties such as your hearing, your vision, your heart and your powers of reason. Your body has been embroidered with patterns of His Most Beautiful Names, and, as with the garment in the example, your Maker works on your body constantly, turning it this way and that, putting it through various different states, and altering it as He sees fit. Just as hunger teaches you that He is 'the One Who Provides' (*al-Razzāq*), then illness teaches you that He is the One Who heals (*al-Shāfi*). Illnesses, trials and tribulations are all there to show you certain degrees of His Beautiful Names, for in those flashes of wisdom and rays of mercy there are many instances of good to be found. If the veil of illness – which you dislike – were lifted, you would find beneath that veil much that is beautiful and full of meaning.

Fifth Remedy

To those afflicted with illness, I would say this: It is my opinion – born of personal experience – that for some people, illness is a bounty from God, the Most Merciful. Over the past eight or nine years, a number

of young people have asked me to pray for their recovery from some illness or other. (I should add here that I do not consider myself worthy of the good opinion of those who ask me to pray for them, but the simple fact is that they do.) Interestingly enough, all of these are young people who, I have noticed, have begun to think of the hereafter much more than their peers do. They lack the usual drunkenness of youth, having renounced to an extent the lusts and negligence of the young. And so I remind them that their illnesses are bounties from God, and that they should try to bear them as much as they are able. I say to them, 'Friend, I have nothing against this illness of yours. And thus I don't feel so sorry for you that I should pray for your recovery. Try to exercise patience until this illness has woken you up completely. Once it has performed its duty, your Compassionate Creator will, God willing, restore you to good health.' I also tell them, "Long periods of good health and well-being can be extremely damaging because they often lead to complacency. And on account of the calamity that is continuous good health, some of your peers become neglectful of their duties. They give up the five daily prayers, they forget that one day they will die, and they give no thought to God Almighty at all. The superficial pleasure obtained from a few moments of worldly engagement blights their eternal lives, in some cases

destroying them completely. Your illness, on the other hand, opens your eyes. It makes you see the grave – which you will enter in any case – and it focuses your attention on what lies beyond. And in so doing, it makes you act and behave accordingly. For you, therefore, illness is actually good health. For some of your peers, however, good health is actually a sickness.

Sixth Remedy – Part One

To those who are sick and who complain of their suffering, I say this: When you think of the past, remembering the happy times you've had fills you with longing, while thinking of the sad times fills you with soothing relief that they are no more. Bringing to mind the troubles of the past causes your heart to sing and your tongue to give thanks to God that they are now history, while recalling the pleasures of the past causes you to sigh with regret that they are gone. Pay close attention and you will see that in fact it is actually the passing of pain and sadness which causes joy and happiness. Similarly, it is actually the passing of joy and happiness which causes pain and sadness. For as pain leaves, pleasure takes its place; as pleasure departs, pain occupies its seat in human hearts. That which makes us sigh with regret is in

fact the legacy of those happy, joyful times we have known in the past.

Just as one day of illicit pleasure can sometimes cause a year's suffering to the spirit, the pain of one short day of illness can lead to many days of pleasure as compensation, together with the pleasure that one feels when one is relieved at its passing. Bear this in mind when you are ill. Think of the pleasure that the passing of this short sickness will bring, and think of the bounties that are hidden beneath its veil. Say, "Everything comes from God! And this, too, will pass!" Say this and offer thanks instead of complaining.

Sixth Remedy – Part Two²

To those who think of the pleasures of the world and feel distress because they are ill, I say this: If this world were everlasting, and our journey did not end in death, yes, maybe I would have pity for you. If in

² In the original Turkish treatise, the sections which appear here as 'Sixth Remedy Part One' and 'Sixth Remedy Part Two' both carry the sub-heading 'Sixth Remedy'. Rather than change the second of these to 'Seventh Remedy', or retitle them as 'Part One' and 'Part Two', as the translator has done, the author decided not to amend the oversight, suggesting that there may be some unknown wise purpose behind his erroneous assignation of the same numerical sub-heading to two different sections (Transl.)

this life the winds of passing and separation never blew, and if our spirits never knew winter, or suffered the storms and calamities of life's ending, maybe I would have felt sorry. But one day the world will ask us to leave, and however much we beg, it will be deaf to our cries. And so we must take heed of the warnings brought by illness, and we must forego our love of the world before it drives us out. Our hearts must abandon the world before the world abandons us.

For illness is indeed a warning. It says to each of us, "Your body is not made of iron or stone; it is made of materials which perish easily. So give up your pride, acknowledge your impotence, recognize your Owner and know your duties. Learn, if you can, why you came to this world." This is what illness whispers in the heart's ear.

Furthermore, the pleasures and enjoyments of the world do not last, and if those pleasures are illicit, they are particularly fleeting, not to mention sinful and shot through with pain. Losing the ability to pursue those pleasures because you are ill really is no cause for regret, so do not weep – on the pretext of illness – for what you have lost. Instead, think how that illness can be a cause of worship, leading you to

rewards in the hereafter. Think of that and try to derive pleasure from it.

Seventh Remedy

To those who are sick and have lost the pleasure of good health, I say this: Your illness does not spoil the pleasure of Divine bounties; on the contrary, illness itself actually brings bounties, and, while you are ill, goes on increasing them. If any state – positive or negative – continues for too long without change, its impact and effects will lessen over time. Furthermore, as those who understand reality assert, ‘Things are known by their opposites’. If there were no darkness, light could not be known and its pleasure would remain hidden. If there were no cold, heat could not be known, and its advantages would remain obscured. If there were no hunger, food would not be enjoyable. If there were no thirst, no-one would find pleasure in drinking water. Similarly, if there were no sickness, good health would give us no pleasure whatsoever.

The All-Wise Creator has endowed human beings with numerous organs, members and faculties, so that they are able to experience and recognise countless varieties of bounty in the universe. It is clear, then, that the Creator wishes to make us aware

of everything that He has created for us. It is clear that He wishes to acquaint us with all of the Divine bounties, so that we may offer constant thanks. To this end, God gives us illnesses and suffering, without which good health and wellbeing would be meaningless. For if you had never experienced a headache or a stomach upset, would you have been able to recognise the bounty of good health? It's certain that if you were never ill, you would never be able to recognise the existence of wellbeing, let alone offer thanks for it. Instead you would have squandered your good health on heedlessness or wasteful self-indulgence.

Eighth Remedy

To those who are sick and who think of the hereafter, I say this: Sickness washes away the dirt of sins and cleanses the soul as though it were soap. A sound Hadith confirms that illnesses are a kind of atonement for sins. Another Hadith says, "In the same way that ripe fruits fall from the branches when the tree is shaken, the sins of a believer fall from him when he is shaken by illness."³

³ *Bukhārī*, Marda, 1, 2, 13, 16; *Dārimī*, Riqaq, 57; *Musnad*, i, 371, 441; ii, 303, 335; iii, 4, 18, 38, 48, 61, 81.

Sins are the chronic illnesses of eternal life; in this earthly life they affect the heart, the conscience, the spirit. If you are patient, and you do not complain, this temporary sickness will save you from numerous perpetual illnesses. If you do not think of your sins, and if you recognise neither God nor the reality of the life to come, you may be said to be suffering from an illness that is a million times worse than your current, minor ailments. This should make you cry out, for everything in creation is connected to your heart, your spirit and your soul. Those connections are severed continuously by death and separation, which cause innumerable wounds. And particularly since you are oblivious to the hereafter, imagining death to be eternal non-existence, your very being is bruised and cut, and the illness you suffer is as beyond measure.

The first thing you must do, then, is search for the cure. And that cure is belief – a certain remedy for the countless illnesses that have afflicted your vast immaterial being. That being of yours is infinitely sick and wounded, and the only way to heal is through correcting your beliefs. The quickest way to find a cure is to recognise the power and mercy of the All-Powerful One of Glory. Your weakness and your impotence are a window onto that power and mercy; your physical illness has torn away the

curtain of heedlessness that hangs at that window, and is allowing you to look through it.

Indeed, those who do not recognise God are afflicted by a world of trial and tribulation. The world of those who recognise Him, by contrast, is a world of light and spiritual joy, which they perceive according to the strength of their belief. The suffering that comes from insignificant physical illness melts away when belief appears, bringing with it pleasure, healing and immaterial joy.

Ninth Remedy

To those who are sick and who recognise their Creator, I say this: if illness brings pain, fear and anxiety, it is because those who are sick know that it may lead to death. This is because on the surface, death is terrifying, particularly to those who are heedless, and so illness which may lead to death causes fear and apprehension. How should one deal with this?

Firstly, one should know, and believe firmly, that the appointed hour of death is fixed by God and does not change. It often happens that those who weep at the bedside of the severely sick are the ones who die first; it often happens that perfectly healthy people

drop down dead, while seriously ill people are cured and go on to live long and healthy lives.

Secondly, death is not as terrifying as it appears superficially. Through the light of the All-Wise Quran, we have proven in many places in the *Risale-i Nur* that for believers, death is a release from the burdens of life. Yes, we have shown that without a doubt, for believers, death means being relieved from the duties of worship which characterise the training ground that is this world, with all of its trials and tribulations. Death is a means whereby believers are reunited with their friends and relations, ninety-nine percent of whom have already departed for the next world. For them, death is the way back to their true homeland, the abode of everlasting happiness. Death is an invitation to the gardens of Paradise, a means of release from the prison of this world. It is their time to receive their wages from the generosity of the Most Compassionate Creator, in return for their services to Him. Since this is how death is, it is not to be feared; instead of seeing it as something terrible, see it as a gateway to mercy and eternal happiness. Indeed, some of God's servants have feared death not because of its terribleness, but because they have wanted to remain alive longer in order to carry out more good works, thus obtaining additional merit in the hereafter.

Yes, for those who believe, death is the door to Divine mercy, while for the people of misguidance, it is a pit of everlasting darkness.

Tenth Remedy

To those who are sick and who worry unnecessarily, I say this: Serious illness may cause you to worry, but worrying merely exacerbates your illness. If you want your illness to improve, you must try not to worry. Think instead of the benefits to be had by being ill; think of the reward for it, and have faith that it will pass quickly. This will remove your worries and sever the illness at its root.

Indeed, worry tends to double the illness, for it adds immaterial pains to the already existing physical ones. Physical illness tends to feed off immaterial illness. Submission, contentment and understanding why one is ill all lessen the worry of illness; as a result, there is a decrease in its severity, and sometimes it almost disappears altogether. Sometimes a minor physical ailment becomes ten times worse simply through anxiety; when the anxiety ceases, nine tenths of the illness disappear with it.

Worry not only increases illness, but it also represents a kind of accusation against Divine wisdom. In fact it is a criticism of Divine mercy and a complaint lodged against the Compassionate Creator. Because of this, worry makes a sick person worse; against expectation, and as a kind of reprimand, the illness becomes more severe. Yes, just as thankfulness increases bounties, complaints increase illness and tribulation.

Furthermore, worry itself is a sickness. The cure is to recognise the wisdom and purpose behind illness. Once you have recognised this, apply it to your worry and you will find relief. Instead of regretting, rejoice! Instead of sighing, say “Thanks be to God for whatever happens.”

Eleventh Remedy

To my brother, impatient on account of his illness, I say this: Although illness is causing you to suffer at this present moment, think of how you have endured it patiently up until now. Think of the spiritual pleasure and happiness that you will receive as a reward for having seen your illness through patiently and uncomplainingly. As for the future, do not think of what has not yet come: your imagined illness in the future does not exist yet, and non-

existence cannot cause pain. And if there is no pain, there can be no distress. You lose patience because you do not see things properly. For the pain you have had up until this present moment is gone, and all that remains is the pleasure you feel at its departure, together with the reward you will receive for enduring it patiently. You should see this as a good thing, and you should be happy. To think instead of past days and to feel aggrieved over pains which no longer exist is pure madness.

As for the future, it has yet to arrive. To dwell on days that have not yet come and to feel upset and impatient over pains not yet experienced makes no sense at all. To be distressed over an illness that does not yet exist is to make something painful out of nothing at all, and if that is not crazy, what is?

If the hours that have passed were hours passed in sickness, those hours have now gone, leaving joy at the thought that they are no more. The time yet to come is non-existent too, and so both the illness and the distress you think it will cause have no reality whatsoever. You are expending energy you cannot afford to lose on things which do not exist! God has given you patience with which to face your present pains: do not squander them by thinking about what is passed and by worrying about what is yet to come!

Say “O Patient One!” and concentrate on the here and now.

Twelfth Remedy

To those who are sick and, owing to illness, find that they are unable to perform certain acts of worship, I would say this: It is true that you feel that you have been deprived of this ability. But take heart from the Tradition which says, “A pious believer who is unable to perform his customary invocations will receive a reward equal to them regardless.”⁴ As long as the sick person performs as many of the obligatory acts of worship as his illness allows, that illness itself will count as non-obligatory worship until such time as he recovers – so long, of course, as he is patient and trusts in his Lord.

Furthermore, illness makes a person understand his weakness and inability. It causes him to offer supplication, both verbally and through his sense of impotence.⁵ For Almighty God has created

⁴ *Bukhārī*, Jihad, 134; *Musnad*, iv, 410, 418.

⁵ Nursi divides invocations (*duʿ*) into two kinds: practical or active (*fiʿilī*) and verbal (*qawlī*). To make a cup of tea, for example, the ‘practical’ invocation is to actually stand up and walk into the kitchen, put the kettle on, pour the water, place the tea in the cups, and so on: every stage of that process is an invocation, for in order to carry out those movements, we need

humankind in absolute impotence and infinite weakness, forcing them to seek refuge continuously at the court of the Divine, and to beg their Lord for help. The verse, *Say: Your Sustainer would not concern Himself with you if it were not for your invocations* (25:77) is instructive in this regard. For it means that humans would be nothing, with no importance whatsoever, if they did not invoke their Creator and supplicate Him at all times. According to this verse, invocation (*du'ā*) is the reason for our creation, and it is through supplication that we acquire value. Since illness pushes us to invoke our Lord, it should not be the cause for complaint; on the contrary, human beings should be thankful to God that they fall ill. Supplication is a tap that opens when one is ill; one should therefore show appreciation and not wish for the tap to close again through the regaining of good health.

Thirteenth Remedy

Divine power to create those actions for us. There is a saying in English, “Man proposes, God disposes”. This means that man registers an intention with his Creator and the Creator, if He so wills, translates that intention into action. As for ‘verbal invocation’, that it is to complement one’s actions by actually calling on God’s most beautiful Names, to confirm one’s intention and to ask Him to manifest the relative Names in order for the action to be blessed, among other things (Transl.)

To those unhappy people who complain when they are ill, I say this: For some people, illness is a treasure-chest, a Divine gift of great value. Every sick person should think of his or her illness in this way. For the appointed hour of death is known to no-one. The hour of death has been concealed from us in order to save us from both despair and heedlessness. It has been hidden from our knowledge so that we are balanced between hope and fear, thus enabling us to preserve both this world and the next. Death may come at any time, and if, when it comes, it catches us unawares, deep in forgetfulness, it may cause untold damage to our eternal life. Illness is something which banishes neglect and forgetfulness. It makes a person recall death and think of the hereafter, so that he may prepare himself. Some illnesses are so profitable in this sense that in the space of just twenty days they are able to gain a person the kind of rank that usually takes twenty years to attain.

For example, there were two youths whom I knew; may God have mercy on both of them. One was Sabri, from the village of Ilema; the other was Vezirzade Mustafa, from Islamkoy. Now, these two were unable to write, yet it never ceased to amaze me how sincere and enthusiastic they were in their service to the cause of belief. I could never understand why this

was. It was only after their deaths that I found out that they were both suffering from serious illnesses. These illnesses had brought about considerable fear of God in them, propelling them to perform extremely valuable services to the cause. Unlike other youths, they had not abandoned the obligatory acts of worship, and they were able to attain a state beneficial to them in the life to come. God willing, two years of distress as a result of physical illness will allow them to attain millions of years of bliss in the eternal world. I understand now that the prayers I occasionally offered for their recovery were, in retrospect, and with respect to this world, more like curses than benedictions! God willing, those prayers will be accepted for their well-being in the life to come.

I believe most firmly that through their patient endurance of illness, those two youths gained profits equal to ten years spent in fearful awareness of God. If, like some young people, they had relied on their youth and good health, throwing themselves into heedlessness and vice, they might have come seriously unstuck. For if they had immersed themselves in the world and death had grabbed them by the collar while they were deep in sin, they would have turned their graves into nests of snakes and scorpions rather than mirrored halls of lights.

Since illnesses contain such benefits, we should not complain when we become sick. Rather, we should bear our illness with patience, relying on God, trusting in His Mercy and thanking Him for His attention.

Fourteenth Remedy

To those who are sick and whose eyes have developed cataracts, I say this: If you knew what lies beneath the cataract on a believer's eye, you would thank God a hundred thousand times over. For beneath that cataract is a spiritual eye, filled with light. I shall recall an incident in order to explain this heart-warming, healing reality.

Once, the aunt of a brother in Barla called Suleyman, who had served me with utter goodwill and loyalty for eight years, became blind. She had a very good opinion of me, much more than I deserved, in fact, and because of this she stopped me one day by the door of the mosque and asked me to pray for her sight to be restored. So I made the blessed woman's righteousness the pretext for my supplication⁶ and, beseeching God, I said, "O Lord! Out of respect for her righteousness, restore her sight." Two days later, an

⁶ Nursi has used the word 'intercessor' her; I have taken the liberty of replacing this with the word 'pretext' (Transl.)

ophthalmologist from Burdur came and removed her cataract. Forty days later, she lost her sight again. I was extremely upset and so I began to invoke God feverishly for a second restoral of sight. I pray to God that the prayer was accepted for her life to come rather than for what was left of her life in this world – which would have been a curse. For just forty days later, she died.⁷ May God have mercy on her soul. It is to be hoped that rather than gaze sorrowfully at the gardens of Barla with the eyes of old age, she would profit instead by being able to spend forty thousand days gazing in her grave at the gardens of Paradise. For her belief was strong and she was a thoroughly righteous woman.

Yes, if a believer loses her sight and enters the grave blind, in accordance with her level of belief she may gaze on the world of light to a much greater extent than others in their graves. We who have eyes see many things in this world that blind believers do not see. But if the blind depart while high in belief, they will be able to see to a much greater extent than others can who are dead and buried. They will be able to gaze upon the gardens of Paradise, watching

⁷ Nursi regretted having prayed for her recovery, for he believed it was better for her to be blind and to reap the rewards of patience during illness than to have her sight and possibly become neglectful of it. (Transl.)

them as though looking through powerful telescopes at a vast cinema screen, in accordance with their levels of belief.

And so through thanks and patience you may find that beneath the veil on your present eye there is another eye, filled with light – an eye with which you may look up through the earth and gaze on Paradise above the heavens. That which will lift the veil from your eye, that oculist which will perfect your vision, is the All-Wise Quran.

Fifteenth Remedy

To those who are sick and who sigh and lament, I say this: Stop sighing! Do not consider the outward aspect of your illness; consider its inner meaning and take hope, be happy! If in its inner meaning illness were not beneficial, the All-Compassionate Creator would not have given it to the servants He loves most. For there is a sound Tradition which says, “Those afflicted with the severest trials are the prophets, then the saints, then those who resemble them.”⁸ This means that those who are most afflicted

⁸ Al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr*, I, 519, no. 1056; al-Ḥakīm, *al-Mustadrak*, iii, 343; *Bukhārī*, Marda, 3; *Tirmidhī*, Zuhd, 57; *Ibn Māja*, Fitān, 23; *Dārimī*, Riḥāq, 67; *Musnad*, i. 172, 174, 180, 185; vi, 369.

with trials and tribulations are the best and most perfect of men. The Prophets – foremost among them the Prophet Job (PBWH) – the saints and the righteous have all regarded the illnesses they suffer as forms of sincere worship; they have seen them as gifts from the Divine, and they have thanked the Most Merciful One with patience. You could say that they have seen these illnesses as surgical operations carried out by the All-Compassionate Creator's mercy.

So to those who cry and moan, I say this: If you want to join the luminous caravan of enlightened souls, be patient and offer thanks. For if you complain, they will not allow you to join their ranks and you will fall into the abyss of the people of misguidance. Theirs is a dark road indeed, and it will be yours too.

Moreover, there are some illnesses which, if they result in death, give those who suffer them a kind of martyrdom; they result in a certain degree of sainthood, even. For example, those who die from childbirth complications die as martyrs;⁹ the same applies to those who die as a result of certain stomach diseases, or who die in a fire, or from drowning, or from the plague. There are many

⁹ This covers any post-partum complication occurring at any time up to the fortieth day of 'confinement'.

illnesses which confer sainthood on those who die from them, and so those diseases are in fact truly blessed. Furthermore, since illness lessens one's love for the world and loosens one's attachment to it, it serves to take the sting out of death. For the worldly-minded, dying is a painful abomination, but for believers who become seriously ill, death may be seen as a welcome relief from pain, thus helping them to sever their connection to the world more easily. Indeed, for some, death even becomes desirable in such situations.

Sixteenth Remedy

To those who are ill and who complain in distress, I would say this: Illness awakens in others feelings of respect and compassion, which are extremely desirable traits for social harmony and cohesion. It also saves those who are ill from that arrogant sense of self-sufficiency which can often make people aloof and unkind. For according to the verse, *Indeed man transgresses all bounds; in that he looks upon himself as self-sufficient* (96:6-7), an evil-commanding soul which feels invincible and self-sufficient on account of uninterrupted good health and well-being may, on occasion, fail to pay respect to those who deserve it. Such a person may not feel compassion towards those who are affected by illness and disaster, and

who need at such times the kindness and pity of others. When such a person becomes ill, he is given the opportunity to understand his own need and his own powerlessness. And this helps him to feel respect for those of his fellow human beings who deserve it. He treats with respect those fellow believers who visit him or help him when he is ill. He feels the warmth of human kindness which arises from fellow-feeling. And he feels compassion – a vital Islamic character trait – for those who are struck by disaster. Comparing the afflicted with himself, he shows pity towards them in the true sense of the word. He is moved to do what he can to help them, even if all he can do for them is offer up a prayer on their behalf. He visits them and asks how they are, which is a Prophetic practice (*sunna*) and deserving of reward.

Seventeenth Remedy

To those who are sick and who complain that illness has prevented them from doing good works, I say this: Be thankful! For it is illness that gives you the opportunity to do the sincerest of good works. A sick person is rewarded simply for being sick – so long as he or she endures it patiently – and those who look after that person are recompensed similarly. But in addition to the rewards that illness brings in and of

itself, it is also a most important means for the acceptance of supplications (*du'ā*). There is a Tradition which says, "Receive gladly the invocations of the sick, for they are accepted (by God)".¹⁰

There are significant rewards for believers who look after the sick. To visit the sick and to enquire after their health is a Prophetic practice (*sunna*)¹¹ – provided that such a visit is not too taxing – and it is considered to be an atonement for sins. To look after those who are ill, particularly if they are relatives and especially if they are your parents, is an important act of worship which brings significant reward. To cheer up a sick person and to console him or her is indeed a kind of charitable giving. Those who bring happiness to the sensitive heart of a sick mother or father should consider themselves more than fortunate to receive their parent's prayer. For when good and obedient children show respect and kindness to their parents during times of illness, even the angels applaud. For the most deserving of respect in society are our mothers and fathers.

Yes, the kindness, pity and compassion shown by others at times of illness bring pleasure which may

¹⁰ *Ibn Māja*, Janā'iz, 1; Daylami, *Musnad al-firdaws*, i. 280.

¹¹ Al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr*, ii, 45, no. 1285.

reduce the pain of illness almost to nothing. That the prayers offered by the sick are accepted by God is an important issue that should not be overlooked. For the past thirty or forty years, I myself have prayed for relief from the back pains I suffer. However, I also understand that illness has been given as a prompter of prayer and supplication. And so, since prayer cannot be removed by prayer – prayer cannot remove itself, in other words – I recognise that the results of my prayer for relief must surely pertain not to this life but the life to come.¹² For illness, when recognised for what it really is, is in fact a kind of worship. Because it is through illness that one realises one's own weakness, and it is weakness that induces one to seek refuge at God's court. And so when I say that I have prayed for thirty years for relief from backache, the fact that God appears not to have answered my prayer does not deter me from continuing to pray. For illness merely marks the specified time for supplication. To be cured is actually not the result of supplication, for if the All-

¹² Yes, while certain illnesses are the reason for the existence of supplication, if the supplication were actually the cause of the non-existence of the illness, the existence of the supplication would be the cause of its own non-existence. And this would not be possible.

Wise and Compassionate One gives healing, He gives it out of his abundant grace.

Supplication, then, may not be answered in the way we would like or would expect. If a prayer is not accepted in the form we wish, we should not assume that it has not been answered. The All-Wise Creator knows what we need better than we do, and He gives us whatever is in our best interests. Sometimes He takes the prayers we make for this world and directs them towards the world to come, accepting them in that context. In any case, a supplication that is made sincere by illness is as acceptable as any supplication can be, so long as it is made with total humility and recognition of one's need and weakness. It is illness which makes supplication sincere. Believers who are sick, or who look after the sick, should take advantage of this opportunity for sincere prayer.

Eighteenth Remedy

To those who are sick and who complain, losing all sense of gratitude, I say this: To complain, one needs to have some kind of right over which to complain. But in becoming ill, none of your rights has been transgressed! Indeed, gratitude is an obligation for you: it has rights over you, and you, by not being thankful, have transgressed those rights. You are

complaining, without paying God His dues, and on top of that you are demanding *your* rights in a way that is most unrightful! You do not have the right to look at others who are better off than you health-wise and then complain. Rather, your duty is to look at those who are not as blessed with good health as you are, and to offer thanks. Your hand may be broken, yes, but your brother's hand is severed! You may have only one eye, granted, but look at those who are blind in both eyes, and give thanks to God!

No-one has the right to look at those who have been blessed with more bounties and then complain. With regard to tribulation, one should consider those worse off than oneself, and one should give thanks. This principle has been mentioned a number of times in the *Risale-i Nur*. Let us revisit it:

Someone – let's call him Ali – takes a wretched man to the top of a minaret. On each step of their ascent, Ali gives the man a different gift, a different bounty, if you like. When they reach the top, Ali gives the poor man the best gift of all. But rather than show gratitude for all of the gifts he has received so far, the ill-tempered wretch forgets everything that Ali has given him, as though none of the gifts was of the slightest value whatsoever. Instead he looks up and complains, saying. "If only the minaret had been

higher, we could have climbed further. Why isn't it as tall as that mountain over there, or at least as tall as that other minaret?" Would such ingratitude be acceptable? Would it be right to complain in such a manner?

Similarly, human beings come into existence from nothing. They come into the world not as rocks or animals but as humans, as Muslims. And most of the time they experience good health and enjoy numerous bounties. Despite this, however, people still complain and show impatience when they believe they have been short-changed with regard to bounties, or when they lose what they have because of abuse or bad decisions. People complain because certain things lie out of their reach, criticizing God's lordship by saying things such as, "Why me? What have I done to be treated like this?" To have such a state of mind is to suffer a sickness of the spirit far more injurious than physical ill-health. And complaint will only make the illness worse – a bit like starting a fight with a broken hand. The sensible route lies in submission and patience, embodied by the verse, *Those who when struck by calamity say: to God do we belong and to God is our return* (2:156). Submission and patience are necessary, so that the illness may complete its duty and then depart.

Nineteenth Remedy

As we know, God possesses 'the most beautiful Names' (*al-asmā al-ḥusnā*). And among those 'beautiful Names' is the name *al-Ṣamad*, which means that while He is in need of nothing, all beings are in need of Him. Among beings, life is the subtlest, most beautiful and most comprehensive 'mirror' that is held up to this name *al-Ṣamad*. And when that mirror is held up to something beautiful, the mirror itself becomes beautiful. For the mirror is displaying the virtues of beauty. And whatever that beauty does to the mirror will, by default, itself be beautiful. And so whatever happens to life will, in respect of reality, be good. For life displays the marks, the impressions, of the 'most beautiful Names', which are full of goodness and beauty.

If life – which we have likened to a mirror – were to pass monotonously, with uninterrupted good health and well-being, it would be a very deficient 'mirror' indeed. For in one sense it would suggest non-existence, non-being and nothingness. And that would cause weariness, reducing the value of life to virtually nothing and transforming the pleasures of life into pains. When someone is bored and unmotivated, killing time – through amusements or through vice – seems like the only way out. Life,

which is inherently valuable, becomes like a prison sentence which has to be passed as quickly as possible. When life is full of change, forever in flux, the value of living becomes apparent, and the importance and pleasure of life can be realised. When life is worth living, no-one wants it to pass quickly, even if some of it is spent in trial and tribulation. When life is full and vibrant, no-one complains of boredom or wishes to kill time.

Yet if you ask a rich person living in the lap of luxury, 'How are you?', you are likely to hear the reply, "Oh, time passes so slowly! Let's have a game of backgammon. Let's find something to amuse us." Or you will hear them complain that they haven't fulfilled this or that ambition. "I don't have one of those," you'll hear them say. Or, "If only I had this or that."

Then ask someone who works for a pittance, or who has been struck by some disaster, "How are you?" If he is sensible, he will say, "I'm thankful to God that I have a job. If only I had more time in the day to get all my work done! Time passes so quickly; life just flies by. Yes, things are hard, but it will pass. Everything passes, after all." In effect he will tell you how valuable life is and how much he regrets its quick passing. This means that he understands the

value and the pleasure of life through his experience of hardship and labour. Ease and health, uninterrupted by their opposites, make life bitter and push one to wish that time passed more quickly.

So to those brothers and sisters of mine who are ill, I say this: Non-existence is the source of all evils and calamities; it is even the source of sin, as we have shown elsewhere in the *Risale-i Nur*. Non-existence is itself evil; it is darkness. Monotonous states like ease, silence, tranquillity and immobility are very close to nothingness and non-existence; they make felt the darkness of non-existence and they cause distress accordingly. Action and flux, however, are replete with existence and they make existence tangible. As for existence itself, it is pure good; it is light.

Since reality is thus, you should realise that illness has been sent to you by the All-Wise Maker as a guest to perform certain duties. One such duty is to purify your most valuable life and strengthen it, helping it to progress. In this way, the other human faculties which make up your being will come to the aid of whichever part of your body is afflicted, displaying various Divine names in the process. God willing, your illness will carry out its duties quickly and depart, saying to good health, "Come and take my

place permanently, and carry out your duties. The house is yours; stay here and remain well.”

Twentieth Remedy

To those who are sick and in search of a remedy for their ills, I say: There are two kinds of illness: one is real; the other is imaginary. As far as the first kind is concerned, the All-Wise and Glorious Healer has made the earth a mighty pharmacy containing a cure for every disease. Those cures actually seek out their corresponding illnesses. And there is a cure for every sickness. We are allowed to use medicine to treat our diseases, but we should bear in mind that the effect of the medicine is from Almighty God; the cure is from Him directly. God gives both the illness and the remedy for the illness.

Following the recommendations of skilful, God-aware doctors is itself an effective medicine. For most illnesses are the result of our abusing our bodies, be it through wastefulness, carelessness, over-indulgence or lack of abstinence. A believing doctor will most certainly give advice that is within the bounds of the religiously licit. He will forbid excess and self-indulgence, and he will console his patients when necessary. His patient will have confidence in his advice and his consolation, and as

a result, the illness will recede: instead of distress, the patient will feel calm and ease.

With regard to imaginary illness – hypochondria – however, the best medicine is to give it no importance whatsoever. The more attention that is paid to imaginary illness, the more it grows and the worse it appears to become. If you pay it no mind, it lessens and goes away. Have you seen how bees become more agitated and swarm around you, the more you try to swat them and wave them away? Pay no attention to them, on the other hand, and they will soon disperse. Similarly, in a dark room, the more importance you pay to a piece of string waving in front of your eyes, the more apprehension it will cause, and eventually you will convince yourself that it is something it's not, and you will run away like a lunatic. Pay it no mind, on the other hand, and you will see to your amusement that it's just a bit of string and not some huge insect or snake.

Yet if hypochondria persists and becomes chronic, it may indeed be transformed into something real. Chronic hypochondria is a serious illness affecting the nervous and those with powerful and uncontrolled imaginations: such people make mountains out of molehills, destroying their own morale and peace of mind. Then, if they come across

doctors whom they judge to be unfair, or inexperienced doctors whom they perceive as unfeeling, their hypochondria increases. If they are rich, they lose their wealth, or they lose their mind or they lose their health.

Twenty-First Remedy

To my brothers and sisters who are ill, I say this: Your illness may be accompanied by physical pain, but consider this: you are surrounded by significant spiritual pleasures that will remove that pain. For if your father, your mother or other family members are with you, the kind of compassion that they once had for you when you were a small child will be reawakened. When they visit you in your sickbed, you will receive the kind of looks and attention that you received when you were very young. Furthermore, friendships that have long been hidden will blossom again, attracted to you thanks to your illness and enveloping you once more in their loving embrace; this in itself is often enough to render one's physical suffering quite bearable. Your illness means that you have become a master or mistress of those whom you once considered to be your masters! For those whom you used to serve as a child are now serving you. Your illness means that you have drawn towards yourself the fellow-feeling

and human kindness in others, attracting to yourself numerous kind friends and helpful companions. And you have received from your illness the order to rest, allowing you to take time out from your tiring duties. Compared to all of these immaterial pleasures, the minor pain you feel should induce you to be thankful rather than to complain.

Twenty-Second Remedy

To those who suffer diseases such as paralysis,¹³ I say this: Firstly, rest assured that for believers, paralysis is considered a blessed illness. I heard this a long time ago from certain saintly individuals and I never knew why. Now, I think I know at least one reason why they used to say this, and it is as follows:

In order to achieve union with Almighty God and attain eternal happiness, and in order to be saved from the spiritual dangers of this world, the people of God have chosen to follow two principles:

The first is to contemplate death. Recognising that the world is transitory, and that they are simply

¹³ Here, Nursi is talking about the kind of stroke that leads to hemiparesis (Transl.)

temporary guests charged with various duties, they strive for eternal life in this way.

The second is to tame the evil-commanding soul and thus be saved from the danger of its whims and blind desires. This it does through fasting and certain ascetic endeavours, such as the practice of retreat and meditation, favoured by the saints and the Sufis.

So, to my brother or sister who has lost the health of half of their body, I say this: These two principles have been imposed on you without your asking for them. Those principles are not too burdensome and they are the cause of happiness. The state you are in at the moment reminds you continuously of the fleeting nature of the world and the ephemerality of humankind. The world can no longer drown you, nor negligence blind you. And the evil-commanding soul cannot deceive you with its base desires and animal lusts now that illness has reduced you to half the person you were. And so you are saved from the trials of the soul.

And so, thanks to the mystery of belief in God, the mystery of submission to Him and reliance on His will, believers are able – like Sufis ‘in retreat’ - to benefit in a short time from a severe illness such as

paralysis – an illness which, for believers so affected, really doesn't concern them at all.

Twenty-Third Remedy

To those sick people who feel alone and friendless, I say this: Even if the loneliness and isolation you feel were to arouse sympathy for you in the hardest of hearts, could their kindness and compassion be any substitute for the kindness and compassion of the All-Compassionate Creator? See how He introduces Himself to us at the beginning of every Quranic chapter but one with, *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, The Merciful*.¹⁴ See how, with one spark of compassion, He makes all mothers take care of their young with such wonderful tenderness. See how, with a single manifestation of His mercy, every spring fills the garden of the earth with bounties. Eternal life in Paradise, together with all its wonders, is but a single reflection of His mercy. Since this is the case, you can be sure that the connection that you make with Him on account of your illness will attract His mercy to you. For your belief in Him and your recognition of Him, occasioned by the weakness you feel, will attract the gaze of His compassion to you. Beseeching Him as you do in your loneliness and

¹⁴ The ninth *sura* – *al-Tawba* – is the only one where the Bismillah is not mentioned at the beginning (Transl.)

isolation, you can rest safe in the knowledge that He will look on you with utter kindness, which compensates for everything else. Since He exists and looks to you, everything in existence looks to you and exists for your sake. Those who are truly alone and isolated are those who are not connected to Him through belief and submission, or who attach no importance to that connection.

Twenty-Fourth Remedy

To those of you who take care of innocent sick children, or old people who resemble small children, I say this: What you are doing is a kind of trade for the hereafter, so approach it with enthusiasm and energy. According to the people of truth, the illnesses of innocent children are like divine training programmes for their delicate young bodies; illness inoculates them in order to prepare and strengthen them for the hardships of life and the coming upheavals in the world. One of the reasons that adults become ill is so that they may atone for their sins. Since children have no sins, their illnesses are like injections which ensure their spiritual progress in the future or in the hereafter, as well as being necessary for the strengthening of their physical bodies in preparation for their earthly lives. Childhood sickness is also an opportunity for

parents to earn rewards for their patient endurance as they tend to the needs of their poorly children. It is particularly opportune for mothers, who, through the mystery of maternal compassion, often prioritise the health of their children over their own health.

Care of the elderly is also highly meritorious according to sound Prophetic Traditions and historical anecdotes. To tend to the old when they are sick, particularly if they are one's parents, brings great rewards. To make them happy, to serve them compassionately and to receive their prayers of thanks leads to great happiness, both in this world and the next. Experience has also shown that when a child obeys his elderly parents to the letter, it is likely that he or she will be treated similarly by his or her own children. But if a child gives grief to his parents, hurting them with words or with actions, he or she will more likely than not be punished with many afflictions, both in this world and the next. Islam requires that one look after not only one's own elderly relatives, but also any elderly believers that one encounters, related or unrelated. The mystery of the true brotherhood of belief is such that one is ready to serve to one's utmost ability those believers who are old and infirm, should they need it.

Twenty-Fifth Remedy

To my sick brothers and sisters, I say this: If you want a cure that is beneficial, pleasurable and sacred, develop and strengthen your belief! Belief is itself a sacred remedy, so make use of it. Make use of the medicine which is to be found in belief through repentance and the seeking of forgiveness. Make use of the belief which arises from the five daily prayers and other acts of worship.

Love of the world and heedless attachment to this earthly life is an immaterial sickness as vast as the world itself. We have shown in many parts of the *Risale-i Nur* that belief is able to cure this illness, which bruises and batters you with the blows of death and separation. Belief saves you from these wounds and truly heals you. But I cut the discussion short here so as not to tire you.

As for the medicine of belief, it shows its effects when you carry out your religious obligations as much as you are able. Negligence, vice, the lusts of the soul and illicit amusement all reduce the effectiveness of this medicine. Illness, however, cuts through negligence, takes away the appetites and acts as an obstacle to illicit pleasure, so take advantage of it. Make use of this sacred medicine of belief through

repentance and the seeking of forgiveness. Make use of the light of belief through prayer and supplication.

May Almighty God restore your health and make your illnesses an atonement for your sins. Amen. Amen. Amen

And they say: All praise be to God Who has guided us to this; never could we have found guidance if it had not been for the guidance of God; indeed, the Messengers of our Sustainer did bring the truth. (7:43)

Glory be unto You! We have no knowledge save that which You have taught us; indeed, You are All-Knowing, All-Wise.(2:32) O God! Grant blessings to our master Muhammad, the medicine for our hearts and their remedy, the good health of our bodies and their healing, the light of our eyes and their radiance, and to his Family and Companions, and grant them peace.

The Life and Thought of
BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI

The Life and Thought of BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI

Said Nursi (1878-1960) is a contemporary scholar and thinker who is best known for his monumental work, the *Risale-i Nur (Epistles of Light)*, a six-thousand page thematic commentary on the Quran. Born in Nurs, a tiny village in the province of Bitlis in eastern Turkey, Nursi spent his early and adolescent years studying the classical Islamic curriculum in various traditional madrasas in the area. He was an exceptionally gifted student who excelled in his studies to the extent that he was able to receive his 'finishing diploma' in 1892 at the tender age of fourteen. Later when he went to Van, a province in eastern Turkey, he also studied the natural sciences in the library of Tahir Pasha, governor of the province. By this point, Nursi was so renowned for his intellectual and academic acumen that he had been given the epithet 'Bediuzzaman' (Wonder of the Age).

Nursi realized that one of the shortcomings of the traditional madrasa education was its omission of the modern sciences, which meant that madrasa students were not able to establish harmony between these new sciences and the traditional disciplines. And so it became his ambition, even at this very young age, to establish a university where the modern sciences could be studied alongside the traditional, Islamic disciplines. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed and the Turkish Republic was established in 1923, Nursi was invited to Ankara, where a role in the new government was offered to him. However, he realised that given the turbulent circumstances there, it would not be possible to carry out his original plan. He decided at this point to withdraw from all engagement with politics. He returned to Van in the spring of 1923, referring to himself now as the 'New Said'.

Nursi found that his life was being shaken at this time by the fast-growing current of aggressive secularism that was sweeping the country, and so

during this period of his life, Nursi spent most of his time with his students quietly on Mount Erek, where he passed all of his private time in prayer and contemplation. In February 1925, however, his pastoral idyll was shaken by the Kurdish revolt – an insurrection which Nursi had warned everyone not to join and not to support. Despite his warnings, however, Nursi was implicated as a participant in the revolt and he was sent into exile as a result. This exile set an unfortunate precedent, for most of the rest of Bediuzzaman's life would be spent either in exile or in prison.

Following his exile to Burdur, Nursi was exiled to Barla, a village in the province of Isparta, where he lived under house arrest from March 1927 until July 1934. Most of the treatises that comprise the *Risale-i Nur* were written during these comparatively peaceful years in Barla. Along with his students, Nursi was brought to Eskişehir to stand trial, a process which began in May 1935 and lasted almost a year. The standard charge levelled against Nursi and his

students, and indeed against anyone who read and defended the Qur'an at this time, was that of "violating secularism". Prison conditions at that time were horrendous, and Nursi tried to encourage his students to think of their incarceration as a kind of school, one which he called "The School of Joseph" (*Medrese-i Yûsufiye*), in memory of the Prophet Joseph, who had also been imprisoned unjustly, and who taught his fellow prisoners, leading them to belief in God. When Nursi was released he was sent to Kastamonu, where he was detained under house arrest from March 1936 until September 1943.

A significant change took place in May 1950 when the newly formed Democratic Party came to power. The new government was sympathetic towards religion and so Bediuzzaman was able to enjoy a certain amount of freedom, albeit still with a number of restrictions. The last ten years of his life was referred to by Nursi himself as the period of the 'Third Said' (September 1949–23 March 1960). The general amnesty of 14 July 1950 brought with it a

relative freedom and so he decided to settle in Isparta, where he kept with him a small number of young students to assist him and to be trained. He referred to these years as the 'Third Said' years, when he continued to devote much of his time to issues related to the *Risale-i Nur*. He instituted the practice of communal reading (*ders*) of the *Risale-i Nur* that would later become the central activity of the Nur community, and each day would hold readings with the students who resided with him. But by the turn of the decade his health was failing. On 20th March 1960 he set off with three of his students for Urfa in south-east Turkey, where on the 23rd March he died.

Nursi was a passionate advocate of personal rights and freedoms, as exemplified by his saying "I can live without bread, but not without freedom." He objected to any association of Islam with oppression and tyranny, stating that Islam came to this world to end injustice and despotism. He defined despotism as "... the basis of tyranny. It annihilates humanity. It is despotism which reduces man to the most abject

valleys of abasement, causing the Islamic world to sink into abjection and degradation, arousing animosity and malice, poisoning Islam... and causing endless conflict among Muslims.”

Unlike many of his contemporaries who associated Islam with politics, Nursi abstained from mixing religion with politics and remained distant from the notion of ‘political Islam.’ Instead, he focused on personal dimension of belief and religion, stating that saving the faith of even a single person is of the utmost importance. Despite all the injustices and harassment to which he was subjected, he lived by the principle of ‘positive action’ always, never advocating violence. He stressed repeatedly that Muslims must now in this age of enlightenment and civilization fight wars with the pen and not the sword. Moreover, he viewed aggressive atheism as the greatest threat to humanity, stating that Muslims and pious Christians must join forces to overcome this threat, which endangers the eternal life of the whole of humanity.

The hallmark of Nursi's teachings is his emphasis on belief – belief in God and belief in the hereafter, which are tenets shared by all of the Abrahamic faiths. After the formation of the new Turkish Republic in the 1920s and the imposition of aggressive secular policies, Nursi devoted himself to saving and strengthening belief in God and the other principles of faith that were at that time coming under attack. He argues that death is a new beginning and is "... not execution, or nothingness, or annihilation; it is not cessation, or extinction; it is not eternal separation, or non-existence, or a random event, or an authorless obliteration. Rather, it is a discharge from duty given by the One Who is All-Wise and All-Compassionate; it is a change of locations. It is a dispatch to eternal bliss, to your true home." For Nursi, attaining strong belief is like gaining an eternal world. Therefore, these two articles of faith are the foundation of human identity that gives humankind a responsibility in this world to be God's vicegerent on Earth in order to preserve order and prevent corruption (see the Qur'an, 2: 30f).

Nursi points out that human beings have desires and hopes that stretch to eternity, thoughts and imaginings that embrace the whole universe, together with an earnest desire for everlasting happiness and Paradise, and various innate capacities and abilities on which no limit has been placed. People are exposed to attacks from innumerable enemies and to blows from innumerable calamities, despite their countless needs, their weakness and their impotence. Under the constant threat of death, they live out their brief and turbulent lives in mostly wretched circumstances. Nursi believed that the main mission of humankind is “to progress through the acquisition of knowledge”, that is, “to aim at reaching perfection via knowledge”. But the highest aim of knowledge, and the thing which makes it valuable, is the knowledge of God (*ma’rifatullah*).

No matter what we say about scholars it is always best for them to speak for themselves. We thus leave you with this short work here and ask that you judge

the tree by its fruit. For further reading we can recommend the following works about Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's life and ideas: Colin Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light*, Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2013; Şükran Vahide and Ibrahim M Abu-Rabi'. *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008.

Nursi Society Editorial Board

This treatise consists of twenty-five 'remedies'. It is in effect a kind of 'spiritual sticking plaster', designed to help those who are ill. Or you could see it as a prescription for the sick, written to console them and to wish them a speedy recovery.

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi