

A RELIGIOLOGICAL COMPARISON OF THE SUFI THOUGHT OF SAID NURSI AND

FETHULLAH GULEN

by

SULEYMAN ERIS

(Under the Direction of Alan Godlas)

ABSTRACT

In this religiological comparison, I compared two Muslim scholars, Said Nursi (d.1960) and Fethullah Gulen (b.1938) from the perspective of their Sufi thought. Although, Gulen has always been known as a strict follower of Nursi and has acknowledged Nursi as a great scholar and the founder of Nursi movement, he has differed from him especially with regard to Sufi thought. In this thesis, I have focused on the differences between Nursi and Gulen and presented a different angle from the commonly accepted one. Some of the most important differences concern their general approach to Sufism and doctrines of methodology.

INDEX WORDS: Said Nursi, Fethullah Gulen, Religiology, Sufism, Turkish.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will compare the Sufi thought of two scholars, Said Nursi (d.1960) and Fethullah Gulen, who is generally regarded as Nursi's successor. This comparison will be in the format of religiology. Religiology is a method used to examine and understand beliefs in a systematic and a coherent way. This method was invented by Dr. Alan Godlas at UGA, and, among its epistemological virtues is that it addresses two types of problems: haphazardness and fragmentation of the knowledge.

Religiology approaches beliefs in the following order: epistemology, ontology, anthropology, psychology, teleology, and methodology. By systematically using these six analytical categories, Religiology attempts to resolve the problem of haphazardness of knowledge. The knowledge of any belief system can be ordered with these religiological categories and then scientifically examined by means of the main questions inherent in each of the categories.

The second problem Religiology addresses is the fragmentation of the knowledge. Belief systems are usually so vast complex. Every piece of information contained in these systems is related in many largely unrecognized ways to other pieces; and these pieces present to the researcher a very complex map of information. Religiology, after putting this complex map of information into an order, maps and lays out important relationships of these bits of information and elevates them from the level of fragmentation to the level of coherence.

This thesis is the religiological comparison between the Sufi thoughts of Nursi and Gulen. In this regard, the thesis will have four sections. The first section is the religiological presentation of the Sufi thoughts of Said Nursi. The second section will present the Sufi thoughts

of Gulen in the religiological format. The third section will compare the Sufi thoughts of these two scholars in their religiological order and the fourth section will be the conclusion.

In comparing these two scholars it will become apparent that although Gulen shares the same thoughts and beliefs with Nursi in many subjects and he is commonly regarded as a strict successor of Nursi, Gulen, especially in his Sufi thought, has independent and different ideas from Nursi.

In sum, this thesis possesses two unique merits: one is its use of religiological analysis and, most importantly, the other is its groundbreaking conclusions concerning the differences between Nursi and Gulen.

A. THE LIFE AND SUFI THOUGHT OF NURSI

I. THE LIFE OF NURSI

There are some uncertainties regarding the birth date of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. In the official biography of Nursi first published in 1958, his birth date is proposed as being 1873. In later editions the date given is 1877. However, the *Risale-i Nur* Institute (dedicated to research on Nursi and his writings) insists that Nursi was born in 1878.¹ The reason for these discrepancies is simply that different calendars were used during Nursi's lifetime.

Nursi was born in the town of Bitlis (which is currently located in sought east of Anatolia), though he was from a small village called Nurs. The name Nursi refers to a person originating from Nurs. His father's name was Mirza, his mother's, Nuriye. The name Bediüzzaman is an epithet meaning "the wonder of the age".²

Two stories are given concerning the origin of this nickname. The first concerns the fact that, from a very early age, Nursi distinguished himself as an extraordinarily gifted student. By the age of fourteen or fifteen, Nursi had completed the standard *madrassa* curriculum of the time, despite having studied under Shaykh Muhammad Celali for only three months. His teacher granted him his diploma and with it the right to wear the turban of a scholar, even though Nursi was still very young. From this point on, he began to engage other scholars in debate, successfully answering all the difficult questions that he was asked. In view of this extraordinary success, the first account reports, Nursi received the nickname Bediüzzaman from Molla Fethullah Efendi.³

¹Risale-i Nur Enstitüsü, "Bediüzzaman Hangi Tarihte Doğdu?", Risale-i Nur Enstitüsü <http://www.risaleinurenstitusu.com/index.asp?Section=SaidNursi&Subsection=DogumTarihi> (accessed April 13, 2006).

² Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 2th vol., (Istanbul: Nesil, 1996), 2212.

³ Şükran Vahide, "Bediüzzaman Said Nursi and the Risale-i Nur," in *Globalization, Ethics, and Islam*, ed. Ian Markham and Ibrahim Ozdemir, 4-5 (Hants: Ashgate, 2005).

The other account of the origin of Nursi's nickname is situated in Istanbul. When Nursi first arrived in Istanbul as a young scholar, he posted a message on the door of his room stating that every question is answered here, and no question is asked. At that time, nobody in Istanbul proved capable of prevailing over Nursi in a debate. One day, after the Friday prayer, scholars visiting Shaykh Bahit (then the president of al-Azhar University) mentioned Nursi and his brilliance. In order to test Nursi, Shaykh Bahit asked him: "What do you say about the future of Europe and the Ottoman state?" Nursi replied, "Europe is pregnant with a Muslim country and it will give birth soon. The Ottoman state is pregnant with Europe and it too will soon give birth." This answer shocked the questioner, who cried out that nobody could possibly answer this question other than Bediüzzaman, the wonder of the age.⁴

Nursi's writings are collectively referred to as *Risale-i Nur* and consist of three main groups of texts. The first comprises writings produced in the time of what Nursi himself referred to as the "old Said," such as *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, *İşaratül İcaz*, and *İçtimai Reçeteler I and II*. By the "old Said," Nursi refers to that earlier stage of his life during which he served the cause of Islam through participation in politics. The other two groups of texts emerge from the phase of the "new Said," the later period in Nursi's life during which he served Islam through his composition of *Risale-i Nur*. The first set of works emerging from the "new Said" includes the books *Sözler*, *Mektubat*, *Şualar*, and *Lemalar*. The second set of works consists of letters written by Nursi to his students, and by his students to each other, such as *Kastamonu Lahikası*, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, and *Barla Lahikası*. Aside from this main corpus, Nursi produced other writings such as *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi* and *Ta'likat*. All of these writings are collected and published by Nesil Publishing in two volumes.

⁴ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 2:2132.

For Nursi, the "new Said" is preferable to the "old Said." To the "new Said" is attributed the famous statement, "I seek refuge in God from Satan and from politics."⁵ The transition from the "old Said" to the "new" occupied several years of Nursi's life. Between 1918 and 1923, Nursi experienced profound changes in his inner world, as he began to leave aside politics and philosophy and turn exclusively to the service of faith and the knowledge of the Qur'an.

In the period of the "new Said," Nursi began to read only the Qur'an, recording the sense of its meanings as they arose in his heart. For Nursi and his students, writing these meanings and reading and explaining them to others is called the "service of faith and the Qur'an" because these meanings are extracted from the Qur'an and they usually discuss Qur'anic faith.

Thus Nursi's movement is referred to as the "service of faith and the Qur'an" by Nursi himself.⁶ For this reason, the movement is not considered to be a Sufi order. Indeed, as Ahmet Akgunduz claims, the Nursi movement is best referred to as a *cemaat* (community), not a Sufi order.⁷ Similarly, Nursi asserts that he is not a Sufi Shaykh, but simply a teacher.⁸ On the other hand, Hamid Algar claims that Nursi's life and work display a number of Sufi influences and aspects,⁹ and it is the supposedly Sufi aspects of his works that will be the subject of this thesis. In the remainder of this section I will discuss only Nursi's Sufi influences.

During Nursi's childhood, the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi order was widespread in eastern Anatolia, and Seyyid Taha Nehri Hakkari (d.1853), one of the Khalidi shaykhs, was the shaykh with whom all of Nursi's teachers have a connection. Shaykh Sıbgatullah Arvasi, a successor of Seyyid Taha, was a shaykh from the same village as Nursi;

⁵ Ibid., 1:368.

⁶ Ibid., 1:374.

⁷ Ahmet Akgunduz, "The Risale-i Nur Movement: Is It A Sufi Order, A Political Society, Or A Community?" Nursi Studies, <http://www.nursistudies.com/englishh/data/95e/ahmedekgunduz95e.htm> (accessed April 13, 2006)

⁸ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 1th vol., 375.

⁹ Hamid Algar, "Bediü zamanın Hayatı ve Eserlerinde Tasavvuf ile Tarikat," in *Bediü zaman ve Tasavvuf*, 2th ed., (Istanbul: Gelenek, 2003), 14.

and everyone in the village, including Nursi's family, held him in great respect. Shaykh Sibgatullah died three years before Nursi's birth.¹⁰

The shaykh who had direct influence on Nursi was Arvasi's successor, Shaykh Abdurrahman Tagi (d.1887). Nursi began his formal education in the *madrassa* established by Tagi when Nursi was nine years old. Later on, Nursi recalls with deep admiration his education in this *madrassa*, referring to the scientific discussions held in it and their influence on his soul. It is said that Tagi was so conscientious in the education of his students because, he said, one of them would bring about the renewal (*tecdid*) of religion. Although there is a strong connection between Nursi and Tagi, there is not any evidence that Nursi was a *murid* (initiate) of Shaykh Tagi.¹¹

Two other Naqshbandi shaykhs are mentioned in the biography of Nursi, Shaykh Fethullah Verkanisi (d.1900) and Seyyid Nur Muhammed Efendi, but there is no solid information about Nursi's relationship with these shaykhs. Another Naqshbandi Shaykh is Muhammed Küfrevi (d.1896). Nursi reports that he received the final lesson in his formal education from Shaykh Küfrevi. Moreover, it is known that one day Nursi dreamt that Shaykh Küfrevi called to him and then disappeared. When Nursi awoke, he learned that Küfrevi had died that day. It is also known that Nursi felt great respect for Küfrevi's successor, Alvarlı Hoca Muhammed Lütfi (d.1956). Another Naqshbandi shaykh to remember is Fehim Arvasi (d.1895), the successor of Seyyid Taha Nehri. Nursi says that in the course of his education, Fehim Arvasi was the most important of his masters.¹² Nursi also shows tremendous admiration for Imam Rabbani, Ahmet Sirhindi (d.1624), in the chain of transmission of the Naqshbandi order.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹¹ Ibid., 15-18.

¹² Ibid., 19-21.

¹³ Ibid., 24.

Another important shaykh in the life of Nursi is Khalid Baghdadi. According to Şamlı Hafız Tevfik, a student of Nursi, there are some parallels between Nursi and Khalid Baghdadi, the last renewer of the religion. For instance, there are exactly one hundred years between the birth days of Baghdadi and Nursi, the days of their service for the religion, and their persecution. A hundred year is considered an important indication because the tradition tells us that there will always be a renewer of the religion, and that there will be a hundred years between their times.¹⁴ Moreover, the cloak of Khalid Baghdadi was given to Nursi by a woman named Asiye.

Beside these Naqshbandi shaykhs, Nursi had an important relationship to the founder of the Qadiri order, Abdulkadir Geylani (d.1166). As a child, Nursi used to call upon Geylani as “Ya Gavs-ı Azam” (O Supreme Saviour) and in this way found belongings that he had lost. When Nursi was fourteen or fifteen, Geylani came to him in a dream and told him to go to the tribal leader Mustafa Paşa and kill him for disobeying the rules of the religion. After this dream, Bediüzzaman went to Mustafa Paşa with a gun and told him to observe the dictates of religious law or else be killed. After this brave behaviour of Nursi, Mustafa Paşa changed his life style and began to pursue the religious law. For Hamid Algar, the relationship between Geylani and Nursi is an *uveysi* type relationship (one of instruction without physical meeting with the master).¹⁵

Although there is obvious influence by many different Sufis on his life, Nursi does not refer to himself as a Sufi or shaykh. Moreover, his movement is not called a Sufi order. For him, Sufism is like a fruit, while faith is like bread. A person can live without fruit, but he cannot live without bread. Therefore, if all the famous Sufis like Geylani, Nakshbandi, and Sirhindi were

¹⁴ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 2:1475-1477.

¹⁵ Hamid Algar, “Bediüzzamanın Hayatı ve Eserlerinde Tasavvuf ile Tarikat,” 21-22.

living in his time, (Nursi asserted) they would leave aside their orders and work to defend and articulate the Qur’anic faith. Faith is the most urgent need of this time.¹⁶

II. EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge, as understood in the Sufi tradition within Islam, is generally described in terms of gnosis acquired through unveiling. And indeed, the writings of Said Nursi are grounded in his multiple experiences of unveiling. Nursi points to these experiences in different parts of his works through the use of a number of concepts and phrases such as *ilham* (inspiration), *sünuhat* (accesses), *hads* (spiritual analogy), *tuluat* (offshoots), *tahattur* (remembering), *yazdırıldı* (I was made to write), and *kalbe geldi* (it came to the heart).

Beside these references to unveiling in the writings of Nursi, four sources of gnosis, namely Muhammad (pbuh), the Universe, the Qur’an and Conscience appear as other important aspects of Nursi’s Sufi epistemology.

In this chapter, I will discuss the concepts and terminology of unveiling in the writings of Nursi and then discuss his four sources of gnosis.

1. The Concepts and Terminology of Unveiling

A. *İlham* (Inspiration)

“*Inspiration*” plays an important role for Nursi in the process of writing his works, known collectively as *Risale-i Nur*. Although most of *Risale-i Nur* is written as a result of *sünuhat* (accesses)¹⁷, one of his important books (called *Asayı Musa*,¹⁸) is explicitly the result of

¹⁶ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 1:355.

¹⁷ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 1st vol., (Istanbul: Nesil, 1996), 843.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:1310.

ilham (inspiration). "Inspiration" likewise informs the spiritual methodology¹⁹ which he extracted from the Qur'an, as well as the name *Risale-i Nur*²⁰ given to his writings.

For Nursi, inspiration is the second most important unveiling, after revelation. There are two main differences between these terms: first, most inspiration comes to a person without an intermediary, such as an angel; whereas most revelations are brought to the prophets through angels. Therefore, inspiration is of much lower stature than revelation; second, inspiration is relatively more obscure and general in its reference; whereas revelation is both more pure and more specific. In inspiration colors are indistinct while in revelation they remain very distinct.²¹ For Nursi, the knowledge of the unseen that is obtained through inspiration is imprecise and in many of its aspects not fully clear.²²

B. Sünuhat (Accesses)

Sünuhat (Accesses) are the most important type of unveiling in Nursi's writing process, to the extent that one of his books is called *Sünuhat*. In this book, Nursi talks about the epigrams that rose in his heart to explain different verses of the Qur'an.

For Nursi, most of the thoughts in the *Risale-i Nur* are not "inspiration," but the result of *sünuhat* that come to the heart as a result of the Qur'an's bountiful abundance and assistance.²³ He says that the most of *Risale-i Nur* is the result of *sünuhat*, not the result of knowledge, thought, intention, or will.²⁴ Therefore, Nursi does not answer the questions of his students by depending on his own intellect and knowledge when there is no "access" in his heart.²⁵

¹⁹ Ibid., 1:1310.

²⁰ Ibid., 1:1080.

²¹ Ibid., 1:907.

²² Ibid., 2:1653.

²³ Ibid., 1:843.

²⁴ Ibid., 2:1650.

²⁵ Ibid., 1:629.

The knowledge that is obtained as a result of “access” is certain. Nursi says "The topics related to truths [*hakaik*, that are invoked in *Risale-i Nur*], sometimes including their smallest and most precise details, are the result of *sünühat*. Thus, there is no need to doubt them; they are certain." Therefore, Nursi has no presence in any of his writings except he could explained them with a good way of expression or not.²⁶

After a careful reading of Nursi, the following statements can be made about the nature of accesses:

1. *Sünühat* occur in the heart, which is to say that they produce a type of knowledge that is obtained through the heart.²⁷
2. They occur suddenly and without the will of any human being.²⁸
3. Nursi usually experienced their onset as a result of the Qur’an’s abundance and direction.²⁹
4. Accesses bring certain knowledge.³⁰
5. The fundamentals of *Risale-i Nur* and the most of its details are the results of accesses.³¹
6. Accesses come to the heart as meanings and the recipient subsequently clothes them in words.³²
7. Most of the accesses that Nursi received concern the meaning of the Qur’an; some of them are about the unseen.³³

²⁶ Ibid., 1:629.

²⁷ Ibid., 2: 1874.

²⁸ Ibid., 2: 1874.

²⁹ Ibid., 1:843.

³⁰ Ibid., 2:1464.

³¹ Ibid., 1464.

³² Ibid., 2:1464.

³³ Ibid., 2:1580.

C. Hads (spiritual analogy)

“*Hads*” (an Arabic and Ottoman word, literally meaning "supposition" or "conjecture") is a term frequently used in *Risale-i Nur* to describe another way of gaining esoteric knowledge. Some scholars think of *hads* as intuition or feeling³⁴, yet I prefer to call it *spiritual analogy*. There are two reasons for this. First, *hads* occurs in the heart, and therefore is explicitly spiritual. In this regard, Nursi uses the term *hads-i kalbi* (*hads* of the heart)³⁵. Second, *hads* is not a type of knowledge lacking bases and premises, corresponding instead to a type logical structure like an analogy. In many parts of *Risale-i Nur*, he talks about underlying premises which denote the analogical aspect of *hads*.³⁶

A careful reading of Nursi draws us to the following conclusions about spiritual analogy:

1. *Hads* brings certain knowledge.³⁷
2. It depends on indications, observations, and premises which naturally compel the person to draw conclusions from the analogy. For instance, from the observation of the resurrection of plants in springtime, one concludes that there is necessarily resurrection in the hereafter.³⁸
3. Spiritual analogy is the instant and natural transition of thought from premises of mind to conclusions in the heart.³⁹
4. The most intense form of spiritual analogy is inspiration.⁴⁰

³⁴ Musa Kazım Gülçür, “Bediüzaman’da Hads Kavramı,” *Yeni Ümit*, 65, (2004), http://www.yeniumit.com.tr/konu.php?konu_id=329&yumit=bolum2

³⁵ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 2:1367.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:228, 252, 444, 643, 649, 730, 782; 2:1242

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1: 228, 730.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:228; 2:1242.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:1242.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:1371.

With all of this in mind, we may define *hads* as follows: Spiritual analogy (*hads*) is the instant and natural transition of thought from premises of mind to necessary and certain conclusions in the heart.

D. Tuluat (offshoots)

One of the concepts that Nursi uses to express his unveilings is “*tuluat*,” which can be translated as "offshoots." "Offshoots" (***Tuluat***) is a concept that Nursi uses less than the others just described, but one of the most famous sayings of Nursi is a result of *tuluat*:

“Der tarik-i aczimendi lazım amed çar çiz:

Fakr-ı mutlak, acz-i mutlak, şükr-ü mutlak, şevk-i mutlak ey aziz”.⁴¹

"On the path of humble impotence, there are four items that are necessary [to follow in order to reach God]: Absolute poverty, absolute humble impotence, absolute gratitude, and absolute enthusiasm, my dear friend."

In this example of "offshoots," (***Tuluat***) it seems that this couplet appeared to Nursi's heart in both this meaning and form.

In another example of "offshoots," (***Tuluat***) Nursi says that while he was fighting in World War I, some epigrams about the verses of the Qur'an came to his heart in this manner.⁴² The collection of these epigrams comprises the still untranslated book *İşarat'ul İcaz*, whose meaning is approximately *Indications of Incomparability*. Unlike the first example, there is no indication that these epigrams came to Nursi's heart in both their meaning and form. One of the

⁴¹ Ibid., 1:354.

⁴² Ibid., 1:1847.

interesting aspects of *tuluat* is that, when he was first moved to a new place of internal exile in Isparta, Nursi did not receive them for some time.⁴³

E. Tahattur (remembering)

Tahattur, hatır, and hutur are three other words that are used by Nursi to refer the way that he obtained esoteric knowledge. All three words originate from the same Arabic root, and in Turkish they mean *to remember*. In some cases, Nursi uses these words in this sense. However, our concern is the contexts where Nursi means to imply that he was *made* to remember. A careful examination of the distribution of these words and their implications in *Risale-i Nur* suggests that Nursi generally uses them to refer to the meanings and epigrams of the Qur'an that appeared in his heart.⁴⁴ In such cases, the words of *tahattur, hatır, and hutur* are a way of expression for his unveilings.

On the other hand, the word *ih̄tar* also comes from the same root and in contemporary Turkish, *ih̄tar* means *to warn* or *warning*. Nursi usually uses this word to refer to meanings that come to his heart regarding his daily issues and concerns, the order of arrangement of the many parts that make up the *Risale-i Nur*, and his service to faith and the Qur'an.⁴⁵

F. Yazdırıldı (I was made to write)

The phrase *I was made to write* refers to the important parts of *Risale-i Nur* which he was compelled to write as though by some will other than his own, such as the Treatise on Sincerity (*ih̄las risalesi*)⁴⁶ ; the Tenth Topic of the Eleventh Ray, dealing with the supposedly repetitious

⁴³ A city in the central Anatolia.

⁴⁴ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 1:1001, 1847.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:709, 722, 723; 2:1580, 1581, 1582, 1615, 1632, 1692, 1695, 1696, 1697, 1810.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:735.

nature of the Qur'an⁴⁷; the Twelfth Hope of Twenty Sixth Flash; and the introduction to the treatise called the Supreme Sign (*ayet'ül kübra*).⁴⁸ Two aspects that these sections have in common is that they are generally long, and that Nursi generally knows the divine reason for his being caused to write them. For instance, the Tenth Topic of the Eleventh Ray is eleven pages in length, and Nursi was made to write it so that it could be used to defend the Islamic faith against the charge of needless repetitiveness in the Qur'an.⁴⁹

G. Kalbe geldi (It came to the heart).

It came to the heart is another expression that Nursi uses frequently. Since this expression is used for different purposes, it is difficult to make general statements about it. However, it can be said that what "comes to the heart" typically does so suddenly, and leaves a meaning which is related to the current situation of Nursi, his students, and their service to the faith. For example, when Nursi was transported to the fifth cell in the jail in Afyon⁵⁰, he was greatly discomfited. However, while he was invoking the names of God in that cell, a divine meaning "came to his heart and informed him that the people sharing this cell with him were in a greater need of his spiritual direction than were those students confined with him in the previous cell. And after this unveiling, he was satisfied with his new situation."⁵¹

On the other hand, a wise meaning related to the Qur'an or any scientific subject may be among those things that "come to the heart" of Nursi too. In this regard, an epigram related to the following verse came to the heart of Nursi: "[Joseph said:] O my Sustainer! You have indeed bestowed upon me something of power and have imparted unto me some knowledge of the inner

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1:977.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1:713.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:977.

⁵⁰ A city in west of Turkey.

⁵¹ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 2:1116.

meaning of happenings. Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are near unto me in this world and in the life to come: let me die as one who has surrendered himself unto you, and make me one with the righteous,” (Qur’an, 12:101). For Nursi, in this verse, Joseph asks to die and meet with God in the happiest moment of his earthly life which implies that the hereafter is a better and happier than even the happiest time of this life.⁵²

Having introduced the terms and concepts referring to various modes of unveiling of esoteric knowledge in the work of Said Nursi, one final, general comment is in order. Although there are five major concepts and two major phrases regarding unveilings in *Risale-i Nur*, there are in effect three distinct levels of unveiling in Nursi’s writings, these being *ilham* (inspiration), *sunuhat* (accesses), and *hads* (spiritual analogy). The remaining terms and concepts can be included under *sunuhat* (accesses).

2. Four Sources of Gnosis

One of Nursi’s writings is called *Nokta* (meaning a period or dot, in the sense of a mark of punctuation) at the beginning of which Nursi writes that “Our aim and what we seek is [to reach] the verse ‘God — there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being.’ (Qur’an, 2:225) [Therefore, in this section of our work] we introduce four major proofs among the numerous proofs of God’s Oneness.”⁵³ For Nursi, these proofs are Muhammad (pbuh), the universe, the Qur’an, and conscience (*vicdan*). They are the main sources of gnosis which present God to humanity.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., 1:479.

⁵³ Ibid., 2:1368.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2:1368.

In one of his later and major works *Sözler* (translated as *The Words*), Nursi reduces these proofs to three and skips the fourth proof conveyed through conscience.⁵⁵ However, in the rest of this chapter, I will follow his early work *Nokta* and introduce four proofs, as did Dr. Ali Mermer in his article “The Ways of Gnosis in *Risale-i Nur*.”⁵⁶

A. Muhammad (pbuh)

For Nursi, the universe is like a marvelous palace that displays the beauty and wealth of its king. All the people who live in this palace of the universe are like the guests of this magnificent king who invited them to this palace in order to serve them different foods and display to them his incredible treasures. After this important invitation from this magnificent king, people come to the palace to see the beauty of it. However, since they do not really know the details of the art and the beauty that is displayed in the palace, they could not appreciate the palace and its beauty as it deserves. As a result, the magnificent king sends his distinguished servant to guide his guests and tell them the art of the palace, and, thereby, the beauty of the king.

In this story, the king is God, the palace is the universe and the distinguished servant is Muhammad (pbuh). Therefore, Muhammad (pbuh) and his servanthood are necessary to teach people about God, His majesty, and His beauty. Otherwise, the whole universe becomes worthless because the reason for creation of the universe is to instruct humans concerning its Creator.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1:91.

⁵⁶ Ali Mermer, “Risale-i Nur’da Marifet Yollari,” in *Uluslar Arasi Bediuzzaman Sempozyumu 3*, 50-61 (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Yayınları, 1996).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1:44-48.

Therefore, in the mind of Nursi, Muhammad (pbuh) and his prophethood play a crucial role in the process of gaining gnosis. People should listen to Muhammad's teaching; otherwise, this would be the physical end of the universe because when God is not known and recognized, there is no further reason for the universe to endure any longer.⁵⁸

At the same time, Muhammad's greatest claim and most significant message is the declaration of faith, which is "There is no deity save God." Therefore, each proof of Muhammad's prophethood is also a proof for God's oneness — and the proofs of Muhammad's prophethood are numerous.

First of all, Muhammad (pbuh) is the last messenger and he proclaims God's oneness as all the previous messengers did. Thus, his message is the culmination of all prior messages brought to humanity by previous prophets. In turn, this implies that all the previous messengers and the proofs of their prophethood are likewise proofs for the prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh).⁵⁹

By the same logic, all the saints and the evidentiary miracles (*keramet*) demonstrating their sainthood are equally to be considered proofs for the prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) because all the saints claim God's oneness which is the message of Muhammad (pbuh).⁶⁰

Other proofs for Muhammad's prophethood include the glad tidings about his coming found in earlier revealed books, as well as the predictions of diviners and miracles relating to Muhammad (pbuh) that occurred before his birth; Muhammad's numerous miracles, from splitting the moon to feeding his entire army with a small amount of food; his perfect morality; his exalted character displayed in his service as the seal of the prophets; his faith and trustworthiness; his serenity in the face of enemies; his extraordinary God-consciousness; his

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1:889.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:91.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:91.

seriousness; his sincere servanthood; and his complete service and commitment to his prophethood.⁶¹ In effect, each of these, as examples of the numerous proofs of the role of Muhammad (pbuh) as prophet of God, is likewise a conclusive proof of God's Oneness.

Nursi also discusses praising (*salavat*) Muhammad (pbuh) and its practical role to obtain gnosis. According to Nursi, the meaning of *salavat* is mercy, and mercy is the best vehicle for conveying human beings to the presence of God. It makes them friends of God.⁶²

God is like the sun, which is far away from us. Just as the sun can, despite this great distance, be brought close to us through its light, so too is God brought close to us through His Mercy. Accordingly, the one who finds God's Mercy finds an eternal, inexhaustible treasury of light, and the way to find this treasury is through praise (*salavat*) upon Muhammad (pbuh) who is mercy for the all creatures, as indicated in the Qur'an (Qur'an, 21:107).⁶³ Therefore, the first door to God's treasury of mercy is Muhammad (pbuh) and the easiest key of this door is his praise in *salavat*.⁶⁴

It is a certain form of *salavat* that reminds Nursi of the oneness of God in the most direct way. The meaning of this prayer is as follows: "O our God! Give mercy to our lord Muhammad and to his family in as great a number as there are illnesses and cures." In this supplication, the mention of illnesses and cures leads Nursi to the apprehension of pure oneness because sending cures to all sicknesses shows knowledge, insight, consciousness, and mercy. Taken as a whole, these are indicative of the oneness of God.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid., 1:92.

⁶² Ibid., 1:635.

⁶³ Ibid., 1:635.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:635.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:849.

Following the *sunnah* of Muhammad (pbuh) is another key to the experience of God's presence. In this respect, emulation of the prophetic *sunnah* is regarded as a mode of remembrance (*zikir*) in Nursi's spiritual methodology.⁶⁶

Moreover, for Nursi, the one who follows the *sunnah* even in his daily, ordinary issues remembers Muhammad (pbuh), such that this remembering leads him in turn to God and to feeling himself in the presence of God. Nursi regards this as another way to gain gnosis because the place of gnosis is the heart and its feelings, rather than mind.⁶⁷

B. The Universe

According to Nursi, the universe is the second major proof that introduces us God's existence, oneness, qualities, and names. For him, the universe is like a book made up of letters, with each letter corresponding to a creature. These creatures describe their Creator not only individually, but as a whole, collectively. In this regard, Nursi thinks that the whole universe invokes the following verse,⁶⁸ "The seven heavens extol God's limitless glory, and the earth, and all that they contain; and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise," (Qur'an, 17:44).

Nursi says that when we look at the universe we see that every single creature takes a certain shape, a certain quality, a certain color, and a certain smell among the infinite range of possibilities. This demonstrates that there is a necessary being that prefers their particular shapes, qualities, colors, and smells over others.⁶⁹ Moreover, each creature assumes its unique position among the other creatures without failing to work with the rest harmoniously. To imagine the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1:211.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1:607.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2:1368.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2:1368.

total web of relationships, from a single atom to the sun, gives one a small sense of the immense complexity of this harmonious universe. All of these complex relationships work together without conflict or collision. For Nursi, this is another sign of the existence, oneness, will, and wisdom of God.⁷⁰

Every letter of the universe, especially if it corresponds to an animate being, has a face looking towards other letters and sentences. For instance, there is an integral relationship between the eyes of a small mosquito and the very sun millions of miles away. To be able to create a tiny mosquito, therefore, implies the need and ability to create a gigantic sun. And this implies further that the one who created this mosquito is precisely the same one who created this sun, just as the one who designed the stomach of the tiniest flea is the one who created the most enormous of the planets.⁷¹

For Nursi, the order that we observe in the universe is a sign of God's oneness. Similarly, every science that we study today is a sign of the order of the universe. Sciences are maintained by general rules, and there is a separate science almost for every aspect of the universe. If each branch of knowledge is upheld by general rules, and if there is an independent science for almost every aspect of the universe, it must be asserted that there is an order in the universe. This is because the general rules of each science indicate stability and order.⁷²

Moreover, when we observe the universe we see that every single being, especially the animate ones, possesses great needs and desires. For instance, a human being needs and desires everything from water and air to love and security. The material as well as immaterial needs and desires of each person are numerous. In our observation, we also see that these numerous needs and desires of creatures are given to them in appropriate time, in appropriate amount, and in

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2:1368.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1:1368.

⁷² Ibid., 1:1370.

appropriate type without any effort on their part. This demonstrates God's existence and unity, and introduces Him as the Generous, the Merciful, and the Knowing.⁷³

Another sign in the universe of the existence and the oneness of God is found in the prayers of creatures. For Nursi, every creature in the universe prays to God and seeks the fulfillment of its needs and desires with the tongue of ability, the tongue of natural needs, or the tongue of compulsion. Moreover, we see that someone accepts these prayers and satisfies their needs and desires, displaying God's necessary existence and oneness and allowing Him to be described with the names Creator, the Compassionate, the Generous, and the One Who accepts prayers.⁷⁴

Furthermore, we see in the universe that every creature, especially animate ones, comes to being very quickly. Due to the speed of their creation, creatures should be simple, formless, and artless — and yet we observe instead creatures endowed with minute complexity, beautiful forms, and great artfulness. From this it follows that there must be someone who is able to manage everything, to create very quickly and no less wonderfully in spite of this dispatch. This is an indication for God's existence and oneness. It also describes Him with the names of the Powerful and the Wise.⁷⁵

Another sign for the existence and the oneness of God in the universe is humanity. Among humans, the prophets, who have enlightening spirits, are witnesses for God's necessary existence, oneness, and management of the universe through demonstration of their clear miracles. Similarly, all saints, who have enlightened hearts, are witnesses to God's differentiated and undifferentiated oneness with their unveilings and miracles (*keramet*). Moreover, all *asfiya*

⁷³ Ibid., 1:299.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:300.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1:300.

(purified people who possess enlightened minds) profess on the strength of their firm examinations that God is one and His management is excellent.⁷⁶

Throughout the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi examines existence as one of the four major proofs of God. Because it is impossible to include every aspect of the subject in this section, I move on at this point to discuss the third proof, the Qur'an.

C. The Qur'an

For Nursi, the Qur'an is the most important source of gnosis. He acknowledges his writings as reflections of the Qur'an and since they mirror the Qur'an, they are influential.⁷⁷ Moreover, if he praises his writings, he praises them for the same reason.⁷⁸

According to Nursi, the defining moment of his relationship to the Qur'an occurred during his service in the *Dar'ul Hikmet'il Islamiye*, the religious affairs ministry of late Ottoman times. In that moment, he experienced fundamental spiritual changes, anticipating death and seeing no goodness in his spiritual life on the strength of which to pass to felicity in the Hereafter. In seeking help and he opened Abdülkadir Geylani's book *Fütuhu'l-Gayb* (translated as *Signs of the Unseen*). By coincidence the page that he stumbled upon informed him that as one in *Dar'ul Hikmet*, he is to seek a doctor who will heal the heart. As a result, Nursi came to regard Abdülkadir Geylani as his spiritual doctor and began to read the book as if written specifically for him. However, the content of the book severely hurt Nursi's ego and he abandoned it. When at length the wounds to his ego were healed, he returned to the book and finished it. In due course he took up Imam Rabbani's book *Mektubat* (Letters), encountering a letter begins with the salutation, "It is a letter to Mirza Bediüzzaman." The name Bediüzzaman

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:302.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1:527.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1:523.

was given to Nursi in his youth; his father's name happened to be Mirza. In this letter, Imam Rabbani says that he needs to find one guide and leave aside everything else.

After reading this letter, Nursi found himself wondering for a while which guide to follow. Finally, the mercy of God informed his heart that he ought to follow the Qur'an because it is the source of every way. This is the point at which Nursi puts everything else aside, dedicating his life to the Qur'an and its meaning.⁷⁹

This stage of Nursi's life is the starting point for the writing of *Risale-i Nur*. From this experience until his death, Nursi continually wrote and refined the *Risale-i Nur* collection, which has some similarities with the Qur'an in terms of its compilation. For instance, most parts of *Risale-i Nur* were recited by Nursi and written down by his students, as in the redaction of the Qur'an. Similarly, the order of the parts of *Risale-i Nur* is somewhat fragmented, and differs from that of other books according to a format reminiscent of the Qur'an. Finally, for Nursi, the main subjects of the Qur'an are oneness of God, prophethood, resurrection, and justice which can be obtained through worship.⁸⁰ In the same way, these four subjects are the main concerns of *Risale-i Nur*.

In the same vein, Nursi clearly states that his spiritual methodology to reach God is extracted from the Qur'an. The following are the verses upon which Nursi's methodology depends:⁸¹

1. "Do not consider yourselves pure," (Qur'an, 53:32).

2. "Be not like those who are oblivious of God, and whom He therefore causes to be oblivious of [what is good for] their own selves: [for] it is they, they who are truly depraved." (Qur'an, 59:19)

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1:515, 516.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 2:1169.

⁸¹ Ibid., 1:210.

3. “Whatever good happens to you is from God and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.” (Qur’an, 4:79)

4. “Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self.” (Qur’an, 28:88)

According to Nursi “In the name of God, the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious” (Qur’an, 1:1) is another key verse in the Qur’an in relation to spiritual growth. For Nursi, there are three circles of creation. The first and the biggest circle is the entire universe, followed by the middle circle which is the earth, and finally the last and the smallest circle which is the human being. The verse “In the name of God, the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious” is a spiritual band which connects all of three to each other. The name God (Allah) corresponds to the entire universe, the name the Most Merciful is for the earth and finally the name the Most Gracious is for a human being. If a human being keeps hold of this spiritual band, he can open himself up fully and attain the highest level of humanity.⁸²

On the other hand, a human being is like a traveller in an Arabian desert. Such a person needs to take the name of a tribal chief in order to travel safely and obtain his needs like food and water. Similarly, a human being who travels in the desert of life needs to take the name of the chief of this life who is God. In this context, the verse “In the name of God, the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious” is the phrase that every traveller in this life needs to take in order to travel safely and obtain both spiritual and material needs. Otherwise, this weak and impotent human being may not be able to finish this journey.⁸³

As it is seen in this metaphorical explanation, the poverty and impotence of the human being are two important concepts for Nursi’s spiritual methodology and the verse “In the name

⁸² Ibid., 1:632.

⁸³ Ibid., 1:3-4.

of God, the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious” is a key phrase to reach God through addressing one’s poverty and impotence.

According to Nursi, the methodology of *Risale-i Nur* to obtain gnosis is extracted from the Qur’an, and it is higher than the methodology of theology (*kelam*) and Sufism. In the methodology of theology, the seeker of gnosis needs to pass through the entire chain of cause and effect and then see that this chain ends at God. However, for Nursi, this is a long journey. It is like bringing the water from the mountain to the city by using long water pipes. On the other hand, the way of the Qur’an is shorter because it sees signs of the Creator on the face of every creature. Therefore, it is like opening an artesian well in the middle of the city.⁸⁴

Similarly, the way of *Risale-i Nur*, being likewise the way of the Qur’an, is better than the way of Sufism. In the way of *Risale-i Nur*, every creature is a sign of God, so a reader of *Risale-i Nur* can feel the presence of God everywhere and everytime. On the other hand, in the way of Sufism, a Sufi needs to say either *There is nothing that exists except God* or *There is nothing to see except God* in order to feel the presence of God. In the first case, the Sufi denies the existence of the universe while in the second, he ignores it.⁸⁵

D. Conscience (vicdan)

Conscience is the fourth proof for God’s existence and oneness. The difference between this proof and the previous ones is that conscience is only mentioned in the early works of Nursi, not in *Risale-i Nur* collection. For Nursi, there is increase and decrease in conscience (*vicdan*).

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1:502-503.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 1:503.

The pulling that conscience feels is due to the "one who is pulling," it. As a result, this "pulling" and "being pulled" in conscience are two signs that show God.⁸⁶

Nursi talks about four attributes of conscience:

1. For Nursi, conscience reflects the nature of the human being, so it does not lie. For instance, the nature of a small seed of apple tree says *I will be a big tree and produce apples*. After a while, it becomes a tree and indeed gives apples. Similarly, the nature of an egg announces *I'll grow and become a chick*. After a while, it grows and becomes a chick. What it says at the beginning becomes true at the end. Therefore, with regard to the conscience of human beings, it is clear through the many who experience the existence of God that God exists.⁸⁷

2. For Nursi, human beings possess more senses than we know. We generally think that humans possess five senses, but according to Nursi, humans have the sixth and the seventh senses which are the parts of conscience. These two senses are *saika* (motivation) and *şaiika* (enthusiasm). *Saika* drives human feelings towards a desire for God, while *şaiika* attracts human beings to God through yearning. These senses do not lie.⁸⁸

3. Conscience has two faculties called *nokta-i istinad* (roughly translated as a need to rely on something above itself) and *nokta-i istimdat* (a need to seek help). These two faculties of conscience use humans' impotence and poverty as a vehicle to connect with God. Through this connection, human beings become the most exalted beings in the universe, even though they possess impotence and poverty within their very nature. As a result, it can be said that two faculties of conscience, *nokta-i istinad* and *nokta-i istimdat*, witness God, so this witnessing must be true because the high and honorable standing of human beings in the universe depends

⁸⁶ Ibid., 1:321.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2:1371.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 2:1371.

upon this witnessing.⁸⁹ *Nokta-i istinad* and *nokta-i istimdat* are two windows of conscience which are always open to the mercy of God. They always lead conscience to implore and seek its needs from God.⁹⁰

4. For Nursi, conscience is always connected to God. One may neglect or forget God in one's mind in the course of dealing with other issues, but conscience never does. Conscience can forget itself, but it does not forget or ignore God. It always thinks of God and faces towards Him.

Moreover, "spiritual analogy" (*hads*); "inspiration" (*ilham*), which is the advanced form of "spiritual analogy;" "tendency" (*meyil*) which is a concept related to will in the mind of Nursi, "desire" (*arzu*) which is the advanced form of "tendency;" "passion" (*şevk*), which is the intense form of "desire," and finally "love" (*aşk*) which is the intense form of "passion," always excites conscience towards God.⁹¹

In sum, Nursi values unveiled knowledge in his epistemological doctrine and uses it through out his whole discourse. Moreover, he acknowledges the universe, the Qur'an, Muhammad, and conscience as the four sources of gnosis and interestingly enough, he leaves aside conscience in the works of new Said since it is not external, and, thereby, objective.

III. ONTOLOGY

In this chapter, I will divide Nursi's Sufi ontology into two sections, theology and cosmology. In the theology section, I will follow three headings: the being of God and the names of God. In the section of cosmology, I will discuss two subjects: macrocosm and microcosm and the seen and unseen realms.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2:1371.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1:316.

⁹¹ Ibid., 2:1371.

1. Theology

A. The Being of God

According to Nursi, the existence of God is necessary; otherwise, there would be no way to explain being. To prove his statement, Nursi says that there are four ways to explain being and if the first three ways can be falsified, then God's existence which is the fourth way becomes true by itself.⁹² These four ways are as follows:

1. Causes are the source of being.
2. Every being comes into being by itself.
3. Nature creates being.
4. God creates being.

To falsify the first way, Nursi uses a metaphorical language. He says let us imagine that we enter a pharmacy and see more than a hundred small medicine bottles on the shelves. Moreover, in the middle of these bottles, there is a cup of medical cream. It seems that this cup of cream is made by mixing all the medicine bottles in the pharmacy. It contains different amounts of medicine from each bottle like three grams from bottle 1 and one ounce from bottle 2 and so on.

After introducing this metaphor, Nursi uses it to falsify the claim that "causes" are the ultimate source of being," when he says that is it possible to claim that the wind somehow managed to blow and open the windows of the pharmacy, throw down the medical bottles; and then only necessary amounts of medicine poured down from each bottle, resulting in the production of this cup of medical cream!? Similarly, every single creature, especially if it is

⁹² Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 1:677.

animate, is like this mixed medical cream or even more complex. Therefore, it is impossible to attribute the whole universe to blind, deaf, inanimate, and coincidental causes.⁹³

In order to falsify the second contention, that "every being comes into being by itself," Nursi says that this is like saying that the body of the human being is like a magnificent palace which has thousands of domes on it. In each dome, every single rock stands shoulder to shoulder with each other without there being any columns supporting them. Moreover, it is like saying that in the palace of the human body, every cell (which corresponds to a single rock in Nursi's analogy), regenerates itself independently every moment. If anybody would claim that each cell of human body created itself, then he would have to accept that each cell is the captive, the master, and the mate of the other cells, [based on the analogy, you should explain why he would he have to accept that each cell is the captive etc. of the others--since it is not self-evident why he would have to accept it] which is impossible.⁹⁴

In order to falsify the third contention, that "Nature creates being," Nursi says if being is not attributed to God (who is powerful and wise) and is instead attributed to nature, then it is necessary to assume that a handful of earth has big machines to create flowers, painting factories to color them, perfume factories to give them an odor, and an intelligence to do all of these. However, it is irrational to assume all of these "factories" exist in handful clay. Therefore, nature cannot be the source of being.⁹⁵ Having shown that the first three contentions are untenable, Nursi concludes that we are left with the fourth contention, that God creates being. As a result, Nursi asserts that God is the creator of being; and His existence necessarily demonstrates that He is the creator of being.

⁹³ Ibid., 1:678.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 1:679.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1:680.

The God that Nursi believes in is one, without any partner. Moreover, nature contains a many signs showing God's oneness. For instance, when we look at life in the nature, we see that God uses one material to create many and uses many to create one. In this respect, sperm is the source of many organs of a human body. Similarly, water is the life giver of different plants, trees and flowers. On the other hand, human beings eat different foods which include different types of meats, vegetables, grains, and fruits, but all of them create one body of human being. As a result, Nursi says that the one who makes everything from one and one from everything can only be one because to accomplish that, the creator must have the power to see everything, know everything, and manage everything.⁹⁶

He goes further in explaining this by using a metaphorical language. He calls upon us to consider a person who is making different types of textiles like satin, velvet, and linen from small amount of cotton. The same man is also making different types of sweets like pineapple cake and cheese cake from the same cotton. After that, you see the same man is taking honey, a rock, butter, water, and clay into his hand; and by squeezing them, he turns them into gold. As a result, you would conclude that this man to be the owner of everything and to have an ability to use everything and make them whatever he likes. Similarly, God is the owner of everything that is in the universe; and he can turn everything into whatever he likes, so He is one and without partner.⁹⁷

On the other hand, if you consider animate beings in the universe --beings like a human being, a honey bee, and a seed of tree-- you would see that God makes them include the attributes of the most of the universe. For instance, a human beings walks on the earth; drinks water, eats meat, fruits and vegetables; breathes air; imagines and remembers the past

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1:122.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 1:122.

occurrences of the universe. In these ways he is related to everything in the universe. He is related to clay, water, animals, plants, air, the world of imagination, and happenings. Therefore, Nursi argues, the One who creates this human being is the One who owns and manages everything. Similarly, a honey bee flies on mountains, lands on trees, makes honey for humans and so it is related to everything. Furthermore, when we look at a fig seed, we see that a small seed contains the program (or as we would say today "the genetic coding") for the giant fig tree. As a result, God especially creates animate beings to be like the seeds of the universe. It shows that the One who creates animate beings in this way is the One who owns and manages everything. Therefore, he should be one.⁹⁸

On the other hand, this management and sovereignty necessitates oneness and declines partnership. As we see in human societies, Nursi asserts that even human leaders who are in need of the help of others decline partnership and eliminate people who want to share their management and sovereignty. Therefore, there is one leader in one country, one governor in a city, and one president in a school. Similarly, the management and sovereignty of God strongly declines partnership and punishes people who associate partners with him.⁹⁹

Moreover, if there is oneness in everything and everywhere, then there is no room for a partner or partners. Oneness points to the One. One product indicates one maker, nothing else. In this respect, we see oneness in creation as many as the names and qualities of God because creation is the reflection of God's names and qualities. Therefore, Nursi contends, there is oneness of management in the universe. The wisdom that we observe in the universe is one. The

⁹⁸ Ibid., 1:122-123.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 1:854.

mercy that we feel in the creation is one. The sun, the moon, the mountains, the seas, the lakes, the clouds of the universe is one. Thus, this oneness denies partnership.¹⁰⁰

This oneness of God has two aspects in the writings of Nursi: *ehadiyet* and *vahidiyet*.¹⁰¹ *Ehadiyet* means undifferentiated oneness and *vahidiyet* means differentiated oneness. Nursi explains these concepts through an illustration. For instance, the sun and its light are one, but it has two aspects. In the first, it enlightens the whole world. This is the aspect of *vahidiyet*. In the meantime, it is reflected transparently (for those who understand or who have the necessary degree of spiritual awareness) in every item in the world. In this respect, there is one sun that is transparent in every item; and this aspect of the sun's light is *ehadiyet*.¹⁰²

Similarly, we see God's management in all over the world and this general management reflects God's oneness of *vahidiyet*. On the other hand, we see that every single creature individually receives care and food. This is the aspect that shows God's oneness of *ehadiyet*. In this respect, Nursi says "*Vahidiyet* means that the whole being belongs to one, shows one and is the product of one. *Ehadiyet* means that the most of God's names reflect the Creator of everything reflected in every single being."¹⁰³ Another difference between these two concepts is that *vahidiyet* refers to the Divine majesty (*celal*) while *ehadiyet* refers to Divine beauty (*cemal*).¹⁰⁴ Due to the differences of *vahidiyet* and *ehadiyet*, in the Qur'an God may alternate between the two and discuss *ehadiyet* while discussing *vahidiyet* so that the human mind can

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1:858.

¹⁰¹ The terms *ehadiyet* and *vahidiyet* were popularized in the school of Ibn 'Arabi and had become widespread in Sufi literature in the seven hundred years between Ibn 'Arabi and Nursi. See Chittick, the *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 325-329 for a discussion of these terms.

¹⁰² Ibid., 1:454-455.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1:455.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 2:1353.

easily follow it. This is the reason why we see the Qur'an referring to a single creature while discussing the creation of the universe.¹⁰⁵

For Nursi, if the creation is attributed to one God, then the creation of the whole universe becomes as easy as creating a single being. If it would be attributed to more than one, then the creation of a single fly would become as difficult as creating the heavens. To explain this statement, Nursi uses an allegorical way of expression. Two soldiers go to the army to fight against the enemy of their country. The first one is arrogant; therefore, he does not accept belonging to the army and tries to fight by himself. Since he wants to do everything by himself, he encounters a lot of difficulties. He needs to cook, he has to fight, and he must communicate and so on. Therefore, he becomes weak and fights little. On the other hand, the second soldier is humble; therefore, he enters the army. Then, everything becomes easy for him. He does not think about any obligation other than fighting. Therefore, he does a lot of work for the army.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, if every single being would be left alone, everything would become difficult in the universe. Creatures could not act as they act right now and could not perform many duties as they do already without assistance.

In conclusion, for Nursi, there are four possible explanations of being: (a) causes are the source of being, (b) every being comes into being by itself, (c) nature creates being, and (d) God creates being. In the view of Nursi, the first three options are not sufficient to explain the being. Therefore, the last one is the real explanation of it.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:632.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1:466.

B. The Names of God

Nursi explains the names of God by using the following illustration: like a Sultan, who rules a country and is called with different names in different departments of his government, like in a court, where he is the just, and like in his army, where he is the commander, God is named with different names in the different territories of his sovereignty too. For instance, He is called by a stormy sea or the quaking earth as "O Glorious One! O Glorious One! O One of Might, All-Compelling!" The small animals and their young being raised with kindness and compassion in the sea and on the land call Him as "O Beauteous One! O Beauteous One! O Most Compassionate and Merciful One!" He is named in the skies as The Glorious One of Beauty. The earth calls Him as "The Beauteous One of Glory!" And the animals; will call Him "The Most Merciful One! O Provider!"¹⁰⁷ God is reflected in every territory of the universe with almost all of His names; however, in certain parts one or two of these names appear brighter than the other names. On the earth the name "The Beauteous One of Glory" is dominant while in the skies the name "The Glorious One of Beauty" is dominant.¹⁰⁸

Nursi does not talk about a specific number for the names of God. However, he says that in every name of God, there is an open window to see all other names of God due to God's *ehadiyet* (undifferentiated oneness). As it is explained in the previous pages, God's undifferentiated oneness means that almost all of God's names are reflected in each being. As a result, although a specific name is the dominant name in a specific being, all other names can be seen in this creature through that specific name.¹⁰⁹ In this respect, a human being reflects every single name of God since he possesses life. Life is the essence of being and a human is the central animate in being. Therefore, a human is the most comprehensive being that reflects God's

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1:143-144.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 1:143.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 1:544, 545.

names.¹¹⁰ Just as a human being is the most comprehensive being for the names for God at the micro level, the universe is the most comprehensive mirror for the names of God in the macro level. Therefore, God is reflected in his all names in the universe. As God's names and their theophanies are numerous, the beings in the universe are similarly various and numerous.¹¹¹

God's names are real; therefore, according to Nursi, their reflections should be real too. In this respect, Nursi argues that the philosophy of the "oneness of being"¹¹² is wrong when it says there is no being except God; because the universe, which is the most comprehensive mirror for the names of God, is real. Especially, the names like The Merciful, The Sustainer, The Crusher, The Compeller, and The Creator need to have a real mirror—which is the universe—so that they can be reflected therein. Without a real and needy being, The Merciful and The Sustainer cannot be reflected.¹¹³

Moreover, God's names are everlasting. Therefore, they desire to eternally be reflected on behalf of God's holy essence. As a result, their mirrors should be everlasting, Nursi asserts, because if there is no everlasting mirror, then there is no place (i.e. no place at all times) for the names of God to reflect.¹¹⁴ Moreover, there is never ending action going on in the universe caused by the ongoing reflections of the names of God.¹¹⁵ Nursi expresses the important but often forgotten insight that even the calamities that human beings experience in their life are results of God's names, so that life can become purified and developed.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1:364.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 1:482.

¹¹² Nursi is actually not arguing against the doctrine of the "oneness of being" as it is understood by most of the exponents of the school of Ibn 'Arabi. Rather, like Imam Rabbani, Ahmad Sirhindi, he is arguing against a popular misunderstanding of the doctrine of the "oneness of being." See Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*.

¹¹³ Ibid., 1:384-385.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 1:482.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 1:452.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 1:366.

Continuing his elaboration of the Divine names, Nursi states that every name of God has layers in it. For instance, there is a difference between the creation of a single human, on the one hand, and the enormous universe, on the other; and this difference refers to the difference between the layers of the name of God, the Creator. Therefore, to be able to reach the highest layer of the name the Creator, one needs to pass beyond the whole universe and see God as the Creator of everything.¹¹⁷ Similarly, both paradise as well as a banana that a human being eats are also results of the name of God, the Merciful; but there is a great difference between them.¹¹⁸

In this respect, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, are the two best ways to gain awareness God's names since the Qur'an and Sunnah are clear reflections of the Names of God. Nursi affirms that the Qur'an is the clear exegesis of God's essence, qualities, and names. It is the explorer of the spiritual treasures of God's names that are hidden in the earth and the sky.¹¹⁹ Similarly, the Sunnah is the life style that reflects blessings of God's names.¹²⁰

2. Cosmology

A. Macrocosm and Microcosm

Nursi refers to both the universe and a single human being by means of the words macrocosm (*alem-i kebir*) and microcosm (*alem-i sagir*). For Nursi, there is a great similarity between the universe and a single human being, whose purpose is to reflect all God's names. Therefore, it would be appropriate to name them as the macrocosm and the microcosm. In this respect, for Nursi, the pen of divine power has written the content of the entire universe in a single human being. Therefore, if the universe could be miniaturized, it would seem like a single

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 1:143.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 1:637.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 1:160.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 1:159.

human being. Similarly, if a single human being could be enlarged, then he would seem like the enormous universe.¹²¹ For Nursi, the universe is like a tree and a single human being is its fruit. Therefore, God has written the program of this tree in the fruit of it. As a result, it can be said that the relationship between the universe and a single human being is like the relationship between a single human being and his DNA.¹²²

In this respect, Nursi says that if you look at the universe as a big book, Muhammad (pbuh) would be ink of the pen used by the author of this book. If it is seen as a big tree, then Muhammad (pbuh) would be its seed and fruit. If it is regarded as a giant animate being, then Muhammad (pbuh) would be the spirit of it. If it is thought of as a big human, then Muhammad (pbuh) would be the mind of it. If it is seen as a big garden, then Muhammad (pbuh) would be the nightingale of it.¹²³

For Nursi, the relationship between the universe and a single human being is a sign of God's oneness because the one who has included the content of the entire universe on the face of every single human being must be the one who created the universe. No one can build the being of a single human as a miniature of the giant universe other than the Creator of the universe.¹²⁴

In this context, as I have noted previously, two aspects of oneness emerge: *vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness) and *ehadiyet* (undifferentiated oneness). God manifests his names in the universe through differentiated oneness and He does the same thing on a single human being through undifferentiated oneness. As a result, two types of oneness display themselves in the being of man: the oneness that we see in the system of the universe and the oneness that we observe in the system of a single being.

¹²¹ Ibid., 1:334.

¹²² Ibid., 1:116.

¹²³ Ibid., 2:1325.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 1:116.

In the terminology of Nursi, the ego of a human being corresponds to the nature in the universe. In this context, Nursi uses the word nature in the sense that an atheistic philosophy might use it. For Nursi, an atheistic philosophy acknowledges nature as the creator of being; and when the word nature is used in this sense, it becomes like the ego of a human being claiming to be the creator and the owner of the human being.¹²⁵ When both the ego in a human being as well as nature in the universe become idols claiming self-sufficiency and independency, Nursi asserts that it would be wise to remember the subsequent verse : “He who rejects idols [the powers of evil] and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing.” (Qur’an, 2:256)

B. The Seen and Unseen Realms

The seen and the unseen realms are two cosmological realms that Nursi talks about in *Risale-i Nur*. The seen realm is called *alem-i şehadet* and the unseen realm is called *alem-i gayb* in Turkish. The seen and the unseen realms are also mentioned as *alem-i mülk* and *alem-i melekut* which mean the external world and the world of the inner or spiritual dimensions of things.

For Nursi, the seen realm is like the body in a human being. As the body functions by depending on the spirit, the seen world functions by depending upon the unseen world, especially upon the names of God that are hidden in the realm of the unseen. The seen world is material and physical. It is like a body for the unseen world. It is a word for the "inner dimension" (ma'na) of the unseen. It is a form for the beauty of the unseen. For Nursi, all the material beauties come out of the beauty of their “inner dimension” (ma'na) and "reality" (haqiqat). Their "reality" (haqiqat)

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1:245.

depends on the unseen world, and especially the names of God that are hidden in the realm of the unseen.¹²⁶

For Nursi, the known physical world that we live in (in addition to reflecting the Divine Beauty) contains the seed of physical hellfire in it. The temperature increases from the surface of the earth towards the center of it and the center of the earth is like a pool of lava. Therefore, when the life of the earth finishes, the earth is cracked and then the fire goes out from the body of the earth. This is the time that hellfire (of the hereafter) begins to be created.¹²⁷

The duty of the seen world is to glorify and praise God. Nursi sees this reflected in the Qur'an when God says that "All that is in the heavens and on the earth extols God's limitless glory; for He alone is almighty, truly wise." (Qur'an, 57:1) Therefore, the universe either individually or collectively always glorifies God. As a single flower glorifies God and shows his beauty, the earth is like a big garden full of flowers glorifying God. As a tree refers to its Creator with its branches, fruits, and leaves, the whole universe signifies God with its planets, stars, seas, and heavens.¹²⁸

Moreover, these glorifications and praises that occur in the seen world are represented by angels in the unseen world. Angels transform the glorifications and praises of the seen world into the language of the unseen world. On the other hand, the beings of the seen world that make these glorifications are like the houses and mosques for the angels in the seen world.¹²⁹ Due to the representation of the seen world (in the forms of angels) in the unseen world, the earth may be acknowledged as a seed while it is represented in the unseen world as a big tree.¹³⁰ This representation (of the seen world in the unseen) not only concerns the physical entities of the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 1:880.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 2:1236.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 1:229.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 1:229.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 1:615.

seen world, but also concerns the abstract rules of the universe— namely, such abstract rules are also represented in the unseen world. Moreover, these abstract rules of the universe can only gain their character through the angels that represent them.¹³¹

In this respect, for Nursi, the unseen world has higher stature than the seen world. Just as the inner being of everything is better, higher, and more beautiful than their external forms, the unseen world is better than the seen world. The relationship between the unseen world and the seen world is like the relationship of the stomach of a human being and his house; or it is like the skin of a human being in relationship to his shirt. However, the lower self cannot understand this reality and disengage itself from earthly attachments.¹³²

Moreover, the beings that pass from the seen world to the unseen world do not go to nonexistence. They pass from the realm of power to the realm of knowledge. Since the physical beings are the reflections of God's names, they live forever because the names of God are eternal. According to Nursi, their transformation from the seen world to the unseen world is on account of their renovation due to the new reflections of God's names.¹³³

IV. ANTHROPOLOGY

According to Nursi, man as a human being is the fruit of the world. He is the most comprehensive, most wondrous, most impotent, most weak, and most subtle miracle of God's Power.¹³⁴ He is the index of all being despite his minute body. He contains the keys to all the treasuries of mercy and the mirrors of all the Divine Names.¹³⁵ He is the fruit of the creation tree and the seed of the earth which is the heart of the universe despite its smallness and lowliness in

¹³¹ Ibid., 2:1265.

¹³² Ibid., 2:1339.

¹³³ Ibid., 1:481.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 1:153.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1:28.

relation to the heavens. Moreover, he is an index representing most of the species and spaces of the universe. He is like a drop filtered from the whole universe with an extremely fine balance.¹³⁶

Due to this extremely important position of a human being relative to the creation, the earth that humans inhabit is the most important planet among the others. It is smaller and lower than the heavens and other planets, but it is the heart and the center. It displays and exhibits of all the miracles of God's divine art. It is the place of reflection and the point of focus of all manifestations of all the Divine Names. Therefore, God repeatedly describes himself in the Qur'an as the Lord of the heavens and the earth thus equating the earth to the heavens.¹³⁷

The earth is like a particle in the heavens and a human being is a like a particle on the earth. However, neither the heavens nor the earth can encompass a human being. The heavens and the earth are the seen realms. Nonetheless, the human spirit, mind and heart cannot be restricted with the seen realms. The desires of human spirit, the thoughts of human mind, and the tendencies of human heart can only be satisfied in the unseen realm and hereafter.¹³⁸

In this respect, a human being is the comprehensive index for reality as a whole. His heart is the map of both the seen and the unseen realms which include thousands of known and unknown worlds. His mind is the center for the telecommunication lines of the universe which produces different sciences. Human mind gave its fruits by producing different sciences. In the same way, the heart needs to be inspired and developed so that it can produce its fruits.¹³⁹

One of the important human qualities of human beings is their ability to have faith in God. The faith is the means that enables human heart to produce its fruits and elevates the whole human being with his all faculties. Faith connects a human being to his Creator. As a result, all

¹³⁶ Ibid., 1:122.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 1:153.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 2:1223.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 1:561.

faculties of a human being become elevated from the level of being mixtures of meat and blood to the level of mirrors that reflect God's Names and Attributes. A human being, with his all faculties, becomes an artistic manifestation of God who not only reflects the Names and the Attributes of God, but also reads and personally understands them.¹⁴⁰

If he does not believe in his Creator, however, the connection is lost. In such a case, the meaningful designs that a human being reflects would then become meaningless. The Names and the Attributes of God could then not be seen and read. The majority of those meaningful sublime arts and elevated inscriptions would become hidden.¹⁴¹

Moreover, faith is a source of power and courage for believers. A faithful person can deal with the difficulties of life easily and is fearful of nothing except God. He depends on God in every situation of his life and life becomes an easy and cheerful place for him. Nursi illustrates this type of life with the example of two travelers. These two travelers traveled to a far place with their belongings in their big bags. At a certain point of their journey, they needed to take a ship and to continue their journey to their final destination. One of the travelers left his heavy bag on the deck of the ship as soon as he got on the ship. The other one does not trust to the captain of the ship and carries his heavy bag while he traveled. For Nursi, the first traveler is the faithful person in this life. The second traveler is not. The ship is the earth that we live on, the destination is our life, and the captain is the Creator of the earth and our life. If a person believes in God and has faith in Him, then his life becomes easy as in the example of the first traveler. If he does not believe in his Creator and put his trust in Him, then his life becomes ugly and difficult as in the example of the second traveler.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 1:132.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 1:132.

¹⁴² Ibid., 1: 133.

A human being has two aspects and two directions: (1) his arrogant aspect and its earthly direction, (2) his humble aspect and its divine direction. In terms of his arrogant aspect, he thinks that he is the owner of himself and he has enough power to do whatever he desires. However, in this aspect, his wealth is his life is like a fast-dying flame. His capital is his body which tends to decay every moment. His power is his will which is like thin and soft hair. His only aim is earthly life, but life is full of fears, difficulties, and calamities for him since he does not acknowledge his Lord, who is the Owner of everything.¹⁴³

In terms of his humble aspect, he acknowledges himself as a poor and impotent creature before his Lord. However, this acknowledgement leads him to unlimited wealth in his poverty and incredible power in his impotence. He confesses that he does not possess power and wealth and this confession attracts to him God's unlimited power and wealth.¹⁴⁴ In contrast, with regard to his arrogant aspect, he only aims to obtain fulfillment in his earthly life, but he obtains it in neither this life nor the next. In terms of his humble aspect, he aims for the next life, which results in him obtaining fulfillment both this life and the next.¹⁴⁵

A human being is sent to the earth for a duty. When he carries out his duty, he attains a world in the hereafter which is vastly better than this world. In contrast, with regard to his arrogant aspect, he only aims to obtain fulfillment in his earthly life, but he obtains it in neither this life nor the next. In terms of his humble aspect, he aims for the next life, which results in him obtaining fulfillment both this life and the next.¹⁴⁶ A human being is sent to the earth for a

¹⁴³ Ibid., 1:137.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 1:137.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 1:137.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 1:137.

duty. When he carries out his duty, he attains a world in the hereafter which is vastly better than this world.¹⁴⁷ The duty of a human being can be examined in three categories:

1. A human being is the center of the universe. Due to this central importance of a human being, God ties every universal bounty that he bestows to the human being. As a result, a human being functions in the universe as a means of God to give order to his bounties.¹⁴⁸

2. A human being is the perfect addressee for the word of God since he has the most comprehensive nature in the creatures. He is the loudest herald for the astonishing arts of God by appreciating and admiring them. Moreover, he offers every kind of conscious thanks, gives praise, glory, and thanks for all the varieties of God's bounties and the limitless different sorts of His gifts.¹⁴⁹

3. He is a mirror for the Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One in four respects:

a. Man is responsible to mirror God's power and its layers through his impotence and to mirror God's mercy and its levels through his poverty. Because as the light seems brighter in a dark place, the power and the mercy of God are manifested on a poor and impotent man more than others.¹⁵⁰

b. Man is responsible for being a mirror of the knowledge of God's unlimited sovereignty, beautiful art, powerful will, and wise knowledge by means of attaining awareness of his limited sovereignty, art, will and knowledge.¹⁵¹

c. The very being of man mirrors God's names by displaying God's different names and their designs on himself. In this aspect, a man can display all God's Names and their Designs since he is the most comprehensive of the whole existence.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 2:2097.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 1:826.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:826.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 1:826.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 1:826.

d. Man can become a mirror for the tasks (*suun*) and the attributes of God by making manifest God's life through his life and by making manifest God's sight and hearing through his sight and hearing.¹⁵²

For Nursi, beside these cosmic duties, a man has two additional duties which are worship and reflection. Because when humanity is taken to consideration, there would be two circles and two tablets: the circles of Lordship and worship, the tablets of art and reflection. The circle of Lordship means that God governs and educates humanity with Love and Mercy. On the other hand, humanity worships God to glorify His Lordship. Similarly, the tablet of art means that God creates humanity with beautiful forms and manner. Additionally, humanity reflects upon this beauty and excellence.¹⁵³ For Nursi, Muhammad (pbuh) is the one who responds towards the circle of Lordship and the tablet of art the best.¹⁵⁴

After introducing Nursi's anthropological perspective in terms of its general structure, I would like to present two essential anthropological terms in *Risale-i Nur: üstad* (master) and *şakird* (student).

1. Üstad (master)

Master is the term that is used for Said Nursi's himself in *Risale-i Nur*. His words and thoughts are worthy to follow for *şakirds*, the students of *Risale-i Nur*. Therefore, he is the master. For the students of *Risale-i Nur*, Said Nursi, as their master, is very important. His students are eager even to sacrifice their lives for the life and the comfort of their master. In one of his letters, an important student Ahmet Asım Önerdem said that he wanted to die before Said Nursi so that he may be honored by God to welcome Nursi in hereafter. He died in 1935 before

¹⁵² Ibid., 1:826.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 2:1288.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 2:1288.

Nursi, as he wished while he was being questioned in the court of Isparta for his being a student of Nursi.¹⁵⁵ Despite the different pressures that were put on the students of *Risale-i Nur* by the government of the time, all the important students of Nursi identified themselves as students of Nursi and his writings without hesitation. For instance, in the court of Afyon¹⁵⁶, Zübeyir Gündüzalp (d.1971), while he was being questioned whether he is a student or not, proudly declared that he is a student of *Risale-i Nur* if Nursi accepts him as a student. Moreover, he said “If I am going to be cut by daggers for the sake of my *üstad* (master) Said Nursi, I ask from my Lord that my blood that is going to spread would write *Risale-i Nur!*”¹⁵⁷

In addition to the term "master," Said Nursi expressed two other related designations for himself. The first is that he is a "guide" for the meaning of the Qur'an. In this sense, Nursi was given a mission by God; therefore, he is a master. This aspect of Nursi is embodied by his writings, *Risale-i Nur*. Thus, what is important is to read *Risale-i Nur* rather than to meet with him in person. The second designation is Nursi's himself as a person. In this face, he is not different from an ordinary person. Therefore, he does not want to be praised by others.¹⁵⁸ He says that he is neither a *mürşid* (shaikh), nor an *üstad* (master). He is only a student who studies with his student friends. His followers are not the people who may obtain spiritual benefit from Nursi. Rather Nursi himself is the person who will benefit from the prayers of them.¹⁵⁹

For the first sense, Nursi sees himself as a servant of the Qur'an. In this respect, people can talk to Nursi and listen to him by reading *Risale-i Nur*. Readers may find Nursi in the each piece of his works and learn different aspects of faith.¹⁶⁰ In this sense, Nursi is a master, but he

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 2:1455.

¹⁵⁶ A city in the western part of Turkey.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 1: 1103.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 1:509-510.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 2:1605.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 2: 1580.

always says that the beauty that is seen in his works is a result of the Qur'an, not his mastership. Nursi is a master and his master is the Qur'an. Moreover, his mastership is the result of the Qur'an's mastership.¹⁶¹ Nursi also sees Ali (d.661), the fourth caliph,¹⁶² Celaleddin Rumi (d.1273),¹⁶³ Abdülkadir Geylani (d.1165),¹⁶⁴ Imam Rabbani Ahmed Faruk Serhendi (d.1634),¹⁶⁵ and his mother¹⁶⁶ among his masters.

Nursi thinks that a master is only a reflection for reality. He is neither the reality nor the source of reality. He is important since he is a mirror for reality, but because of his clear and humble awareness of man's limitations in contrast to God, he did not give any importance to being considered the Owner of reality—which is one of God's qualities, not man's.¹⁶⁷ In this context, Nursi says that people usually mistakenly think of rain as the reason for the growth of the plants. However, rain is not the reason; rather the reason is the Will of God. But when God wills the growth of the plants, He usually sends rain to them first. By the same token, Nursi warns his students and says that he is not the source of the spiritual benefit that they feel already. Rather he is just a vehicle and that God was using him to spread spirituality.¹⁶⁸

Finally, Nursi accepted the designation of a "master" since he, as a person, represented *Risale-i Nur*, the students of *Risale-i Nur*, and the service of the faith and the Qur'an. For him, *Risale-i Nur*, the students of *Risale-i Nur*, their brotherhood and sisterhood and the service of the faith and the Qur'an are one corporate entity requiring a representative. Nursi was only playing this role, nothing else.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 2:1430.

¹⁶² Said Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, (İstanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 1990), 240.

¹⁶³ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 1:356.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:515.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:515.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 1:689.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 1: 654.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 1:654.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 2:1668.

2. Şakird (student)

Şakird means a student, in particular, a student of *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi describes him in the following way: A student of *Risale-i Nur* is the one who feels like he wrote "Words" (Sözler, the main work of Nursi) and thinks that his life duty is to spread it and serve it.¹⁷⁰ Spreading "Words" means to serve the Qur'an and the Qur'anic faith, because "Words" are the reflections of the Qur'an. This service is to introduce people to the Qur'anic faith so that they can save their life on earth and in the hereafter from the calamity of unbelief. For Nursi, serving people to save their life is a great spiritual attainment. Therefore, if the students of *Risale-i Nur* experience any difficulty while they carry out their service, they need to be patient and even thankful because paradise is not cheap.¹⁷¹ Moreover, there are many people who carried out a similar service in history and endured great hardships, not the simple difficulties that the students of *Risale-i Nur* experience in their service. Thus, they need to be thankful, rather than complaining.¹⁷²

The most important human issue that the students of *Risale-i Nur* should be aware of is their brotherhood (*kardeşlik*). The brotherhood of the students of *Risale-i Nur* encompasses not only this world, but the next.¹⁷³ Moreover, their success in the service of the faith and the Qur'an depends on their brotherhood.¹⁷⁴

In this respect, there are several rules that the students need to follow:

1. Do not to criticize the students of the Qur'an.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 1:510.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 1:999.

¹⁷² Ibid., 1:1011.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 1:669.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:663.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 1:668.

2. Do not promote jealousy among your fellow students by showing off one's personal success in service of faith and the Qur'an.¹⁷⁶
3. Believe that your only power is in your sincerity and brotherhood.¹⁷⁷
4. Be proud with the good attitudes of one's brothers as if one possesses them.¹⁷⁸
5. Always act with the love of your service, not with the hate of other services or people.¹⁷⁹
6. Always try to cooperate with other Islamic groups by thinking of your common grounds.¹⁸⁰
7. Try to cooperate even with sincere Christians and do not make controversial issues a means for argument.¹⁸¹
8. Although you have the right to believe that your group or service is the best, you do not have the right to believe or say that your group is the only right group or service.¹⁸²
9. You need to know that your brotherhood and your union is a reason for the help of God.¹⁸³
10. Strive to maintain alliances with other groups and unify when Unbelievers construct pacts against the Believers.¹⁸⁴

Beside these preceding rules to follow, there are six enemies of which the students of *Risale-i Nur* should be careful.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:668.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 1:669.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 1:669.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 1:663.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 1:663.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 1:663.

¹⁸² Ibid., 1:663.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 1:663.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 1:663.

The first enemy for the students of *Risale-i Nur* is fame and love to possess earthly authority. This desire to be famous and to be followed by other is very dangerous for the students who seek the beauty of the hereafter; and it is considered the weakest part of a human being.¹⁸⁵ The way to fight with this enemy is to know that being content to God's will is such an important factor that it compensates people whose stature is low. If there is compensation from God, it is enough for a student.¹⁸⁶

2. The second enemy is fear. Fear, as an enemy, was more related to the time in which Nursi lived. There was tremendous pressure inflicted on his students by political authorities; and the resultant fear forced some of his students to leave *Risale-i Nur*.

Nursi says that people who want to pacify (namely, to diminish the fervor of) the students of *Risale-i Nur* use fear as a means to obtain their aim. However, the students who fear their propaganda lose in the hereafter. They try to escape from the bite of a mosquito, but leave themselves to the bite of a poisonous snake. The students should know that as students of the Qur'an, they live in the castle of the Qur'an. Therefore, they should live free of harm. If they choose to walk in a harmful way in the world while continuing their service to God and the *Risale-i Nur*, they will bear the difficulties they encounter and sacrifice their earthly benefits for the sake of hereafter.¹⁸⁷

3. The third enemy is to leave aside the service of the faith and the Qur'an in order to increase their worldly livelihood. For this enemy, Nursi says that lawful livelihood comes to the person according to his poverty and humble impotence, not because of his power and effort. Nursi contends that trees stay where they are and their nutrition comes to them. However, animals go after their food and because of this, they do not get nutrition as much as trees get.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 1:545.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 1:546.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 1:547.

Similarly, fish seem foolish when compared to monkeys. However, fish are always fat while monkeys are thin. God says “Verily! God himself is the provider of all sustenance, the Lord of all might, the Eternal,” (Qur’an, 51:58).

4. The fourth enemy is nationalism. Some people who worked against *Risale-i Nur* and its people said that Said Nursi is Kurdish, while Turks should follow Turkish scholars rather than a Kurdish one. In response to this controversy, Nursi said that although he was a Kurdish scholar, because Islam was his religion, he saw himself as a brother of all Muslims with all Muslims as his brothers and sisters. Moreover, he maintained a stronger connection with Turks out of all Muslims because Turks represented the religion of Islam for almost a thousand years. Therefore, for the sake of Islam, Nursi was proud of Turks and loved them.¹⁸⁸

5. The fifth enemy is the egoism which can be found in some scholars. For Nursi, his writings are reflections of the Qur’an. Therefore, he did not own them. They belong to the Qur’an. Moreover, the success of *Risale-i Nur* and other many signs showed Nursi that he was given a mission by God to explain and defend the Islamic faith. Therefore, scholars should leave their ego and find no difficulty in accepting *Risale-i Nur*. During the time in which Nursi lived it was very difficult to disseminate the teachings of the *Risale-e Nur*. Nursi realized that enemies made pacts against *Risale-i Nur* and belief in God in general. Therefore, he asserted that believers should not listen to their ego and should instead follow *Risale-i Nur*. Otherwise, he stated that they could become used by unbelievers against the *Risale-i Nur* and belief.¹⁸⁹

6. The last enemy that Nursi mentions is laziness. He says that Satans among the humans and jinn always produce a lot of earthly work for the students of *Risale-i Nur* in order to make them busy and unavailable for the service of the faith and the Qur’an. Sometimes, they show the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 1:549-550.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 1:552-553.

beauty of earthly life to the students of *Risale-i Nur*, thus making them forget or ignore the service of the faith and the Qur'an.¹⁹⁰

V. PSYCHOLOGY

In this section, I will discuss two psychological subjects from *Risale-i Nur*: faculties of consciousness and psychological transformation. While many Sufis also deal with the Sufi psychological concepts of state and station, since Nursi does not really deal with these terms in his works, I will not discuss them.

1. Faculties of Consciousness

Nursi discusses three generally accepted faculties of consciousness in *Risale-i Nur*: *ruh* (spirit), *kalp* (heart), and *ene* (ego).

A. *Ruh* (Spirit)

The Qur'an says that "They will ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is from the command of my Lord: of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, [O men]," (Qur'an, 17:85). Therefore, for Nursi, the spirit is the law that came from the realm of command. The spirit is similar to the laws that we see in the nature because the realm of command is the source of both the spirit and the laws of nature. On the other hand, the spirit is also different in certain ways from the laws of nature. For instance, the spirit is alive and enlightened. Moreover, it possesses consciousness and external body. The external body of the spirit is not the mixture of flesh and bones. It is a soft and transparent cover.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 1:553.

¹⁹¹ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 1:231-232.

According to Nursi, there are two types of evidence for the existence and the eternity of the spirit. The first evidence is that a human being can see and experience in his inner being. For Nursi, everyone can understand that he has a spirit if he examines his life and himself. Moreover, his spirit is immortal because although the body changes every year, the spirit stays as it is. Therefore, the body is subject to change and death while the spirit does not. In other words, the body may be changed or completely disappear, but it does not effect the spirit. The spirit may live with or without the new body. In this respect, the body is like the “house” of the spirit rather than its skin that cannot detach itself from it.¹⁹²

The second evidence for the existence and eternity of the spirit is one that a human being can observe outside of himself. He says that if it is evident that a single spirit is eternal then all the spirits are eternal. Furthermore, when an essential attribute is found in a single spirit, it must be found in the other spirits as well. When we examine past human experience, we see that humans sent blessings to the dead and received blessings from them. There are countless signs, experiences, and occurrences proving that spirits are immortal and eternal.¹⁹³

Moreover, Nursi asserts it can be known by the conscious through spiritual analogy (*hads*) that a part of the human being will exist forever after the human being dies. This part is the spirit. It is neither subject to change nor destruction. The spirit has a simple and uncompounded nature. However, change and destruction are the functions of complex and compound substances. Therefore, there can be no change and destruction for the spirit.¹⁹⁴

Furthermore, when we look at the laws of the nature, according to Nursi, we see that they are immortal. For instance, if a fig tree dies, we see that the laws that form the being of the fig tree remains in a small seed. Similarly, the spirit in the human body is like the laws that shape

¹⁹² Ibid., 1:231.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 1:231.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 1:231.

the being of the fig tree. Therefore, if the laws in the nature do not die when their bodies die, the spirit does not die when its body dies.¹⁹⁵

A human being possesses a mind, eyes, hands, tongue, and ears. He thinks through his mind, sees through his eyes, touches with his hands, and hears with his ears, but all of these organs are just tools for the spirit of the human being. Therefore, the spirit is the one who thinks and sees rather than merely the mind and the eyes. For this reason, a human being should follow the verse “God has purchased of the Believers their person and their goods; for theirs [in return] is the Garden [of Paradise]” (Qur’an, 9:111) and should "sell" (so to speak) their organs to God so that their spirit may be elevated from the level of pursuing its earthly pleasures to the level of becoming God’s servant.¹⁹⁶

In this respect, Nursi says “Give up the physical life of the soul. Rise to the level of life of the heart, spirit, and inner faculties; see what a broad sphere of life they possess. For them, the past and the future—which for you are dead—are Living; they are existing and full of life. O my soul! Like my heart, you too should weep¹⁹⁷ and cry out and say:

I am ephemeral; I do not want another who is thus.

I am helpless; I do not want another who is thus.

I have surrendered my spirit to the Most Merciful; I do not want another.

I want another, but let him be an eternal friend.

I am a mere atom, but I desire an Everlasting Sun.

I am nothing, yet I wish for these beings, all of them.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 1:232.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 1:9.

¹⁹⁷ Here (and in other remarks of his concerning the spirit), in speaking of the weeping of his heart, Nursi seems to foreshadow Gülen's Sufism of sadness.

¹⁹⁸ Said Nursi, “26th Word,” Risale-i Nur, http://www.ayetulkubra.com/rnkdiller/eng/english_word.htm (accessed April 06, 2006).

For Nursi, the scope of the life of the spirit is vast. Therefore, when a human being is able to free his spirit from the pressure of his body, he can experience expansions in time (*bast-i zaman*) and transportation in place (*tayy-i mekan*); that is to say that he can perform several tasks in a short period of time. In addition, he can be in more than one place in the same time. For Nursi, there is no reason to deny these miraculous occurrences because expansions in time and transportation in place are experienced by common people in their dreams.¹⁹⁹

The human spirit is subject to several needs and sorrows. It is desirous of many types of pleasures. It has endless ambitions. If he disbelieves in Islam or fails to practice it, then his spirit gives him unlimited anguishes. Even the most cheerful bounty of God, compassion, becomes a source of anguish. Also, there are numerous traumatic events happening in the world either at the human society level or at the natural occurrences level. As a result, these events may possibly make people's spirit sad and give them pain if they do not believe in Islam.²⁰⁰

For Nursi, the spirit is the means by which the body tastes different pleasures. As for the relationship between "consciousness" (*vicdan*) and the spirit, consciousness is to the spirit as the spirit is to the body. So just as the spirit is the means by which the body experiences pleasure, so too consciousness is the means by which the spirit to tastes pleasures. The level of pleasure that the spirit will taste with the tongue of consciousness depends on the strength of the faith. The Islamic faith contains different levels; and each believer can taste spiritual pleasure according to his level of faith. The stronger one's faith is, the higher will be the pleasure that one tastes. The Islamic faith provides spiritual pleasure not only in the hereafter, but also in this world. Therefore, a believer can create a paradise with his consciousness and spirit even in this world.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 2:1346.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 2:1338.

Moreover, thinking of the delight in the pleasures of faith enables the believer to increase his or her ability to feel them more.²⁰¹

For instance, the daily invoked phrase *There is no partner for God* brings good news to a believer that God is One and there is no partner along with Him in His Lordship. Therefore, He does whatever He wants to do without anyone to prevent Him from doing it. Moreover, since He is One, there is no intermediary between you and Him. Hence for Nursi, no one can prevent you from presenting your needs to Him and asking help from Him. Similarly, the phrase *He takes life* gives such happiness to a Believer who says that death does not mean that one disappears. God is the One who give you death and He is Eternal and Merciful. Therefore, God does not give you death to make you disappear. Rather, He gives you death in order to transfer you to your eternal place.²⁰²

B. Kalp (Heart)

Nursi thinks that if the creation is imagined as a big tree, then humans are both the seed and the flower of this tree of creation. Similarly, if the religion of Islam is considered as a tree sent to humanity, then Muhammad (*pbuh*) is the seed and the flower of this tree. In addition, along these same lines, if a single human being is considered as a tree, then the heart becomes the seed and the flower of it. The heart itself can also be regarded like a tree the needs, hopes, and fears of which reach to the seen and the unseen realms like the branches of this tree. Therefore, Nursi concludes, the heart needs all the beautiful names of God, since its aims are ultimately the Names (which reside in the unseen).²⁰³

²⁰¹ Ibid., 1:342.

²⁰² Ibid., 1:449,450.

²⁰³ Ibid., 2:1325.

The heart is like a map or an index of the whole of the universe. It is related to all realms whether visible or invisible. For this reason, the heart can only be content with The One and The Only who created the whole universe.²⁰⁴ As the Qur'an states "God guides to Himself those who turn to Him in patience, those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of God, for without doubt only in the remembrance of God do hearts find satisfaction," (Qur'an, 13:28).

The heart, the seed of the whole humanity, needs to be watered with the water of Islam through servanthood and sincerity. If the heart is cared for in this way, it becomes enlightened and serves like a spirit for the material life of the person. Otherwise, this seed dries and then it needs to be burned so that it returns to the original condition and enlightens its people.²⁰⁵

A human being is given different faculties of consciousness like mind, spirit, *sir* (an inner faculty of the heart), and soul (*nefs*). All of these faculties are the soldiers, and the heart is their commander. Every soldier has a specific spiritual aim; for instance, to reach a Name or an Attribute of God. Moreover, it has a special means to reach each specific aim. Among these faculties, the heart, as the commander, leads them to their own spiritual aim while reaching to its specific aim, the essence of God.²⁰⁶ In another analogy, Nursi says that if the human being is considered as a machine, the heart would be the center of it. If the heart can be functionized through the practices of Sufi orders (*tarikats*), then the human being will be elevated to the level of real humanity because the heart is the commander. When the commander functions well, the soldiers also function well.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 2:1325.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 2:1325.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 1:219.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 1:568.

If there is any disorder in the heart, it results in disorder in the other faculties of a human being. For instance, if the heart of a human being is injured in terms of its spiritual life, the human being tends to deal with philosophy more than before. When he deals with philosophy more than before, the disorder of his heart increases.²⁰⁸

The heart is the most important means to obtain the waves of gnosis. However, in order to obtain these waves, the heart should not criticize them. It should face to these waves and detach itself from carelessness. These waves are like water, air, and light. If the heart doubts or criticizes them, they do not come to the heart. Therefore, it should not attempt to obtain them. Rather, it should only turn toward them and await their coming. Otherwise, this would be a cause of missing them.²⁰⁹

C. Ene (Ego)

God states in the Qur'an that "Verily, we did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up for verily he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish," (Qur'an, 33:72). For Nursi, in this verse the word trust (*al-amāna*) may have several meanings and one of them is the human ego. The human ego, according to Nursi, is the key to open the lock of God's Names and the universe. The universe is the macrocosm which reflects God's Names. Similarly, the human being is the microcosm which reflects God's names as the universe does. Therefore, if the ego of the human being is correctly understood, the universe is correctly

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 1:1304.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 1:650.

understood; and if the universe is correctly understood, thus the Names of God can be correctly understood.²¹⁰

As a result, the ego is given to a human being so that he can understand God's Names and Attributes. The human being, focusing on his ego, says "I own my house and my car." Moreover, I possess knowledge and power." He may also say "God owns the universe as I own my house. Similarly, God possesses unlimited knowledge as I possess knowledge." According to Nursi, this is the only way for a human being to understand God's Names and Attributes.²¹¹

Light can not be understood if there is no darkness. Similarly, God's Names and Attributes can not be understood without the human ego. Therefore, a human being has to possess an ego and make comparisons between his ego and God in order for him to understand His Names and Attributes. Otherwise, it would be impossible to draw a picture of God's Names and Attributes due to their limitlessness.²¹²

On the one hand, the ego can be a great tool to understand God. On the other hand, the ego itself has to be understood correctly before it is used as a tool to understand God. Otherwise, it may be a tool to deviate from the servanthood rather than to understand God's Names and Attributes.²¹³

The ego is like a mirror to show God's Names and Attributes. As the mirror only reflects the images and does not own them, the ego only reflects God's Names and Attributes, and does not own them. Therefore, its existence is not real. It cannot possess any goodness and cannot be a source for existence. In this face, the ego is only a recipient for the goodness that comes from

²¹⁰ Ibid., 1:241.

²¹¹ Ibid., 1:241.

²¹² Ibid., 1:241.

²¹³ Ibid., 1:241.

God. It can accept the goodness, yet it cannot invent it. On the other hand, it can possess evil and can be a source for it.²¹⁴

If a person understands the nature of the ego, he will be able to fulfill his duty in terms of the trust that he was given by God. Moreover, he will be able to understand the nature of the universe, its meanings and implications. In such a case, if any information comes from outside to the inside of the person, it finds a confirmer inside of the person. Then it becomes wisdom, light, and gnosis. This person can be considered under the meaning of the verse:²¹⁵ “To a happy state shall indeed attain he who causes this [self] to grow in purity,” (Qur’an, 91:9).

On the other hand, if the person does not understand the condition of his ego and thinks of his ego as independent being, he cannot fulfill the duty in terms of the trust that he was given by God. It becomes a source for all the evil actions and rebellious behaviors. In this case, the information that comes from outside to inside of the person becomes meaningless. This is the sense of the person referred to by the meaning of the verse:²¹⁶ “Truly lost is he buries his self [in darkness]” (Qur’an, 91:10). If the person thinks of his ego as being independent, he will see the whole universe as being independent from God. In this case, he commits the sin of associating divine power with something besides God and “such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed an awesome wrong,” (Qur’an, 31:13).

In this manner, a human being is ignorant even though he possesses higher levels knowledge. When his senses and thoughts bring him the knowledge of God from the universe, he cannot find anything in the inner dimension of his being to confirm this knowledge coming from outside of himself. So he is left without what is needed to transform this knowledge into gnosis

²¹⁴ Ibid., 1:242.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 1:242.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 1:242.

and light. His inside is dark and whatever comes to him becomes colored with darkness. Even if the knowledge that comes to him is pure wisdom, he transforms it into meaningless data.²¹⁷

For Nursi, the ego is like a seed that has grown as a tree in human history, a tree possessing two branches: prophethood and philosophy. When the philosophy listened to the prophethood and followed it, humanity experienced great happiness and goodness. When they were separated from each other, all of the goodness stayed in the prophethood, and all of the evil stayed in the philosophy.²¹⁸

From the perspective of prophethood, the ego is a servant. It is not a word, but a single letter which has no meaning in itself. Its being depends on God; therefore, it possesses a shadowy nature. It is created by God. It possesses ownership, but this ownership is given to it by God. Its duty is to serve God. It is to be a tool of God's Actions, Names, and Attributes. It is to know its helplessness and poverty and make them a tool to pray God and seek refuge in Him.²¹⁹

From the perspective of philosophy, the ego is a word which possesses meaning by itself. It works for itself, and governs its being for itself. It thinks that it is the real owner of its actions and belongings. Its duty is to liken itself to the Necessary Being. In this sense, the ego forgets its poverty and helplessness and locks the door of servanthood. The ego thinks that right belongs to the powerful one. and that the beauty that it possesses belongs to it, not God.²²⁰

2. Psychological Transformation

Psychological transformation in the Sufi sense occurs in the self (*nefis*). For Nursi, there are four principles to follow in order to transform the self from its carnal desires to Divine aims.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 1:242.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 1:242.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 1:243.

²²⁰ Ibid., 1:243.

Before presenting these rules, it is necessary to discuss the characteristics of the self living on the level of carnal desires.

The self loves itself more than anything; therefore, it does not acknowledge its mistakes. It deems itself to be perfect without any deficiencies. Therefore, if it sees something negative about itself, it always interprets it in a positive way. When it thinks of the earth as a temporary place to live, it immediately jumps to hereafter in its imagination and comforts itself. When it thinks of the good deeds that are necessary to do in this life if one is to be happy in the hereafter, it tends to forget and ignore them for the sake of its current pleasures. It thinks of its earthly affairs as if they are heavenly and imagines its earthly -directed knowledge as if it will produce heavenly fruits in hereafter. In this respect, the self is like an ostrich that hides its head under the clay and thinks that the hunter does not see its body.²²¹

Moreover, the self thinks of itself as being independent and self-sufficient. It does not accept that it is under the destiny and the control of God. Furthermore, it does not accept that other beings are controlled by God because since it thinks that it is independent in itself, this necessitates that every other being is likewise independent. In this respect, it is the source of atheistic thoughts.²²² However, the existence and the life of the self are the foundation for the desires, hopes, and needs of the self, but this foundation is not eternal. It is like a building which may be broken down at any time. The life of the self, consequently, is between the two graveyards, past and future. Therefore, there is no reason for the self to claim independency.²²³

The self wants to be liberated from the influence of God and claims that God is far from it. However, the relationship of the self and God is like the relationship of the person and the sun. The sun is really far from the person, but it is close to him with its lights. Similarly, the person is

²²¹ Ibid., 2:1340.

²²² Ibid., 2:1243.

²²³ Ibid., 2:1304.

far from God, yet God is so close to him. As the Qur'an says "Now, verily, it is We have created man, and We know that his innermost self whispers within him: for We are closer to him than his neck-vein," (Qur'an, 50:16). For Nursi, there is no difference between the foolishness of the person who says the sun is far from me; thus, it does not have influence on me; and the person who says God is far from me; hence, He does not have influence on me.²²⁴

For Nursi, the self needs to be purified and enlightened in order to understand Reality. Otherwise, even a single dark point in the self may cause the self to deny Reality. Nursi likens Reality to a palace that has hundreds of doors to enter in it. In fact, all of these doors open, but the dark point of the self focuses only the closed door in its view and says that there is no way to enter this palace because all of the doors are closed.²²⁵

There are many factors that strengthen the dark point of the self, and one of those is to eat excessively. If the person eats excessively and carelessly, like eating unlawful foods, it is harmful for both his physical life and spiritual life. Afterwards, for the self, it becomes difficult to obey the soul and the heart. Such a human being can no longer manage himself. In this case, the Holy Month of fasting in the Islamic calendar is like medicine for the sick and rebellious self. Fasting and eating less educates the self and teaches it good manners.²²⁶

For Nursi, there are four rules that are essential for transforming the self from the level of carnal desires to the level of divine aims. I will discuss these in the section on Nursi's methodology. Sometimes, however, the self may die with regard to its carnal desires, yet the person may gain a character that can be easily irritated. For Nursi, this is something that shows that the self can be elevated further even though it has already obtained a high level of spirituality. This is the reason that the Companions of the Prophet (*pbuh*) and famous Saints

²²⁴ Ibid., 2:1308.

²²⁵ Ibid., 2:1310.

²²⁶ Ibid., 1:541.

complained about the *nefs-i emmare* (the commanding self) although they possessed *nefs-i marziyye* (self with which God is contented). In this case, the sickness of the self does not come from the heart but the imagination.²²⁷

VI. TELEOLOGY

The teleological purpose of life is clearly stated in *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi says “You should certainly know that the highest aim of genesis and the most elevated result of human nature (*fitrat*) are to believe in God.”²²⁸ In this regard, Nursi not only works for his own belief, but for the belief of others. He says that “The most important duty of *Risale-i Nur* is to rescue humanity from aberration and disbelief.”²²⁹ Moreover, for Nursi, to establish strong faith is not only his duty, but also the duty of his students; thus, they do not have time to deal with the issues of social life, but faith.²³⁰

For Nursi, there are two types of faith. The first one is simple faith. In this type of faith, the believer says and believes that God is one, He does not have a partner and the universe belongs to Him. In this case, he does not seek evidence for his belief. The second type of faith is strong faith. In this type of belief, the believer says that God is one and everything belongs to Him. Moreover, he sees the evidence of his belief on every creature. For him, every being shows the seal of God on its face.²³¹ Nursi in *Risale-i Nur* chose the second type of faith as his method and used it skillfully. In this respect, *Risale-i Nur*, its method and language are very effective. A reader of *Risale-i Nur*, Dr. Colin Turner, says that “I was a Muslim before I met *Risale-i Nur*, but

²²⁷ Ibid., 1:502.

²²⁸ Ibid., 1:448.

²²⁹ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 1:1018.

²³⁰ Said Nursi, *Kastamonu lahikası* (İstanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 1990), 208.

²³¹ Said Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye* (İstanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 1991), 11-12.

not a *Mu'min* (believer).²³² By this he implies that it was through the Risale-i Nur that he was transformed into a mu'min, into being a Muslim of firm belief.

For Nursi, the universe is full of evidence for God's existence and oneness. He says that if you see light and warmth on every piece of glass, you conclude that there is a sun which reflects upon these glasses. Otherwise, you would need to assume a small sun in every piece of glass. However, this is illogical and impossible. Similarly, God is reflected in every creature, especially in animate beings, by means of His names. Among these names, the name "The Life Giver" (al-Muhyī) enables even a single mosquito to interact with almost all the creatures on the universe. If you think that there is only one Creator who possesses different names and every single being reflects God's different names, this would be a good explanation for each being. Otherwise, Nursi asserts, you would need to assume that every being contains a small god in it, which is illogical and impossible.²³³

For Nursi, a letter that is written in a book may display itself in one way while it may display its author in many ways. Similarly, every being in the universe is like a letter and the universe is like a book written by God. Therefore, every being may display itself in one way, while it displays God in many ways. These letters are signs that signify their Creator both individually and collectively. These letters and the book of universe that is made up of these letters, with their attributes, formats, and designs are like a poem that is written to glorify its owner.²³⁴

On the other hand, when we look at the universe, we see that in every spring more than 300,000 plants are resurrected almost in the exact format. Resurrecting these similar plants

²³² Colin Turner, "Ruhlarda İnkılap Yaratan Kamil Eserler," in *Tespitler Işığında Bediüzzaman ve Risale-i Nur*, ed. Talat Ordu and Seyyit N. Erkal, 120 (İstanbul: Şahdamar Yayınları, 2005).

²³³ Said Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 13.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

without any confusion and mistake shows that the one who resurrects them has infinite power, encompassing knowledge, and every resurrected plant displays the seal of this infinite power and encompassing knowledge. This resurrection can only be carried out by the one who knows what is within everything and who holds the keys of every being. The speed, ease, order, and distinction of each being in this resurrection are, Nursi states, a sign not only for the oneness of God, but also the resurrection of all humanity.²³⁵

For Nursi, the each page of the book of universe is a sign of the undifferentiated oneness of God while the book as a whole is a sign for differentiated oneness of God. The universe seems like a magnificent giant factory. In this factory, every person, species, tool, and machine works as if they know each other, talk to each other, help each other, and hear each other. Therefore, everything in the universe happens very quickly and easily. The stars and the sun in the sky send light and warmth to the earth. The clouds send water, snow, and ice towards the earth, and the earth sends steam towards the clouds. Over all, everything in the universe works to fulfill the needs of living beings. This is a sign for the differentiated oneness of God in which all different beings act as if they are one being and entity. Similarly, Nursi contends that in every single being, there is a similar work order which implies God's undifferentiated oneness.²³⁶

The sustenance of animate beings is another sign of the oneness of God. Even a superficial observation shows us that the sustenance of each being is sent to him in the proper time, amount, and type. As a result, it shows that there is only One Creator who gives them mercy, helps them, knows their needs, collects these needs from every corner of the world and brings them to them. For Nursi, this is another sign that proves God's oneness.²³⁷

²³⁵ Ibid., 15-16.

²³⁶ Ibid., 16.

²³⁷ Ibid., 17.

In another argument, Nursi says that planting a seed in a field implies two conclusions: The first is that the field belongs to the owner of the field; and the second is that the seed belongs to the owner of the field. When we look at the universe, every single being is like a seed; while earth, air, fire, and water are the fields for planting of this seed. In this case, every seed being like a single animal and every field being like the earth and air imply that both the seed and the field belong to the same Creator. Therefore, for Nursi, it could be said that every single change on a single, tiny being is made by God who owns the fields that this single being lives on; and every change that happens in the fields is made by God who creates the single creature that lives on these fields.²³⁸

For Nursi, the oneness of the Creator is the best explanation for the creation of the universe. According to Nursi, there is no difference in terms of difficulty between the creation of a fruit and the creation of the tree that produces this fruit, because two of them depend on the same center, the same rule, and the same cultivation. Similarly, there is no difference between making one cloth and a thousand cloths, because a thousand pieces of cloth can be made with the same tools for making the one piece of cloth. As a result, for the creation of the multiplicity, it necessarily depends on oneness.²³⁹

For Nursi, every pillar of Islamic faith is connected to each other because every proof proving the accuracy of one pillar is also a proof for the other pillars of the Islamic faith. Therefore, denying one pillar of the faith means denying the whole faith. Also, in order to deny one of the pillars, one needs to deny and disprove all the pillars of the faith, which, argues Nursi,

²³⁸ Ibid., 17.

²³⁹ Ibid., 18.

is impossible. For instance, believing in One God is one of the six pillars²⁴⁰ and this pillar proves both itself and the other pillars by its own proofs. For Nursi, it is impossible for the Creator of the universe not to create the hereafter, as if He were simply to let the creatures vanish after creating, caring, sustaining, and managing them for years and years.²⁴¹

Similarly, it is impossible for the Creator of the universe not to send prophets who will explain the meanings of the arts, designs, colors, and shapes the universe after creating it like a meaningful book whose every letter contains the meaning of a gigantic book. It is also impossible for the Creator of the universe not to talk to the people through a book like the Qur'an and not to explain to them the meaning of the universe, the purpose of the creation, the duty of the human being, and the value of life. It is also impossible and illogical for the Creator of the universe to fill up the earth with humans who may understand and appreciate the meaning of the design of the universe and not to create angels, not to fill up the stars with them, and not let them appreciate his arts and designs in those planets. It is also impossible, Nursi maintains, for the Creator of the universe who encodes the life of the trees in their seeds, the characteristics of the animals and the humans in their sperms and DNA, and the history of humans' life in their memories not to save the deeds of human beings and either reward or punish them according to their deeds.²⁴²

For Nursi, these six pillars of faith enlighten the six directions of a human being: the top, the bottom, the front, the back, the right, and the left. A human being is related to every direction of life and being. Therefore, he receives either happiness or sadness from these directions. When he receives happiness, there is no problem. However, when he receives sadness, he needs faith to

²⁴⁰ The six pillars of faith are belief in God, the angels, the divinely revealed scriptures, the prophets, the Day of Judgment, and God's decree of both good and evil. (See the well-known hadith of Gabriel in the hadith collections of Bukhari and Muslim.)

²⁴¹ Said Nursi, *Şualar*, 237-238.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 240-241.

transform this sadness into happiness. If the person has Islamic faith, wherever he turns, he sees the face of God and obtains happiness as the Qur'an says "God's is the east and the west: and wherever you turn, there is God's countenance. Behold, God is infinite, all-knowing," (Qur'an, 2:115).²⁴³

When he speaks of the top, Nursi means the heavens. If a person looks at heavens with disbelief, he sees that millions of big planets flow like horses without having any directions and aims. Then, he fears it. On the other hand, if the person looks at it with the glasses of Islamic faith, then every planet becomes an obedient employee of God, and they flow around in order to enlighten human beings.²⁴⁴

The bottom implies the earth. If a person looks at the earth from the perspective of disbelief, he sees it as if a giant ship floating without a captain. Then, he becomes afraid of it. However, if he looks at it from the perspective of Islamic faith, he sees it like a ship which is managed by The Most Merciful and The Most Compassionate God who not only manages the ship, but also provides food and sustenance to its travelers.²⁴⁵

The front is the direction that all animate beings, animals and humans walk toward. In the eyes of a disbeliever the end of this direction is absence. Therefore, as a person walks to that end, he is afraid and is very sad. However, if he looks at the same direction as a believer, he sees that going in this direction does not result in absence; but rather it is to transport him from a temporary world into permanent one; from the world of work to the world of reward; and from the world of difficulties to the world of ease and happiness. For him, death and the grave is a doorway to eternity and paradise.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Ibid., 755-756.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 754.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 754.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 755.

The back is the direction of the people who come into this world from outside. For the disbeliever, there is no the answer to the questions of "Where do these people come from and Where do they go to?" On the other hand, for the believer the answer to these questions is very clear. These people come from the realm of God in order to see the artistry and the beauty of God that is displayed in the exhibition of the universe; and they go to back to the realm of God after understanding His artistry and beauty.²⁴⁷

The direction on the right is the past. For the disbeliever, the past is the world that is destroyed. It is full of dead bodies. Therefore, it is dark and scary. In the eyes of the disbeliever, the past is the world of chaos, unhappiness, atrocity, and horror. In the eyes of the believer, although the world of the past is destroyed, the people of it are moved to a better and brighter world. Graves are like underground tunnels that go the world of eternity. In the eyes of the believer the past is the world of happiness and serenity.²⁴⁸

The direction to the left is the future. From the perspective of the disbeliever, the future is the world that will destroy us. It is like a giant graveyard which is full of darkness, horror, snakes, and scorpions. From the perspective of the believer, it is like a table that is full of different and tasty foods, fruits, and drinks. It is a world that is prepared for us by our Creator who is the Merciful and the Compassionate.²⁴⁹

According to Nursi, the most comprehensive name of God is the combination of six divine names: the Most Holy (al-Quddūs), the Wise (al-Ḥakīm), the All Just (al-ʿĀdil), the Single (al-Fard), the Ever-Living (al-Ḥayy), and the Self-Subsistent (al-Qayyūm). Therefore, the

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 755.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 754.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 754.

reflections of these names can be seen all over the universe and these reflections display God's existence and oneness.²⁵⁰

Nursi sees the earth like a big hotel. Every day, people come in to this hotel, stay for while, and leave it. Similarly, animate beings come into this earth at birth, stay here for a while, and leave it. One might think that the earth should be filled with the dead bodies of animals, plants, and even people. However, we see that God's name the Most Holy (al-Quddūs) is reflecting on the universe and as a result, not only do animals live by eating dead bodies, but also insects like ants and maggots work as cleaning employees who clean the earth. Similarly, the red and white blood-corpuses purify the blood while breathing refreshes it in the human body. On a bigger scale, the clouds clean the sky, while on a smaller scale a small mosquito cleans its eye with its hands. For Nursi, this cleaning process in the universe shows that there is a Creator who knows every corner of it and cleans it through the theophany of his name the Most Holy. The idea of cleaning the universe has one character. It is one type of action that is going on at every corner of the world. Therefore, it shows both God's existence and unity. Otherwise, we would need to accept the idea that everything from a single ant to gigantic clouds that play a role in this awesome cleaning process act by themselves in knowing their own roles in this complex action. Of course, for Nursi, this is not logical.²⁵¹

The other name that shows God's existence and oneness is the name the All Just (al-Ādil). When we look at the universe, we see that everything is laid out in a certain measurement and scale. From the cells of a human body to the red and white blood-corpuses that travel in these cells, from the mutual proportion and relation of the body's organs to the balance between the incomings and outgoings of the seas, from the births of animals, plants, and human beings to their

²⁵⁰ Said Nursi, *Lemalar* (İstanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 1990), 399.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 304-307.

deaths, from the balance of darkness and light to the portions of cold and heat, everything in the universe is well portioned and balanced. The Qur'an says "No single thing exists that does not have its source with Us; and naught do We bestow from on high unless it be in accordance with a measure well-defined," (Qur'an, 15:21). Nursi also uses the following verse in order to prove his case: "The skies has He raised high, and has devised [for all things] a measure, so that you [too, O men,] might never transgress the measure [of what is right]: weigh, therefore, [our deeds] with equity, and cut not the measure short," (Qur'an, 55:7-9). For Nursi, all of these balances and measurements show not only God's existence and oneness, but also that the judgment day will be governed by the All Just.²⁵²

The third name that signifies God's existence and oneness is the Wise (al-Ḥakīm). The All-Wise God created the universe as a being which includes many worlds. He created the human being as the center among these many worlds. He also created these worlds to fulfill the needs of the human being and to serve him. He created the human being as the center of the worlds, due to his consciousness. This consciousness is a reflection of the divine name the Wise; and the modern age's sciences are reflections of human consciousness. If we go and ask science of medicine the question of what is this universe? It will tell us it is a big and well ordered pharmacy. If we ask the science of chemistry the same question, it will tell us that the universe is a magnificent and well ordered laboratory. The science of industrial engineering will tell us that it is a perfect factory. For Nursi, the sum of this analogy indicates God's existence and oneness. Otherwise, we would have to accept that causes in the universe have wisdom, will, knowledge,

²⁵² Ibid., 308-310.

power, and consciousness to create the universe. For Nursi, accepting this idea is an indication of madness.²⁵³

The fourth name is the name The Single (al-Fard). When we look at the universe, we see that the universe is like a body whose organs are unified. It is like a factory whose machines work together and in order. Every organ in this body and every machine in this giant factory work together, help each other, and lean each other. This is a reflection of the name the Single in two aspects: The first is that the universe is a unified and a single body with all parts. The second is that the owner of the universe can be the Single One because all parts of the universe are connected to each other. Therefore, owning a single part means owning the whole universe. In other words, one who does not own the whole body cannot claim ownership for even a single part of the whole universe because all are connected to every other part.²⁵⁴

The fifth name is the Ever-Living (al-Ḥayy) and the Life Giver (al-Muḥyī). The Qur'an invites its readers to reflect about the concept of life in the universe. It says "Behold, then, [O man,] these signs of God's grace how He gives life to the earth after it had been lifeless! Verily, this selfsame [God] is indeed the One that can bring the dead back to life; for He has the power to will anything," (Qur'an, 30:50). According to Nursi's reflection upon life, the life that we see in the universe is an indication of the Ever-Living and the Life Giving One. If we see reflections of the sun on the water of a river appearing and disappearing, we conclude that the sun is the source of these reflections; and it is ever-living although its reflections on the river appear and disappear. Similarly, through the births and deaths in the universe, we conclude that God is the

²⁵³ Ibid., 313-315.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 318.

one who gives life, and He is the ever-living. And the Qur'an says "God; there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being," (Qur'an, 2:255).²⁵⁵

The sixth name is The Self-Subsistent (al-Qayyūm). Nursi says "The existence, continuance, and perpetuation of the heavenly bodies in the universe are tied to the mystery of Self-Subsistence. If the manifestation of Self-Subsistence was to avert its face for a moment, millions of globes, some of them a thousand times larger than the globe of the earth, would be scattered into the infinite void of space, and colliding with one another would crash into nothingness."²⁵⁶ Therefore, the existence and continuance of the universe is a sign for God's name The Self-Subsistence.

VII. METHODOLOGY

One of the clearest religiological aspects of Nursi's thought is his methodology, because he clearly states his method in his writings. One day, the famous Nakshi couplet about leaving the world as a method to reach God²⁵⁷ suddenly came to his heart while he was contemplating on the top of a mountain. And then, it naturally caused a similar couplet to rise in his heart:

"Der tarik-i aczimendi lazım amed çar çiz:

Fakr-ı mutlak, acz-i mutlak, şükr-ü mutlak, şevk-i mutlak ey aziz."²⁵⁸

The translation of the quotation is as follows: "On the path of humble helplessness, there are four things that are necessary [in order to reach God]: Absolute poverty, absolute humble helplessness, absolute gratitude, and absolute enthusiasm, my dear friend."

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 334-335.

²⁵⁶ Said Nursi, "The Thirtieth Flash," *Risale-i Nur*, http://www.ayetulkubra.com/rnkdiller/eng/english_flash.htm (accessed April 16, 2006).

²⁵⁷ Der tarik-i Nakşibendî lâzım âmed çâr terk,
Terk-i dünya, terk-i ukbâ, terk-i hestî, terk-i terk
Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı, Dördüncü Mektub*,
<http://www.risale-inur.org/yenisite/moduller/risale/index.php?tid=67>

²⁵⁸ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 1:354, 522.

Interestingly enough, on another occasion Nursi stated his method as being poverty, impotence, compassion, and reflection.²⁵⁹ Based on these two statements, it can be said that Nursi's methodology has two major and four minor concepts: poverty and humble helplessness are the two major concepts while compassion, reflection, gratitude, and enthusiasm are minor ones. Unfortunately, a partial reading of Nursi has led Dr. 'Ammār Jadīl from the University of Algeria and Dr. Muḥammad Abū al-Hudā al-Husaynī to say that Nursi's methodology is only based on four concepts: poverty, humble helplessness, compassion, and reflection.²⁶⁰

Beside the six concepts I have noted, the Spiritual methodology of Nursi is established on four steps:

1. The human being loves only himself. He loves himself before everything and more than anything. He always defends himself and does not accept his mistakes. Moreover, he praises himself with the ability to praise that is given to him by God to praise God. In this stage he needs to know that his purity relies on recognizing that he himself is not pure.²⁶¹ Nursi states that the first step of his method is based the Qur'anic verse²⁶² "Do not consider yourselves pure," (Qur'an, 53:32).

2. The unpurified self has the tendency to think of himself at the times of positive occasions and forget at the times of negative occasions. For instance, he forgets himself when he thinks of death and does not think that he will die. Similarly, he does not remember himself at the times of difficulties and service. On the other hand, at the times of pleasures, goodnesses, and

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 210.

²⁶⁰ 'Ammār Jadīl, "al-Ṭarīq al-Nurīy fī al-Tarbiya wa-al-Sulūk," *Nursi Studies*, <http://www.nursistudies.com/arabic/teblig/ajedal.htm> (accessed February 8, 2006).; Muḥammad Abū al-Hudā al-Husaynī, "al-Manhaj al-Ṣūfiy al-Má rifiy al-Sulūkīy fī Ḥayāt Ustādh al-Nursiy," *Nursi Studies*, <http://www.nursistudies.com/arabic/teblig/mebuhuda.htm> (accessed February 8, 2006).

²⁶¹ Ibid., 1:211.

²⁶² Ibid., 1:211.

awards he remembers himself and hopes to receive or obtain them. In this stage, he needs to act contrary to his normal manner in order to purify himself.²⁶³ Nursi asserts that the second step is based on this verse:²⁶⁴ “Be not like those who are oblivious of God, and whom He therefore causes to be oblivious of [what is good for] their own selves: [for] it is they, they who are truly depraved,” (Qur’an, 59:19).

3. The unpurified self sees every single goodness from himself and then becomes arrogant. In this stage he needs to see every goodness from God and every deficiency from himself. He needs to know that every goodness is a gift of God and he needs to thank Him and be humble instead of being ungrateful and arrogant. The person should know that he obtains his perfection by acknowledging himself to be mistaken.²⁶⁵ The third step is based on the following verse:²⁶⁶ “Whatever good happens to you is from God and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself,” (Qur’an, 4:79).

4. The unpurified self sees himself free, autonomous, and self-existing. Then, he claims to possess lordship. However, everything other than God is transitory, mortal, and dependent. In this stage, the person needs to know that his true existence will come from his non-existence. If he depends on his own existence and ignores God, he becomes a glow worm flying at night. Nevertheless, if he leaves his own existence and depends on his Lord, he will gain unlimited existence and own everything.²⁶⁷ The fourth step is based on the Qur’anic verse²⁶⁸ “Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self,” (Qur’an, 28:88).

²⁶³ Ibid., 1:211.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:211.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:211.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 1:211.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 1:211.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 211.

For Nursi, there are a lot of sound Sufi ways to reach God and all of them are based on the Qur'an. However, he asserts that his way is shorter, safer, and more general than others. It is shorter because it has only four steps while other methods have either ten or seven steps. It is safer because the self does not see any goodness in it. Rather, the self should always strive to be in poverty and humble helpfulness. Nursi regards his method as being more general and applicable to everyone, because the person does not need to deny the existence of the universe in order to reach oneness of God, (which is the way the oneness of being (*vahdet-i vucud*) is commonly misunderstood). Moreover, he does not need to ignore the existence of the universe either, as in the method of the oneness of witnessing (*vahdet-i şuhud*). Rather than that, he sees every single being as a sign for God's existence, names and qualities.²⁶⁹

For Nursi, the daily duty (*vird*) of the person who follows this method is to follow the sunnah of the Prophet, to avoid major sins, and to do the obligatory duties of the religion, especially to pray carefully and to glorify God after it.²⁷⁰

Moreover, Nursi says that "It [his method] is reality (*hakikat*) and [derived from] the divine law (*şeriat*) rather than a sufi order (*tarikât*)."²⁷¹ However, the well-known scholar Ramađan al-Būfī claims that based upon on Nursi's prayers, lifestyle, and teachings –in particular, his teachings such as about love, God-consciousness, and the heart– that Nursi was a Sufi without a name. Furthermore, when Nursi claimed not to be a Sufi in his several books, al-

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 1:210, 212.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 1:211.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 1:210.

Būfī asserts that he probably he made these statements on purpose in order to be silent but spiritually active before God, instead of sounding like a Sufi but not practicing it.²⁷²

By these statements, Ramaḍan al-Būfī means that Nursi was a spiritual person, which is right. Nevertheless, it is a fact that Nursi has some concerns about Sufism. For him, the method of Sufism is long, dangerous, narrow and too dependent on imagination.²⁷³ And these aspects of Sufism do not really fit with his method, which he considered as being oriented to reality (*hakikat*). Therefore, the reason for him not to call himself a Sufi or his method as a particular form of Sufism was neither simply his humility nor that Sufism was seen unlawful by the government of his time.

On the other hand, Ramaḍan al-Būfī is right to consider Nursi as a spiritual person and to draw our attention to the spiritual aspect of his lifestyle and teaching. However, Nursi in general should not be regarded as a Sufi in the classical meaning of the word, although his life, teaching, and methodology contain a lot of Sufi components and spiritual aspects. For this reason, I would like to call his methodology a spiritual methodology rather than a Sufi methodology.

After this general introduction of Nursi's Spiritual methodology, I would like to elaborate on the six concepts that are central to Nursi's methodology:

1. Two Major Concepts: Absolute Poverty and Absolute Humble Helplessness

Said Nursi says that poverty and humble helplessness are two ways that lead to God. They enable humans to reach the name The Most Merciful (*rahman*) and the name The Most

²⁷² Ramaḍan al-Būfī, "al-Wahj al-Rūhānīy fī hayāt al-Ustādh Saīd al-Nursī," Nursi Studies, <http://www.nursistudies.com/arabic/teblig/buty.htm> (accessed February 8, 2006).

²⁷³ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 1st vol., (Istanbul: Nesil, 1996), 210, 670.

Compassionate (*rahim*). By acknowledging their poverty and impotence before God, people even may reach the station of belovedness (*mahbubiyet*).²⁷⁴

According to Nursi, the desires and needs of human beings are unlimited while their power is limited. They may desire whatever they are able to imagine, but they can only have whatever their hands can attain. They desire a single flower as they desire to see the spring season and its results in terms of unlimited flowers, trees, and plants. Just as they like to have a garden in this world and live in it, so too they like to have the gardens of the heaven and live in them. Just as they like to see their friends who live far away and need to go to their place, so too they like to see their dead loved ones and go to the *barzakh* (isthmus) (between the material world and the hereafter) and then to paradise to see them. However, all of these desires cannot be fulfilled by their own power. Therefore, Nursi contend, human beings' desires and needs are unlimited while their power is very limited.²⁷⁵

God creates human beings in poverty and helplessness in order to show them His unlimited wealth and power. First, He gives them health, happiness, pleasures, and goodness which they cannot obtain by their own power, and then He makes them recognize His wealth and thank Him. Sometimes, he increases their poverty and humble helplessness through calamities, illnesses, pains, and afflictions so that they may turn to Him and recognize His power.²⁷⁶

In the meantime, this is a way that God enables human beings to worship Him with their full capacities. Because when the human beings are given a pleasure of the heart, not only does their tongue praise God, but also their heart begins to praise God by showing enthusiasm for this

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:210, 358.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 1:136.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:583.

pleasure. In contrast to that, when humans get sick, not only do their tongue and mind seek a cure, but even their ill organs seek for help by being eager for the cure.²⁷⁷

Moreover, because of their poverty and humble helplessness, humans acknowledge that their Lord can be the only one whose wealth is enough for everyone's need and whose power can deal with every difficulty. Because one who is not able to provide the needs of humans and one who is not able to solve every difficulty with his power does not deserve to be worshipped. The following famous saying of Nursi might be a good example of that:

“I am transient, so I don't desire one who is transient.

I am humbly helpless, so I don't desire one who is humbly helpless.

I submitted my soul to the most Merciful, so I don't desire any one else.

I desire nothing but only a Beloved who is eternal.

I am nothing, but I desire everything.”²⁷⁸

Human beings are created in poverty and humble helplessness, but their poverty and humble helplessness can become a source of wealth and power. If humans realize and accept their poverty and humble helplessness before their Lord and then pray to Him with these weaknesses, they may obtain whatever they desire. In this context, Nursi gives two examples to prove his case and says that the poverty and humble helplessness of a chick causes the mother chicken to attack the fox. Similarly, a small child may be able to obtain whatever he desires by crying and displaying his humble helplessness. In the same way, if humans can recognize the power which lies in their humble helplessness and the wealth in their poverty and use their weaknesses as means to pray to God, they may be able to obtain whatever they desire.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 1:583.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 1:136, 210.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 1:140.

In this context, *besmele*, “In the name of God, the most Mercifull and the most Compassionate” is a great way for humans to show their weaknesses to their Lord and connect themselves to His power because every creature in the universe says “In the name of God” and do whatever they do. Soft roots of flowers say “In the name of God” in order to penetrate earth. Sheeps and cows say “In the name of God” and give white milk although they eat green grass. Trees say “In the name of God” and provide delicious fruits. Therefore, humans should use this blessed treasure and make it a bridge between their impotence and God’s power.²⁸⁰

Repeating, remembering, and contemplating other phrases like “God is sufficient for us,” “How beautiful is God, the deputy,” and “There is no power and force save God’s power and force, the Highest and the Magnificent.” are also good ways to knock on the door of God. By saying “God is sufficient for us”, humans may find an ointment for their humble helplessness and against their enemies. To say “How beautiful is God, the deputy” is a cure for the poverty and needs of humans. Believing that “There is no power and force save God’s power and force, the Highest and the Magnificent.” is a wonderful method relying on God’s power and force.²⁸¹

In fact, the meaning of servanthood is that the servant acknowledges his deficiency, poverty, helplessness, and then prostrates before the perfectness of his Lord, perfect power of his Creator, and His mercy. Because as the authority of Lordship calls for servanthood, its purity necessitates that the servant recognize his deficiencies and repent of them. Similarly, God’s power requests that the servant see his helplessness versus God’s power and then praise and glorfy Him. In the same way, God’s unlimited wealth and treasures require the servant to see his own needs and poverty and then display them with prayers and supplications.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 1:3.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 1:797.

²⁸² Ibid., 1:15-16.

For Nursi, this is the way of the prophets versus atheist philosophers. Prophets acknowledge that the goal and the duty of humanity is to know their impotence and seek refuge in God's power as well as to see their poverty and rely on God's mercy. Moreover, it is to see the weaknesses of humanity and lean on God's strength. It is to see unlimited needs of humanity and then to seek help from the wealth of God. It is to seek God's forgiveness by acknowledging the mistakes and deficiencies of humanity.²⁸³

On the other hand, atheistic philosophers see humans as autonomous and self-existing. For them, humans possess power and they are the owners of their beings. Therefore, humanity's only purpose is self-development, which emanates from the love of themselves. By stating that, such philosophers encourage the ego to rebel against God and associate themselves as partners of God. They deny the poverty, helplessness, needs and mistakes of human beings and thereby close the doors of servanthood.²⁸⁴

2. Compassion

According to Nursi, the compassion that we feel toward creatures is a way that connects us to God. He says "Like love, compassion is a way [to reach God and it] leads to the Divine name The Most Compassionate (*rahim*). Nevertheless, compassion is more direct and more general than love."²⁸⁵ Moreover, compassion is pure love because it does not seek reward, while love seeks such a reward.²⁸⁶

For instance, in a letter that he wrote to parents whose child died, he said that if they accept their condition and not complain about it, the compassion that they feel toward their child

²⁸³ Ibid., 1:243.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 1:243.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 1:210.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 1:653.

might be a short and safe way to connect them to their Lord. Because when they bear the situation with patience and accept it, their compassion changes its nature from earthly compassion to the divine compassion.²⁸⁷ Similarly, if people give mercy and feel pity and compassion toward their parents when they get older, this mercy and compassion attract the mercy of God toward themselves. He says “If you would like to receive the mercy of The Most Merciful, be merciful to the gifts of The Most Merciful who live in your house.”²⁸⁸ Otherwise, they would be punished because they disobeyed the rule of compassion that is embodied in the universe like other rules of the universe.²⁸⁹

Said Nursi, who gives this advice to his readers, was a very compassionate person in his personal life. When he thought of animals, their needs for food versus their poverty and helplessness, he deeply felt pity for them.²⁹⁰ Trees would cause him to cry when they lose their leaves. Most importantly, he was deeply compassionate about rescuing his people from false beliefs. He says “I have sacrificed [not only this life] but even my life in the hereafter for the sake of the safety of people’s faith. I possess neither the love of paradise nor the fear of hellfire. May not just one Said but thousands of Suids be sacrificed for the sake of 25 million Turkish people’s faith. If our book [The Qur’an] becomes without followers [after I die], I would not even like to go to paradise. [On the other hand] if I see the faith of my people safe, I would accept being burned in the fires of hellfire because my heart would become a garden of paradise although my body would burn.”²⁹¹

For Nursi, the generous person becomes happy when he gives to others. He becomes happy with the happiness of the people whom he has given to. Similarly, the compassionate

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 1:383.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 1:469.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 2:1306.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 1:1149.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 2:2206.

person becomes happy with the happiness of the people for whom he has felt compassion. Therefore, the mother is happy due to her child's happiness. Moreover, the mother chicken sacrifices her life for the sake of her chicks.²⁹² Similarly, if it is necessary for Nursi to enter hellfire in order to rescue his people, he would be happy to do that because his compassion makes his heart happy although his body suffers.

For Nursi, the names of the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate which can be reached through compassion are the names that encompass the entire creation. He says "O my brother! I see the names of the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate to be such a giant and powerful light that it encompasses the entire creation, provides the eternal needs of each soul, and protects them from their enemies."²⁹³

In spite of his deficiencies and weaknesses –like the possibility of being killed by a small scorpion which has no eyes or a snake which has no legs– the human being is the master of the universe. He is fed with honey by the stinging honey bee and clothed with silk by the hand of a small bug, the silkworm. This mastership and compassionate care that the human being receives is due to the theophany of the two names, the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate.²⁹⁴

Similarly, the food and subsistence of humans and as well as other animate beings is the result of the same names. All creatures are given their food at the proper time and in the proper amount. Fruits are provided to creatures at the proper time, in the proper amount and in a portioned way. For instance, the bananas are already portioned for one person and created in a sliceable form. These foods are given to the creatures due the mercy and compassion of God.²⁹⁵

²⁹² Ibid., 1:284.

²⁹³ Ibid., 1:358.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 1:141.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 1:304.

The names that are reached through our compassion are such powerful names that God may create the hereafter just because of these names. It is impossible for the Most Merciful to see, listen and fulfill every single need of even small creatures like mosquitoes and then ignore the biggest need of all humanity, which is eternal life. Moreover, the name the Most Compassionate is an eternal name as are all the other names of God. An eternal name needs to reflect eternally. Similarly, the Most Compassionate needs to reflect eternally. However, this life is temporary, so there has to be second and eternal life so that the name The Most Compassionate can reflect eternally.²⁹⁶

On the other hand, another important need of poor, helpless and weak human beings is to know their possessor, protector, and trainer. Otherwise, life would become chaos, and the biggest blessings that human beings possess, like mind and compassion, would become the biggest calamities. Fortunately, God knows this deep need of humans and sends his revelation to humanity through his messengers out of his compassion.²⁹⁷

God created the universe as a feast table which includes numerous, different types of bounties and as an exhibition which includes very antique, magnificent, beautiful arts so that He can show to human beings the beauty of His mercy, excellence of His compassion, perfection of His Lordliness and make them appreciative and thankful. Therefore, it is impossible for such a compassionate and bountiful God not to talk and teach good manner to his guests who eat from His feast table and who are amazed by the beauty of His exhibition.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 1:30.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 1:907.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 1:969-970.

3. Absolute Enthusiasm

Said Nursi was not only a scholar who wrote books and lived in seclusion; moreover, he was a leader. People were moved by his writings and began to positively change their life and society. They were thinking that by reading, publishing, distributing, and explaining the writings of Nursi, they would be carrying out a divine duty which is called by Nursi as the service of the faith and the Qur'an (*hizmet-i imaniye ve kuraniye*). This was a divine duty that was loaded upon their shoulders by the grace of God. In a sense, they were chosen by God.²⁹⁹ As a result, the servants of the service of the faith and the Qur'an needed to have a spiritual foundation that would always encourage, energize, and excite them to carry out their divine duty and this foundation was absolute enthusiasm.

For Nursi, God, due to His compassion and beneficence, puts the spiritual taste and divine enthusiasm of every duty within it. Therefore, from the honey bee to the sun, every single creature carries out their duty which is loaded upon their shoulders by God with perfect enthusiasm. For instance, roosters invite their chickens to the food that they have found and not eat from it although they are hungry. Similarly, chickens sacrifice their life by attacking to the dog in order to save their chicks. In both examples, they carry out their duty eagerly and ambitiously although their duty may be harmful for some cases. The reason for this is that the taste and the enthusiasm that God has put in their duties are more attractive than the taste and the enthusiasm for eating and for saving their own life. For Nursi, this taste and enthusiasm can be sensed even by the creatures to a certain degree.³⁰⁰

In that manner, the servants of the service of the faith and the Qur'an need to apply this natural rule to their divine duty. Otherwise, they may not be able to cope with different

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 1:668.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 1:648.

difficulties that they will encounter along the way and may become hopeless. Fulfilling the divine duty of faith and the Qur'an is a difficult task. It is to strive to rescue people from disbelief, which terrifies this life and as well as one's prospects in the next one. To obtain paradise is not cheap. Therefore, the servants of the faith and the Qur'an need to seek absolute enthusiasm.³⁰¹

There are many obstacles that may hinder or diminish the enthusiasm of the servants of the faith and the Qur'an. Three of these obstacles are as follows:

The first one is not to be satisfied with the result of their service. At the beginning, the servant needs to aim at the goal of rescuing everyone; however, toward the end, he needs to be satisfied by the result that he is given. In this context, Nursi narrates a story about the Muslim commander, Celaleddin Harzemşah (d. 1230). Before one of his battles, his viziers told him that he would be victorious and that God would give him victory. Celaleddin turned to them and said "I am supposed to fight for the sake of God. Being victorious or not is not my duty. It is something that belongs to God, not me."³⁰²

On the other hand, if the servant is satisfied with the result that he is given, it increases his enthusiasm. It gives him desire to serve more. It causes thanking and thankfulness which in turn invite more blessings.³⁰³

The second obstacle is the distraction of the attention of the servant. For instance, media and its news is a means of distraction. People spent their time with curiosity before radio or television and then become more interested in the news which is not really related to their personal life and duties. Then, their mind is distracted and they become neglectful of their necessary duties or their heart is distracted and they become irreligious. Moreover, this

³⁰¹ Ibid., 1:999, 2:1958.

³⁰² Ibid., 1:652.

³⁰³ Ibid., 1:660,661.

distraction obstructs the spiritual pleasures that they could taste in the religion and faith. Finally, it causes them to lose their enthusiasm regarding to their duty.³⁰⁴ For this reason, Nursi did not even listen to the news of the Second World War. When he was asked about that it, he said “The capital of life is so limited, but the duties that we need to do are so many.”³⁰⁵

The third obstacle is the unspiritual climate that the servant lives in. Nursi says that one time he realized that his enthusiasm got tired, as did his students. He began to question this issue and finally realized that as the physical climate affects the body either in a good or bad way, the spiritual climate affects the enthusiasm of the servant too. Therefore, he and his students lose their deep enthusiasm after the blessed months in the Islamic calendar (Rajab, Sha'ban, and Ramadan, the last of which is the month of required fasting). The reason for their loss of enthusiasm was because when the blessed months are over, the spiritual climate changes and people begin to seek earthly desires. Then, the spiritual senses of the servants sense this climate and willingly or unwillingly they become affected.³⁰⁶

4. Absolute Gratitude

Nursi says that “Our path is gratitude. It is to see a face of mercy and a face of blessing in every thing.”³⁰⁷ For him, by being grateful people may reach the names The Most Merciful and The Most Compassionate.³⁰⁸ According to Nursi, gratitude is God’s purpose in creating the universe. God persistently invites people to thank him in the Qur’an. On the other hand, if the

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 2:1585.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:952.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 2:1595.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 2:2288.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 1:358.

universe can be read as the created book of God, the universe will be seen to say the same thing: "The purpose of creation is gratitude."³⁰⁹

Nursi states that if people take a look at the universe, they will see that God created life at the center of the creation. Everything circles around life to serve it. Moreover, He locates animate beings at the center of life and human beings at the center of them. And finally, He puts daily subsistence at the center of life and all animate beings. Without food and means of subsistence neither humans nor other animate beings can live. Therefore, food and means of subsistence are at the heart of creation. Apparently, food and means of subsistence are given to animates and humans through their conscious or unconscious gratitude. As a result, gratitude is the purpose of the creation.³¹⁰

For Nursi, all animates thank God either consciously or unconsciously. The unconscious thankfulness of animates is their appetite, taste, and enthusiasm. All animals and humans do that, but only believers receive the reward of their unconscious thankfulness because they consciously acknowledge God by means of their faith.³¹¹

On the other hand, there are many ways of conscious thankfulness. Among them, the daily prayer (*namaz*) is at the top of the list because it is the most comprehensive type of worship.³¹² Moreover, the daily prayer contains three meanings in its essence, and one of them is gratitude.³¹³ God designates the daily prayers in time intervals so that people can be thankful for the blessings and bounties that they received from God between these time intervals.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 1:520.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 1:520-521.

³¹¹ Ibid., 1:521.

³¹² Ibid., 1:521.

³¹³ Ibid., 1:16. (The other two meanings are glorification and praise.)

³¹⁴ Ibid., 1:15.

A second type of conscious thankfulness is to acknowledge God's bounties publicly (*tahdis-i nimet*) because the Qur'an says to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) "But the bounty of your Lord – rehearse and proclaim it!" (Qur'an, 93:11) Therefore, if people proclaim the bounties that they have received from God, it would be a way of thanking God. In this manner, Nursi praises his writings as bounty from God in order to thank God. However, a careful reading leads to the conclusion that Nursi follows a number of principles in expressing this second type of thankfulness:

1. There should be some type of benefit for the people or the religion in this proclaiming.

2. The person has to acknowledge with his heart that God is the real owner of the bounty.

3. Sometime, humbleness can mean disrespectfulness to God. In these cases, the person may praise his beauty by acknowledging God as its owner.

4. Especially in the service of the faith and the Qur'an, God may grace his servants with different bounties. In these cases, the servants may talk about the bounties that they have received from God since these bounties don't belong themselves. Moreover, since these bounties are the results of the service of the faith and the Qur'an, servants usually don't have the right to keep them secret.

5. Acknowledging God's bounties has to lead humbleness and gratitude, rather than arrogance and disgrace.³¹⁵

The third type of gratitude is to use every bounty in the lawful and the proper way. For example, radio is an important bounty of God to all humanity. However, modern civilization uses it to encourage people to follow their earthly pleasures. Then, a bounty of God becomes a

³¹⁵ Ibid., 1:359, 522-524, 940; 2:1360.

reason for the misery of all humanity. Therefore, humanity needs to use it to spread the word of God. In that case, humanity can become thankful in regard to this magnificent gift of God.³¹⁶

For Nursi, God's bounties are limitless; therefore, humans need to serve God by unlimited thankfulness. However, humans are limited in terms of their life and capacity. In this context, Nursi suggests the concept of unlimited intention and gives the following example. A farmer comes to the palace of the king with his small and cheap gift. He is ashamed that his gift is not suitable for the king. Suddenly, he says to the king, "O my Lord! I am a poor farmer. Therefore, I do not have a suitable gift for you. However, if I were able to give you the gifts that these rich people give you, I would give all of them to you." And then, the king accepts the intention of this poor farmer as the biggest gift that he received. Similarly, humans, as the poor servants of God, should present to God their intention to be unlimited in their gratitude.³¹⁷

5. Reflection

The sixth concept of Nursi's methodology is reflection. One of the famous Nursi scholars, Ümit Şimşek, thinks that reflection is the most important concept of Nursi's methodology.³¹⁸ According to Nursi, like love, reflection is a way to reach God. Nevertheless, it is richer, brighter, and wider than love. It enables the person to reach the name of God, the Wise.³¹⁹

For Nursi, the Qur'an invites the believers to reflect in many cases in different ways.³²⁰ For instance, it says "Do any of you wish that he should have a garden with date-palms and vines

³¹⁶ Ibid., 2:1597.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 1:158.

³¹⁸ Ümit Şimşek, "Risale-i Nurda tefekkür Üslubu," Uluslar Arası Bediüzzaman Sempozyumu, (İstanbul: Yeni Asya Yayınları, 1996), 26.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 1:210.

³²⁰ Ibid., 1:746.

and streams flowing underneath, and all kinds of fruit, while he is stricken with old age and his children are not strong [enough to look after themselves] that it should be caught in a whirlwind, with fire therein, and be burnt up? Thus does God make clear to you [His] signs, that you may reflect.” (Qur’an, 2: 266) Another one is as follows: “Men who celebrate the praises of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the [wonders of] creation in the heavens and the earth, [with the thought]: Our Lord! You have created [all] this not for nothing! Glory to you! Give us salvation from the penalty of fire.” (Qur’an, 3:191)

On the other hand, if the human being looks at the universe, he may realize that the Creator of the universe wants to display His beauty and perfection by creating it.³²¹ Therefore, the duty of humans is to contemplate the creation and then the Creator.³²²

In this manner, according to Nursi there are two circles and two tablets in regard to humanity. The first circle is the circle of Lordship, and the second one is the circle of servanthood. On the other side, there is the tablet of beautiful art and the tablet of reflection and appreciation. So, there is the Lord and His servant; His Lordship and the servanthood of the servant toward it. Also, there is the beautiful art of the Lord which is displayed in the universe and the reflection and the appreciation of the servant regarding this beautiful art.³²³

Therefore, reflection and appreciation in regard to the magnificent beauty of the universe is so important. It is the purpose of creation. God has created human beings so that they can realize this purpose. Moreover, since the reflection and the appreciation of human beings are not enough in regard to the unlimited beauty of the universe, God has created angels to carry out this divine duty too.³²⁴

³²¹ Ibid., 1:44.

³²² Ibid., 2:1386.

³²³ Ibid., 1:90; 2:1288.

³²⁴ Ibid., 1:225.

For Nursi, there are two types of the method of reflection. The first one is called *manayi ismi*, the meaning of the noun. The second one is called *manayi harfi*, the meaning of the letter. In the first type of method of reflection, the thinker considers the universe for itself. In this type of thinking, a tree is a tree and does not possess any further implications. Its full meaning is in itself. It is like a noun in grammar whose meaning is complete in itself. On the other hand, the second type of thinking says that a tree is a letter; therefore, it does not possess a meaning in itself. It is a tool to indicate the meaning of something else. Therefore, a tree indicates its creator. It indicates that its Creator can give form to His creation because the tree itself has a shape and form. It signifies that its Creator is the Knower because the creation of the tree requires knowledge.³²⁵ For Nursi, the second method transforms the knowledge of creation into gnosis; therefore, humans should choose the second type of reflection. Otherwise, their knowledge becomes ignorance itself because knowing the qualities of a tree without knowing its creator is meaningless.³²⁶

According to Nursi, beside these two methods of reflection, there are two more types of reflection. The first type of reflection is called *afaki tefekkür*, outer reflection. On the other hand, the second type of reflection is *enfüsi tefekkür*, inner reflection. The outer reflection is to contemplate the universe while the inner one is the thinker's contemplation in his inner being. Regarding these two types of reflection, Nursi bases himself on the following verse: "Soon will We show them our signs in the [furthest] regions [of the universe], and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is witness all things?" (Qur'an, 41:53). The outer reflection should be carried out more superficially while inner reflection should be detailed. Otherwise, the thinker may be distanced from oneness and

³²⁵ Ibid., 2:1354.

³²⁶ Ibid., 1:332.

lost in multiplicity. His negligence would increase and his arrogance would become aggravated.³²⁷

In sum, Nursi's writings are full of both outer and inner reflection. Therefore, Nursi encourages his followers to read his works. For him, to reflect upon the realities that are stated in his work *The Words* means to search the treasures of the Qur'an.³²⁸ His works are sources of faithful reflection.³²⁹

³²⁷ Ibid., 2:1338.

³²⁸ Ibid., 2:1530.

³²⁹ Ibid., 2:1579.

B. THE LIFE AND SUFI THOUGHT OF GULEN

I. THE LIFE OF GULEN

As yet, no scholarly biography of Fethullah Gulen has been written. The only source that we have today is an unfinished interview about his life, named "My Small World" (*Küçük Dünyam*). According to this source, Fethullah Gulen was born in 1941, in Erzurum, a city in eastern Anatolia. His father's name was Ramiz and his mother's was Refia. He has two sisters and four brothers and belonged to a pious family. The father of his grandfather, Molla Ahmed, was an ascetic and God-conscious person. Gulen narrates that Molla Ahmed never laid on his bed for the last thirty years of his life. Similarly, his grandfather Şamil Ağa was a serious person in his spiritual life. Gulen never saw Şamil Ağa laughing. His grandmother Munise Hanım was a sensitive person who had a great deal of influence on the softness of Gulen's heart. Also, his father Ramiz Hoca was a spiritual person. Especially, his prayers were said to be very deep and sincere. In addition, his mother Refia Hanım was his first Qur'an teacher.³³⁰

Gulen recalls that when he was a child, his house was always full of Sufis. For instance, Alvarlı Mehmet Lütfi Efendi, his brother Vehbi Efendi, Shaykh Sırrı Efendi, Halil Hoca and Şehabeddin Efendi are some of the names that Gulen can remember. Among them, Alvarlı Mehmet Lütfi Efendi was a Naqshi³³¹ Shaykh (d.1956) who was greatly respected by Said Nursi. Lütfi Efendi was also very well respected by Gulen's family members of. Especially his uncle and aunt were very attached to him. Therefore, for the young Gulen, every word that came out of the mouth of Lütfi Efendi was as if it was coming from the heavens. Gulen sees himself grateful to Lütfi Efendi with regard to his spiritual life.³³²

³³⁰ Latif Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam* (İstanbul: AD Yayıncılık, 1995), 15-26.

³³¹ In Turkey "Naqshi" is a common abbreviated form of Naqshbandi.

³³² Ibid., 25-28.

On his end, Lütfi Efendi felt deep compassion and attachment towards Gulen too. He always used to show his attention towards Gulen either by his words or behaviour. The times that Lütfi Efendi called Gulen his student were the times of great joy for Gulen. One time, Gulen wanted to move from Erzurum and study Arabic from a teacher. However, for some reason, he could not move. At that time, Lütfi Efendi called Gulen and told him that if he were gone to another city and left Lütfi Efendi, he would die.³³³

In 1957 is the year that Gulen first encountered the writings of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. In that year, Bediuzzaman sent one of his students, Muzaffer Arslan, to Erzurum. Arslan stayed there for fifteen days and every night read and explained *Risale-i Nur* to the people of Erzurum. Each piece of *Risale-i Nur* that was read by Arslan touched Gulen. Moreover, the pious manner of Arslan was another reason for the admiration of Gulen. At the end of these fifteen days, Gulen decided to follow these writings and people. After Arslan left the town, Bediuzzaman sent a letter to Erzurum and in that letter he thanked several people, among whom was Fethullan Gulen. This was one of the happiest moments of Gulen's life.³³⁴

After this occasion, Nursi and his writings become a major aspect of Gulen's spiritual life. Gulen would read *Risale-i Nur* and frequently use its ideas in his sermons as an influential preacher. Moreover, he built his methodology of serving the religion on the basis of Nursi's writings. In this respect, it could be said that Nursi was the most influential scholar in the life and the thought of Gulen. It is interesting, however, that although Gulen had great admiration towards Nursi, he did not meet with him in his lifetime. Gulen was not present even at the funeral ceremony for Nursi when he died in 1960.

³³³ Ibid., 28-29.

³³⁴ Ibid., 45-46.

Today, Gulen and his movement is generally seen as neo-Nur community by scholars,³³⁵ and there is an undeniable intellectual and spiritual connection between *Risale-i Nur* and the Gulen movement. In the mean time, there are some major differences between Nursi and Gulen and their movements. Dr. Hakan Yavuz asserts that “Gulen’s faith-inspired education movement is different from Nursi’s exclusively faith movement. Gulen is an inspirational leader of a transnational education movement, whereas Nursi was the formative giant of intellectual discourse. Although Nursi was focused on personal transformation, Gulen has focused on personal and social transformation by utilizing new liberal economic and political conditions.”³³⁶ Gulen has given the Nursi movement new direction, which is still occurring today, a new direction in which life has taken the place of faith. At the time of Nursi, the need was to establish a strong grounding in faith; however, in the time of Gulen, the need is to bring this faith into life.³³⁷

Another difference that is more related to our thesis is that Nursi did not author Sufi discourse in the classical sense although he did use a lot of Sufi concepts and approaches in *Risale-i Nur* collection. On the other hand, Gulen explains the key concepts of Sufism in a three volume book called *Kalbin Zümürü Tepeleri, The Emerald Hills of The Heart*; and he still has not completed his work yet. In this respect, Gulen is a thought-provoking writer in Sufism and a Sufi in his personal life, as one of his main students, Enes Ergene asserts.³³⁸ Dr. Zeki Sarıtoprak calls him a Sufi in his own way.³³⁹ For Fr. Thomas Michel, who has written articles and book on both

³³⁵ Hakan Yavuz, “The Gulen Movement,” in *Turkish Islam and The Secular State*, ed. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, 19 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

³³⁶ Ibid., 19.

³³⁷ Eyüp Can, *Ufuk Turu* (İstanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1996), 16.

³³⁸ Enes Ergene, *Gelenğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı* (İstanbul: Yeni Akademi Yayınları, 2005), 352.

³³⁹ Zeki Sarıtoprak, “A Sufi In His Own Way,” in *Turkish Islam and The Secular State*, 156.

Gulen and Nursi, Gulen possesses an interpretation which allows Sufism and modernity to coexist.³⁴⁰ Nursi, however, is not regarded as a Sufi.³⁴¹

Gulen's main occupation was to preach to the Turkish people as a government employee in the system of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*). He began to his duty in 1959 in Edirne. After several years, he moved to Izmir, where the first seeds of the Gulen movement were cultivated. In Izmir, he began to teach at Kestane Pazari Student Dormitory. He also was giving his sermons on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday not only in Izmir, but also in different cities that surround Izmir. Between 1966 and 1971, Gulen preached in Izmir and taught in Kestane Pazari Student Dormitory; and the people who attended his sermons and the students who were in his classes were the core people who would shape what is known today as the Gulen Movement.³⁴²

Today, the Gulen Movement is seen as the establishing hand behind different national and international media associations, more than five hundred elementary, middle, and high schools all over the world, as well as different universities, hospitals, culture houses, small student houses, and business associations. Among the people who support the activities of the movement with their time, money, or thoughts are people who belong to different religious, social, and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, it is difficult to define and locate the movement with current sociological structures. Gulen himself refers to the movement as *Örnekleri Kendinden Bir Hareket* (a movement whose examples are from itself).³⁴³

³⁴⁰ Thomas Michel, "Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gulen," *The Muslim World* 95, no.3 (2005): 341.

³⁴¹ Ahmet Akgunduz, "The Risale-i Nur Movement: Is It A Sufi Order, A Political Society, Or A Community?" *Nursi Studies*, <http://www.nursistudies.com/englishh/data/95e/ahmedekgunduz95e.htm> (accessed April 13, 2006).

³⁴² Latif Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 98-99.

³⁴³ Mehmet Gündem, *Fethullah Gülenle 11 Gün* (İstanbul: AlfaYayıncıları, 2005), 130.

The Gulen movement is based on education. The various activities and associations of the movement are encompassed by education. The movement has educational intuitions beginning from the kindergarten level until the graduate level. These schools and institutions are not only in Turkey, but are also in over ninety countries. Moreover, they receive compliments from many politicians, educators, intellectuals, and journalists. For instance, the former prime minister of Turkey, leftist Bülent Ecevit, praised these schools, saying “What is happening [in these schools] is education; the most important factor for the improvement of humanity. Therefore, I am happy [with these schools].”³⁴⁴

One of the main characteristics of the movement is openness to dialogue with citizens of other nations and members of other religions. Gulen has said “Interfaith dialogue is a must today; and the first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones.”³⁴⁵ In this respect, Gulen is a person who initiates different dialogue activities beginning in Turkey and reaching out to the surrounding the four corners of the world.

Gulen’s messages are always centered in love and tolerance. He says “The most distinctive feature of a soul overflowing with faith is to love all types of love that are expressed in deeds, and to feel enmity for all deeds in which enmity is expressed.”³⁴⁶ The following aphorism also belongs to him: “Be so tolerant that your heart becomes wide like the ocean. Become inspired with faith and love for others. Offer a hand to those in trouble, and be concerned about everyone.”³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴ Bülent Ecevit, “Türk Okullarının Türk Dili ve Türkiyeye Katkısı” in *Barış Köprüleri* ed. Toktamış Ateş, Eser Karakaş, and İlber Ortaylı, 25 (İstanbul: Ufuk Kitapları, 2005).

³⁴⁵ Ali Ünal and Alphonse Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue: Fethullah Gulen* (Virginia: The Fountain, 2000), 244.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

Although Gulen's messages and activities always have a soft and moderate character, he is constantly the subject of criticisms and even accusations. These criticisms and accusations are very general, but they mainly blame Gulen for not telling people his final aim and intention, which they claim is to promote Islam and establish an Islamic state in Turkey. In these accusations, people have gone too far, to the ridiculous point of targeting even the spelling of Gulen's name, whether it is Fe-T-ullah or Fet-H-ullah. Their accusation is that, in it is original spelling his name was spelled with only T, and then Gulen has changed it to TH spelling so that his name could mean the victory of God.³⁴⁸ Any person who has a little knowledge of Turkish and Arabic, however, knows that this name can only be spelled as Fethullah. Spelling it without the H is a clear mistake. A similar accusation has been leveled against the magazine that belongs to the movement. The name of the magazine is Sızıntı, which means *leak*. For one critic, Bayram Balcı, the implication of the name of the magazine is that the movement will leak into the society slowly, without letting themselves known.³⁴⁹ The magazine, however, takes the following quatrain as their slogan, which implies the humbleness of the name of the magazine:

“Sıza sıza göl olur
Akar akar yol olur
Yaradan dileyince
Az çoklardan bol olur.”³⁵⁰

The meaning of the quatrain is as follows:

It becomes a lake by leaking

³⁴⁸ Ergün Poyraz, *Fetullahın Gerçek Yüzü*, 2th ed. (İstanbul: Toplumsal Dönüşüm Yayınları, 2004), 26.

³⁴⁹ Bayram Balcı, *Fethullah Gülen Okulları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), 160.

³⁵⁰ No Autor, Sızıntı, <http://www.sizinti.com.tr> (accessed April 14, 2006).

It becomes a road by pouring
When God is willing
Little becomes much more than plenty.

Against these criticisms and accusations, Gulen had to find a way and a language to defend himself and his movement. In this regard, he enlarged his dialogue activities and made himself known more to the public. He met with distinguished journalists, authors, politicians, and businessmen from all social and ethnic backgrounds. He also used a non-political language in order to avoid being against the politics of the government. He always wanted to solve the problems between the different layers of Turkish society. In order to do that, he encouraged his people to respect the government and the army. He also encouraged them to relinquish their rights (if need be) in order to establish unity in Turkish society.

Besides Gulen himself, there are many other intellectuals who have found such criticisms of Gulen to be unfounded.. For Dr. Elizabeth Özdalga (in her research about religious movements), for a writer or scholar it is more objective to depend on the statements of the members of these movements rather than trying to examine their inner intentions. For her, it is certain that making decisions about intentions is not more valuable than the examination of the clear statements.³⁵¹ Another famous journalist Fehmi Kuru says that “We need to be clear. The religious background of Fethullah Gulen makes him automatically guilty before the eyes of some people although he has done incredible services.”³⁵² Liberal journalist Taha Akyol says “What are we doing?! Without thinking about the sociological function of it, we are making guilty (by

³⁵¹ Elizabeth Özdalga, “İslami Kadrolarda Dünyevi Asketizm: F. Gülenin İlham Veren Riyazet Ve Aktivizmi,” in *Küresel Barışa Doğru* (İstanbul: Gazeticiler ve Yazarlar Vakfı Yayınları, 2002), 13.

³⁵² Fehmi Kuru, *Yerli ve Özgün: Nobellik Bir Öykü* (İstanbul: Gazeticiler ve Yazarlar Vakfı Yayınları, 2003), 41.

means of secret agent logic) the movement of Fethullah Gulen, which is an example of modern pluralism in the relationship of religion, modernization, and secularism.”³⁵³

II. EPISTEMOLOGY

In this chapter, I will examine Gulen’s Sufi epistemology in two categories mainly based on his book *The Emerald Hills of The Heart*. In the first category, I will discuss Gulen’s use of five different types of Sufi knowledge: Intellectual and transmitted knowledge, direct knowledge, wisdom, certainty, and gnosis. In the second category, I will touch on four different means of Sufi knowledge (or gnosis) that Gulen expresses: mind, *vicdan* (which includes the *latife-i rabbaniye* [center of lordship], consciousness, intellect [*zihin*] and the senses), heart, and reflection.³⁵⁴

1. Types of Sufi Knowledge

A. *İlim Through Mukāşefe (knowledge through unveiling)*

In Sufism, knowledge is a type of information which can be obtained through the human senses or through the revelations and inspirations of God. Sometimes it is understood as information that is relevant to unseen reality or to gaining true understanding of a subject. Knowledge in Islam can be categorized in different ways with regard to different basis. When it is categorized according to its methods, Gulen divides it into two groups: knowledge that is obtained through the intellect and knowledge that is obtained through transmission. Knowledge that is obtained by transmission is also of two kinds: that which is called *muamele*(knowledge

³⁵³ Taha Akyol, *Asyadaki Türkiye*, 2th ed. (İstanbul: Gazeticiler ve Yazarlar Vakfı Yayınları, 2003), 38.

³⁵⁴ These four agents of gnosis (mind, *vicdan*, heart, and reflection) could also have been discussed under the heading of psychology, since they are faculties of consciousness (although "reflection" is more particularly a function of the heart).

concerning Islamic daily life) and that which is called *mukaşefe*, (knowledge discovered through Islamic spirituality and inspiration). According to Gulen, the knowledge that is meant in Sufism is *mukaşefe*, inspired knowledge.

Gulen states that *mukaşefe* is usually interpreted in English as “unveiled knowledge,, and this interpretation implies that *mukaşefe* is completely independent, autonomous, or self-contained knowledge; however, it is not. On the contrary, it is dependent on the Qur'an and the Sunnah. In this context, Gulen asserts that “Any knowledge one finds in one’s heart or conscience that has not been filtered through these two pure sources [i.e. the Qur’an and the Sunnah] is not reliable. It cannot be binding knowledge for the individuals, themselves, or others it cannot be considered as authentic, sound knowledge.”³⁵⁵

For Gulen, unveiled knowledge (*mukaşefe*) is the knowledge that is obtained through the process of the theophany of God’s knowledge. First of all, God’s knowledge is a type of light; and at the beginning of the process, this light illuminates itself from the realms that are beyond the material worlds. Then it slowly envelops the spirit, and finally bursts like flowers at *sır* (inner core), *hafî* (the subtle center), *ahfa* (the most subtle center), which are inner faculties of the heart.³⁵⁶

Furthermore, Gulen states that at the beginning of unveiled knowledge, the inner faculties of the Sufi’s heart begin to face toward God. His desires start to be elevated from carnal ones to the level of the pure soul. Finally, his life is opened to the Real by means of belief, love, and attraction. In the end, this new life of the Sufi transforms unveiled knowledge into direct knowledge from God, which is called *ilm-i lediün* (knowledge from God's presence).³⁵⁷ This process can also be described in the following way: The Sufi begins his journey with abstract

³⁵⁵ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümürüt Tepeleri 2* (Istanbul: Nil Yayınları, 2001), 21.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:22.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:22.

knowledge; and this knowledge leads the Sufi to belief. Then, belief generates detailed knowledge; and detailed knowledge leads to intense spiritual life. Finally, this practice generates direct knowledge.³⁵⁸

Another epistemological aspect in the writings of Fethullah Gulen is the immersion of knowledge in the *hal* (which means "manner" in contemporary Turkish).³⁵⁹ The immersion (*istiğrak*) of knowledge in the manner of the Sufi is a station that the Sufi visits in one of the advanced degrees of his spiritual journey.³⁶⁰ At the beginning of his journey, the Sufi may know some truths; however, he is not able to experience them yet. Therefore, he is not able to grasp the inner realities of the truths that he knows intellectually, because experiencing is very different from knowing. For instance, belief, love, and spiritual taste are practical concepts; and their realities cannot be known until they become a dimension of the Sufi's very nature. When they are experienced and practiced by the heart of the Sufi, the Sufi's attitude predominates over his knowledge, and that knowledge begins to become immersed in the attitude; then it melts and finally perishes. This is called the immersion of the knowledge in the attitude of the Sufi. This also may be called the knowledge of the Prophets.³⁶¹

According to Gulen, after this station, the Sufi may experience another station which is called *gaybet* (absence). The absence might be experienced in two different levels. At the first level, the Sufi deeply loves God and becomes absent where and when the Beloved is not experienced. At the second level, the Sufi begins to travel on his spiritual journey, and along the way, he realizes and understands the pillars and essentials of it. He recognizes that the separation of knowledge and attitude is against oneness, which is the foundation of the journey, and then He

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 2:22.

³⁵⁹ *Hal* in Turkish is not the equivalent of the Sufi term '[spiritual] state,' although Ali Ünal, the translator of Gulen's Emerald Hills, uses the word "state" to translate "*hal*." Cf. Gulen, *Sufism: Emerald Hills of the Heart*, v. 2, p. 80.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 2:81.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 2:85.

will reach a level in which he begins to feel the manner and the knowledge together. Hereby, he saves himself from both the error of separating knowledge from the Sufi manner as well as from the heedlessness of a manner that is not knowledge.³⁶²

B. İlm-i ledün (direct knowledge)

İlm-i ledün, often translated into English as "direct knowledge from God" indicates the knowledge that is transmitted from God to the servant without any intermediary agent. It is also called the knowledge of the mystery or the unseen. The Qur'an talks about *ilm-i ledün* in the following verse: "We [God] have taught him [Khidr] from ourselves a type of knowledge," (Qur'an, 18: 65). Direct knowledge is a special type of knowledge that is granted to those fortunate ones by the grace of God. It is special because of both its nature and its recipients. It is special because its nature is mysterious and usually related to the enigmatic meaning of occurrences. It is also special because only God-selected people can receive it.³⁶³

Direct knowledge is different from unveiled knowledge, in five ways. First, although deep devotion to God, sincere adherence to Him and His Messenger Muhammad, sincerity (*ihlas*) and certainty in belief are usually considered as ways to receive unveiled knowledge, they generally are not thought of as a means to obtain direct knowledge. Direct knowledge is completely seen by Gulen as a gift of God.³⁶⁴ Second, unveiled knowledge may finally transform itself into direct knowledge. Nobody, however, has spoken about the transformation of direct knowledge into unveiled knowledge. Third, direct knowledge is usually related to the inward aspects of beings while unveiled knowledge is related to the outward aspects of them. Fourth,

³⁶² Ibid., 2:88.

³⁶³ Fethullah Gulen, "İlm-i Ledün," *Sızıntı*, 259 (2000), <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=6fd3dc8dd5&k=804&1162719165>

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 259.

unveiled knowledge is more common than direct knowledge in terms of its recipients. Fifth, according to Gulen, direct knowledge might be better than unveiled knowledge for specific occasions, yet unveiled knowledge is generally preferred to direct knowledge as in the story of Moses and Khidr.

God usually bestows direct knowledge to his servant through inspiration (*ilham*). If this inspiration is revealed to a prophet, there can be no doubt that its source is God because prophets are saved from mistakes and from the temptations of Satan. On the other hand, if the one who receives this inspiration is a saint, then there might be a possibility that this inspiration is a temptation of Satan. Although saints are loved, cared, protected by God to a certain degree, they are not fully secure from error and the temptations of Satan.³⁶⁵ In this case, Gulen suggests that the inspiration be tested with the fundamental teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Moreover, the Sufi must turn to God and seek refuge in Him when he suspects any inspiration. Gulen also says that Satan's temptations sometimes may not contradict the fundamentals of the Qur'an and the Sunnah in appearance; however, they may in fact serve insidious satanic aims and purposes. Therefore, the Sufi always must be careful.³⁶⁶

C. Hikmet (wisdom)

Knowledge, philosophy, understanding of the soul of causes, inner and outer aspects of beings, knowing the book of universe and the purposes of the religion are some meanings which the word *hikmet* includes. *Hikmet* is translated as wisdom in English, and as a term it means the combination of knowledge and good deeds. Wisdom is also described as the ability to act appropriately.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 259.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 259.

The Qur'an uses the word *hikmet* in three different meanings:

1. *Hikmet* means to understand the meanings of the Qur'an and thereby the meaning of the universe, because it is explained by the Qur'an. The following verse is related to this meaning: "God grants wisdom (*hikmet*) to whomever He wills, and whoever is granted the wisdom has indeed been granted much good," (Qur'an, 2:269).

2. *Hikmet* means prophethood and the mysteries of prophethood: "And we granted Luqman wisdom (*hikmet*)," (Qur'an, 31:12).

3. *Hikmet* means encouraging others with the combination of knowledge and good deeds: "Call the way of your lord with wisdom (*hikmet*) and fair exhortation and preaching," (Qur'an, 16:125).

According to Gulen, wisdom is a mixture of seven different meanings:

1. Wisdom is the unity of thought and attitude. Precision in expression, unerring thinking, and acting upon it are some colors of wisdom.

2. Certainty in knowledge and perfection in deeds are other aspects of wisdom. For Gulen, these aspects of wisdom can also be expressed as nurturing knowledge with good deeds and nurturing art with perfection.

3. Grasping the aims and purposes of the religion and representing it in both individual and social life is another characteristic of wisdom.

4. Understanding of the aims of the existence and the unity between the peculiarities of the universe is another dimension of wisdom.

5. Knowing causality and acting in the universe as the vicegerent of God by using the knowledge of causality is another aspect of wisdom.

6. Seeing the wisdom of God in the order and the balance of the universe and applying this order and balance to our personal life. In the mean time, trying to keep maintaining the order of the universe by establishing different branches of science is another interpretation of wisdom.

7. Applying Godly morality to our interactions with people and, in so doing, transforming the earth and earthly management systems into heavenly nature is another beautiful aspect of wisdom.³⁶⁷

Besides these different meanings of wisdom, Gulen also talks about the sources of wisdom. He says “the principle sources of wisdom are the Divine revelation (*vahiy*) and inspiration (*ilham*).”³⁶⁸ Gulen also asserts that dedicating oneself sincerely to God for forty days is another way to open wellsprings of wisdom from the heart to the mouth.³⁶⁹

D. Yakin (certainty)

In Sufism, *yakin* means to reach right, sound, and certain knowledge. It also means to liberate the self from doubts and uncertainties by ending the separation of the knower and the known. Concerning certainty in knowledge, Gulen asserts that it can be possible only for beings that are open to progress. Therefore, God's knowledge cannot be talked about in such terms because there is no progress for God's knowledge. As a result, God can be called the knower, but not the certain one.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, 2:27.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:22.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:93.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:171.

The Qur'an uses the word *yakin* in the following verse: "And who believe in the Revelation sent to you, and sent before your time. And in their hearts have *yakin*, the certainty of the hereafter." (Qur'an, 2:4)

For Gulen, certainty is a level of assurance that is beyond the point that can be reached after using all of the sources of knowledge, including every way of disclosure and self-supervision. Therefore, even the least degree of certainty can fully enlighten the heart, clean it of the "dirt" of doubts, and give joy and satisfaction.³⁷¹

Gulen explains certainty in three levels (common to traditional Sufi discourse):

1. *Ilme'l-yakin* (the knowledge of certainty): to reach the strongest belief and conviction of all the essentials of faith by means of proofs.

2. *Ayne'l-yakin* (the eye of certainty): to reach the indescribable gnosis through unveiling, disclosure, and feelings.

3. *Hakka'l-yakin* (the truth of certainty): to reach the unity with God without any veil.³⁷²

Certainty is a process, and Gulen approaches it in the following way: In the beginning, certainty requires effort from the Sufi; while in the end, it appears as grace from God. In the beginning, there might be unease, while at the end, unimaginable serenity replaces it. Certainty also may begin with unveiling; then disclosure (*mukaşefe*) follows it; and, finally, disclosure gives way to observation (*muşahede*); and all of these levels indicate a different stage in the process of certainty.³⁷³

For example, disclosure (*mukaşefe*) is to feel and know the realities of God's names and attributes; that is to say, that the one who obtains disclosure is the one who completes his

³⁷¹ Ibid., 1:172.

³⁷² Ibid., 1:174-175.

³⁷³ Ibid., 1:173,174.

spiritual journey related to the names and attributes of God. After that, his *latife-i rabbaniya*, one of the faculties of *vicdan*, begins to receive Godly mysteries. On the other hand, observation (*muşahede*) is to see the names of God in His actions, and to see the Blessed Named in the names. "Observation" is different from "disclosure" because "disclosure" is related to meanings and abstract realities whereas the subject of "observation" is the essence of God.³⁷⁴

In his writings, Gulen also touches upon the ways to obtain certainty. For him, recent years, or even today, are the years of positivism and rationalism in the world. Therefore, it is really difficult for modern people to gain certainty. Because of this, the first test for a modern person is to believe in spirituality, because human beings cannot experience what they do not believe. In this regard, Gulen's suggestion for elevating the people of today to the level of spirituality is to educate them in their early ages; because in old age, anger, hate, and enmity become obstacles to reaching spirituality. Besides belief and education, Gulen also points out that worship is another vehicle for reaching certainty, and the following verses indicate it: "Those who believe in the unseen, who are steadfast in prayer, and who spend out of what we have provided for them, and those who believe in the Revelation sent to you, and sent before your time. And [in their hearts,] they have *yakin*, assurance in the hereafter, [they are those who are following guidance from their Lord]" (Qur'an, 2:3-4).³⁷⁵

E. Marifet (gnosis)

Marifet, often translated as gnosis, is experiential knowledge of God. Qushayrī says "Among the scholars, *marifet* means knowledge. For them, every piece of knowledge is *marifet*

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 2:112,115.

³⁷⁵ Gulen Fethullah, "Yakine Ulaşmak İçin," Bir Gönül İnsanı Portresi Fethullah Gülen, <http://tr.fgulen.com/a.page/eserleri/fasildan.fasila/fasildan.fasila.3/ruhi.hayat/a921.html> (accessed April 21, 2006).

(gnosis) and every piece of gnosis is knowledge. Therefore, if somebody has knowledge about God, he also has gnosis about Him; or if somebody has gnosis about God, he also has knowledge about him.³⁷⁶

For Gulen, gnosis is the unification of the knower with knowing, and the representation of the knower with what he knows in his every manner. Gulen asserts that knowledge is different from gnosis because knowledge is acquired through reading, learning, researching, synthesizing and examining, whereas gnosis is obtained through reflection, intuition, and self-disclosure. Moreover, gnosis is the essence of the knowledge; and the opposite of knowledge is ignorance; while gnosis' opposite is denial. Another difference between knowledge and gnosis is that knowledge is to comprehend something in term of its general structure, whereas gnosis is to recognize very deeply the same thing from one certain aspect of it.³⁷⁷ Of course, the knowledge that Gulen talks about is the knowledge of *mukāṣefe*; therefore, there is no contradiction between what Qushayrī and Gulen says.

For Gulen, gnosis is to perceive the reality of anything from the inside of it, to perceive exactly as what it is in itself without depending on any outside designating factor. Of course, the main subject of gnosis is God; however, the gnosis of God slightly differs from the above general definition of gnosis, because God is known with His actions, names, and attributes, but He is not known in terms of his essence. Therefore, there is no end for the gnosis of God. In other words, although gnosis of God can tell us a lot about God, it can never tell us the final word about Him, because God is infinite. In that context, God is called the unknown known.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Abdülkerim Kuşeyri, *Kuşeyri Risalesi*, 3ed ed. (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1999), 398.

³⁷⁷ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümürüt Tepeleri* 2, 140.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:141.

In Sufi writings, Sufis introduce different interpretations of gnosis and talk about different implications of it. Some relate it to the feeling of awe and see the Sufi's awe as a sign for gnosis. Others relate it to serenity and say that depth of gnosis is related to the depth of serenity. Some says that gnosis disengages the Sufi from everything other than God.³⁷⁹ According to Gulen, all of these different interpretations are caused by different temperaments of Sufis and their different Sufi paths or orders.³⁸⁰ However, reflections of wonder, utter astonishment, and awe can be seen as a common ground in all of these different interpretations.³⁸¹

According to Gulen, the first indication of gnosis is to realize the theophanies of the names of God around us and to journey in the astonishing and mysterious environment of them. Along the journey, what the Sufi sees and hears pours to his lips as lights; his heart begins to manage his manners, and the Real displays himself in his manners. In this point, the Sufi closes the doors of his heart to carnal feelings and passions and opens the windows of his bosom to the breezes of unseen worlds. This point is the point of gnosis at which nothing can be felt other than God.³⁸²

In this climate, life becomes very pure, as in the gardens of heaven; the heart becomes content with joy and serenity, and the Sufi feels as if he lives the life of the angels. In every moment of this life, the Sufi comes to face to face with his Lord, and every meeting contains a different joy than the previous one. Gulen exclaims this beautifully as follows: "Let the

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 1:197.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 1:198.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 2:145.

³⁸² Ibid., 2:143.

philosophers and scholars be content with their knowledge, the Gnostic drinks serenity in each moment from radiant cups of gnosis!"³⁸³

According to Gulen, self-possession, steadfastness, seriousness, profundity, and resolution are the main aspects of the gnostic. Therefore, in his Sufi teaching, there is no room for any laxity, impertinence, or conceit. For him, the more the Sufi knows and obtains gnosis, the more he follows self-possession (tamkīn) and steadfastness.³⁸⁴

The results of gnosis are not restricted to this world. According to Gulen, there will be another result of gnosis in the hereafter, which is to see God himself according to the Sufi's level of gnosis. The one who acquires more gnosis than others in this world sees God in a clearer fashion than the others in the hereafter because more gnosis means more unveiling. Therefore, the Sufi should deepen his gnosis through reflection, and make it a part of his nature in order to see God with clearer vision.³⁸⁵

Since gnosis has such importance, Gulen also talks about various ways of obtaining gnosis. He says that the shortest, most secure, and most loved way to closeness with God is the way of doing obligatory duties and prayers. Nevertheless, obligatory prayers are limited in their efficiency. Therefore, after completing his obligatory prayers, the Sufi needs to fly to the unending heaven of voluntary prayers. Hereby, he obtains real love and proximity to God. After obtaining proximity to God, the Sufi feels more desire for both obligatory and voluntary prayers, and dives into them. In this level, God loves the Sufi and lets him feel it; and, finally, becomes (as the well-attested hadith states) "his eyes with which he sees with and his feet with which he walks."³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Ibid., 1:199.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 2:147.

³⁸⁵ Fethullah Gulen, *Fasıldan Fasıla 2*, (Istanbul: Nil Yayınları, 1995), 19.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 2:25.

For Gulen the signs of gnostic can be summarized in the following way: A gnostic only expects favors from God and close his doors to others. Not only earthly positions like leadership, but also spiritual levels, cannot be the aim of a gnostic. He sees and acknowledges everyone to be in a better position than he is. He does not regret the chances that he lost. He does not feel arrogant due to his accomplishments. He always seeks the company of God, and tries to be with the Creator while he is among the creatures.³⁸⁷

Although these are common characteristics of gnostics, there might be some differences between them since every gnostic is a traveler of his own journey. As a result of that, some travel in the realm of the acts, names, and attributes of God, while others journey towards the source of those acts, names, and attributes; and their journey neither veils the acts, names and attributes for the sake of the essence nor neglects the essence for the sake of the acts, names and attributes.³⁸⁸

2. Methods of Attaining Gnosis

The methods of attaining gnosis consist of mind (*akıl*), conscience (*vicdan*), heart, and reflection.³⁸⁹

A. Akıl (mind)

As a term, *akıl* points out the intellectual faculty of human beings which understands and comprehends the meanings that can not be recognized through five senses. In English, *akıl* corresponds to mind. Mind is the primary meaning of *akıl* in Sufism. However, Sufi texts

³⁸⁷ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümürü Tepeleri*, 2:146-147.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:147-148.

³⁸⁹ As noted earlier, what are being considered here under the heading of "methods of attaining gnosis" are generally considered to be faculties of consciousness, and hence would in most cases be analyzed under the heading of "psychology." Nevertheless, because of their importance to gnosis, we are discussing them now, immediately following "gnosis."

sometimes use intellect (*zihin*) or self (*nefis*) in the definition of *akıl*. According to Gulen, these differences represent different functions of the same faculty, rather than indicating different faculties. In other words, according to Gulen, mind is one faculty that has different functions; therefore, it is sometimes called intellect (*zihin*) to refer its function of sensing, or called self (*nefis*) to refer its function of acting.³⁹⁰

Thus, for Gulen, mind has different functions. It distinguishes right from wrong, good from evil. It also recognizes the necessary and the unnecessary, as well as theoretical and practical knowledge. If it can protect itself from the influences of the carnal self, it can reflect, remember, and comprehend under the management of the heart and the soul, and, thereby, encourage its owner to spirituality.³⁹¹

Although mind is the light and the radiance of Godly knowledge and can comprehend itself, beings, and occurrences, it is still limited in its comprehension. There are many subjects which mind is not able to grasp. Therefore, in order to enlarge the comprehension of mind, one should make his mind follow a few steps behind the heart. In this way, mind passes beyond its limits and begins to share spiritual gifts that *latife-i rabbaniye* (*Lordly ability*), --which I will discuss in the next section-- receives from God.³⁹²

In order to acquire knowledge, mind uses two main methods. In its first method, mind progresses gradually, acts slowly, and finishes its duty in a relatively long time of period of time. This method is named *tefekkir* (reflection). In its second method, mind leaves aside the concept of time and reaches its aim in its first and sudden attempt. This second method is called *hads* (intuition). The Sufi can reach the level of intuition either after intense effort, long experiences,

³⁹⁰ Fethullah Gulen Gulen, "Akıl," *Sızıntı*, 292 (2003),
<http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=55cb01e1b3&k=95&410102239>

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 292.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 292.

and exercises or it can happen through the grace of God without the effort of the Sufi. In both cases, intuition itself does not take time and happens rapidly.³⁹³

Sometimes mind may make wrong determinations and unfair decisions or may reach sound conclusions and right solutions. However, in both cases mind is not the real maker because in reality, there is only one real maker, which is God. Therefore, to be able to find right conclusions and make fine decisions, mind needs to turn God and obey his Messenger because the only right decision maker is God, and His messenger is His vicegerent on the earth.³⁹⁴

B. Vicdan (conscience)

For Gulen, *vicdan* is a mechanism that comprises four different faculties: will, lordly ability (*rabbaniye*), consciousness, intellect and senses. Will is a part of *vicdan* through which a human being differentiates, and then chooses, right from wrong. "Lordly ability" is a dimension of the heart. Consciousness colored intellect is another tool of *vicdan*, and the senses are its hands. The human being feels through them. Human beings feel desire for belief, gnosis, love, and knowledge as long as the faculties of *vicdan* are alive.³⁹⁵

One of the functions of *vicdan* is to feel its poverty, helplessness, and its needs, in addition to recognizing that God is the only power who can help it fulfill its needs. Because of that function, *vicdan* can turn to its Lord with belief and thank the bounties of God by means of gnosis, love, and enthusiasm.³⁹⁶

³⁹³ Ibid., 292.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 292.

³⁹⁵ Fethullah Gulen, "Vicdan 1," *Sızıntı*, 290 (2003),

<http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=5306819087&k=75&1193277642>

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 290.

It can also reflect upon the meanings of all beings and occurrences, and then analyze, synthesize, and transform them into new forms. Due to these functions of *vicdan*, the one who realizes it may not need another source of knowledge.³⁹⁷

Moreover, *vicdan* is an agent of knowledge. It comprehends the conclusions of mind and understands the fruits of experience; however, its main way to obtain knowledge is to experience knowledge itself without any agency. Therefore, *vicdan* provides us with reality itself rather introducing us to the map or the form of it.³⁹⁸

Furthermore, while other agents of knowledge like observation, reflection, explanation, and analysis enable us to view reality from afar, *vicdan* makes us feel it without any distance. Because of this difference between *vicdan* and other agents of knowledge, the human being needs to interpret the knowledge obtained through the agents of knowledge other than *vicdan*. On the other hand, Gulen contends that the human being does not need to interpret the knowledge obtained through *vicdan*.³⁹⁹

As I stated above, *vicdan* has four different faculties. *Latife-i rabbaniye* is one of them and can be translated as *Lordly ability*. *Lordly ability* is the first and the most important faculty of *vicdan*. It is the clear mirror for the names and the attributes of God, the place of theophany for belief, the recipient of unveiling and intuition, the storage place of divine gifts, and the place for the moon of gnosis to rise. It is a special observer of the realm of divine dominion (*Alem-i Ceberut*). Serenity, love, God-consciousness, certainty, surrender, fear and hope are flowers of it. It is the center of *vicdan* and all other faculties of *vicdan* circle around it.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 290.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 290.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 290.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 290.

The second faculty of *vicdan* is will. There are different schools of opinion concerning the concept of will in the history of Islamic thought. The school that Gulen follows is the *Ehl-i Sünnet* (People of Prophetic Tradition). Therefore, he believes that God is the only Creator of actions. However, human beings are responsible for their actions because God creates their actions due to their will. In the creation process of any action, first, one human being wills the action and then, God creates the action that the human being willed. Basically, human will is acknowledged by God as a simple cause of the creation of human actions.⁴⁰¹

The Third faculty of *vicdan* is *zihin* which in English can be translated as "intellect." Intellect is the ability of understanding, knowing, and memorizing. According to Gulen, intellect functions in the following way: First, conscious or subconscious input flows into the disc of intellect; then it pours to the memory; and there, it is processed and, finally, encoded to be remembered in the future.⁴⁰²

Consciousness is the most important component of intellect. The weakest level of knowledge begins at consciousness, and it is not available for use until it settles at the intellect. At this point, knowledge is like the seed for the tree or sperm for an animal. It is weak, yet available for processing. When this knowledge is processed, it takes a new form in the memory and becomes available for the usage of mind.⁴⁰³

The fourth faculty of *vicdan* is the senses. When Gulen says the senses, he means, however, the inner senses, like imagining, comprehending, reflecting, suspecting, remembering, etc. All of those senses and others which have not been discovered or named yet by today's level of knowledge are in cooperation with other faculties of *vicdan*. Every single sense has its own

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 290.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 290.

⁴⁰³ Fethullah Gulen, "Vicdan 2," *Sızıntı*, 291 (2003),

<http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=f704df582d&k=63&1630495413>

type of good and bad deed. Therefore, a specific type of good deed is nutrition for a specific sense, and a specific type of bad deed is poison for a specific sense. These senses may live or become more sensitive as long as they are not killed with sin.⁴⁰⁴

C. Kalp (heart)

When we hear the word heart, our mind directly goes to the organ which we carry in our chest. However, when we say heart in the Sufi sense of the word, we mean the spiritual correlate of this organ. Therefore, we may refer it as the spiritual heart. Although many people talk about the relationship between the physical heart and the spiritual heart, few people really know the nature of the relationship.

According to Gulen, the spiritual heart has different features and functions. It is somehow related to consciousness, sense, mind, comprehension, and will. Moreover, the spiritual soul is the essence of it, while the biological soul is its vehicle. It is one's spiritual heart that God addresses, cares for, and looks at. It is the responsible faculty from the actions of human. It is the part of human being which receives reward and penalty. The spiritual heart is the faculty which accepts or denies guidance. In a sense, the spiritual heart is the comprehending one, and in another sense, it is the comprehended one.⁴⁰⁵

According to Gulen, there are different relations between the spiritual heart and epistemology. First of all, the direction or the objective of the spiritual heart is belief, gnosis, love, and spiritual delight. Second, it is the center of both physical and spiritual body as indicated in the following hadith: "There is a fleshy part in the body. If it is healthy, then the whole of the

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 291.

⁴⁰⁵ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümrit Tepeleri 1*, (Izmir: Nil Yayınları, 1994), 44-45.

body is healthy. If it is corrupted, then all the body is corrupted. Beware! That part is the heart.⁴⁰⁶ Because of the crucial importance of the heart both for the physical and the spiritual health of the body, the health of the spiritual heart is the main factor for healthy thoughts and imaginations. Third, the spiritual heart has two faculties: *istinad noktası* and *istimdat noktası*. *Istinad noktası* literally means the point that searches for support to rely on, and *istimdat noktası* means the point that seeks help. These two points make the heart aware of its needs, and when these needs are answered by God, the spiritual heart finds one of the best ways to obtain gnosis.⁴⁰⁷

The spiritual heart has different life-giving sources as well as different enemies. In this manner, belief is the life, worship is the blood, and reflection is the nourishment of the heart. The heart is dead if it has no belief, and it is about to die if it does not worship. And it is weak if it does not reflect. Therefore, for Gulen, unbelievers do not have a spiritual heart since they do not hold faith. The people who do not worship can never travel the emerald hills of the heart. Similarly, the people who do not reflect cannot reach the peaks of the emerald hills of the heart although they may have passed a lot of small mounds.⁴⁰⁸

D. Tefekkür (reflection)

Reflection is to think and contemplate on a subject deeply and systematically. It is the nutrition of the heart, the spirit of the knowledge, and the blood of Islamic life. For Gulen, reflection is the light of the heart by which the heart distinguishes right from wrong, harm from benefit, and good from evil. With this light, the universe becomes a divine book to read, and also

⁴⁰⁶ Muḥammad Bin Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Germany:Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 2000) 1:16, hadith no: 52.

⁴⁰⁷ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümürü Tepeleri*, 1:46.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:48.

with it the Qur'an is better understood. It is a way to take lessons from beings and occurrences; and it is a golden key to learning lessons from different experiences.⁴⁰⁹

Reflection can be made on any subject, especially ones related to God, except on His essence. Although it is a weak one, Gulen uses the following *hadis* to support his argument:⁴¹⁰ “No act of worship is as meritorious as reflection. So reflect on God’s bounties and the works of his power; but do not try to reflect on His Essence, for you will never be able to do that.”⁴¹¹

One of the subjects that the Qur'an encourages us to reflect on is the book of universe. Again, Gulen uses the following verse to sketch the outlines of this subject, and he renders the verse into Turkish in a remarkable fashion:⁴¹² “They reflect upon the creation and the formation of the heavens and the earth,” (Qur'an, 3:191).

In this verse, God uses the word *khalq* in Arabic, and the primary meaning of this word is to create. However, the word *khalq* may also refer to physical appearance, and Gulen remarkably pays attention to that meaning. Hereby, he encourages us to reflect upon both how God created and formed the heavens and the earth as well as upon its present reality.

Although reflection can be practiced in all sciences, to reflect upon scientific knowledge is a preliminary step towards the final goal of reflection, which is to reach perfection in gnosis. In this context, Gulen designates the beginning stages of reflection and the perfection in gnosis in the following way: Reflection begins with the book of universe and then reaches belief. After belief, gnosis comes and leads to love. One step beyond love is to live one's whole life with full of spiritual joy and pleasure.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 1:29.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 1:29.

⁴¹¹ Ismā'īl Ibn Muḥammad al-Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-khafā' wa-muzil al-Ilbās 'ammā Istashhara min al-ahādīth 'alā alsinah al-nās*, 2th ed. (Beirut: Dār Iḥya' Turāth 'Arabī, h.1351) 1:311-312, hadith no: 1005.

⁴¹² Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, 1:30.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 1:30-31.

As stated above, reflection is to contemplate systematically, and Gulen locates God at the center in its system. For him, one who wants to gain the fruits of reflection must begin his reflection by accepting that God is the Creator of all beings, their characteristics, features, and qualifications. Otherwise, sooner or later reflection will get stuck and becomes fruitless, because the reality is that God is the Creator. On the other hand, the one who begins his reflection with God easily passes to God's bounties and then turns to Him with gratitude; and then, gratitude attracts new bounties and openings of God. In this way, the thinker never gets stuck; if he feels any contraction in his reflection, he enriches his reflection by invoking the names of God and thereby opens his way.⁴¹⁴

In conclusion, Gulen's doctrine of epistemology has five different types of Sufi knowledge and four different agencies of Sufi knowledge: Intellectual and transmitted knowledge, direct knowledge, wisdom, certainty, and gnosis are the five different types of Sufi knowledge while mind, conscience, heart and reflection are four different agencies of Sufi knowledge.

III. ONTOLOGY

In Islamic ontology, being can be examined in two categories: the Being of the Creator and the being of the creation. Beliefs about the Being of the Creator can be analyzed under the category of theology, while beliefs concerning the being of creation can be examined under the category of cosmology. As a Muslim thinker, Gulen talks about his Sufi ontology in the same way. Therefore, I will divide Gulen's ontology into two sections, theology and cosmology. However, before presenting these sections, it is necessary to introduce the idea of "being" in Gulen's ontology.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 1:32.

According to Gulen, all existence is God's theophany. Every single being emanates from God, and its being is sustained through him. Each being in the whole of existence both individually and as a whole is a sign of God. All things and all occurrences always flow from non-being to being through God's theophany, and in each instant, they signify God. Basically, the whole universe and all human beings are a result of God's theophany.⁴¹⁵

From this perspective, the whole of existence can be considered as a flowing river that in each instant comes from non-being to being through God and then goes back to non-being. However, due to the harmony, continuation and speed of this flow, we cannot recognize any disconnection between each step of this flow either in ourselves or in the universe. Everything comes one by one into being and goes one by one into non-being; nevertheless, we feel neither the ones that go nor the ones that come.⁴¹⁶

In the river of being, every single creature is from God, and each being is dependent on God; beings are sustained through Him. Therefore, the whole of existence is the shadow of God's being, and because of that, it might be called something imaginary. However, the fact that existence is the shadow of God does not mean that every being is God. In eternity, there was only God, nothing else. Then, God wanted to give physical form to the beings in his knowledge, and thus He created existence itself. By doing that, He viewed Himself through the eyes of other beings. Moreover, calling the whole existence as the shadow of God does not mean that existence has no being. On the contrary, it possesses being; however, this being is not necessary and independent as God is.⁴¹⁷

Due to this unnecessary and dependent being, the Sufi, if he has deepened himself thoroughly, should consider his being as nonbeing when he thinks of himself in terms of his own

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 2:181.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 2:181.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 2:182.

ability to be. This is because his being, which may vanish at anytime, is just a shadow of God's necessary and independent being. At this level, the Sufi feels the whole of existence, including himself, to be one; however, this feeling should not lead him to believe that every being is just one entity. In other words, he should be able to combine oneness and differentiation at the same time in order to be safe from the mistake of *vahdet-i vucud philosophy* (oneness of the existence).⁴¹⁸

When the Sufi begins to think of other beings except himself and God, although he calls different beings with different names, he knows that there is oneness behind this differentiation because there is either the theophany of *ehadiyet* (undifferentiated oneness) or *vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness) beyond the different colors decorating existence.⁴¹⁹

When the Sufi thinks of God in terms of being, he may have two different approaches: he may think of only God's essence and ignore the qualities of God, their equivalence, or contradiction with each other. This level is called as *ehadiyet* (undifferentiated oneness). At the other level, the Sufi thinks of God both with his essence and qualities and this level is called as *vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness).

1. Theology

A. Allah and Divinity

In Islam, the general understanding is that God possesses ninety nine names and the name *Allah* (God) is *İsm-i Azam* (the supreme name) among them. According to Gulen, *Allah* is the only holy name that signifies God truly, and it is the special name of God. Moreover, it is the

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 2:183.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 2:184.

name for his essence. All other names are just names which qualify God in a certain aspect. In that sense, all other names are qualities for God.⁴²⁰

On the other hand, since the name *Allah* is the name for the essence of God, it includes all other names. Therefore, *Allah* is considered to be the comprehensive name. As a result when somebody wants to declare his faith, he must use the name *Allah* in his declaration. Otherwise, he will not be able to express his faith truly.⁴²¹

The being that corresponds to the name *Allah* is the reason for the whole of existence; therefore, the name *Allah* is read in both the inner and outer aspects of existence. *Allah* is written both on individual beings and the whole of existence. However, this name can be read on the human face more clearly than any other being, since the human being is the most comprehensive creature in the universe. The human being is a small creature in terms of his physical entity; however, he is the essence of the whole universe.⁴²²

Allah expresses himself with every single creature of His, and He makes himself felt in the *vicdan* with thousands of tongues. In this respect, He reminds us that He is everywhere even though place and time are not relevant concepts for Him. Because of this all-encompassing aspect, by definition, Allah deserves to be worshipped. In other words, *Allah* deserves to be worshipped not for any reason other than He is *Allah*.⁴²³

As Gulen asserts, *Allah* is neither matter nor substance. He is neither a whole that can be divided nor a part of the whole. He is not like any creature in terms of form and essence. He is beyond all of these descriptions. His appearance is more hidden than hidden beings. His hiding is more apparent than apparent beings. He is known to us through his names like the All-

⁴²⁰ Fethullah Gulen, "Allah ve Uluhiyet Hakikati," *Sızıntı*, 310 (2004), <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=3f9aa9ffb6&k=922&1105064021>

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 310.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 310.

Merciful, the All-Beneficial, the Absolute Ruler, the Pure One, the Savior, the Inspirer of Faith, etc. He is also recognized through His qualities like wisdom, power, will, sight, majesty, etc. For Gulen, although we may express these opinions about *Allah*, we cannot really know him.⁴²⁴

According to Gulen, as *Allah* cannot be truly known, all aspects of His Divinity (*Uluhiyet*) are not knowable to humans. We may know the rules of Divinity and view the consequences of it (like bounties); however, we cannot really comprehend it. The things that we know about Divinity are just some qualities of it; however, this partial knowledge is not enough to know It truly. What we know is that all the bounties of *Allah* come from His divinity, and all worship and thanks go back toward It. Divinity is a realm in which each being is given its full and deserved rights.⁴²⁵

When one thinks of *Allah* from the perspective of *Ehadiyet* (undifferentiated oneness), only *Allah* is taken into consideration. When he is reflected from *vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness), not only his essence, but also his names and attributes are considered. Therefore, the level of *Ehadiyet* (Undifferentiated oneness) is higher than the level of *Vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness). Nevertheless, Divinity is higher than both *vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness) and *Ehadiyet* (undifferentiated oneness) because it is the realm that purely surrounds God's essence.⁴²⁶

B. Ehadiyet - Vahidiyet (differentiated oneness- undifferentiated oneness)

For Gulen, both the term *Ehadiyet* and *Vahidiyet* mean oneness, but each one signifies a different aspect of oneness. *Ehadiyet* means pure oneness and carries more emphasis than *Vahidiyet*. Therefore, in *Ehadiyet*, there is such oneness that it envelopes multiplicity in all of its

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 310.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 310.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 310.

aspects; while in *Vahidiyet*, oneness shows itself in multiplicity. In the realm of *Ehadiyet*, God's essence is at the center while His qualities and names stay in the background. In the realm of *Vahidiyet*, God's qualities and names are at the center while his essence stays in the background. Therefore, in *Ehadiyet*, there is oneness of God's essence; while in *Vahidiyet*, there is oneness of God's qualities and names. In the theophany of *Ehadiyet*, in a sense all the qualities and names of God disappear, and only God's oneness and the radiance of His essence remain. In the theophany of *Vahidiyet*, in a sense, all beings disappear, and only the oneness of God's qualities and names remains.⁴²⁷

Ehadiyet is higher than *Vahidiyet* because *Ehadiyet* primarily looks at God's essence, whereas *Vahidiyet* primarily looks at God's qualities and names. Because of this hierarchy, *Ehadiyet* is related to the cosmological realms of *Lahut*, *Rahamut*, and *Ceberut* whereas *Vahidiyet* is related to the cosmological realms of *Malakut* and *Mulk*. Moreover, *Ehadiyet* is related to Divinity while *Vahidiyet* is related to Lordship.⁴²⁸

The realm of *Ehadiyet* reflects both beauty (*cemal*) and grandeur (*celal*); however, grandeur is the dominant color in this combination. Thus, it is the realm of inaccessibility (*izzet*), severity (*kahr*), gentleness (*lutf*), tremendousness (*azamet*), and where private favors are bestowed. It is also the realm in which God makes us aware of His affection and expresses his affection for His essence, actions, and artistry. The realm of *Ehadiyet* in Gulen's writings is also understood as the mirror of *Samed* (the Satisfier of all needs) and the opening point for *Vahidiyet*.⁴²⁹ On the other hand, *Vahidiyet* is also the realm that reflects both the theophany of beauty and grandeur; nevertheless, beauty is dominant in this pair. Therefore, it is the source of

⁴²⁷ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümürü Tepeleri 3*, (Istanbul: Nil Yayınları, 2005), 130-131.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:130-131.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:132.

gentleness, beneficence, spiritual rewards and all beauties, real or relative, even ones related to grandeur.⁴³⁰

Ehadiyet cannot be comprehended and encompassed from the perspective of its relationship to divinity (*uluhiyet*) and mercifulness (*rahmaniyet*). However, *Vahidiyet* can be comprehended and encompassed from the perspective that it is related to beneficence (*rahimiyet*). Therefore, the Qur'an usually changes direction after talking about *Ehadiyet* and when it begins to talk about *Vahidiyet*. This is because after a while the human mind and heart need such a change to satisfy our need for something concrete. For that reason, it can be seen that in many instances when the Qur'an talks about the universe and all of existence, it subsequently talks about an order on a smaller scale that comforts the human mind and heart.⁴³¹

The realm of Divinity is above all the realms, and its theophany influences all the realms that are beneath it. *Ehadiyet* is the first realm for the development and entification (*taayyün*) of divinity, and *Vahidiyet* is the continuation of this development and entification.⁴³² (Here entification is understood as the process by which all entities are made manifest, come into being, and thereby become entities.)

For Gulen, grandeur is dominant in the nature of the realm of divinity. Therefore, the corresponding name for divinity is *lafza-i celal* (the word of grandeur), which is *Allah*. Since *Ehadiyet* primarily looks at divinity and secondarily at qualities and names, grandeur is the dominant color or characteristic of *Ehadiyet* as well. On the other hand, *Vahidiyet* primarily looks at qualities and names and secondarily at divinity; thus, its dominant color or characteristic

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 3:134.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 3:134.

⁴³² Ibid., 3:132.

is beauty. As a result of this, qualities and names are mentioned as *cemalullah* (Allah's beauty).⁴³³

The human mind and heart can feel *Ehadiyet*, yet cannot comprehend it. It is sensed; however, it cannot be encompassed. Therefore, there is always bewilderment. On the other hand, *Vahidiyet* can be felt and comprehended, sensed and encompassed. Therefore, it can be used as criteria to understand *Ehadiyet*.⁴³⁴ Grandeur may instill hearts with awe, fear, and bewilderment. However, its consequences are soft and warm. Therefore, for the ones who are able to see, there can be *Vahidiyet* in *Ehadiyet* and beauty in grandeur. As Gulen asserts "The peak of grandeur is beauty and in a sense, the perfection of beauty is grandeur."⁴³⁵

C. Holy Qualities

In Islamic and Sufi discourse, there are some words which are used by scholars and Sufis to describe the qualities God. These words are called *Sifat* (Qualities) in both Arabic and Turkish.

According to mainstream Sufi understanding and also Fethullah Gulen, there are five spiritual layers between us and God's essence, and the realm of qualities ranks at the third level. The first layer between us and God's essence is God's actions, followed, second, by His names. The third layer is his qualities. The fourth is God's affairs (*şe'n*) and the fifth one is His essence. In this picture, each layer inclines towards the closest upper layer; and finally, all of them incline towards God's essence.⁴³⁶

⁴³³ Ibid., 3:132-136.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 3:136.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 3:136.

⁴³⁶ Fethullah Gulen, "Sıfat-ı Subhaniye," *Sızıntı*, 321 (2005), <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=3f9aa9ffb6&k=1595&1105064021>

For Gulen, God's essence is unknowable to humans. The knowledge which we can obtain about His essence is through His qualities, names, and actions. God is known to us through His names, and He encompasses us with His qualities. This is the final point of human knowledge about Him. What is beyond this point can be known only by certain people who have been given the gift to understand Allah through their feelings, intuitions, and spiritual tastes. However, this type of knowledge is a special type of knowledge and is not attainable for most human beings.⁴³⁷

For Gulen, the qualities of God are separate from God's essence, and they are a curtain for His essence. Although Gulen accepts the statement of Sunni Muslim Theologians that "God's qualities are neither joined with him nor separate from him," in his Sufi approach he prefers to consider them separate from God's essence. Therefore, according to Gulen, God is not alive because of the quality of *hayat* (life). Instead, He is alive because of His essence. Similarly, He is not a knower due to the quality of *ilm* (knowledge), but He is a knower due to His essence. On the other hand, His qualities are a curtain for His essence and thereby not His essence. As God's inaccessibility necessitates making causes in nature a curtain for His actions, the radiance of His essence necessitates making qualities as a curtain before His essence too.⁴³⁸

Gulen also asserts that human qualities are a shadow of God's qualities; however, there are some differences between the two. Although human qualities are reflections of God's qualities, they have a beginning and an ending. Moreover, their continuation is dependent on God's qualities. On the other hand, God's qualities have no beginning and no ending. Humans, jinns, and angels possess *hayat* (life) and *ilm* (knowledge), but their *hayat* (life) and *ilm* (knowledge) are not like the *hayat* (life) and *ilm* (knowledge) of God. God is the one who gave humans different qualities like sight and hearing and their related organs. Moreover, God is the

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 321.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 321.

one who created objects to be seen and sounds to be heard, and He also created the action of seeing and the action of hearing. Therefore, the real seer and hearer is God. Human beings' sight and hearing are just reflections of God's sight and hearing.⁴³⁹

D. Evvel (first), Ahir (last), Zahir (apparent), Batın (hidden one)

Evvel, *Ahir*, *Zahir*, and *Batın* are four different names of God, and according to Fethullah Gulen, they are a quartet. They also can be two binary combinations as *Evvel-Ahir* and *Zahir-Batın*.⁴⁴⁰ *Evvel* means the first, the past eternal, the thing previous from everything else, the beginning point of existence, and the one who creates from nothing. On the other hand, *Ahir* means the last, endless, and eternal. *Zahir* means the manifest and apparent one while *Batın* is the hidden one.

God precedes every being except himself, since he is *Evvel*. He is *Ahir*, so he controls the end of everything and makes being into non-being, and non-being into being. He is apparent and manifest on every letter of being since he is *Zahir*. He is *Batın*, so he is the returning point of everything and every occurrence. Basically, he is *Evvel*, *Ahir*, *Zahir*, and *Batın* in time.⁴⁴¹

As a result of this, when Gulen reflects upon eternity-before-time from the perspective of *Evvel*, he becomes concerned about what destiny God has designated for him. When he thinks of the gifts of Islam, *iman* (faith) and *ihsan* (perfect goodness) which God has bestowed upon him from the perspective of *Zahir*, he becomes hopeful and realizes that his behaviors are just thanks to God for the gifts that are already given to him. When he reflects from the perspective of *Batın*,

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 321.

⁴⁴⁰ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümürü Tepeleri*, 3:140, 143.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 3:141.

he feels bewilderment because of many ambiguous issues. And when he contemplates on the name of *Ahir*, he disengages from his worries and concerns.⁴⁴²

God is *Evvel* and *Ahir*. Because He is *Evvel*, He is self-sufficient and self-existing. His being is necessary and all other beings sustain their existence through Him. Since He is *Ahir*, He is last and endless. He was when there was nothing and He will be when everything perishes. He is *Evvel* since He created everything at the beginning, and He is *Ahir* since he will forgive his creation at the end. He is *Evvel* because of the guidance which He provided and He is *Ahir* because of the bounties which He will provide to this guidance. He is *Evvel* without beginning, and He is *Ahir* without end.⁴⁴³

In addition to being *Evvel* and *Ahir*, God is *Zahir* and *Batin*. His being is more apparent than other beings because all unnecessary beings are signs pointing to Him. Therefore, He is *Zahir*. His being is more hidden than other beings because all beings are themselves, but not Him. Thus, He is *Batin*. He is *Zahir* since His being can be read on the face of creation, and He is *Batin* for he cannot be truly sensed through our senses. He is *Zahir* because He gives life, and He is *Batin* because He takes it too.⁴⁴⁴

2. Cosmology

A. Kesret (multiplicity)

Kesret basically means multiplicity and it is the opposite of *vahdet*, which means oneness. As a Sufi term in the writings of Gulen, *kesret* stands for the book of universe. *Kesret* is all the beings and the occurrences that are theophanies of the encompassing knowledge,

⁴⁴² Ibid., 3:142.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 3:141, 142.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 3:144.

dominant power, and powerful will of God. It is the book of the universe in which a Sufi can read the Divine beauty and perfection.⁴⁴⁵

Gulen explains the creation process of *kesret* in the following way: Everything had an immaterial form and nature in cognitive being (*ilmî vucud*). After that, these immaterial forms and natures were transformed into spiritual natures (*ruhani mahiyetler*) through the pure theophany of God in the plan of destiny. Then, everything wore its physical body and became a different and new mirror for the reflection of God.⁴⁴⁶

As it can be understood from the process of creation, *kesret* is the theophany of different names and qualities of God on different mirrors according to mold of destiny . Therefore, *kesret* is created through the reflections of oneness of *Vahid u Ehad* (The one and only). As a result, although *kesret* appears as multiplicity, it symbolizes oneness (*vahdet*) through the congruity, harmony, solidarity, unity, and cooperation among beings. In that manner—and keeping in mind the famous *hadith qudsi* where God says, "I was a hidden treasure; and I loved that I be known; so I created creation in order to be known"—*kesret* can be understood as the opening theophany of the hidden treasure of oneness into creation.⁴⁴⁷

For Gulen, oneness can be read on the face of multiplicity by only elite people. The people who stay close to their Lord and examine beings and occurrences in this closeness, the people who reach the level of heart and spirit in their life and set up their pavilion on the hills of spiritual realities, and the people who elevate themselves from the atmosphere of physical nature are the people who are able to meet with the radiance of oneness.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 3:154.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 3:160.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 3:156-157.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 3:158.

When they meet with the radiance of oneness, they find themselves (through their comprehension, feelings and observation) in the middle of a raining untouched and unseen surprise. In their feelings, oneness encompasses multiplicity and gives its color to every single being. They always feel the Named through the names, and wherever they turn, they see the colors of God's qualities and their *latife-i rabbaniye* always beats for the Qualified (i.e. God to whom belongs the Divine qualities). The people who are lost in such feelings do not see any multiplicity anymore. In every corner, they see only oneness and taste only oneness.⁴⁴⁹

There is always a danger for those types of people if they do not keep their spiritual journey to following the footprints of the Prophet Muhammed (*pbuh*). They may be stuck in their observations and disclosures and say, "There is nothing in being other than Him," or "There is nothing seen in the universe except Him," while the real expression of oneness is "There is nothing served except Him." For these types of dangers, strictly following Muhammed and his directives and adhering to objective rules of the religion are the most efficient medicines.⁴⁵⁰

B. Âyân-i Sabite (immutable entities) and Alem-i Misal (the world of images)

Âyân means entities and *sabite* means immutable. Therefore, *Âyân-ı Sabite* is immutable entities. *Alem* means world and *misal* means images. Thus, *Alem-i Misal* is the world of images. According to Gulen, there are two types of beings other than God's being. The first includes beings that are at the level of cognitive being (*ilmî vucud*), and they are called *Âyân-i Sabite*, immutable entities. The other one includes beings that have physical entities, and they are called *Mümkinat-ı Mevcude*, possible or unnecessary beings.⁴⁵¹ Moreover, there are two different

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 3:164.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 3:158, 163.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 3:113.

realms for these two types of beings to reflect or appear. The first one is called *Alem-i Misal*, the world of images in which immutable entities reflect and become new and different entities. The second one is named as *Alem-i Şhadet*, the world of the visible in which the possible or unnecessary beings appear.

Immutable beings are considered as non-being when *taayyün-ü evvel* (the first entification) is not taken into consideration, while they are being when *taayyün-ü evvel* is taken to consideration. They are hidden and unknown in the level of appearance (*zuhur*), and they are still non-being from the perspective of their own selves even when they have come into being.⁴⁵² In the same way, possible or unnecessary beings are non-being in terms of their own selves, but they are being in terms of being the shadow of the shadow of God. From the perspective of beings, there are different entities and multiplicity; however, there is only one entity and oneness in reality. As Gulen quotes an anonymous couplet:

If you look at the form, there are you and me,
But in fact, there are neither you nor me.⁴⁵³

There are Divine severity and benevolence in the immutable entities just as there are creation and corruption in this world. In the immutable entities, Divine severity and benevolence follow each other, and death comes out of Divine severity while birth comes out of Divine benevolence. Moreover, the creation and corruption in this world are the continuation of this Divine severity and benevolence.⁴⁵⁴

Light and dark, good and bad, righteous and sinful are already clear in the immutable entities; however, to designate bad as bad and good as good is related to physical entities and their will. Therefore, no one has a right to apply the designations of good or bad to the

⁴⁵² Ibid., 3:115.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 3:114-115.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 3:116.

immutable entities through unveilings before they have become physical entities and have shown their inclinations.⁴⁵⁵

As it is said above, *Alem-i Misal* (the world of images) is the realm in which the immutable entities reflect and become new and different entities. The world of images is also called as *berzah* (isthmus) and *taayyün-ü sâni* (the second entification). This term has two main meanings according to Gulen. The first meaning is that the world of images is each realm in which immutable entities wear their apparant shapes and physical bodies and leave their first nature during the proces of becoming an unnecessary or possible being. The second meaning is that the world of images is the waystation midway between this world and the hereafter, a waystation that every being and especially humans visit and remain for a while in their journey towards eternity. According to the first understanding, it is a bridge between spirit and body, the abstract and concrete. In terms of the second understanding, it is the intersection of this world and the next, a mixture of the seen and unseen.⁴⁵⁶ Besides these meanings of the world of images, Gulen brings up another Sufi term: *berzahu'l-cami* (encompassing isthmus). For Gulen, the heart of this term is about the human spirit and meaning. Therefore, its seed and fruit is *Hakikat-i Ahmediye* (Ahmedan Reality) (where this is understood that Ahmedan is a reference to a cosmological level of the being of the Prophet).⁴⁵⁷

C. Taayyünat (entifications)

Coming into existence, becoming designated, and becoming entified are some meanings of the word *taayyün* (entification). As a term in Gulen's understanding, it refers to the apperance of different but related entities in different theophanic dimensions beginning from the essence of

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 3:116.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 3:119.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 3:120.

the Real and including Being, Life, and Knowledge. At the level of necessary being, it is called *Tecellî-i Evvel* (The First Theophany) or *Nefes-i Rahmanî* (The Breath of Mercy) and at the level of unnecessary or possible being, it is called *Akl-ı Evvel* (The First Mind) or *Hakikat-i Muhammediye* (Muhammedan Reality).⁴⁵⁸

For Gulen, there are different levels of entification. The physical objects which we sense through our five senses are the appearance of images. These images are the mirrors of spiritual substances. These spiritual substances are the development of cognitive entifications. These cognitive entifications are the reflections of immutable entities. These immutable entities are the theophanies of the names of God. These names are the places for God's qualities to appear, and these qualities are the explaining word of God's essence.⁴⁵⁹

From another perspective, entification can be divided into two categories in the writings of Gulen: divine entification and engendered entification. The beginning of divine entification is the quality of knowledge, and the ending of it is unending holy words of God which are spread in different levels. On the other hand, the beginning point of engendered entification is the spirit of Muhammad (*pbuh*) and especially other prophets; and then whole humanity and existence is the end of it.⁴⁶⁰

The spirit of Muhammad (*pbuh*) is an immaterial, illuminated substance and pure light. It is the universal mind (*Akl-ı küll*) which comprehends the Creator. It is also called the supreme spirit because the eternal life of God's essence began to be opened through this mirror. It is also the reason for the creation of the universe. God has given the privilege of his first entification to

⁴⁵⁸ Fethullah Gulen, "Taayyünat ve Berisi 1," *Sızıntı*, 319 (2005), <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=09bbf2e6d1&k=1255&84908100>

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 319.

him and made him the center of his affection. The mystery of divinity and lordship is known through him.

D. Levh-i Mahfuz (the well-guarded tablet and Levh-i Mahv u İsbat (the tablet of effacement and confirmation)

Levh means a flat tablet and *Mahfuz* means well-guarded; therefore, *Levh-i Mahfuz* means imperishable, well-guarded tablet. *Levh-i Mahfuz* is called well-guarded because it is not subject for any change. On the other hand, *Levh-i Mahv u İsbat* means the tablet of effacement and confirmation, and it is subject to change.

The well-guarded tablet is the spiritual tablet in which God records everything from material and immaterial to animate and inanimate. It includes not only objects of this world but also the next one. There is nothing left outside of it because every single thing is recorded in it. It has records of the events that have happened and events that will happen. It is a spiritual notebook which includes the occurrences and their results. It has the records of known and unknown in all realms, their beings and occurrences.⁴⁶¹

As Gulen asserts, the entification of this well-guarded tablet is before the entification of *Beyt-i Ma'mur* (Ka'ba). Moreover, every single physical and metaphysical object is entified in the well-guarded tablet before they have come to the physical world. However, this entification does not mean that there is any compulsion of beings because this entification is at the level of knowledge, and knowledge always follows the known. Since God knows things will happen before they happen, he records them before they happen, as they will happen.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ Fethullah Gulen, "Taayyünat ve Berisi 2," *Sızıntı*, 320 (2005), <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=7a8acbd89c&k=1000&84908100>

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 320.

The well-guarded tablet is the cognitive foundation, essence, and structure of everything. It never changes, yet it looks at all changes and alternations. It sees beginning and ending and encompasses cause and effect, reason and result, together. It is a special entification in divinity and the record of all entifications. All levels of the proceeding of divine law and the first and last position of every being and occurrence are in the well-guarded tablet.⁴⁶³

Levh-i Mahv u İsbat or the "tablet of effacement and confirmation" is related to the Qur'anic verse: "God effaces or confirms whatever He wills, for with him is the source of all revelation" (Qur'an, 13:39). For Gulen, the tablet of effacement and confirmation is the rewriting of the well-guarded tablet; and while the well-guarded tablet is not subject to change, the tablet of effacement and confirmation is always the subject of changes and alterations.⁴⁶⁴ All the changes and alterations which we see in this world are the reflections of the tablet of effacement and confirmation. Since these changes happen in the realm of time, the tablet of effacement and confirmation may be understood as the reality of time.⁴⁶⁵

Gulen talks about the changes and alterations at the levels of nature, divine law, social life and personal life and sees all of these changes as the reflection of the tablet of effacement and confirmation. At the level of nature, ecosystems, species, and the face of the earth, all the worlds are subject to changes and alterations. They are a mirror for God's beauty and grandeur. Births and deaths, coming into existence and then leaving it, reflecting life with bright green color and then becoming brown and withered, and youthfulness and oldness, these and similar

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 320.

⁴⁶⁴ Fethullah Gulen, "Levh-i Mahfuz ve Berisi 1," *Sızıntı*, 316 (2005), <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=285dcd0f7c&k=1014&181533001>

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 316.

pairs of qualities always follow each other; and there are always effacements and confirmations in nature.⁴⁶⁶

At the level of divine law, God effaces old rules and confirms new and better ones. He continued to spread his message with the scriptures of Noah after the scriptures of Adam. After a while, he sent Abraham and his scriptures. He keeps some rules of previous scriptures and added new rules to them in the new scriptures. He made these scriptures a book in the hands of Moses. The book of Jesus spoke about realities that the book of Moses had never spoken of. He gave the good news of Ahmad (i.e. the Paraclete, who is Muhammad) in the book of Jesus and finally, said in the Qur'an, "Today I have perfected your religion (*dīn*) for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of my blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion." (Qur'an, 5:3)⁴⁶⁷

Such fulfillment happens in our social world as well. In the level of social life, the leading nations of yesterday have left their positions to today's leading nations; old cultures have left their places to new ones; and religious lives have been replaced with new understandings and practices.⁴⁶⁸ In terms of personal life, we are sometimes active and sometimes passive, while at others times we are stable. At times we are suspicious, while in other cases we are impure and far from our Lord, and at other times clean and close to Him. Sometimes we are faithful and hopeful, while at others doubtful and hopeless.⁴⁶⁹

E. Metaphysical Worlds

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 316.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 316.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 316.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 316.

There are numerous names and qualities of the Creator, and there are different metaphysical worlds for those names and qualities (which are made manifest by means of theophanies) in different levels. According to Gulen, these worlds are *Âlem-i Lâhut*, *Âlem-i Rahamut*, *Âlem-i Ceberut*, and *Âlem-i Meleket*.⁴⁷⁰

Âlem-i Lâhut is the world of divinity. It is the world of *vahidiyet*, the unseen of the unseen, the hidden treasure, the limitless world, and the world beyond the worlds. It is bordered by the signs of *vahidiyet*, known by its names, and encompassed by its qualities. It is interesting that although Gulen acknowledges this world as the world of *ehadiyet* while he discusses his understanding of *ehadiyet* and *vahidiyet*,⁴⁷¹ he prefers to explain it as the world of *vahidiyet* while he speaks of metaphysical worlds.⁴⁷²

Âlem-i Lâhut, asserts Gulen, is the intersection of divine tasks, holy qualities, and beautiful names. It is the first entification and the first comprehensive mirror for the theophany of God, a theophany that includes every material and supra-sensory being, their attributes and qualities, their beginning and the end, their development and changing. It is even the source of our being, senses, feelings, thoughts, and actions. It is the world which corresponds to the name *Allah*.⁴⁷³

The second metaphysical world, which is located under the *Âlem-i Lâhut*, is the *Âlem-i Rahamut*. The *Âlem-i Rahamut* is the world into which the mercifulness and beneficence of God opens. Therefore, the existence of all animals and plants, their life, their reproduction, their harmony, cooperation, and order in all the levels of life are reflections of this world. Moreover, the compassion, help, and kindness that humans receive through their spiritual and physical

⁴⁷⁰ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, 3:120.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 3:130-140.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 3:123.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 3:123-124.

attributes are echoes of *Âlem-i Rahamut*. In other words, the general compassion and mercy that the whole universe receives is the reflection of *Âlem-i Lâhut*, while the mercy and compassion that every single being receives according to his ability is the reflection of *Âlem-i Rahamut*.⁴⁷⁴

The third metaphysical world is the *Âlem-i Ceberut*. It is known as a mirror for the theophany of God's names and qualities. This world is also related to destiny. Therefore, it is related to the individuals who are the subject of destiny as well. It is in this world, the *Âlem-i Ceberut*, where all beings and occurrences are processed-- but in a general sense. In contrast, they are subject to being processed in the *Âlem-i Meleket* individually.⁴⁷⁵

The *Âlem-i Meleket* is the last metaphysical world in Gulen's cosmology. It is the last level of angelic beings and is the ceiling of the *Âlem-i Mülk*. In fact, *Âlem-i Meleket* is closely related to human perfection. If the heart of a human is open to the *Meleket*, it is vaster than the deserts. The spiritual bounties that come from the *Âlem-i Meleket* are the power, the treasure, and the foundation of the spirit. Therefore, no one can neglect the value of *Âlem-i Meleket*. Otherwise, they would be in danger of losing everything.⁴⁷⁶

Besides this four-part structure of metaphysical worlds, there is another way to explain these metaphysical realms. According to this second formulation, there are four worlds: *Âlem-i Emr*, *Âlem-i Halk*, *Âlem-i Gayb*, and *Âlem-i Şhadet*. In this manner, the things that are related with the order of God, like mind, spirit, self, consciousness, senses, and comprehension are considered in *Âlem-i Emr*, the world of the [Divine] command (*emr*). On the other hand, physical beings and things related to time are considered to be in the *Âlem-i Halk*, the world of creation.⁴⁷⁷ The *Âlem-i Gayb* is the world of the unseen. The beings that cannot be sensed

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 3:125.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 3:126-127.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 3:128.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 3:122.

through our five senses are considered to be in this world. Therefore, the *Âlem-i Gayb* includes *Âlem-i Lâhut*, *Âlem-i Rahamut*, *Âlem-i Ceberut*, and *Âlem-i Melelut*, which are the hierarchically ordered worlds (from highest to lowest) at the different levels of the unseen realm.⁴⁷⁸ The *Âlem-i Şehadet* is the world of the seen. It is the world that we can sense through our five senses. The *Âlem-i Halk* (The World of Creation), *Âlem-i Madde* (The World of Matter), *Âlem-i Cisim* (The World of Body), *Âlem-i Suret* (The World of Form), and so many worlds that are mentioned with different names are representations of this world from slightly different perspectives and with slightly different emphases.

Although the *Âlem-i Emr*, *Âlem-i Halk*, *Âlem-i Gayb*, and *Âlem-i Şehadet* are designated by distinctly different names, they are in fact intermingled worlds. The relationship between these worlds is the relationship of inner and outer. These worlds, however, as places of theophanies of names, qualities and even tasks of Lordship, are different from each other. Even their entification levels are different from each other.⁴⁷⁹

In sum, Gulen's ontology consists of two primary categories: the Being of the Creator and the being of the creation. Beliefs about the Being of the Creator are analyzed under the category of theology, while beliefs concerning the being of creation can be examined under the category of cosmology.

IV. ANTHROPOLOGY

In this chapter I will first draw a picture of Gulen's general philosophical anthropology and then give definitions of his Sufi anthropological terms such as *sufi*, *derviş*, *mürşit*, *talip*, *mürid*, *salik*, and *evliyaullah*.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 3:122.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 3:122.

According to Gulen, a human being is the most comprehensive mirror for the reflection of God's qualities, names, and actions. Therefore, he is the most beautiful fruit of the tree of existence, the essence of the whole universe, and the equivalent of the whole of creation in terms of his inner being. He is an ocean even though he seems to be a droplet, and he is the most beautiful poem of creation ever composed, even though he is like a single letter.⁴⁸⁰

There is a close relationship between human beings and the whole of existence. Human beings sit at the center of the whole universe. Animate or inanimate, every created thing surrounds human beings to serve them. In a sense, The Creator ties everything to human beings and human beings to themselves. On the other hand, existence becomes valuable and meaningful through human beings because only human beings can read and understand God's messages which are carved on the face of every creature.⁴⁸¹

This close relationship is also an indication of the closeness of human beings to the Creator, because the whole of creation is created by God for the needs of human beings and because human beings are deeply in need of God. This correlation indicates a very strong relationship between human beings and God. Therefore, it can be said that human beings and their servanthood are the purpose of creation.⁴⁸²

A human being who has discovered the meaning of servanthood and instantiated it in his own life is a witness of the Real and guide to others. One whose thoughts are as pure as his beliefs and whose conduct is fully consistent with his true nature as servant of God always reminds people of God and becomes a witness for His Presence wherever he goes. And he becomes a fountain from which others around him may imbibe.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸⁰ Fethullah Gulen, *Işığın Görüldüğü Ufuk*, (İstanbul: Nil Yayınları, 2000), 29.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 40.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 30.

In Gulen's view, there have been many witnesses and guides to God throughout history, though the best of them, in terms of marvelous God-given abilities and extraordinary and persistent striving, was Muhammad (pbuh). Muhammad is the very model of the complete human being, such that his name is the first to leap to mind when enumerating the qualities and accomplishments of the *Īnsan-ı Kamil*, the perfect man.⁴⁸⁴

According to Gulen, the human being is highly esteemed among creatures, valued in Islam on account of his humanity. The Qur'an reports that "We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favored them far above most of Our creation" (Qur'an, 17:70). Therefore, human beings merit love and respect unconditionally and entirely on account of their humanity. Love is the source of life for them and the means by which they become happy and bring happiness to others.⁴⁸⁵

Although the human being is esteemed by virtue of being human, he gains his true value through the relationship established between him and his Lord. As the Qur'an points out, "All honor belongs to God, to his Apostle, and thus those who believe in God"⁴⁸⁶ (Qur'an, 63:8). Moreover, when he struggles for the sake of his faith and Lord, God begins to guide him: "As for those who strive hard in our case, we shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto us." (Qur'an, 29:69). In addition, when he does good deeds for the sake of God, he becomes beloved of others: "Verily, those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds will the Most Gracious endow with love" (Qur'an, 19:96).⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 31-34.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 31.

In fact, God designates the ultimate role of the human being as servanthood: “I have not created the *jinn* and humans to any end other than that they should worship me” (Qur’an, 51:56). Servanthood is the name given to a life lived in harmony with all entities and events in the universe, embodying integrity with the two types of divine law, these being revealed in the Qur’an and embodied in the fabric of creation. For Gulen, servanthood is also the heart of human vicegerency.⁴⁸⁸

Human vicegerency is a broad concept, the discussion of which necessarily includes topics ranging from belief in and worship of God, to understanding the mystery of beings and occurrences. A true vicegerent of God orients his thoughts and feelings according to his faith, then puts his personal and social life in order through worshipping God, and finally manages the whole universe, from the depths of the earth to heights of heavens, in accordance with God’s law. This overview of the nature of human vicegerency is centered upon servanthood.⁴⁸⁹

The duty of human beings is therefore to discover, comprehend, and implement God’s rules and principles in the life of this world. Each person is to shape his inner being as a reflection of these, and thereby to acquire and establish a personal character whose adherence to divine law does not waver.⁴⁹⁰ This requires, in Gulen’s view, that one turn away from short-term and transient successes and establish long-term goals. One is to abandon simplistic reasoning and confront weighty and complex ideas. Instead of expending time and effort exclusively upon mundane concerns, one is to engage those issues that nurture the soul and that prepare one simultaneously for success in this world and the next.⁴⁹¹ Fortunately, each person is created with abilities enabling him to fulfill these duties. These include the will and ambition to move

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁹⁰ Fethullah Gulen, *Yitirilmiş Cennete Doğru*, 2th ed. (İzmir: T.Ö.V Yayınları, 1996), 19.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 20.

forward; the curiosity and love for beauty that inspire one to explore the universe; a longing for justice; concern for the wellbeing of others; an intellect capable of moral discernment; and inspiration enabling one to remain on course during this lengthy journey.⁴⁹² Along the way, each of us also needs pure intention, systematic thinking, strong will, and constant ardor. Moreover, one is to keep in mind that only passionate people who are searching can obtain their desires. Those people who long to be truly human and fully vicegerents of God, and who search within their souls throughout their lives will certainly obtain their goals and discover their essence.⁴⁹³

For Gulen, a human being should be careful about his thoughts along the journey because his journey will be shaped according to his thoughts. At the end of his journey, he becomes the person that he strives to be, because if a person considers beings and occurrences from a certain perspective for a long time, the soul and character slowly begin to be shaped precisely along such lines.⁴⁹⁴

One of the most important advantages of the human being in this journey is the ability to know himself. In this respect, Gulen reminds us of Socrates' advice about knowing the self, and also invokes the famous Sufi saying, "Whoever knows himself knows his Lord." For Gulen, people who do not know themselves have nothing to offer for others, and their statements and comments are always superficial and inconsistent. Unfortunately, people of self-knowledge are very few, and those who are not aware of themselves are many.⁴⁹⁵

Accordingly, human beings can be placed into two categories. Some of them are broad-hearted and open to the perspective of eternity, the remainder narrow and limited. Some are humble and others arrogant; some are people of faith, others faithless; and a number of them are

⁴⁹² Ibid., 20.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁹⁵ Fethullah Gulen, *Günler Baharı Soluklarken*, (İzmir: T.Ö.V Yayınları, 1993), 152.

people of sincerity and integrity, with the rest being hypocritical. The reason for these two human types is the nearly unlimited capacity of human beings for both good and bad. And thus human beings are capable of both belief and unbelief.⁴⁹⁶

The reason that people are good or bad is commonly reduced to anthropological descriptions of human types and to the choices and life styles that correspond to these. According to Gulen, the 20th century interpreted humanity in terms of the body, focusing on biological transformations, and defining the human being as a thinking animal. Consistent with these criteria, people began to seek fun, selfish advantages, carnal gratification, the pleasures of their body, and animal-like happiness. They forgot their souls, noble ideals, spiritual gains, and the pleasures of the heart. As a result, a style of life in the service of carnal desires became popular. This caused the real human being to become lost, despite the fact that all were created to embody religion and strive to uphold moral values, noble merits, and art.⁴⁹⁷

The following terms are the stages recognized by Gulen that a human being will follow while returning to his true home.

A. Sufi

According to Gulen, the *Sufi* is the traveler for the sake of God whose heart is stabilized and purified for the sake of God. Although the term *Sufi* was not used at the time of Companions of the Prophet, it addresses the pure lifestyle of the Prophet and his Companions.⁴⁹⁸ *Sufi* is one who places the heart, spiritual love, and affection in the service of God. The term *Sufi* indicates one who is living a life focused on the Hereafter and shows a heart freed from carnal desire. It

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 154,155.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 158-161.

⁴⁹⁸ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, 1:12,13.

points to the person liberated from earthly wishes and bodily appetites, elevated to the level of divine interests, and dedicated to honesty, simplicity, noble morals and courteous manners.⁴⁹⁹

Gulen acknowledges Sufism as the practice that cultivates the inner aspect of the heart and knowledge of the realities behind the manifest and hidden realms of existence. The *Sufi* is a student of this knowledge and a knight traveling towards the depths of this knowledge. This knight always moves towards the horizon of the *Insan-ı Kamil* (perfect man).⁵⁰⁰

Gulen assigns *Sufis* to two different groups. The first group consists of those who always travel in the orbit of knowledge and gnosis, and the second are those who only seek spiritual taste, unveiling, and ecstasy. The first group of *Sufis* flies with the wings of knowledge and gnosis, along the way visiting different stations like *seyr ilallah*, (journey toward God), *seyr fillah*(journey in God), and *seyr anillah*,(journey from God). Their minds and hearts always adhere to the saying, “There is neither force nor power except God.” Every change and formation in the universe reminds them of God. The second group of *Sufis* is, although sincere in their journey and asceticism, sometimes at risk of deviation from the proper and safe path due to their seeking spiritual tastes, unveiling, and ecstasy.⁵⁰¹

B. Derviş (dervish)

Literally, the word *derviş* means a poor, needy person; and is commonly rendered in English as a *dervish*. As a technical term, it refers to that person who is aware that he or she is poor, needy, and weak before God. For Gulen, when the word *dervish* is used in the Sufi context, it refers to the person who disengages his heart from everything other than God, dedicates

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 1:12-14.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 1:15.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 1:16.

himself to servanthood in order to reach Reality, and lives in a state of God-consciousness, patience, ecstasy, love and tolerance.⁵⁰²

The first step on the way of the dervish is to leave aside sins and to undertake works of righteousness. The second step for him is to love everybody and open his arms to everyone. It is to see the whole universe as a place of brotherhood and sisterhood, to exemplify Muhammadan morality and Ahmadan reality in his own life. The third step of the dervish is to experience theoretical knowledge directly through his tasting and spiritual states.⁵⁰³

In the first step, the dervish puts into practice in his life the ability to understand religion and the Qur'an and the desire to reach reality. At the end of this stage, his life is open to the starting point of God-consciousness (*takva*) and he begins to travel toward new stages of the spiritual journey as long as he preserves his sincerity.⁵⁰⁴ In the second step, the dervish establishes a deep, sincere relationship with every created being, animate or inanimate, respects every person according to their position, loves everything, embraces every creature, repels hostilities with love, shows no resentment towards anything, but instead consistently displays patience and tolerance.⁵⁰⁵ In the third step, the dervish constantly experiences the presence of his Lord, always seeing Him wherever he may happen to glance. In this stage the dervish sees nothing other than God, hears nothing other than his Lord, and knows nothing other than his Creator. For him, the intimacy of a friend or hostility of an enemy feels the same. He disengages himself from everything other than God and gains a second, spiritual character. At this point, the

⁵⁰² Ibid., 2:274.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 2:275.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 2:275.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 2:275.

dervish only knows what he needs to know, and thus rescues himself from the burden of unnecessary knowledge.⁵⁰⁶

C. Mürşit (shaykh)

The *mürşit* is the wise and knowledgeable person whose speaking and writing guides others to the right path, leading them to awareness of the Real by destroying both the spiritual and intellectual obstacles that impede the approach to God. Moreover, by training people who are already in the right path either individually or as a group, he elevates their spiritual level and deepens their relationship with God.⁵⁰⁷ The *mürşit* is a gnostic who deeply knows the qualities of and relationships among human beings, the universe, and God. The unbeliever who denies God and the ignorant person who does not know Him cannot be a *mürşit*, being instead in need of spiritual training by one who is.⁵⁰⁸ The *mürşit* is a wise man who constantly analyzes both the created and written books of God that are the universe and the Qur'an. He is a curious examiner of the mysteries of the universe and a dedicated reader of the Qur'an. He makes his decisions at the intersection of the created and the written books of God and thus is always able to think holistically.⁵⁰⁹

The *mürşit* neither demands nor expects anything in return for his training. He dedicates his whole life to benefitting people. If any spiritual or material good comes from his efforts, he attributes these goods to his sincere friends and always effaces himself. He acknowledges his friends as the reason for God's help. Therefore, every accomplishment makes him more humble

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 2:275-276.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 3:35.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 3:35.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 3:35.

before them and before God.⁵¹⁰ The *mürşit* knows his addressees as they truly are, making no mistake in his approach to them. He always embraces them with compassion, mercy and love. He shares their happiness and sorrow. He applauds their accomplishments and positive efforts and overlooks any failings or discourteous manners. He is a hero of love and tolerance. He is like a candle which illuminates everyone, even though it causes him to melt instant by instant. He dies to give life, cries to make others laugh, and works to give others rest.⁵¹¹

D. Hak Yolcusu (the traveler on the path of the Real)

Hak Yolcusu means the "traveler on the path of the Real;" and it is a general term that is used by Fethullah Gulen to refer to four types of wayfarers at different stages of the journey, called *talib*, *mürid*, *salik*, and *vasıl*.⁵¹²

Talib means the one who seeks and desires. As a Sufi term that is used by Gulen, it refers to an aspirant who has only recently begun to learn and practice Sufism and surrender himself to a *mürşit*. He is a beginner who strongly wills to obtain what he seeks and hopes to reach the Real.⁵¹³ For the *talib*, there is a procedure to be followed in seeking acceptance by a *mürşit*. First, he is tested by the *mürşit* in terms of his manners, behaviors, and character; and if he seems able to be a *talib*, then the *mürşit* accepts. After this acceptance, he is a *talib* and a prospective *mürid*. He is able to travel toward the Real as long as his abilities allow him, every single *talib* being limited or unlimited according to his abilities.⁵¹⁴ After acceptance by the *mürşit*, there are some rules that the *talib* needs to observe. He should dedicate himself to his journey, carefully

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 3:35.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 3:39.

⁵¹² Fethullah Gulen, "Talib, Mürid, Salik, Vasıl," *Sızıntı*, 301 (2004), <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=bd23622c0c&k=428&1903672784>

⁵¹³ Ibid., 301.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 301.

following the guidance of his *mürşit*, acknowledging his *mürşit* as the only mirror for the Names of God, and always awaiting the spiritual gifts that will come to him through his *mürşit*.⁵¹⁵

The level of the *talib* might be underestimated, being just at the beginning of the journey. However, all the accomplishments that arise in the future are the fruits of the *talib*'s deep passion and desire. It is a general rule in Sufism that the one who seeks sincerely and does whatever is necessary, sooner or later, obtains that which he seeks.⁵¹⁶

For the *talib*, the journey may seem very long, viewed from the beginning. However, if he fulfills his duties and struggles passionately, he may suddenly find himself elevated to the level of *mürid*. Subsequently, he may jump to the level of *salik* and begin to dream of reaching the level of *vasil*. On the other hand, it is also possible for him to remain stuck at the level of *talib*, unable to surpass this level in spite of all the efforts that he expends.⁵¹⁷

Mürid refers to the second stage that the traveler of the Real passes through along the way. As a word, *mürid* means the "one who wills." As a Sufi term in the teaching of Gulen, it refers to the person who empties his heart of his personal desires and surrenders himself to religion in the guidance of a perfect man, his *mürşit*. The term *mürid* signifies the person who is one step ahead of a *talib*.⁵¹⁸ At the end of his journey, the *mürid* reaches the point at which he completely disappears in the will of his Lord — though to do so, he needs to follow his *mürşit* strictly from the beginning. He should neither ask *why?* with regard to the orders of his *mürşit*, nor should he seek any evidence to justify them. He should always fulfill his duties and never abandon the daily additional recitations and prayers assigned to him by his *mürşit*. In this way, if he always acts appropriately in his relations with his *mürşit*, he will attain the level of

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 301.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 301.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 301.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 301.

consciousness called *fena fişşeyh*, passing away in the *mürşit* or shaykh. This is the first station that a *mürid* reaches in his journey.⁵¹⁹

Along the way, there are some rules that a *mürid* must follow. He should be observant of the rules of the Qur'an and Sunnah. He should remain well aloof from sins and improprieties, and continually practice good deeds. Should he mistakenly sin or omit a good deed that he is able to do, he is to turn immediately to his Lord and cleanse himself through sincere repentance. He should afford no opportunity for spiritual corruption to dwell in his heart for a long time. Moreover, he should bind his heart to his Lord and turn away from thoughts of wealth and position. There should be only the love of his Lord in his heart. Furthermore, accomplishment and failure, being and not being, possessing and not possessing, what is in his hand and what is not — all such oppositions should seem the same to him.⁵²⁰

Another important point concerns the status of the *mürid* in relation to other people and his Lord. First of all, he should always see himself as less valuable than others; and, so as to better to justify this perspective, he should remember or even record all of his mistakes and feel them as if he has made them recently. Every instant, every hour, and every day, he should continually examine himself, his errors, and his shortcomings, and give no further thought to the mistakes and deficiencies of others. Furthermore, even in his accomplishments, he should find some failing and preserve an attitude of self-criticism, all the while acknowledging his Lord as the source of positive accomplishments and thanking Him for these bounties.⁵²¹

Salik is the name of the third stage of the traveler on the path of the Real. As an ordinary word, it means "anyone who travels on a path." As a Sufi term in Gulen's usage, it refers to a person who travels the path of Sufism according to Sufi disciplines in order to shorten the

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 301.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 301.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 301.

distance between him and his Lord and thereby to please his Lord.⁵²² There are two types of *saliks*. The first is the one who obtains his perfection through God's attraction without following the formal stages of the journey, stages like forty days of seclusion (*çile*), solitude (*uzlet*), and retreat (*halvet*). The second is the one who follows the formal stages of the journey and reaches the Real through his inner and outer spiritual travel.⁵²³

The first step of a *salik* is "intention" (namely, to have the intention to follow the path resolutely). Intention is the starting point of everything and the essence of the journey. Without intention, deeds are soulless and reaching the Real is impossible. On the other hand, if it can be supported with firm will and resolution, a true and sincere intention enables the *salik* to overcome every difficulty and to reach his perfection.⁵²⁴

When the Sufi is a *talib*, he knows the reality of *iman* (faith) and Islam only partially. Once he becomes a *mürîd*, he begins to experience different dimensions of them; and when he becomes a *salik*, he experiences these realities directly and tastes them spiritually. Faith sheds the cloak of theory, making itself available to him in direct practice. At this level, the *salik* feels the real serenity of which everyone speaks but few truly know. His knowledge becomes gnosis, and he becomes pure and enlightened in both his inner and outer being.⁵²⁵

While the *salik* travels toward the Real, he sometimes receives spiritual gifts, tastes, and openings. For some, these gifts would be a reason to deviate from the path of servanthood and a cause for arrogance. However, the ones who are awake in their spiritual journey pass by these traps without dwelling upon them, because such gifts are not the aim of the journey. The real *saliks* are not the ones who desire these types of extraordinary experiences. They try to keep far

⁵²² Ibid., 301.

⁵²³ Ibid., 301.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 301.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 301.

removed from them even in their dreams. Nevertheless, if God grants these gifts as a spiritual bounty without their desiring them, the *saliks* acknowledge them as a reason to praise God and to deepen themselves in servanthood. They become still more sincere in their worship. They remain awake in the quiet hours of the night to worship their Lord. They certainly know that God is God and the servant is the servant.⁵²⁶

Vasıl (literally "one who has arrived," is the Sufi whose gnosis has reached the last step, which is gnosis. He is the perfect man. Since in Sufi thought in general (and in Gulen's thought in particular) becoming a "perfect man" is seen to be one form of the purpose of life, I will therefore deal with it in the chapter on teleology.

E. Evliyaullah (friends of God)

Evliyaullah can be translated into English as "Friends of God" (although it has often been translated as "God's saints"). As a Sufi term that is used by Gulen, it refers to the travelers of the Real who pass over carnal desires through ascetic practices and exerting effort and thereby attain proximity to God.⁵²⁷ Such a friend of God is one who has died to personal desires and lives in terms of the desires of his Friend. He is the one who has found what he has searched for and has disregarded everything except his Beloved. He is the one who has become a locus of the gifts, blessings, and bounties of God. He is the one who has approached his Lord with feelings of friendship and obtained friendship from Him in return.⁵²⁸

A true friend of God passes away in terms of his body and then obtains a second character which is shaped by proximity to God, by the mysteries of His divinity, and by gnosis and love of Him. In his eyes, east and west, winter and summer, death and life are not different.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 301.

⁵²⁷ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, 3:72.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 3:70,72.

For him, everything begins with God and ends with God, rises and sets through Him, lives and dies because of Him. He senses himself and all beings through God. Therefore, morning and evening, earth and heaven, sea and land, animals and plants remind him of nothing but God.⁵²⁹

In the heart of the friend of God, enthusiasm toward God increases, negligence disappears, and God's attraction doubles itself. His heart meets with his mind, and existence becomes a book to read from the top to the bottom. The earth dies in its mortal aspect to be resurrected with a divine face. Whatever the friend does, he does for the sake of God and as a result, God never leaves him alone, even for a blink of an eye. God protects him, cares for him, and loves him. There is neither sorrow nor horror for the friends of God.⁵³⁰ “Verily, friends of God, no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve” (Qur'an, 10:62).

Although all friends of God are men of heart and soul, they are different in terms of their character, mission, and duties. Therefore, they are called with different names like *ebrrar*, *mukarrabin*, *ebdal*, *evtad*, *nüceba*, *nukaba*, *gavs*, and *kutub*.

The *Ebrrar* are the good people who dedicate themselves to righteousness, moral uprightness, and spiritual practice in all aspects of life. Their inner and outer aspects are the same; and they are people of God-consciousness who live life in the accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah.⁵³¹ The *ebrrar* are of two groups. The first consists of those whose only concern is with themselves and their own spiritual development. They are in a close and deep personal relationship with God. Their every action and plan is related to their personal development. Sometimes they completely withdraw from others — or even from themselves — and then experience total immersion in the waves of the ocean of oneness (*tevhid*). These waves captivate

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 3:70.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 3:71.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 3:73.

and amaze them. Although they are friends of God, they are carried away by His Presence in such a way that they are not considered spiritual leaders for others to emulate.⁵³²

Those in the second group of *ebrrar* are always in a state of stable equilibrium, conducting themselves in the light of Muhammad (*pbuh*). Their every action and plan is developed in an equilibrium among the divine revelation, the mind, and the heart. They understand the Qur'an and the Sunnah in the proper way, neither being confused nor confusing others. They are judicious in their understanding of the seen and the unseen. Their ecstasy (*vecd*) and immersion (*istiğrak*), through which they might have been carried away, are corrected through the essentials of the religion. They always view this life with the criteria of the messengers, seeing it as a field in which to cultivate good deeds for harvest in the Hereafter. In contrast to the first group of *ebrrar*, the second group presents a living example that can be emulated by others.⁵³³

The *mukarrabin* are those who are brought close to God. It is the title that is used for the friends of God who are above the *ebrrar*. This title can be also used for the prophets and the leaders of the angels.⁵³⁴ For Gulen, they are the people who have overcome their carnal desires through love of God. They are the gnostics who have subjected the body to their heart and soul. They are the friends of God who are able to see the Real through the Real. They are the lovers of God whose inner nature is colored by love. They are such soldiers of gnosis that other people sense the real color of beings through the lens of their gnosis. They love God and know that they are loved by God.⁵³⁵ “God loves them and they love God” (Qur'an, 5:54). Some have proposed

⁵³² Ibid., 3:73.

⁵³³ Ibid., 3:73.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 3:74.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 3:74-75.

that the *mukarrabin* number 347 or 4,000 (among other estimates), but there is no consensus among them. Accordingly, Gulen does not offer a specific number regarding the *mukarrabin*.⁵³⁶

Ebdal is a word that is used to describe another group of friends of God. *Ebdal* is the plural of *bedil*, which literally means "substitute," and which refers to a clean person. As a Sufi term, it indicates those friends of God who help to solve daily problems of the ordinary people. In other words, God uses them as a veil for His actions.⁵³⁷ The *ebdal* are of two groups. The first consists of those friends of God who have rescued themselves from negative attitudes and beautified their souls through righteous conduct. The second group comprises the friends of God who have a particular mission before God. When one of them dies, another friend of God becomes his "substitute" (*bedil*) and comes to take his place. If one of the *ebdal* must leave the place that he occupies, he either leaves his double behind or sends his double ahead while he remains. The *ebdal* are said to be 7, 40, or 700 in number, though again there is no consensus on this point.⁵³⁸

Nüceba is another title that is used for a class among the friends of God. *Nüceba* is the plural of *necib*; and *necib* means the "essence of any thing." Therefore, *nüceba* are considered to be the noble ones among the people.⁵³⁹ The *nüceba* have completed their spiritual journey toward God and then returned to the people in order to guide them. Their journey is a *seyr min allah* (journey from God). They are heirs of the prophets; therefore, their only concern is people. They act in order to guide people to God, speak in order to invite them to spirituality, and contemplate how to rescue them from the prison of carnal desires. They live to make others' lives better. Thus, they are always engaged in the problems and difficulties of others. They

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 3:75.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 3:75-76.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 3:76.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 3:80.

become sad on account of the sorrows of others and become happy on account of others' joys. In honor of their supplications, God prevents certain calamities.⁵⁴⁰

Nukaba is also another name that is used for specific friends of God. *Nukaba* is the plural form of *nakib*, meaning a "leader of a group." These are the beloveds of God who are always with other people, gently correcting their mistakes and delicately encouraging them to do good deeds. Their inner observations (*muṣahada*) are deeper than their outer observations. They are aware of the secrets of both God and people. They are translators between the *alem-i mulk* (the physical world) and the *meleket* (the angelic world).⁵⁴¹

Evtad means wooden or iron poles. This term in Sufi thought refers to four friends of God who are very close to each other. They are literally four, but they are like one because of their closeness. Their names are *Abdulhayy* (the servant of the Living), *Abdulhalim* (the servant of the Forebearing), *Abdulmurid* (the servant of the Willing One), and *Abdulkadir* (the servant of All Powerful). They journey under the shade of four prophets: namely Idris, Ilyas, Isa (Jesus), and Hizir. Their connection with the Real is through the four angels: Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and Azrael. Each one of the *evtad* represents one corner of the Kaaba.⁵⁴²

Gavs (literally "saviour") refers to the friend of God who has obtained the highest spiritual level after the *kutub* (pole or axis). His most important feature is to help people. If one of the friends of God does not have a specific mission to help people, he cannot be called a *gavs*. In each era, there is a *gavs*. He is the leader of the people of God in his time. He is the most comprehensive mirror for the names of God, the essence of existence and the possessor of the Muhammadan Reality. He is the primary locus of manifestation of God's divine inspirations and bounties. Although spiritual practices and striving are important in becoming a *gavs*, this level is

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 3:80.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 3:81.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 3:82.

seen to be entirely a gift of God.⁵⁴³ “Such is God’s bounty: He grants it unto whomever He wills” (Qur’an, 62:4). The title of *gavs* is sometimes held by a person, and sometimes by a group of people. If a group of people get together for the sake of God and sincerely work on behalf of His Book and religion, they might come to possess the title of *gavs*.⁵⁴⁴

The *kutub*(pole or axis)⁵⁴⁵ is the beloved of God who is at the highest level of spiritual friendship. This title was originally conferred upon the four successors of the Prophet (pbuh).⁵⁴⁶ The *kutub* is a unique friend of God. He sees behind the face of beings and occurrences, and always searches for gnosis. Thus the light of gnosis always radiates from him. He is the mirror of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the reflection of four angels, Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and Azrael. As such, he is the center of all metaphysical realms.⁵⁴⁷

In conclusion, a human being is the most comprehensive mirror for the reflection of God’s qualities, names, and actions. Therefore, he is the most beautiful fruit of the tree of existence and the terms such as *sufi*, *derviş*, *mürşit*, *talip*, *mürid*, *salik*, and *evliyaullah* are different names referring to different stages of human perfection.

V. PSYCHOLOGY

In this chapter, I will summarize the Sufi psychology of Fethullah Gulen in three subheadings. The first subheading will be "Faculties of Consciousness." Under this heading I will talk about spirit (*ruh*), heart (*kalp*), and self (*nefis*). Then, I will continue with the second subheading which is "Psychological States and Stations." In this section, I will give the

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 3:83-85.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 3:85.

⁵⁴⁵ The *kutub* does not mean "pole" in the sense of a metaphor based on a long wooden or metal rod. Rather, the term refers to a "pole" as a metaphor based on an axis or a pole such as the North Pole. Namely, just as a "pole" in a geometric or geo-physical sense is a point around which things revolve, a Sufi "pole" is that particular friend of God about whom the spiritual world revolves.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 3:86.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 3:85-87.

definitions of "state" and "station" in the thought of Gulen and give one example for each. Finally, I will talk about the stages of the spiritual journey under the subheading of "Psychological Transformation."

1. The Faculties of Consciousness

A. Ruh (Spirit)

According to Gulen, the spirit is a vast subject. There are a lot of opinions and thoughts about it. It can even be said that there is a kind of pollution of doctrines concerning the spirit; and that two reasons for this may be suggested. The first reason is that people were not satisfied with the knowledge of revelation and began to express further details on the subject based on their personal opinions (rather than based on revelation itself). They named the spirit with different names such as "mind," "self," "speaking self," "I," and then began to examine it according to these names rather than according to the nature of the spirit. A second explanation for the profusion of concepts of the spirit is that people usually confuse the nature of the spirit with its functions.⁵⁴⁸

Nevertheless, although there are lots of different opinions about the spirit, there is still common ground among those opinions; and this commonality is that the spirit is the only source of life, action, sense, consciousness, comprehension, and every kind of development in man.⁵⁴⁹ In terms of Sufi understanding, the spirit is an essence which is the reflection of divine life, and its reality is only known by God. What we know about it, states Gulen, is that it is the shadow of divine life.⁵⁵⁰ In a general sense, life is the reflection of the divine names the "Ever-Living One" and the "Giver of Life." In terms of human life, life is the appearance of spirit in the human body

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 3:168,169.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 3:168-169.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 3:210.

and the different actions that the body carries out. The spirit is created in time in terms of its relation to the body, and this creation constantly reoccurs in each moment. This creation is the breeze that blows from the Ever-Living One and the Self-Existing One to the created one.⁵⁵¹

The spirit is so important for the human being. The human being knows what he knows through his spirit and feels what he feels with it. His perfection is related to his spirit because the spirit is the vehicle that takes him to God. He becomes a real human being because of his spirit.⁵⁵² The address of the spirit is the body; however, the spirit is not restricted to the body. It may partially disconnect itself from the body while the person sleeps or faints away. When death comes it totally leaves the body and goes to the isthmus (*berzah*) and stays there until resurrection.⁵⁵³

The spirit is an angelic being, and because of this nature the body follows the spirit in order to pass from this world to hereafter. The body goes to the hereafter because of the spirit, passes through the "isthmus" with it, and visits *mizan* (the spiritual scale that weighs deeds) through it. The body enters paradise due to its developed spirit and tastes pleasures and enjoyments of paradise through it.⁵⁵⁴

Just as the spirit has relationships to the body, it possesses a relational web with the self (*nefs*) and the body too. When the spirit is strengthened in terms of spirituality, the self begins to have stability and straightforwardness (*istikamet*). Then, the self can be purified by a diet that is maintained over a long period of time and by exercises. In addition to that, if the body is purified

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 3:212-213.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 3:210.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 3:210.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 3:210-211.

through worship, the body and the self become able to taste different divine pleasures under the management of the spirit.⁵⁵⁵

To see and think beautifully, to have right and straightforward faith, constant prayer and worship, repentance and obedience are the ways of nurturing the spirit. The people who are able to activate the ways of nurturing the spirit are never stuck in their spiritual journey. They always travel toward the higher levels of spirituality. On the other hand, following carnal desires, living a body-oriented life, and pursuing a sinful lifestyle are the factors that kill the spirit.⁵⁵⁶

Another relational web that the spirit possesses is the relationship of the *latife-i rabbaniye* (lordly ability; an inner level of the heart), *sır* (mystery; an inner level of the heart) and the heart. "Lordly ability" is related to the *Alem-i Ceberut* (the realm of compulsion), while mystery is related to *Alem-i Lahut* (the realm of divinity). Both "lordly ability" and the "mystery" receive inrushes (*varid*) from the realms to which they are related; they paint them with their own spirituality; and then pass them to the heart; and finally the heart sends them to the spirit.⁵⁵⁷

There are three births of the spirit:

1. The birth of the spirit which took place at the first entification (*tayyün-ü evvel*).

This birth of the spirit precedes the birth of the body.

2. The birth of the spirit which took place in the first human being Adam as the verse indicates: "When I have formed him [Adam] fully and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down before him in prostration." (Qur'an, 15:29).

3. The rebirth of the spirit by rescuing itself from the influence of the body and carnal desires.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 3:214-215.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 3:215.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 3:216.

In sum, life in the universe is everything, and it is the reflection of the Ever-Living One and the Self-Existing One. The spirit is the vehicle that brings life to the human being from the Giver of Life.

B. Kalp (heart)

According to Gulen, the heart is the center of sensing, feeling, consciousness, emotion, and will.⁵⁵⁸ The spirit is the eye of the heart, insight is its faculty of sight, reason is its spirit, and will is its inner dynamics.⁵⁵⁹ The heart is an enlightened essence that has two faces looking at different directions. The first face looks at the world of spirits, and the second face looks at the corporeal world. If the human follows the rules of the Qur'an and the Sunnah in his life, his heart brings spiritual inrushes from the world of spirits to the body, and the body becomes a place of serenity and tranquility.⁵⁶⁰ The heart, in addition, can be the source of both good and bad feelings. It may be a channel that transports goodness to a human being. It also may be a recipient for satanic temptations. Therefore, it needs to be directed to the Real. Otherwise, it may be a target for the temptations of Satan.⁵⁶¹

In terms of psychology, Gulen talks about two different deeds of the heart. They are *ihlas* (sincerity) and *ihсан* (perfect goodness).⁵⁶² Sincerity is to be pure, right, and honest in regard to God. It is a deed of the heart, and God evaluates his servant according to his sincerity. Sincerity is a source of blessing; it makes a few good deeds worth the weight of many.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁸ Previously, under the heading of epistemology (subheading "methods of attaining gnosis"), I dealt with the "heart" specifically with regard to its role in the epistemology of gnosis.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:44,45.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:45-46.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 1:47-48.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 1:94, 185.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 1:94-95.

The heart is one of the most important vehicles that takes the human being to God, and perfect goodness is its biggest deed.⁵⁶⁴ In the Sufi terminology of Gulen, perfect goodness means to think beautifully, to plan goodness, to deal with good issues, and to do every act as if it is going to be presented to God. If perfect goodness covers the heart from the top to bottom, then the bounties of God begin to rain on the person.⁵⁶⁵ “For those who persevere in doing good there is the ultimate good in store, and more than that” (Qur’an, 10:26).

The heart is a vehicle for feeling extraordinary spiritual feelings. However, there are some rules to follow in order to open the heart to spiritual feelings. One such rule, Gulen asserts, is to patiently persevere regarding following obligations of the religion, like praying everyday, as well as regarding performing extra prayers, which is a way to open the heart. The second rule is to be patient when faced with the calamities of destiny. The third rule is to patiently persevere in abstaining from different sins that attract human beings. And the fourth rule is to wait patiently at the heart's door, the door of the Lord, until it opens.⁵⁶⁶

Another psychological concept in the Sufi discourse of Gulen is *selim kalp*, the "straightforward heart." The Qur’an tells us that “The day on which neither wealth will be of any use, nor children, [and when] only he [will be happy] who comes before God with a straightforward heart” (Qur’an, 26: 88-89). Gulen interprets the "straightforward heart" as the heart which only deals with itself and its deficiencies, and disregards the deficiencies of others. God loves this type of heart, because He does the same thing. He feeds unbelievers in spite of their unbelief. He forgives the person who has done good deeds in spite of his bad deeds.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:185.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:182.

⁵⁶⁶ Fethullah Gulen, *Fasıldan Fasıla 1*, (Izmir: Nil Yayınları, 1996), 52.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 1:64.

In terms of Sufi psychology, the heart should be encompassed by the feeling of oneness. There are some people who say that they believe in God and his oneness, but they are still not satisfied with their destiny even though God is the one who designates their destiny. They say that God is the only creator, yet they acknowledge causes as if they create the effects. All of these feelings are against oneness. These feelings indicate that there is duality in the heart.⁵⁶⁸ However, “Never has God endowed any man with two hearts in one body.” (Qur’an, 33:4)

C. Nefis (self)

Nefis is usually translated into English as self. As a word, *nefis* means essence, the heart of everything. As a Sufi term that is used by Gulen, it means the essence of enmity, animosity, grudge bearing, sexual desire, anger, etc. However, it is able to change and develop.⁵⁶⁹ According to Gulen, the self is located between the spirit and the body, and because of this location it functions like a channel between these two. In this manner, when a spiritual pleasure, taste, or inrush happens in the spirit, it causes a change in the body through the self. In the same way, if any change happens in the body, it affects the spirit through it.⁵⁷⁰

For instance, when the human being thinks of something horrible, it may make him feel like vomiting. Moreover, sometimes a psychological difficulty may cause a physical illness. Similarly, an occurrence in the body may cause a psychological change in the spirit. All of these interactions occur through the self.⁵⁷¹

Fortunately for human beings, the self can change for the better. The route to take for such change of the self, according to Gulen, is Islam; the captain of the vehicle is Muhammad

⁵⁶⁸ Fethullah Gulen, *Prizma 4*, (İstanbul: Nil Yayınları, 2004), 236.

⁵⁶⁹ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri*, 3:253.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:253.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3:253-254.

(pbuh); and its fuel is remembrance and reflection. If the self does not follow its route and thereby devolves into a sinful life, then the self may cause turbulence in the interactions between the body and the spirit. Such turbulences may appear in the spirit of human being as contractedness (*kabz*).⁵⁷² Although the self is the source of arrogance, egotism, jealousy, enmity, and injustice, it possesses a potential to be a friend of the spirit. If it knows that its purpose is to acknowledge the Real, leaves its personal claims, turns to pray, seeks refuge in God because of its deficiencies, and follows the spirit; it becomes enlightened and journeys toward the Real.⁵⁷³

Although the self in Sufi thought is generally associated with bad attitudes, it may benefit the person. When it encourages the person to do unrighteous deeds, the person (especially one following the spiritual path) tries to refuse it with his spirit. As a result, the self energizes the person and sharpens his ardor and mind. If the person wins the battle against the self, then the self becomes a twin of the spirit, refusing injustice and embracing justice; carrying out good deeds and refraining from bad ones. It carries out good deeds and leaves the bad ones. Finally, the time will come-when the self becomes extremely sensitive to the conflicts between good and evil impulses, such that, as Gulen states, "it leaves its mission to nerves."⁵⁷⁴

In the journey of the self, there are different levels. The self begins its journey from the level of *nefs-i emmare* (the commanding self) and then follows *nefs-i levvame* (the blaming self), *nefs-i mülheme* (intuited self), *nefs-i raziye* (self that is content), *nefs-i marziyye* (self with whom God is content), and *nefs-i zekiyye* (pure self). Each level has its own character, taste, inrushes, and feelings. These levels sometimes may be recognized by the *mürşit* while the Sufi continues

⁵⁷² Ibid., 3:255.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 3:256.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 3:256.

his journey. Sometimes they are recognized by the Sufi himself after a long time of self-supervision and self-criticism.⁵⁷⁵

In this journey, prayer and repentance, guidance of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and blocking the unending desires of the self (by both reasonably feeding it with permitted pleasures and thinking about the end of forbidden pleasures) are the nutrition of the traveler. If the self is purified through this healthy nutrition, it may become a shiny radiant source. Otherwise, it can become a source of evil.⁵⁷⁶

When the self develops, it remembers its sinful past life with abhorrence and then motivates itself for the future by saying “There is a shiny future before me.” It runs toward the future and tries to fulfill the holes of its past life by using the new chances of the future. While people are busy with their pleasures, in contrast, the self on the spiritual path says “I have tasted such pleasures in the past,” and instead, focusing on its spiritual goal, it does what truly needs to be done. It always feels itself in the presence of its Lord. Its standing in prayer is an expression of reverence, its bowing in prayer is an expression of shame, and its prostration in prayer is a declaration of modesty.⁵⁷⁷

2. The Psychological States and Stations

A. Hal and Makam (state and station)

In Turkish, *hal* is called state, and *makam* is called station. In the Sufi discourse of Gulen, states are the temporary psychological changes that happen in the heart of the Sufi without any effort of the Sufi, states like happiness and sorrow, contraction and openness. They can also be

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 3:256-257.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 3:257.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 3:260.

increased as the Sufi's life flows with the breezes that come from metaphysical realms, that visit his heart, and then alter it.⁵⁷⁸

On the other hand, the term "station" denotes the permanent form of these temporary moods, a form that is obtained through the effort of the Sufi. If this permanent mood goes away, then this new situation is called "becoming caught up in the self" (*nefsanilik*).⁵⁷⁹ On the one hand, a state is a divine bounty that comes to the Sufi's heart without his effort, stays there for a while, and then leaves it. On the other hand, a station is the result of the Sufi's will and ardor. It comes to the heart and settles there. Then, the Sufi gains a second and new character that is colored with this station.⁵⁸⁰

For Gulen, being affected by a state refers to an openness to the source of everything, the real oneness without any curtain. In contrast, a station speaks to the Sufi behind the curtain of his will and ardor; therefore, it cannot reflect the Real as clearly as a state. Therefore, it would be more fitting with the Real and reality to tell others what comes to the heart as inrushes instead of coloring one's expression with station.⁵⁸¹

In this context, Gulen profoundly connects his comment to two sayings of the Prophet. In one of his sayings, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says that "God does not consider your bodies and forms, but your hearts,"⁵⁸² teaching us that the heart, and thus the state, is what God values. On the other hand, a less reliable version of the same hadith says that "God considers your hearts

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 1:41.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 1:41.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 1:41.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 1:41.

⁵⁸² Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, (Germany:Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 2000) 609, hadith no: 4682.

and deeds.”⁵⁸³ But this is in fact a favor to the station, which is actually due to the state, because the station is obtained through the continuation of the state.⁵⁸⁴

A state is the theophany that occurs when God wills. Its field is the heart. The sense and consciousness are its hunters. Each state is separate and different from the previous one. Therefore, Muhammad (pbuh) repented seventy times a day, since he considered his state that occurred to be less when compared to the one that followed.⁵⁸⁵

In the rest of this section, I will talk about *dehşet* and *heyman* (amazement and stupor) as an example for the state and *rıza* (contentment) as an example for the station from the Sufi discourse of Fethullah Gulen.

B. Dehşet and Heyman (amazement and stupor)

Dehşet is translated into English as amazement. On the other hand, *heyman* is stupor. They are two separate states; however, they are usually examined together since they usually occur consecutively. In the Sufi terminology of Gulen, amazement is a state of a Sufi that denotes the feeling of shock before the theophany of God’s beauty. Although Gulen states that there is no clear evidence of amazement in the Qur’an and the Sunnah, he relates it to the following verse:⁵⁸⁶ “When they saw him, they were greatly amazed at his beauty” (Qur’an, 12:31). Amazement is also described as becoming shocked before something that is not encompassed by the mind and not comprehended with knowledge. It is the astonishment of unbearable Reality that envelops the spirit of the Sufi. Gulen transforms these descriptions into a Sufi language in the following way: Amazement is the state that occurs when contemplation

⁵⁸³ Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, 2th vol., (np.: Dār lhyā’ al-Turāsh al-‘Arabī, 1975), Zuhd, Bāb 9, hadith no: 4143, 37.

⁵⁸⁴ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, 1:41-42.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:42-43.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:38.

(*şuhud*) overcomes the mind, the pain of separation exceeds the limits of patience because of deep affection, and the current feelings of the Sufi go beyond his comprehension.⁵⁸⁷

For Gulen, there are three different forms of amazement:

1. Sometimes the current feelings of the Sufi overcome his knowledge and comprehension. Then, the ecstasy of the Sufi becomes unbearable. Finally, unveiling opens itself beyond the efforts of the Sufi and causes him to be amazed. This type of amazement may occur when the Sufi recites the Qur'an or prays. Sometimes the Sufi feels that his serenity in his recitation or prayer is punctured by another intense serenity and it causes him to be amazed.

2. Sometimes the ecstasy of the Sufi ruins every picture and form that covers the sight of the Sufi. Then, the Sufi begins to feel everything in the horizon of union (*cem*), and eternity-before-time changes his concept of time. Finally, he observes (*müşahede*) the Real. This is another state of amazement.

3. The third type of amazement suddenly comes to the hills of the heart as inrushes and the rain of gifts. Then, the heart is fully illuminated with the light of God-closeness, and finally, perfect goodness (*ihsan*) envelops the spirit.⁵⁸⁸

Stupor (*heyman*) is the state of the Sufi which usually follows amazement. Literally, it indicates a thirst that drinking water increases instead of decreasing. It also means deep love which causes a lover to fall madly in love. As a Sufi term in the discourse of Gulen, "stupor" denotes the state in which the Sufi loses his self-control with wonder, appreciation, and spiritual pleasures because of surprising theophanies and spiritual gifts of the journey.⁵⁸⁹

Gulen examines stupor in three categories:

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 1:38.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 1:39.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 1:40.

1. In the beginning of the journey, the Sufi receives extra spiritual gifts although he thinks that he does not deserve them because of his helplessness, poverty, and insignificant value. Then, the Sufi begins to say “Is there yet more?” (Qur’an, 50.30). Finally, these bounties of God make him feel stupor.

2. Along the journey, a time may come when the Sufi begins to receive unbelievable bounties and presents because of his current sincerity, upcoming spiritual features, and goodness. At this junction of the journey, the Sufi begins to view these extraordinary spiritual occurrences with new comprehension, fresh spirit, and developed will; and then, the Sufi starts to say “O our Sustainer! Cause this our light to shine for us forever” (Qur’an, 66:8). In this level of stupor, the sight and feelings of the Sufi intersect, and he begins to experience what he used to see. In this stage, the Sufi sees the world as temporary and mortal. Then, everything changes through the theophanies of subsistence with God (*beka billah*), and the Sufi begins to see nothing other than God. In this stage, his life is the life of perfect goodness (*ihsan*).⁵⁹⁰ According to Gulen, in the states of amazement and stupor, the Sufi needs to strictly follow Muhammad (pbuh) and feel his guidance. Otherwise, extraordinary issues that occur in both states may cause him to deviate from the right path.⁵⁹¹

C. Rıza (contentment)

According to Gulen, *rıza* (contentment) is a station because the Sufi has to will and struggle to obtain it at the beginning. However, in the end, it seems like a state because it is given to the Sufi by the grace of God.⁵⁹² "Contentment" means to feel serenity when faced with the

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 1:40-41.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 1:42.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 1:149.

calamities of destiny and not to be shaken by them. It means to welcome every difficulty of life with a calm heart, although they seem painful, hard, and incomprehensible.⁵⁹³

As it is stated above, contentment is a gift of God with regards to its end, but it is a result of the Sufi's will with regards to its beginning. Therefore, the Sufi has to have deep faith, sincere and serious deeds, perfect goodness (*ihsan*), appreciation for each bounty of God, a welcoming heart for the calamities of life, and obedience for the orders of God in order to receive the gift of contentment.⁵⁹⁴

Since contentment is a very difficult station to obtain, God does not order it, but rather He mentions it on different occasions.⁵⁹⁵ For instance, in the following verse, contentment is mentioned as a station of paradise, and Muslims are encouraged to obtain it in this life: "Their Sustainer gives them the glad tiding of the grace [that follows] from Him, and of [His] goodly acceptance [*rizā*], and of the gardens which await them, full of lasting bliss" (Qur'an, 9:21).

Contentment is a station that brings serenity to the life of the Sufi in this world and in the hereafter as well. However, other stations like fear and hope affect only the life of the Sufi in this world without possessing existence in the Hereafter except through their fruits.⁵⁹⁶ Although contentment is a source of serenity in both this world and the Hereafter, the people who possess this station are not free of difficulties and calamities. They may actually be the people who face the most difficult calamities. Nevertheless, the heroes of contentment acknowledge these calamities as the mercy of God; they drink poison and digest it as sweet syrup. From Gulen's

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 148.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 1:150-151.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 1:150.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 1:151.

perspective, the calamities of the journey are the favors of God. They are the give and take of relations between the lover and the Beloved.⁵⁹⁷

Although the way of contentment is heavy and difficult, it is safe and a shortcut. Sometimes this way may take the Sufi to the emerald hills of the heart instantly. When the Sufi bears different calamities with contentment or when he travels –with deep yearning for the peaks of his dreams– and then cries since he is not able to reach their heights, God may open a way before him and take him to his dreams.⁵⁹⁸

For Gulen, the way of contentment is difficult, but if the following facts are taken to consideration, then it may be easy:

1. The human being has no right to object to his role; he is simply a figure standing before God's decisions.

2. Every calamity that the human encounters is a result of his free will. Moreover, he does not have the power to change the calamity.

3. The human being is a servant of God in all aspects. Therefore, he cannot object to His decisions.

4. If the person really loves God, then everything that comes from God should be fine for him.

5. The human being usually is not able to figure out the results of calamities. However, they produce a lot of goodness in terms of their results.

6. A Muslim means "one who is surrendered to God." Therefore, he should not feel uncomfortable because of God's operations.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 1:151.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 1:150-151.

7. To see the operations of destiny in a good way and interpret them in a good way always comforts the person and gives him serenity.

8. To show contentment toward God means that his Lord carries contentment for him.

9. To feel anger before God's operations means to open the windows and doors of the heart to Satan.

10. To feel contentment before God is to declare acceptance of His justice in His decisions.

11. The first sin was the sin of Satan, which is not accepting God's decision

12. Contentment is an elevator that takes the person to the emerald hills of the heart immediately.

13. Contentment is a spiritual rank that God will bestow unto his servants in paradise. Therefore, it is the greatest station in the sight of God.⁵⁹⁹

3. Psychological Transformation

The Sufi is a person who travels toward God. In this traveling, there are four stages: *seyr ilallah* (the journey toward God), *seyr fillah* (the journey in God), *seyr maallah* (the journey with God), and *seyr anillah* (the journey from God). Moreover, along the way, there are four selves (*nefs*) through which the Sufi experiences his psychological transformation: *nefs-i emmare* (the commanding self), *nefs-i levvame* (the blaming self), *nef-i mülheme* (the intuiting self), and *nefs-i mutmainne* (the self at peace). In this section, I will talk about four stages of the journey as well as the four transformations of the self according to Fethullah Gulen.

The first stage of the journey is *seyr ilallah*, the journey toward God. In this journey, the Sufi begins to travel from the actions of God toward His names. Then, it ends at a name that is

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 1:157-160.

the beginning point of the entification of other names. When this journey finishes, the Sufi no longer feels interested in anything except God. At this point the Sufi finds himself at the center of "passing away in God" (*fena fillah*).⁶⁰⁰

The journey toward God is the stage of seeing oneness in multiplicity through inner and outer reflection. In this journey, the Sufi senses with his heart the mystery of *ehadiyet* (undifferentiated oneness) in the light of *vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness), and it denotes God's specific present to the Sufi. The Sufi at this stage always travels from the creation to the Creator. When he observes his accomplishments, his enthusiasm increases and he finds himself in a righteous circle.⁶⁰¹ The following verse may denote this type of Sufi and journey: "Verily, they who are conscious of God bethink themselves [of Him] whenever any dark suggestion from Satan touches them, whereupon, they begin to see [things] clearly" (Qur'an, 7:201).

The second stage of the journey is *seyr fillah*, the journey in God. In this journey, the Sufi sheds the cloak of human qualities and wears the cloak of Godly qualities. He begins to reflect God's names as much as his abilities allow him to do so. He begins to act with the morality of the Qur'an. At the end of this journey, the Sufi sees the unseen and receives direct knowledge (*ilm-i ledun*) from God. This is the point where the Sufi feels the waves of "subsistence with God" (*beka billah*).

The third stage is *seyr maallah*, the journey with God. In this journey, the Sufi sees only God, knows only Him, and senses only Him. Everywhere is surrendered by the gnosis of Him. The light of God's essence ruins the Sufi's awareness of everything; and the reality of the following verse appears: "All that lives on the earth or in the heavens is bound to pass away: but forever will abide thy Sustainer's Self, full of majesty and glory" (Qur'an, 55:26-27). At this

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 2:256.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 3:43.

level, if the Sufi feels anything other than God, it becomes a burden for his heart. This is the place where all opposites disappear. This journey is also called *aynu'l-cem*, the essence of union.⁶⁰² In this "journey with God," the heart of the Sufi beats with the love of God. It is a journey of God's love. In this journey, the Sufi deeply loves God and causes others to love Him. From now on, words that do not talk about Him are meaningless. For him, every speech should begin with Him and end with Him.⁶⁰³

The fourth stage of the journey is *seyr anillah*, the "journey from God." The Sufi at this level returns to multiplicity concerned with oneness after oneness. In other words, the Sufi, after experiencing oneness, desires to enable people to experience what he experienced and to feel what he felt. His dream is to light the fire of love in the hearts of the people. This journey is the journey of returning from the Creator to the creation; and the Sufis of this journey are the heirs of prophets.⁶⁰⁴ At this horizon, the Sufi sees multiplicity in oneness and oneness in multiplicity. He combines duality in oneness. He is happy with his own union as well as with the union of the people who are guided by him. He neither falls into confusion nor does he display feigned reluctance. Instead, he always acts as a servant.⁶⁰⁵

Along the way, the self of the Sufi experiences four different psychological transformations beginning with the *nefs-i emmare*, the commanding self and ending at the *nefs-i mutmainne*, the self at peace. At the level of the commanding self, the Sufi usually is not aware of his sins. Even though he may worship and pray, he cannot control himself since his self-supervision is not developed yet. He does not know the meaning of obeying and rebelling. He

⁶⁰² Ibid., 2:257.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 2:258.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 2:258.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 2:259.

always needs to be guided by a perfect human.⁶⁰⁶ At this level, the Sufi needs to listen to the advice of good people, remember his mistakes, question himself, continue to pray, and disengage from sins in order to be saved from his mistakes.⁶⁰⁷ If the Sufi continues to do whatever he needs to do, some psychological changes will begin in his inner being. To see that even his best deeds are not sufficient and to criticize seriously even his small mistakes are the most important changes among them; and they are the signs of the Sufi's new self, *nefs-i levvame* (the blaming self).

The blaming self is a developed self to a certain degree. However, he still sometimes deviates from the road, makes mistakes, and sins. His life is mixture of good and bad. He sins and regrets each time. Each sin is followed by repentance. Moreover, he severely criticizes himself, and always feels the pain of his mistakes in his heart. The Sufi of the blaming self is a traveler of an isthmus. His thoughts come and go between his inner being and outer being. His tongue either says "There is no deity except God" or "There is not any aim save God."⁶⁰⁸

When the feeling and the sight of this Sufi meet and begin to experience what he used to see, the smallest mistakes become the biggest mistakes in his perspective; and from that time, white and black, good and bad become distinctively separated from each other. When he thinks of his sins, he feels repugnance. When he thinks of good deeds, he becomes ashamed for not being able to possess them. Because of his regret about his past and his striving for the future, God guides this self to goodness.⁶⁰⁹ "For those who strive hard in Our cause, we shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us: for, behold, God is indeed with the doers of good" (Qur'an, 29:69).

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 2:263.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 2:263.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 2:264.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 2:264.

The next level of self is *nefs-i mülheme*, the intuiting self. At this level of self, the Sufi faces God with all of his attitudes and behaviors. In everything and everywhere, what he sees is God. While his heart always says "There is no deity save God," all of his senses invoke "There is nothing that deserves worship other than God." He is a lover and his love increases every day. Every earthly aim becomes worthless. Even the pleasures of the hereafter become secondary if they are not related to God. And in the words of a person at the level of the intuiting self there is enthusiasm towards God.⁶¹⁰

The Sufi at this level eats little, drinks little, and sleeps little. He always feels wonder. The end of this level is the peak of *ilme'l-yakin* "certainty of knowledge" and beginning of *ayne'l-yakin* "certainty of vision." Until now, the Sufi used to say everything is from God, since he knew it; but now he says it because he feels it with his entire being. Moreover, at this point the Sufi begins to feel the issues of religion as a part of his nature, and this is an indication of *nefs-i mutmainne* (the self at peace).⁶¹¹

The "self at peace" is the highest level of the transformational process. At this level, there is nothing except God. The being of the Sufi is intermingled with the being of God. The Sufi says that there is no existent being except God; however, this is not an expression of *vahdet-i vucud* (the oneness of being). This is an expression which only can be understood by the people who experience it.⁶¹² Softness of the heart is one of the most significant signs of this level. Therefore, the Sufi at this level always weeps. He loves every being, embraces everything, and sees them as signs of God.⁶¹³

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 2:265.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 2:266.

⁶¹² Ibid., 2:267.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 2:267.

VI. TELEOLOGY

In the Sufi writings of Gulen, it may seem that Gulen holds more than one teleological aim. However, after a careful reading, it can be discovered that all the aims he holds are just minor aims that lead to the major one, which is to please God. In this respect, Gulen says that “We don’t have any earthly aim; we are not even related to this life. We only seek God’s contentment in comparison to which even paradises would be cheaper.”⁶¹⁴ In an interview, he also says that “Sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly I have always told my friends that we should disengage from earthly life and dedicate our lives to obtaining God’s contentment.”⁶¹⁵ Moreover, in his Sufi work *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* he says that “There is no doubt that the goal is to obtain God’s contentment.”⁶¹⁶ For him, there is no bigger station than God’s acceptance. If there were, God would grant it to His people in paradise. However, God grants nothing in the hereafter except his contentment.⁶¹⁷ “God has promised the believer, both men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss: but God’s goodly acceptance is the greatest [bliss of all] for this, this is the triumph supreme!” (Qur’an, 9:72). According to Gulen, people can even pray the prayer of need⁶¹⁸ (*hacet namaz*) to obtain God’s acceptance since it is such an important goal and need.⁶¹⁹

On the other hand, when he explains the result of Sufism, he says “Sufism establishes a connection between humans and the Creator of things and occurrences in an unknown dimension and makes humans God’s friends.”⁶²⁰ Moreover, while he explains *çile*⁶²¹ and its purpose, he

⁶¹⁴ Fethullah Gulen, *Fasıldan Fasıla*, 1:90.

⁶¹⁵ Mehmet Gündem, *Fethullah Gülenle 11 Gün*, 83.

⁶¹⁶ Fethullah Gulen, “Talib, Mürid, Salik Vasıl 1,” *Sızıntı*, 301, (2004), <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=6fa6559c7b&k=428&138288251>

⁶¹⁷ Fethullah Gulen, *Ümit Burcu*, (Istanbul: Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı Yayınları, 2005), 246-247.

⁶¹⁸ It is a special prayer that is carried out in the times of big calamities and needs.

⁶¹⁹ Fethullah Gulen, *Ümit Burcu*, 246.

⁶²⁰ Fethullah Gulen, *Ölçü Veya Yoldaki Işıklar*, (Istanbul: Nil Yayınları, 2004), 39.

says that “It is by all of these [ascetic practices and purifications] that one strives to reach [the level of] the perfect man .”⁶²²

Based on these quotations, it can be stated that Gulen’s ultimate Sufi goal is to please God and obtain his contentment. In the meantime, to have friendship with God and to become a perfect man (*insan-ı kamil*) are other lesser goals that lead to the ultimate one. Therefore, in this chapter, I will talk about two Sufi concepts from the perspective of Gulen, friendship and the perfect man.

1. Friendship

In the technical terminology of Sufism, "friendship" denotes the death of the Sufi in terms of his self and ego. It refers to his closeness to God due to this death. In this stage, the Sufi feels God’s dominion on himself.⁶²³ The Qur’an mentions the beginning point of friendship in the following verse: “God is near to those who have faith, taking them out of deep darkness into the light, whereas near unto those who are bent on denying the truth are the powers of evil that take them out of the light into darkness deep: it is they who are destined for the fire, therein to abide” (Qur’an, 2:257). The following verse indicates the endpoint of friendship: “Oh verily, they who are close to God, no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve” (Qur’an, 10:62).

At the first stairs of friendship, the friend of God may encounter many miracles. These are like candies that are given by God to encourage him. However, at the end of friendship, these

⁶²¹ The Turkish word *çile* literally means forty (from the Persian "cheheleh,"). It refers to the forty-day retreat commonly practiced by Sufis and commonly means "ordeal" in contemporary Turkish.

⁶²² Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümrii Tepeleri*, 2:244.

⁶²³ Ibid., 60.

miracles disappear and lose their importance. Therefore, in the life of companions of the Prophet, there are not that many miracles.⁶²⁴

The friend of God is called *veli*, which has two meanings. The first one is the Sufi who strives with servanthood and then reaches the friendship of God. The second meaning is the one who is taken to care of God by God. The following hadith mentions both meanings of *veli*.⁶²⁵ “God almighty declares: whoever shows hostility to My friend (*veli*), I will surely wage war on him. My servant cannot get near to Me with something more loveable to Me than fulfilling the things I have made incumbent on him. Then, My servant gets nearer and nearer to Me until I love him by fulfilling the supererogatory acts of worship. When I love him, I become his ears with which he hears, his eyes with which he sees, his hands with which he grasps, and his feet on which he walks. If he asks Me for something, I surely grant it to him, and if he seeks refuge from something, I surely take him under My protection.”⁶²⁶

In this respect, there are two aspects of friendship:

1. The careful obedience of the friend to the rules of the religions.
2. God’s care and protection of the friend.

When the Sufi loves God and follows his Prophet and the rules of the religion, he begins to feel the spiritual taste of invocation. Then, the Invoked takes the hand of the Sufi and brings him to His closeness. And finally, the Sufi begins to feel nothing but Him. He thinks of nothing but Him. He closes the doors and the windows of his heart to everything other than God. As a result, God begins to love and take care of him.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ Fethullah Gulen, *Fasıldan Fasıla*, 1:25.

⁶²⁵ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümürüt Tepeleri*, 2:62.

⁶²⁶ Muḥammad Bin Ismā’īl al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2:1318, hadith no: 2581.

⁶²⁷ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümürüt Tepeleri*, 2:63.

In this stage, the friend of God experiences passing away in God and subsistence with God; however, these experiences cannot eliminate his need for Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). On the contrary, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), his prophethood, and the Sufi's submission to him are the first sources of blessing for the Sufi.⁶²⁸ In many instances, The Qur'an mentions this important source: "Say [O Prophet]: If you love God, follow me, [and] God will love you and forgive your sins; for God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace" (Qur'an, 3:31). Moreover, the need for Prophet Muhammad is not only a need that the friend of God has. Even other prophets of God are in need of him because he is the sun of the heaven's of prophethood. As the moon takes its light from the sun, other prophets take their light from him.⁶²⁹

For Gulen, there are different methods to obtain friendship. However, practicing a restricted diet for forty days is the best of them. If a person eats, drinks, and sleeps less for forty days and nurtures his spirit through fasting and worshipping, it becomes possible for him to understand different realities and to see behind the seen.⁶³⁰

Islam is a religion that addresses both the spirit and the body of human beings. Therefore, friendship is not only the friendship of the spirit. Moreover, it means the friendship of the body too. The biggest example of this type of friendship in Islam is the ascension (*miraç*) of the Prophet because the Prophet Muhammad was elevated to the heavens with his spirit and body.⁶³¹

2. Perfect Man

The perfect man is the brightest mirror of God's actions, names, qualities, and even affairs (*şuun*) of his essence. When the perfect man is considered, Muhammad (pbuh) is the first

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 2:60-61.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 2:61.

⁶³⁰ Fethullah Gulen, *Fasıldan Fasıla*, 2:24.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 2:29.

person that comes to mind, followed by other prophets and saints.⁶³² Gulen regards the perfect man as being the essence of all of existence. Therefore, he represents the Real who is reflected in all times and all places. Moreover, he connects everything to the Real and remembers Him with the vastness of his *vicdan* and his intense nature.⁶³³

The perfect man is like the mind, heart, and spirit of the universe. Therefore, the universe becomes valuable because of the perfect man. Without him, nothing can be properly understood, knowledge cannot be transformed into gnosis, and the mystery of life cannot be sensed. The places which are not related to him are spiritless and the times that are not enlightened with him are lightless. Thus, the people who live in these places and times are unfortunate.⁶³⁴

Up to the present time, people have been directed to God through perfect men without any disorder. People have found eternal directions through them and have interpreted things and occurrences correctly because of them. Therefore, it can be said that the people who find them find God and those who see their inner being see God's theophany.⁶³⁵

Interestingly, Gulen designates the perfect man's goal as God's contentment. He always tries to help others and gain knowledge that will elevate him. Since he lives according to good morality, he always radiates goodness. He always sees beautifully, thinks beautifully, and speaks beautifully. He always thinks of God, speaks of Him, and represents Him. However, he does not seek any reward for these qualities other than God's acceptance.

If what is meant by perfection is to purify spirits, to be cleansed, to develop truly human abilities, to disregard bodily desires, to be bounded with the Real, and to be a bright mirror for the names, qualities, and affairs of God, then Muhammad (pbuh) can be considered to be the first

⁶³² Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, 2:302.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 2:302.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:303.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:303.

perfect man. He combines all of these abilities in his nature; thus, he is regarded by Muslims and especially Sufis as the pride of all humanity and the seal of prophethood.⁶³⁶ Muhammad (pbuh) is like the spirit of the whole universe. As the spirit is the source of life in the body, Muhammad (pbuh) and the revelation that he brought are the source of life for the universe. The whole universe would be dark, cold and dead if there were no Muhammad (pbuh) and his message.⁶³⁷

Being a perfect man means to have attained a very high status. However, there is one higher level above it which is called *ev edna*, "even closer." This status is a stage between the necessary Being and unnecessary being, and it is only possessed by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He possesses the highest position and reflects God's undifferentiated oneness to highest degree.⁶³⁸ Since the perfect man is the perfect mirror of God's tasks and the most comprehensive mirror of God's being, his inner being is the reflection point of all of God's names, qualities, and affairs, while his outer being is the index of all beings and occurrences. As a result, every being is represented in him and the essence of God is reflected in his heart.⁶³⁹

When the perfect man is considered in terms of his relations to beings and occurrences, he is the perfect vicegerent of God on the earth. Therefore, he is like God's eyes, ears, and hands. God sees, hears, and holds through him. The perfect man cares and embraces beings with compassion like a mother. He always looks around with love and mercy. He is a part of all social layers and protects the social body from harming factors. If there is a need, he nurtures society and becomes a clear sign of God in every behavior of his.⁶⁴⁰

There are two types of obligations for the perfect man. His first obligation is toward beings. He explains their nature of them and connects them to gnosis. His second obligation is

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 3:304.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 2:217.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 3:311.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 3:305.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 3:305.

toward humans. He cares for them, guides them to the right path, purifies their souls, cleanses them, and opens up their abilities toward the Real. He is like a compass among human beings, guiding them to the right path and making sure they do not stray from it. He not only guides people but also develops their souls towards perfection. Whoever finds the perfect man, sooner or later finds God.⁶⁴¹

The perfect man is the perfect mirror of God on the earth. Understanding the mystery of divinity depends on one's need for him. Whoever finds him understands the mystery of being. Whoever sees him sees the Real, and whoever loves him loves the Real, and whoever follows him, follows the religion of God. The one who shares the same environment with him obtains many mysteries and light which are impossible to be obtained by others.⁶⁴²

In spite of his enormous abilities the perfect man is always humble and aware of his position. He considers himself as a temporary reflection point for God's theophanies. If he has any goodness he knows that it is given to him by God as a gift. He knows that his qualifications and abilities are from God alone.. He considers himself under the context of the following verse:⁶⁴³ “[O believers!] It was not you who slew the enemy, but it was God who slew them; and it was not you who cast [O prophet!], when you did cast it; but it was God who cast it: and [He did all this] in order that He might test the believers by a goodly test of His own ordaining. Verily God is all hearing, all knowing! ” (Qur'an, 8:17). Such thoughts as these, however, never lead the perfect man to the thought of unification with God; because unification might occur between two beings. However, the perfect man does not possess real existence before God's

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 3:306.

⁶⁴² Ibid., 3:306-307.

⁶⁴³ Ibid., 3:308.

existence. Therefore, the thought of unification or oneness of the being is nothing but misguidance.⁶⁴⁴

The perfect man is aware that everything is from God. Therefore, he is careful to protect his servanthood and the fact that he is created. His accomplishments never lead him to arrogance. He always knows that he is just a mirror for the beauty of God and the beauties that he reflects do not belong to him. He is a mirror for the names, qualities and actions of God. He is a reflection point for undifferentiated oneness (*ehadiyet*). His accomplishments never drive him to deviate from the right path because he has died in terms of his self and ego but is alive in terms of his heart and soul.⁶⁴⁵

The perfect man is like the pole star in the sky that guides people along the right path. He directs people along the right path, shows them the difference between right and wrong, and broadens their perception of the world. When people share his atmosphere, they feel proximity to God, and then pass all the obstacles and reach the undifferentiated oneness of God.⁶⁴⁶ Everything has an apparent and a hidden face. The apparent face is called apparent (*zahir*), and the hidden face is called hidden (*batin*). The whole world is apparent and all metaphysical realms are hidden. The perfect man functions as a bridge between these two realms.⁶⁴⁷

The perfect man sees with God, knows with God, and holds with God; however, all of them are like mere shadows relative to the sight of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The reality of Muhammad (pbuh) is the most comprehensive reality among the realities of all perfect men. All perfect men reflect a few names of God. On the other hand, Muhammad (pbuh) reflects the

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 3:308.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 3:309.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 3:310.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 3:311.

supreme name *Allah* and this name includes all other names and qualities of God. Therefore, Muhammad (pbuh) is the real mirror of God's names, qualities and tasks.⁶⁴⁸

VI. METHODOLOGY

Religiologically, one of the most difficult aspects of Gulen's Sufism is to determine his methodology. Gulen does not tell us his method to reach God in an explicit format. Therefore, the only way to figure out his method is to carefully analyze his Sufi writings (in which he gives hints about his method) in the context of his life and personality.

One thing that we can be sure about concerning the character of Gulen's Sufi methodology is its centeredness on the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad. Gulen refers to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet a great deal throughout his writings. Moreover, he repeatedly states either in an explicit or implicit fashion that the only criterion to test the accuracy of a Sufi thought is the Qur'an and the Sunnah.⁶⁴⁹ According to him, "Real, perfected Sufis have always depended on the basic principles of the Islamic law and have based their thoughts on the Qur'an and the Sunnah. They have derived their methods from these basic sources of Islam."⁶⁵⁰ For him, Sufis should feed not only their consciousness, but even their subconsciousness with the rules of the Qur'an and the Sunnah; otherwise, they may be deceived as a result of the experiences of amazement that occur to them. Gulen states "Those who do not lead their lives in strict accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah and who do not feed their

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 3:315.

⁶⁴⁹ Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, 1:8,9,10,11,117; 2:20,21,38,40,96,152,220,242,252,260,266,268,275,302,316; 3:37,40,68,93,94,106,108,109,111,117,150,154,155,156,159,206,218,296,299.

⁶⁵⁰ Fethullah Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart I* (New Jersey: The Fountain, 2004), XX.

subconsciousness with the lights that emanate from the sun of Prophet may be deceived through the influence of these feelings [amazements] and experiences.”⁶⁵¹

Although Gulen constantly repeats two concepts, the Qur’an and the Sunnah, in his Sufi works, these two can be reduced into one, because the Sunnah, as Gulen states, is not different from the Qur’an [with regard to its overall thrust]. When Aişe, the wife of the prophet, was asked about the ethics of Muhammad (*pbuh*), she said that his ethics was the Qur’an.⁶⁵² Moreover, Sufism is the practical aspect of Islam; it is Islam which is put into practice. Similarly, Muhammad (*pbuh*) himself represents the practical aspect of the Qur’an; he is the Qur’an which is put into practice.

Additionally, there are many particular characteristics only attributed to Muhammad (*pbuh*) in the writings of Gulen. For instance, he says “Those seeking the gifts of the Almighty must certainly enter the circle of Muhammad (*pbuh*); and the lovers of the Almighty’s light must conform to the rhythm of that circle.”⁶⁵³ He also says “He [Muhammad] is the first among those sources that are people’s means of becoming guided to attain sainthood. In several verses, the Qur’an stresses exactly this point, focusing attention on that source of enlightenment and that mine of truth. For example: “[O Messenger] say [to them]: if you indeed love God, then follow me, so that God may love you and forgive your sins,” (Qur’an, 3:31).⁶⁵⁴ Moreover, Gulen asserts: “As the moon receives its light entirely from the sun, so a saint is enlightened by following the Prophet and becoming like him-- a polished mirror in which the Divine light is reflected.”⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 2:41.

⁶⁵² Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, 1:109.

⁶⁵³ Fethullah Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, 2:43.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 2:61.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 2:61.

After introducing this analogy, the issue that remains is to find the methodological characteristics of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) in the perspective of Gulen. Gulen makes a comparison between the Prophet Abraham (*pbuh*) and the Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) when he discusses the concept of *hullet* (friendship). In this comparison, Gulen talks about the characteristic differences between the two Prophets. For Gulen, the Prophet Abraham (*pbuh*) is *halilullah* (the friend of God) while Muhammad (*pbuh*) is *habibullah* (the beloved of God). Hence, the relationship between the Prophet Abraham (*pbuh*) and God is characterized by *hullet* (friendship), while the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) and God is characterized by *muhabbet* (love). Moreover, allegiance is a predominant taste and shade that goes with *hullet* (friendship) while joyful zeal and yearning are predominant tastes and shades that go with *muhabbet* (love). Additionally, gratitude is dominant in *hullet* (friendship) while sadness is dominant in *muhabbet* (love).⁶⁵⁶

As a result, it can be said that in the methodology of Gulen, who follows the Prophet Muhammad, there are two poles and their two dimensions: the pole of love with the dimension of intense joyful zeal and yearning, and the pole of sadness with the dimension of rescuing people from hellfire and spreading the word of God. Gulen clearly states that sadness in the Sufi sense is the sadness that is felt in the Sufi's heart and that moves him to spread the name of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) and the meaning of the Qur'an to every corner of the earth and every aspect of the life.⁶⁵⁷

Moreover, when the life, character, and writings of Gulen are observed, it is seen that there is a major emphasis upon love in his life. For him, Sufism is a journey that is oriented to

⁶⁵⁶ Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümürüt Tepeleri*, 3:304.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:52.

contentment and love.⁶⁵⁸ In this journey, each calamity the Sufi experiences is a favor from the Beloved.⁶⁵⁹ The foundation of Sufism is to be content with the love of God and then see the whole of being as a place of brotherhood.⁶⁶⁰ Gulen also says that “Love is the most direct and safest way to human perfection. It is difficult to attain the rank of human perfection through ways that do not contain love. Other than the way of "acknowledging one's innate helplessness, poverty, and reliance on God's Power and Riches, and one's zeal in following His way and thanksgiving," no other way to truth is equal to that of love.”⁶⁶¹ He also says “Love is a mount, bestowed upon us by God, that carries us toward the Paradise that we have lost. No one who has ridden this mount has ever been stranded on this road, although we sometimes find people who have ridden this celestial mount walking on the roadside due to some boastful words they have uttered because of their intoxication from joy. However, this is a matter between them and God.”⁶⁶²

Furthermore, when the sermons of Gulen are observed and heard, it can be easily seen that Gulen's love makes itself known to the audiences. Gulen cries in almost all of his sermons, and tears are usually considered as signs of love. Moreover, the subject of his sermon that he gave in December 17, 1989 in Sultanahmet Mosque, which is considered to be one of his main sermons, is the love of God.⁶⁶³ In another major sermon that he gave in January 28, 1990 in Şadırvan Mosque, his subject is the passionate desire that a person feels for reaching God.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 2:3.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:151.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:3.

⁶⁶¹ Fethullah Gülen, “Love,” Fethullah Gulen, <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/books/pearls.of.wisdom/a625.html> (accessed April 17, 2006).

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ Fethullah Gülen, Allah Sevgisi, 2 VCDs, December 17, 1989 in Sultanahmet Mosque, Istanbul (Istanbul: Nil Production)

⁶⁶⁴ Fethullah Gülen, Vuslat Arzusu, 2 VCDs, January 28, 1990 in Şadırvan Mosque, Izmir (Istanbul: Nil Production)

Also, a dream that Gulen narrates about himself would be another sign of Gulen's love-oriented character. In 1980, Gulen had a dream in which the chair that he was sitting on while giving his sermon seemed about to overturn; but then it did not fall and instead stood upright again. Gulen also saw in this dream that he was preaching the following verse from the chapter of Mary: "Verily, those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds will the Most Gracious endow with love," (Qur'an, 19:96). Narrating this dream, Gulen says that he felt then that there will always be love for his people on the earth.⁶⁶⁵ Of course, due to his humility, Gulen does not connect this dream to himself.

For Gulen, the Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) is the prophet of sadness (*hüzün peygamberi*) besides being the Beloved of God.⁶⁶⁶ The life and the psychological condition of Muhammad (*pbuh*) was constant sadness.⁶⁶⁷ The Qur'an clearly tells us the reason for the sadness of Muhammad (*pbuh*): "You would only, perchance, fret yourself to death, following after them, in grief, if they believe not in this Message," (Qur'an, 18:6). Another verse also has a similar meaning: "It may be that you fret your soul with grief that they do not become Believers," (Qur'an, 26:3).

The reason for Gulen's sadness is not different from the above reason. Gulen says "Every perfected believer will continue to suffer this pain according to the degree of belief, and weave the tissue of life with the "threads" of sadness on the "loom" of time. In short, one will feel sadness until the spirit of the Muhammadan Truth is breathed in all corners of the world, the sighing of Muslims and other oppressed peoples ceases, and the Divine rules are practiced in the daily lives of people. This sadness will continue until the journey through the intermediate world

⁶⁶⁵ Fethullah Gülen, "İman Hizmeti ve Beklentilerimiz," Bir Gönül İnsanı Portresi Fethullah Gülen, <http://tr.fgulen.com/a.page/eserleri/prizma/perspektif/a664.html> (accessed April 17, 2006).

⁶⁶⁶ Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümriü Tepeleri*, 1:53.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:310.

of the grave is completed, safe and sound, and the believer flies to the abode of eternal happiness and blessing without being detained by the Supreme Tribunal in the Hereafter. A believer's sorrows will never stop until the meaning of: "Praise be to God, Who has put grief away from us. Surely our Lord is All-Forgiving, Bountiful," (Qur'an, 35:34) becomes manifest."⁶⁶⁸

For him, the one who is going to spread the word of Islam should be unified with sadness. Otherwise, his talks would not influence people. Moreover, every important person in history is a person of sadness. Among them Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was the greatest one. He always felt sadness and sorrow when facing unbelief and unbelievers. Due to his deep sorrow, for many nights, he could not even sleep. For Gulen, if a person does not feel this degree of depth of sorrow and sadness when facing the situation of humanity, then he would not be a person who could spread the word and rescue people from their situation. The person who does not possess sorrow and sadness possesses nothing. The person who lost his sadness has lost everything.⁶⁶⁹

Gulen tells us the depth of his sorrow with some examples from his life. Several years ago, when Saddam Huseyin killed many *Pesmerge* partisans (the Kurdish resistance to Saddam) in Iraq, Gulen was watching the situation of these people on television. When he wanted to stand up from his chair, he could not stand up; and he back down into the chair due to his sorrow and sadness. On another occasion, when the Russian army came to Baku, Azerbaijan, Gulen saw the sad situation of the Azerbaijani people and totally fainted. He also recalls that he could not sleep for many nights and walked on his balcony until morning due to his sorrow that he felt for the

⁶⁶⁸ Fethullah Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, 2: 29.

⁶⁶⁹ Fethullah Gülen, *Fasildan Fasila*, 2: 64.

welfare of humanity.⁶⁷⁰ It should also be noted that one of his main sermons is about the holy sadness that Muslims should feel for the welfare of humanity.⁶⁷¹

In discussing love and sadness as the two primary concepts of Gulen's Sufi methodology, I would like to explain his Sufi understanding of their meaning . For Gulen, love is the deep and passionate desire for God, and it cannot be controlled. Love demands obedience to God in every situation, whether this situation would be apparent or hidden. Love necessitates seeking the Beloved's will and desire in every issue. True love requires turning to the Beloved with the whole of one's heart and then always being with Him. For Gulen, the lover does not feel anything but his Beloved. Moreover, he does not possess any personal desire or aim other than the desires and aims of his Beloved. His heart is always busy with the love of God. His imagination travels only in His magical climate. His feelings always receive different messages and favors from the Beloved, and then his will becomes a hero with these messages. The heart of the lover always beats for the blessed meeting.⁶⁷²

Love is the lover's wings; and he flies with these wings away from his carnal concerns and desires toward the blessed ones. Both his inner and outer beings are bound to their duties before God; and his heart is occupied only with the vision of the Beloved. His being is burned with the light of the essence of God; and he is drunk with the beauty and the mystery of these lights. His life is programmed to please his Beloved. Therefore, he walks at the order of his Beloved when he walks; and he stops at the order of God when he stops. He talks by means of the breezes that come from the Beloved; and he stops talking for the sake of the Beloved. He is sometimes for God, sometimes with Him, and sometimes from Him.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁷¹ Fethullah Gülen, *Mukaddes Hüzün*, 2 VCDs, June 24, 1990 in Hisar Mosque, Izmir (Istanbul: Nil Production).

⁶⁷² Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümürü Tepeleri*, 1:201.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 201-202.

For Gulen, love has two aspects. The first aspect is the outer aspect of love which is to seek the contentment of the Beloved in every apparent situation. The second aspect of love is its inner aspect. In this aspect, the lover seeks the contentment of God not only in his outer behaviors, but also in his inner feelings. The love that is sought in Sufism is the inner aspect of love. In this type of love, the lover closes the doors of his inner being to everything except God. For him, even the taste of love, the benefits of love, and the spiritual pleasures of love do not deserve to be sought. All of them are other than the Beloved.⁶⁷⁴

From another perspective, Gulen talks about three types of love: the love of ordinary people, the love of distinguished people, and the love of the most advanced people. The love of ordinary people is unstable. They only can dream and hope, sometimes seeing the hints, the signs, and the clues of Muhammadan reality and sometimes missing them, but never really experiencing it. There is always a distance between them and the reality.⁶⁷⁵

The love of distinguished people is real love. These lovers live in the shadow of the Qur'an; and they represent the ethics of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) in all aspects of their life. When they represent these ethics, they do not seek any material or immaterial reward. If they can really represent Muhammadan ethics, they regard themselves as being very fortunate. When they succeed in this representation, they their humility increases. If they make any mistakes and cannot represent these ethics in the perfect sense, they turn inward and severely question themselves.⁶⁷⁶

The third type of love is the love of the most advanced people. These lovers are the people who have become effaced in Muhammadan ethics. Therefore, they live with the Beloved and feel the being through His love. Wherever they look, they see Him; and whenever they

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 202.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 203.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 203.

breathe, they breathe Him. They are always filled out and emptied by the love of God; and their life circles within this sanctuary of love.. The result of their love is their realization of the ultimate reality of being and their interaction with what is beyond being.⁶⁷⁷

For Gulen, love is the reason for the creation. God loved to be loved; therefore, He created being. God knew in advance that people who are aware of the true Reality would love His names, attributes, and essence. Therefore, he created the universe. First, God loved being and loved to be loved by being, so He created it. Second, being loved God. As a result, love is the main type of relationship between the Creator and the creation.⁶⁷⁸

For Gulen, love is the final point in terms of reaching God. For the lover of God, either there is still one step ahead or not. Love emanates from the essence of God; it is the first theophany of God. Therefore, the lovers who fly with the wings of love directly reach God and feel amazement. Others need to pass the isthmus of the beings and the names.⁶⁷⁹

As noted above, for Gulen, joyful zeal and yearning are the feelings that appear as a dimension of love of God in the heart of the lover. It is joy, happiness, excitement, and longing that are felt upon seeing the beauty of the Beloved. It is also described as fire that burns all the enthusiasms, tendencies, remembrances, and desires other than for God's love. Love is the source of joyful zeal and yearning, while joyful zeal and yearning are the result of love. The Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) is the most advanced lover; and his love always appears in the form of joyful zeal; and his joyful zeal always appears in the horizon of yearning.⁶⁸⁰

There are two types of joyful zeal and yearning. The first one emanates from the sadness of separation that comes after the union of the Beloved. The second one emanates from the

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 203-204.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 205.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 206.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 209.

sadness of not being able to encompass the Beloved. The lover sees and feels the Beloved; however, he cannot really encompass Him. He burns with the love of the Beloved; however, he is not allowed to go forward even one more step; and this passionate desire results in the joyful zeal and yearning in the soul of the lover.⁶⁸¹

The lover is the happiest and the saddest person in the world. When he is excited with the idea of union with his Beloved, he could refuse even paradise and choose to be with Him instead. In this case, there can be no happier person than him. On the other hand, when he is burning with the fire of separation, even the rivers of the paradise could not extinguish his burns. In this case, there can be no any person sadder than him.⁶⁸²

Another feeling that closes the doors of human heart to everything other than God is sadness. Sadness is the sorrow that the Sufi feels due to his responsibilities, duties, and goals. The Sufi loves Muhammad (*pbuh*), and he will remain sad until Muhammad is loved by all people. The Sufi lives according to the Qur'an and its enlightened climate. Thus, he is sad until all the people feel the beauty that he feels. The biggest concern of the Sufi is to pass the isthmus of the grave and go to paradise. He also thinks that this concern is the biggest concern of humanity. Therefore, he will remain sorrowful until everybody goes to paradise. Basically, sadness is the feeling that the Sufi will always feel in during his life.⁶⁸³

Sadness is a Sufi concept that can make the life of the Sufi blessed and fruitful. The life of a person is short, but his desires are endless. Therefore, every Sufi or every person needs to do a lot in order to gain his desires like paradise, eternity, as well as material and immaterial bounties. In this regard, sadness is like potion that transforms the spiritual worth of a few deeds into what a multitude of good deeds would be worth. Sadness transforms a short life into a long

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 210.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 211.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 52.

one; sins into good deeds; and a drop into a sea. Every sickness, every difficulty, and every calamity that brings sorrow and sadness to the life of a Sufi or a person is an opportunity to bless that life and make it fruitful.⁶⁸⁴

Sadness is like an atmosphere for the heart. It comes to the heart and covers it completely; and then it does not let any feeling which could harm the spirituality of the heart come in. It is also an trainer for the self. Sometimes a short period of sadness and sorrow trains the self just as if it had completed a forty day period of repentance and austerity. Similarly, a short period of sadness at times might be more blessed than a forty day period of repentance. God does not look at the physical appearance of people; but He does look at their hearts, especially at saddened ones.⁶⁸⁵

The first prophet, the father of humanity, the Prophet Adam was the father of sadness. When he came to the earth, he came with sadness of his mistake, and separation from the paradise and the Lord. He came with sadness and always felt sadness in his life. The Prophet Noah lived his life in the environment of sadness. From his people to his own son, there were a lot of reasons for sorrow and sadness in his life. The life of the Prophet Abraham was a life destined for sadness. His tests were always against the rules of reason; and these tests were always a source of sadness in his life. In spite of the sadness of all of these prophets, the sadness of the last prophet, the Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*), was so profound that he was named the Prophet of sadness.⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 56.

C. A RELIGIOLOGICAL COMPARISON OF NURSI AND GULEN

Before comparing Nursi and Gulen from the perspective of the religious categories, I would like to discuss their views and comments about Sufism in general. Nursi clearly states that his way is not Sufism, and his movement is not a Sufi order. Moreover, he says that people can go to paradise without Sufism, but they cannot go there without faith. Sufism is like fruit, while the way of reality (*hakikat*) (which is what he called his path), is like bread. Again, people can live without fruit, but they cannot live without bread and vital nutrition.⁶⁸⁷

For Nursi, the biggest problem facing the Turkish people was disbelief. In one of his unveilings, Nursi envisioned the terrible future situations of the girls who were dancing in the yard of Eskisekir High School. He envisioned that the most of them were destined to be punished in their graves and that the rest of them would spend the last years of their lives in deep sorrow and in miserable conditions. For him, the reason for this terrible situation was disbelief.⁶⁸⁸ Moreover, he said that in the past, disbelief emerged from ignorance. However, in his time, disbelief was a product of knowledge. People were using science to deny God and spirituality. Therefore, in his time (as well as today, from the perspective of his followers) there is a great need to fight against disbelief with the knowledge of the Qur'an and the way of Reality. For Nursi, Sufism is not the tool for opposing today's problems. If the most famous Shaykhs of the past like Geylani, Naksibendi, and Imam Rabbani (al-Sirhindi) were living in the time of Nursi, he asserted that they would follow the way of Nursi and leave aside Sufism. They would work with their all power to strengthen Islamic belief.⁶⁸⁹ In this vein, Mehmet Kırkncı,

⁶⁸⁷ Said Nursi, *Mektubat* (İstanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 1991), 23.

⁶⁸⁸ Said Nursi, *Asayî Musa* (İstanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 1984), 16.

⁶⁸⁹ Said Nursi, *Mektubat*, 23.

one of Nursi's famous followers, asserted that Nursi believed that the realities of Islam needed to be introduced to people of his time without the isthmus or intermediary of a Sufi order.⁶⁹⁰

Furthermore, according to Nursi, the aim of Sufism is to grasp the realities of Islamic faith. In other words, Sufism seeks to develop the faith of Sufis. However, Nursi's "way of reality" is focused on enabling the person to obtain developed faith in a more concise and superior way. In the past, people used to obtain these high levels of faith in forty days or even as much as several years. Yet Nursi contended that his "way of Reality" produced this level of faith in forty minutes. Therefore, this eliminated the need to deal with Sufism.⁶⁹¹

For Nursi, the way of Sufism, in many ways, depends on imagination. However, using the imagination in excess is not appropriate for the way of reality. For instance, in the way of Sufism, when a Sufi makes *rabita* (detaching yourself from earthly desires by thinking and contemplating one's own death) he imagines himself as if he were dead although he is not.⁶⁹² However, in the way of reality, the person knows with great certainty that some day he will die. By having this knowledge, the person travels to the time of his death and sees his dead body. In this type of *rabita*, the person only deals with the realities of the life and not with imagination.⁶⁹³

Although the way of Sufism is intriguing, by the same token, it can be dangerous. It is intriguing because along the way, the Sufi is repeatedly favored by God in different ways. On the other hand, it is dangerous because if the Sufi cannot overcome his ego and carnal desires, he can easily forget his servanthood and claim to possess a high spiritual position. However, the main and the never changing position of a human being before his Lord is servanthood. For Nursi,

⁶⁹⁰ Mehmet Kırkinci, *Bediüzzaman ve Tasavvuf* (Erzurum: Ekev Yayınları, 1988), 120.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 22-23.

⁶⁹² *Rabita* as it is most commonly understood today (in contrast to Nursi's presentation of it), however, is visualizing and sensing one's connection with one's shaykh, the shaykhs of one's lineage, or with the great saints of Sufism.

⁶⁹³ Said Nursi, *Lemalar*, 163.

leaving aside servanthood and claiming to possess a high spiritual position is the biggest mistake that a person can make; and, he asserted, the way of Sufism is open to that type of mistake.⁶⁹⁴

Additionally, the most common types of Sufism are the ways of *vahdeti vücud* (the oneness of existence) and *vahdeti şuhud* (the oneness of witnessing). In the popular understanding of the oneness of the existence, the Sufi believes that there is no existence except God. From the perspective of the doctrine of the "oneness of witnessing," the Sufi believes that there is nothing seen in existence except God. For Nursi, both these types of Sufism are true to a certain degree because God's existence is so dominant that one may ignore the existence of creatures to a certain degree. However, it does not mean that there is nothing in existence other than God. For Nursi, God's Names are real, and one of His Names is the Real. Therefore, the reflections of God's names also are real. Moreover, one of the essential principles of Islamic faith, believing in the hereafter, necessitates that the existence of creatures is real. If this were not the case, there could be no concept of the hereafter.⁶⁹⁵

Aside from these criticisms, Nursi made several supporting statements in favor of Sufism. For him, Sufism enables people to experience the realities of Islamic faith in their hearts. Therefore, Sufism itself is evidence for the truth of Islam because Sufism tests the realities of the Islamic faith in practical life. Through Sufism, the theoretical realities of Islam are practiced. Sufism is a way of spiritual development through the practice of Islamic realities. As a result, in spite of his criticisms, he contended that there could be no justifiable reason to deny Sufism.⁶⁹⁶

Moreover, Sufism is a way for people to save their belief in the time of the pressure of disbelief. People who follow Sufi orders feel great admiration for their shaykhs and the friends of

⁶⁹⁴ Said Nursi, *Mektubat*, 446-448.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 448-449.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 444-445.

God. Through that admiration and love, they are able to save and maintain their belief. They may commit major sins, but they do not lose their faith.⁶⁹⁷

It seems that Nursi's objections to Sufism can be summarized in his famous quote: "The time is not the time of a Sufi order [i.e. Sufism], but it is the time of rescuing [people's] faith."⁶⁹⁸ Nursi's primary concern of was not whether Sufism was right or wrong, rather it was the needs of his time and the best method to fulfill those needs. Of course, for Nursi, this best method is not Sufism, but what he called the "way of reality."

It is certain that Nursi was really concerned about and even partial to his time. He regarded himself as the person devoted to solving the problems of his time. In a sense, he felt that he was sent to earth for that purpose. He clearly stated that "We are granted with the mission of giving solutions (*fetva*) in the sciences of faith."⁶⁹⁹ He also said that "The blessed service of faith and the Qur'an is loaded upon our shoulders as a result of God's Grace."⁷⁰⁰

Another reason behind Nursi's criticism of Sufism is that in the time of Nursi, Sufi orders were regarded as illegal by the law. Moreover, Nursi was accused by his opponents of being a Sheikh, and his movement was accused of being a Sufi order. The law against the Sufi orders was a weapon in the hands of these people to use against Nursi. Nursi clearly stated that such people were trying to liken the Nursi movement to Sufi orders and especially to the Nakşibendi order, so that they could block the spread of the movement.⁷⁰¹ Due to these accusations, Nursi had to put distance between his way and Sufism, between his movement and Sufi orders.

In the view of Fethullah Gulen, Nursi was not against Sufism. For Gulen, if the essence of *Risale-i Nur*, the writings of Nursi, is examined, it will be seen that it talks about the spiritual

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 445.

⁶⁹⁸ Said Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, 29.

⁶⁹⁹ Said Nursi, *Mektubat*, 426.

⁷⁰⁰ Said Nursi, *Lemalar*, 158.

⁷⁰¹ Said Nursi, *Şualar*, 302.

life of Islam, which is Sufism. Moreover, for Gulen, Nursi cannot be considered to be against Sufism, since he only criticized the dangerous parts of it. Gulen also says that one of the reasons for the confusion of people in positioning Nursi with regard to Sufism is ignorance about the difference between Sufism and a Sufi order. For Gulen, a Sufi order can always be a subject of criticism; and the criticism of a Sufi order then results in the criticism of Sufism.⁷⁰²

On the other hand, the standpoint of Gulen with regard to Sufism is very clear. Gulen considers Sufism to be one the main sources of the Turkish-Muslim cultural heritage. He regards Sufism as a vast ocean of knowledge and gnosis, the depths to which neither the philosophy of West nor the mysticism of the East can reach.⁷⁰³ He also says “Sufism is the soul of Islam. Islam cannot be thought of without Sufism.”⁷⁰⁴ For him, the sources of Sufism are the Qur’an and the Sunnah; and Sufi thought consists of the spiritual opinions that are extracted from the Qur’an and the Sunnah.⁷⁰⁵

The standpoint of Gulen with regard to Nursi’s criticisms about the dangerous character of Sufism revolves around the Sufi concept of *temkin*, self-possession. For Gulen, self-possession involves becoming deeper in straightforwardness and gaining stability in the attainment of contentment and peacefulness.⁷⁰⁶ It is the healthiest way to obtain God’s resignation.⁷⁰⁷ The goodly manner of Sufism, for Gulen, is to decorate closeness of God with self-possession and to avoid excessive claims and reckless or casual speech (*şatahat*) or behavior incompatible with the rules of the Qur’an and the Sunnah.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰² Eyüp Can, *Ufuk Turu*, 95-96.

⁷⁰³ Fethullah Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru* (İstanbul: Nil Yayınları, 2005), 102.

⁷⁰⁴ Fethullah Gülen, *Ölçü Veya Yoldaki Işıklar*, 39.

⁷⁰⁵ Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri*, 1:8.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:108.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:2.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:13.

The interesting part of Gulen's Sufism is that Gulen keeps Sufism within the scope of his personal life. In his daily life, speeches, writings, and poems, the influences of Sufism are very apparent. The Gulen movement, however, is not a Sufi order. Moreover, Sufism is not a central issue in the movement. The followers of Gulen are unconsciously and indirectly educated with Sufi terms, thoughts, and feelings by Gulen. Nevertheless, neither the followers nor Gulen elevate Sufism to the level of a central issue.

In comparing the thoughts of Nursi and Gulen about Sufism in general, I would like to compare their thoughts along the lines of the religiological categories.

I. EPISTEMOLOGY

Nursi and Gulen have the same epistemology in terms of their main structure. For Nursi, there are four main sources of gnosis, and two of them are the Qur'an and Muhammad. For Gulen, the Qur'an and Muhammad (*pbuh*) are also the main sources of knowledge. Gulen says "Any knowledge one finds in one's heart or conscience which has not been filtered through these two pure sources is not reliable. It can not be binding knowledge for either the individuals themselves or others, it can not be considered as authentic, sound knowledge."⁷⁰⁹

Moreover, both of them accept the validity of unveiled knowledge as long as the content of it is not against the Qur'an and the Sunnah. However, the main difference between the two in terms of unveiled knowledge is whether they will express the unveiled knowledge that they obtained as being unveiled knowledge or not. Nursi neither called himself as a Sufi nor his methodology Sufism; however, he repeatedly states in *Risale-i Nur* that he received unveilings, which in Sufism is the main method of obtaining knowledge. In different parts of his works, he used a number of concepts and phrases for these unveilings, terms such as *ilham* (inspiration),

⁷⁰⁹ Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümrit Tepeleri*, 2:21.

sünühat (accesses), *hads* (spiritual analogy), *tuluat* (offshoots), *tahattur* (remembering), *yazdırıldı* (I was made to write), and *kalbe geldi* (it came to the heart). Moreover, although Nursi used these concepts and phrases to signify the nature of knowledge, he did not describe these concepts and phrases in detail.

On the other hand, although Gulen mentions his sympathy towards Sufism on many occasions, he writes about the key concepts of Sufism and discusses different types of unveilings like unveiled knowledge (*mukaşefe*), direct knowledge (*ilm-i ledün*), wisdom, certainty, and gnosis in his Sufi works, yet he does not state that he receives unveilings. Nevertheless, it would be unrealistic to conclude that Gulen has not received any unveilings. Rather, it seems that Gulen's approach is not to refer to his knowledge as forms of unveiled knowledge, in spite of the fact that he has received such knowledge through different types of unveilings. Most likely, his humility leads him to act in that manner.

Similarly, Nursi's reason for mentioning his revelations as unveiled knowledge is not in support of his arrogance or ego, rather it reflects the conditions in which he lived. Nursi lived in a time when disbelief was very common and when people were confused about religion and the existing Sufi orders. At that time, Nursi was aware of his abilities and knew what he could do for his religion. Therefore, he chose to mention his unveilings as unveilings in order to attract the attention of his people. This approach was his conscious methodology.

The most interesting epistemological difference between Nursi and Gulen is their position in regard to conscience (*vicdan*). Nursi mentions conscience as one of the four major proofs of God in the works of the "old Said" and explains it in a few paragraphs. In contrast, in the works of the "new Said," he reduces these four proofs to three and excludes conscience. On the other hand, conscience is one of the key concepts in the Sufi work of Gulen, *The Emerald*

Hills of The Heart. Gulen explains its nature by breaking it into four faculties: will, lordly ability (*latife-i rabbaniye*), intellect, and senses. Moreover, his whole Sufi work can be regarded as the elaboration of conscience, because Sufism is the systematic voicing of the feelings of conscience. If Gulen's Sufism is seen as the continuation of Nursi's way of reality, it can be said that what Gulen does in his Sufi work is to elaborate Nursi's fourth proof of God, which is conscience.

The last major epistemological difference between Nursi and Gulen (with regard to Sufism) is their approach to the concept of gnosis. For Nursi, the result of gnosis is the love of God, and the result of the love of God is spiritual pleasures.⁷¹⁰ Gnosis and the love of God cannot be considered without spiritual pleasures. On the other hand, although Gulen does not deny the dimension of the spiritual pleasures for gnosis, he heavily emphasizes that the station of gnosis is the station of wonder, utter astonishment, and awe.⁷¹¹ He also says that self-possession, steadfastness, seriousness, profundity, and resolution are the clearest and most important signs of gnosis.⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ Said Nursi, *Mektubat*, 222,450.

⁷¹¹ Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümürüt Tepeleri*, 2:145.

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 2:147.

II. ONTOLOGY

The ontological differences between the thought of Nursi and Gulen are centered on their interest in ontological realms and their approach to the concepts of *ehadiyet* (undifferentiated oneness) and *vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness). In the writings of the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi's main interest is to read or be aware of the reflections of God upon the visible realm and to see God's different names and qualities in the mirror of multiplicity. On the other hand, Gulen, as an author of Sufism, tends to deal more with the invisible realms and God's essence rather than the visible realm and God's names and attributes.

According to Nursi, the universe, as the visible realm, is one of the four main sources of gnosis. People mistakenly deny God's existence, Names, and Attributes by depending on science. However, the universe is the visible mirror of God, and sciences are the tongues that recite the reflections of God. The universe is like a big Qur'an, and every being in it is a verse. Moreover, it is not only a book that describes God, but it is also a servant who praises God with His different Names and Attributes.⁷¹³

In this regard, Nursi stated "If you want to observe these elevated truths up close, go and ask a stormy sea or the quaking earth: "What are you saying?" You will hear that they are saying: "O Glorious One! O Glorious One! O One of Might, All-Compelling!" Then ask the small animals and their young being raised with kindness and compassion in the sea and on the land: "What are you saying?" For sure they will say: "O Beauteous One! O Beauteous One! O Most Compassionate and Merciful One!" Then listen to the skies; they say: "O Glorious One of Beauty!" And give your ear to the earth; it says: "O Beauteous One of Glory!" Listen carefully to the animals; they are saying: "O Most Merciful One! O Provider!" And ask the spring; you will

⁷¹³ Said Nursi, *Sözler*, 429.

hear many Names like: "O Gentle One! O Most Merciful One! O Most Compassionate One! O Most Generous One! O Gracious One! O Benevolent One! O Giver of Forms! O Giver of Light! O Bestower! O Adorner!" And ask a human being who is a true human, and see how he recites all the Most Beautiful Names and how they are written on his forehead."⁷¹⁴

On the other hand, in the Sufi works of Gulen, the universe and the reflections of God on it are not his main concern. Gulen does not even seek to prove God's names. Gulen talks to audiences who already believe in God's names and who already read their reflections upon and within the universe. Therefore, one does not find in the Sufi writings of Gulen paragraphs similar to the above paragraph written by Nursi. Nevertheless, the descriptions of the invisible realms and related subjects like *taayyünat (entifications)*, *âyân-i sabite* and *alem-i misal (immutable entities and the world of images)*, *levh-i mahfuz* and *levh-i mahv u isbat (the well-guarded tablet and the tablet of effacement and confirmation)*, *âlem-i lâhut (the world of divinity)*, *âlem-i rahamut (the opening world for the mercifulness and beneficence of God)*, *âlem-i ceberut (the world of grandeur)*, and *âlem-i melekut (the world of angelic beings)* can be seen in the Sufi works of Gulen. Moreover, the ways to reach God's essence like love, intense love, joyful zeal, and yearning are the subjects that interest Gulen.

The other main ontological difference between Nursi and Gulen is their interpretation of undifferentiated oneness and differentiated oneness. For Nursi, undifferentiated oneness refers to beauty while differentiated oneness refers to grandeur.⁷¹⁵ Nevertheless, for Gulen, undifferentiated oneness primarily looks at divinity and secondarily at God's qualities and names. Therefore, grandeur is the dominant tint of undifferentiated oneness. On the other hand,

⁷¹⁴ Said Nursi, "The Twenty-Fourth Word," *Risale-i Nur*, http://www.ayetulkubra.com/rnkdiller/eng/english_word.htm (accessed April 20, 2006).

⁷¹⁵ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur K ülliyatı*, 2:1353.

differentiated oneness primarily looks at qualities and names and secondarily at divinity; thus, its dominant tint is beauty.⁷¹⁶

III. ANTHROPOLOGY

With regard to philosophical anthropology, there is not a major difference between Nursi and Gulen. For both of them, a human being is both the servant and the vicegerent of God. As God says in the Qur'an, the purpose of human creation is his servanthood: "I have not created the *jinn* and humans to any end other than that they should worship me" (Qur'an, 51:56). Moreover, this servanthood is a means to actualize human vicegerency. In other words, a better servant is a better vicegerent.⁷¹⁷

Moreover, for both scholars, a human being is a microcosm. For Nursi, man as a human being is the fruit of the world. He is the most comprehensive, most wondrous, most helpless, and most subtle miracle of God's Power.⁷¹⁸ He is the microcosmic index of all being despite his minute body. He contains the keys to all the treasuries of mercy and the mirrors of all the Divine Names.⁷¹⁹ He is the fruit of the creation tree and the seed of the earth (which is the heart of the universe despite its smallness and lowliness in relation to the heavens). Moreover, he is a microcosmic index representing most of the species and spaces of the universe. He is like a drop filtered from the whole universe with an extremely fine balance.⁷²⁰ Similarly, for Gulen, a human being is the most comprehensive mirror for the reflection of God's qualities, names, and actions. Therefore, he is the most beautiful fruit of the tree of existence, the essence of the whole universe, and the equivalent of the whole of creation in terms of his inner being. He is an ocean

⁷¹⁶ Fethullah Gulen, *Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri*, 3:132-136.

⁷¹⁷ Said Nursi, *Sözler*, 321; Fethullah Gulen, *Işığın Görüldüğü Ufuk*, 125.

⁷¹⁸ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 1:153.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:28.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:122.

even though he seems to be a droplet, and he is the most beautiful poem of creation ever composed, though he is like a single letter.⁷²¹

On the other hand, there are two anthropological differences between the thoughts of Nursi and Gulen. These differences are the approach of Nursi regarding *fena filihvan* (passing away in the brothers) in contrast to Gulen's *fena fişseyh* (passing away in the sheikh) and Nursi's concept of *şahs-ı manevi* (corporate personality) in contrast to Gulen's *insan-ı kamil* (perfect man).

Nursi is not a sheikh and his movement is not a Sufi order. Therefore, Nursi says that there can be no concept such as the Sufi concept *fena fişseyh* (passing away in the sheikh). However, there is a reflection of this concept in Nursi's movement, and it is called *fena filihvan*, "passing away in the brothers." Nursi sees his movement as the body of a single human being, and each member of the movement as an organ of this giant body. As the organs of a human being do not criticize the other organs, but work with them and help to them, each member of the movement should work with the other members and help them. In order to actualize this union and harmony, members of the movement should pass away from their personal desires and successes and resurrect in the desires and successes of other members. This is called *fena filihvan*, passing away in the brothers.⁷²²

When the members of the movement pass away in their brothers, they constitute *şahs-ı manevi* (corporate personality). This corporate personality is the equivalent of the perfect man in Sufism. All the members of the movement work together and gain the position of the perfect man together. In this type of perfect man, each member of the corporate personality gains the

⁷²¹ Fethullah Gulen, *Işığın Görüldüğü Ufuk*, 29.

⁷²² Said Nursi, *Lemalar*, 159-163.

spiritual reward of the whole body. In other words, in this system, each member shares the spiritual reward of his other brothers without decreasing their spiritual reward.⁷²³

On his part, Gulen does not deny these two concepts. In fact, he uses them in his relation to his followers. However, he adds them the Sufi concepts of *fena fişşeyh* (passing away in the sheikh) and *insan-ı kamil* (perfect man). In this regard, Gulen aims to elevate each member of the movement to the level of perfect man in addition to actualizing the perfect condition of *şahs-ı manevi* (corporate personality).

IV. PSYCHOLOGY

The thoughts of Nursi about psychology are not in the form of classical Sufism. For instance, although Nursi discusses the psychological transformation of a person, he does not discuss it in the classical Sufi sense. Moreover, he does not express his thoughts about the Sufi psychological terms "state" and "station." On the other hand, his thoughts about the ego (*ene*) are completely unique and original. Therefore, with regard to these psychological issues, Nursi does not really give us a chance for a comparison.

Despite these differences, Nursi and Gulen can be the subject for a comparison in terms of their thoughts about the psychological transformation of a person and *tahdis-i nimet* (mentioning God's bounties and grace). In terms of psychological transformation, Nursi follows four verses of the Qur'an.

1. "Do not consider yourselves pure," (Qur'an, 53:32).

2. "Be not like those who are oblivious of God, and whom He therefore causes to be oblivious of [what is good for] their own selves: [for] it is they, they who are truly deprived," (Qur'an, 59:19).

⁷²³ Ibid., 164.

3. “Whatever good happens to you is from God and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself,” (Qur’an, 4:79).

4. The fourth step is based on the Qur’anic verse⁷²⁴ “Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self,” (Qur’an, 28:88).

From these four verses of the Qur’an he extracts four steps:

1. Do not think of yourself as purified from mistakes, deficiencies, and sins.

2. Do not forget yourself in the times of criticisms, difficulties, unpleasant issues, and calamities. For instance, if you are reminded about the fact of death, do not think that this is only for others, and that it excludes you. Moreover, do not reflect on yourself in the times of rewards and pleasant issues.

3. Think of yourself as the source of all deficiencies and mistakes and think of God as the source of all the goodness and beauty.

4. Do not think of yourself as self-sufficient and self-existing.⁷²⁵

For Nursi, these are the four steps of psychological transformation. They are only four; according to Nursi, which are less than the seven steps of transformation generally accepted in Sufism.⁷²⁶

As it is seen, Nursi’s way for psychological transformation is the combination of three general rules about the self and one rule about how to act in the times of pleasant and unpleasant issues. Beside these general rules, Nursi does not tell us the level of self to which we will be elevated after practicing these rules. Moreover, he does not even speak and elaborate about different levels of self like *nefs-i emmare* (the commanding self), *nefs-i levvame* (the blaming self), *nefs-i mülheme* (intuited self), *nefs-i raziye* (acceding self), *nefs-i marziyye* (acceded self),

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 211.

⁷²⁵ Said Nursi, *Sözler*, 476-478.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., 476.

and *nefs-i zekiyye* (pure self). On the other hand, Gulen does talk about these levels of self, their feelings, deficiencies, traps, and ways for purification.

The second difference regarding psychological transformation between Nursi and Gulen is their approach to the concept of *tahdis-i nimet* (mentioning God's bounties and grace). Nursi mentions God's bounties that are given to him or to the *Risale-i Nur* in many cases. There are two reasons for this: the first is that Nursi uses *tahdis-i nimet* in order to defend and promote the service of faith and the Qur'an. This is solely because the circumstances in which he lived were not in favor of him. The second is that he sees *tahdis-i nimet* as a dimension of his gratitude. We already know that gratitude is one of the six concepts of his spiritual methodology.

On the other hand, although Gulen respects these ideas and behaviors, he invents another concept which is *kelamı nefsi ile tahdisi nimet*, mentioning God's bounties to you, not to others. For Gulen, *tahdisi nimet* is also a part of gratitude, but it is dangerous. A person may work for his ego by thinking that he does not do anything, but *tahdisi nimet*. On the other side, there is no danger in mentioning God's bounties to you, and this type of *tahdisi nimet* is also gratitude.⁷²⁷

V. TELEOLOGY

For Nursi, the purpose of life is to believe in God. He says "You should certainly know that the highest aim of genesis and the most elevated result of human nature (*fitrat*) are to believe in God."⁷²⁸ Moreover, Nursi thinks that "The foundation and the purpose of [*Risale-i*] *Nur* are strong belief and the realities of the Qur'an."⁷²⁹ In order to actualize this teleological aim, Nursi

⁷²⁷ Fethullah Gülen, "Talib, Mürid, Salik, Vasil 1," *Sızıntı*, 26, 301 (2004)
<http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konu.sizinti?SIN=25abe94b1e&k=428&954872533>

⁷²⁸ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 1:448.

⁷²⁹ Said Nursi, *Şualar*, 325.

discusses the pillars of Islamic faith through out *Risale-i Nur*. The Universe, the Qur'an, and Muhammad (*pbuh*) are the source of Nursi to discuss and prove the pillars of the faith.

In the view of Nursi, the aim of Sufism is also to strengthen and elaborate the realities of Islamic faith. By depending on two statements of Imam Rabbani, Nursi states that the ultimate purpose of all the Sufi orders is the clarification and elaboration of the realities of the faith. Therefore, there is no any teleological contradiction between the way of Nursi and Sufism. However, for Nursi, his way is better and even shorter than the way of Sufism since the *Risale-i Nur* can provides the spiritual results of Sufism in just forty minutes.⁷³⁰

On the other hand, Gulen says that the benefit of Sufism is to develop angelic qualities and to elevate the superficial and primitive faith to higher levels by tasting and experiencing it with unveilings and spiritual pleasures. Moreover, the foundation of Sufism is to reach to the real oneness by practicing different theoretical and practical ways.⁷³¹ Therefore, there is no difference between Nursi and Gulen in terms of their teleology.

However, there is little difference between them in terms of how to actualize this aim. For Nursi, the way is to read *Risale-i Nur*, contemplate on the realities of faith, read the book of universe and confirm its meanings with the Qur'an. In this regard, Nursi does not really focus on personal perfection and friendship of God. For him, the movement as a whole body is a big perfect man and holds deep friendship. Moreover, every member of the movement benefits from this perfection and deep friendship. Therefore, in a sense, every member of the movement is a perfect man and a friend of God.

⁷³⁰ Said Nursi, *Mektubat*, 22-23.

⁷³¹ Fethullah Gülen, "Tasavvuf," Bir Gönül İnsanı Portresi Fethullah Gülen, <http://tr.fgulen.com/a.page/eserleri/kalbin.zumrut.tepeleri/kalbin.zumrut.tepeleri.1/a2269.html> (accessed April 21, 2006)

Gülen accepts this interpretation of Nursi. However, his focus is to go forward and also realize this perfection and friendship in the individual level. While he explains *çile* (suffering) and its purpose, Gülen says that “By all of these [ascetic practices and purifications], one seeks to attain the degree of being a perfect man.”⁷³² Moreover, for him, “Sufism establishes a connection between humans and the Creator of things and occurrences in an unknown dimension and makes humans God’s friends.”⁷³³

VI. METHODOLOGY

Gülen’s method for reaching God is different from Nursi’s method in some ways. These differences are the most important aspect of the comparison of Nursi and Gülen. Nursi’s methodology is clearly stated in his works. He follows six concepts and four steps. The concepts are poverty, impotence, compassion, reflection, gratitude, and enthusiasm. The steps are already discussed in the comparison of psychology. Moreover, Nursi states that daily duty of this methodology is to follow the Sunnah of the prophet, make the obligatory duties, avoid from major sins, and especially to do daily prayers with great care.⁷³⁴

For Nursi, this methodology is a reflection of the character of Prophet Abraham. The character and the methodology of Prophet Abraham are based on two concepts: reflection and compassion. For Nursi, his methodology is very well-matched with the methodology of the Prophet Abraham.⁷³⁵

Nursi’s methodology is not only well-matched with the methodology of Prophet Abraham, but also with the needs of his time. Nursi says that he has been fighting with two idols

⁷³² Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri*, 2:244.

⁷³³ Fethullah Gülen, *Ölçü Veya Yoldaki Işıklar*, 39.

⁷³⁴ Said Nursi, *Sözler*, 476.

⁷³⁵ Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 1:846.

for thirty years: One of them is his ego (*ene*) and the other one is his nature. The ego is the idol that is in the microcosm while the concept of the nature is the idol in macrocosm.⁷³⁶ It seems that Nursi's methodology has the weapons of poverty and impotence for the idol of the microcosm. On the other hand, reflection is the weapon for the idol of the macrocosm.

Another need of the time of Nursi was simplicity, and for Nursi, his methodology is simple and more applicable to the everyday person.⁷³⁷ In his time, materialism was common and people were primitive in regard to religion and spirituality. Today's famous Nur writers were highly uneducated in religion in the time of Nursi. For instance, the famous writer Hekimoğlu İsmail says that when he and some of his friends came to Said Nursi in 1956 and they told Nursi that they did not know how to read the Qur'an. They asked him what they needed to do. Said Nursi told them to follow Sunnah, avoid major sins, pray the daily prayers, and invoke God's Names after it. Hekimoğlu says that he could not understand what Nursi said and consequently went to a Mufti and asked him about the meaning of this advice.⁷³⁸

For Nursi, this methodology is given to him through the Grace of the Qur'an, and it possesses some merits compared with other methodologies: First of all, his way is extracted from the Qur'an; thus, it is more Qur'anic. Second, it is shorter than the way of Sufism because it has only four steps.⁷³⁹ Third, it is purer than the way of love because love expects compliments from the Beloved while compassion does not expect any reward.⁷⁴⁰ Fourth, it is safer than the way of love because it includes the concepts of poverty and impotence. Therefore, it is not open to arrogance. Fifth, it is more applicable to the everyday person. Sixth, poverty takes the person to

⁷³⁶ Said Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 118.

⁷³⁷ Said Nursi, *Sözler*, 476.

⁷³⁸ Hekimoğlu İsmail, "Bediüzzaman ve Risale-i Nurlar," *Zaman*, March 25, 2006, final edition, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/?bl=yazarlar&alt=yazarlar&trh=20060325&hn=269267>

⁷³⁹ Said Nursi, *Sözler*, 476.

⁷⁴⁰ Said Nursi, *Mektubat*, 30.

God's Name The Merciful. Impotence takes him to the level of being beloved. Compassion takes him to the name The Compassionate. Reflection leads him to the name The Wise.⁷⁴¹

On the other hand, Gulen respects this methodology and uses it in regard to his followers. He elaborates Nursi's concepts on many occasions and writes poems promoting the way of enthusiasm.⁷⁴² However, the methodology that Gulen follows in his personal life and in the context of Sufism is love and sorrow. In this sense, Gulen is a follower of the Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*).

In contrast to Nursi, Gulen makes the following statement: "Love is the most direct and safest way to human perfection. It is difficult to attain the rank of human perfection through ways that do not contain love. Other than the way of "acknowledging one's innate impotence, poverty, and reliance on God's Power and Riches, and one's zeal in His way and thanksgiving," no other way to truth is equal to that of love."⁷⁴³

For Gulen, love is the final point in terms of reaching God. For the lover of God, either there is still one step ahead or not. Love emanates from the essence of God; it is the first theophany of God. Therefore, the lovers who fly with the wings of love directly reach God and feel amazement. Others need to pass the isthmus of the beings and the names.⁷⁴⁴

The second concept that Gulen follows in his Sufi methodology is sadness. He says "In short, one will feel sadness until the spirit of the Muhammadan Truth is breathed in all corners of the world, the sighing of Muslims and other oppressed peoples ceases, and the Divine rules are practiced in the daily lives of people."⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴¹ Said Nursi, *Sözler*, 476.

⁷⁴² Fethullah Gülen, *Kırık Mızrap* (İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 1991), 6, 38.

⁷⁴³ Fethullah Gülen, "Love," Fethullah Gulen, <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/books/pearls.of.wisdom/a625.html> (accessed April 17, 2006).

⁷⁴⁴ Fethullah Gülen, *Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri*, 1:206.

⁷⁴⁵ Fethullah Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, 2: 29.

CONCLUSION

Said Nursi, as the master of Nursi movement, calls his works *Risale-i Nur*, his service as the service of faith and the Qur'an, and his method as the way of reality (*hakikat mesleği*). He clearly states that he is not a Sufi and his movement is not a Sufi order. Moreover, he asserts that his way of reality, which is the combination of poverty, impotence, compassion, enthusiasm, gratitude, and reflection is better than the way of Sufism in many aspects.

On the other hand, Gulen has two main aspects: The first is his manner towards his followers. In this manner, he regards Nursi as the most influential scholar of his life and names his own movement as a movement whose examples are from itself. In this aspect, Gulen shares the same norms with Nursi. The second aspect of Gulen is his personal life and Sufi inclinations. In this manner, Gulen is a person of love and sorrow, rather than a person of poverty, helplessness, compassion, and reflection.

Over all, both scholars have similar epistemological values and approaches. For them, the Qur'an and the Sunnah are the main epistemological sources and authorities. On the other hand, the most important epistemological difference occurs with regard to the term of conscience (*vicdan*). Nursi mentions this term as the fourth proof of God in the works of old Said. In the period of New Said, Nursi does not mention this term and proof. In contrast, Gulen regards conscience as one of the key concepts of his Sufi work. Moreover, his whole Sufi work is the elaboration of different aspects of conscience.

Ontological differences between the thoughts of Nursi and Gulen rest on two issues: The concepts of *ehadiyet* (undifferentiated oneness) and *vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness) and their interest in ontological realms and God. It seems that in the concepts of *ehadiyet* (undifferentiated

oneness) and *vahidiyet* (differentiated oneness), Nursi and Gulen have different unveilings. For Nursi, undifferentiated oneness refers to beauty while differentiated oneness refers to grandeur. Nevertheless, for Gulen, it is vice versa. On the other hand, Nursi's main interest in *Risale-i Nur* is to read the reflections of God on the visible realm and see God's different names and qualities on the mirror of multiplicity while Gulen, as an author of Sufism, tends to deal more with the invisible realms and God's essence rather than the visible realm and God's names and attributes.

On the level philosophical anthropology, there is no major difference between Nursi and Gulen. For both, a human being is both the servant and the vicegerent of God. Moreover, he is a microcosm. On the other hand, there are two anthropological differences between the thoughts of Nursi and Gulen. These differences are the approach of Nursi about *fena filihvan* (passing away in the brothers) in regard to Gulen's *fena fişseyh* (passing away in the sheikh) and Nursi's concept of *şahs-ı manevi* (corporate personality) in regard to Gulen's *insan-ı kamil* (perfect man).

Similarly, the thoughts of Nursi and Gulen about psychology do not pose major differences. However, their approaches about the psychological transformation of a person and *tahdis-i nimet* (mentioning God's bounties and grace) are different. In terms of teleology, both scholars have the same major goal, yet their methodology to reach this goal is slightly different.

The most important religiological difference of Nursi and Gulen occurs in methodology. Both individual and collective scope, Nursi walks in the footsteps of Prophet Abraham (*pbuh*) while Gulen follows the shadow of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) in the individual level. In this regard, Nursi is a person of *hullet* (friendship) whereas Gulen is a person of *muhabbet* (love). Poverty, helplessness, reflection, compassion, enthusiasm, and gratitude are the key concepts of

Nursi's methodology. On the other hand, love, intense love, joyful zeal, yearning and sorrow are the main terms of Gulen's methodology.

In conclusion, the ideas of Nursi and Gulen are among the most influential currents of Islamic thought in Turkey today. This study comparing the Sufi thought of Nursi and Gulen demonstrates that although their views are similar in certain ways, profound differences can also be seen. The most important similarities with regard to their Sufi thought are their Qur'an and the Sunnah based epistemology, their anthropology which regards a human being as both the servant and the vicegerent of God, and their teleology which aims to establish a strong faith. The most significant differences of their view on Sufism are their approach to Sufism itself, and thereby, their methodology for reaching God.

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