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PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE IN ISLAM AND EMOTIONAL STABILITY: EXAMINING SAID NURSI'S PERSPECTIVE

Salih Yucel*

Abstract: This article discusses the significance of a purpose-driven life in achieving emotional stability and wellbeing, particularly from the perspective of Said Nursi (d. 1960). The central focus is on Nursi's belief that a purpose-driven life, rooted in religious and spiritual principles, is essential for emotional stability. Nursi asserts that emotions are Divine gifts and emotional stability can be achieved when they are aligned with their intended purpose in creation. This article first explores the relationship between emotional stability and a purpose-driven life by examining Nursi's works, highlighting his unwavering emotional strength in adversity. Second, the article draws a connection between Nursi's philosophy and Ibn Sina's theory of pleasure. Nursi's alignment with this theory suggests that intellectual pleasure is permanent and intrinsic to human nature, distinguishing it from sensual and inward pleasures. Nursi advocates engaging in spiritual practices as sources of solace and healing, offering structured ways to process emotions and gain emotional stability during challenging times. Finally, this article discusses Nursi's comprehensive perspective on a purpose-driven life and emotional stability, guiding readers toward resilience, personal growth and a closer relationship with the Divine, ultimately leading to emotional stability and wellbeing. A purpose-driven life serves as a source of inspiration, fostering resilience and equipping individuals to face and overcome challenges. When life becomes purposeless, it becomes unliveable. Nursi suggests the human ego can lead to emotional stability if purified and used wisely. Overall, this article argues that Nursi's philosophy on emotional stability is highly idealistic and can be practised by the spiritual elite. However, individuals can benefit from it according to their spiritual level.

Keywords: *Purpose-driven life in Islam, emotional stability, ego concept, Said Nursi, Ibn Sina, intellectual satisfaction, spiritual pleasure*

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INTRODUCTION

Religions, particularly monotheistic religions, ask their followers to lead a purpose-driven life, which promotes wellbeing.¹ Islamic sacred texts (the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*) provide a clear answer about the meaning and purpose of life (Qur'ān 51:56-58). They also address “the existential questions that we all encounter at some point in life.”² The Prophet had set up a tent in the courtyard of his mosque, the first hospital in Islamic history to treat patients, injured people and orphans. The aim was to provide emotional and spiritual care alongside medical treatment. Rufaydah was assigned as a nurse to look after the patients. When Sa'd b. Muadh was wounded in the Battle of the Trench, the Prophet said, “Keep him in Rufaydah's tent so that I can visit him closely and often.”³ He acted as a role model for his community by providing spiritual and emotional care then setting up a tent in the courtyard where his house once stood. Prophet Muhammed never abandoned these supplications, every morning and evening:

O Allah, I ask You for forgiveness and well-being in this world and in the Hereafter. O Allah, I ask You for forgiveness and well-being in my religious and my worldly affairs. O Allah, conceal my faults, calm my fears, and protect me from before me and behind me, from my right and my left, and from above me, and I seek refuge in You from being taken unaware from beneath me.⁴

The aim of the Qur'ān and sunnah, the tradition of the Prophet, is to create a socially, spiritually and economically healthy society in this world and gain eternal happiness in the hereafter. Muslim scholars systematically discussed the philosophy and concept of pleasure and happiness. A significant body of literature indicates that religion and spirituality play important roles in wellbeing and emotional stability in societies.⁵ Islam takes a holistic

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- ¹ Naser Aghababaei and Agata Blachnoi, “Purpose in Life Mediates the Relationship between Religiosity and Happiness: Evidence from Poland,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 17, no. 8 (2014).
- ² Farah Islam and Osman Umarji, *Faith in Mind: Islam's Role in Mental Health*, Yaqeen Institute, May 12, 2023, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/ed/faith-in-mind-islams-role-in-mental-health>.
- ³ Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Mohammad, A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 463.
- ⁴ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, accessed May 15, 2024, book 34, *ḥadīth* no. 45, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:3871>.
- ⁵ See Nazila Isgandarova, *Islamic Spiritual Care: Theory and Practices* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2019); Nazila Isgandarova, “Muraqaba as a Mindfulness-Based Therapy in Islamic Psychotherapy,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 58, no. 4 (2019); Zuleyha Keskin, *Attaining Inner Peace in Islam: Said Nursi's Perspective* (Singapore: Springer, 2021); Salih Yucel, *Prayer and Healing in Islam* (New Jersey: Tughrah Books, 2010); Salih Yucel, “An Islamic Therapy: A Fear Reducing Holistic Approach (FERHA),” *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 5 (2021); Ahmed M. Abdel-Khalek and David Lester, “Constructions of Religiosity, Subjective Well-being, Anxiety, and Depression in Two Cultures: Kuwait and USA,” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 58, no. 2 (2012); Adam B. Cohen and Kathryn A. Johnson, “The Relation between Religion and Well-Being,” *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 12 (2016), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11482-016-9475-6>; Ronald F. Inglehart, “Faith and Freedom: Traditional and Modern Ways to Happiness,” in *International Differences in Well-Being*, ed. Ed Diener, Daniel Kahneman and John Helliwell (New York: Oxford Academic, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199732739.003.0012>, Hussein G. Rassool and Zuleyha Keskin, “Positioning the Self (Nafs) in Islamic Psycho-spirituality,” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* online (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2023.2264848>.

approach to health, connecting it to the wellbeing of the mind (*'aql*), body (*jism*) and spirit (*ruh*).⁶ Leading Muslim psychologist Malik Badri says “The real revolution in psychology will come when it regains its soul and liberates itself from the constricted scientific and medical models” so as to feed “the yearning for the rediscovery of the long-forgotten and neglected spiritual aspects” of the lives of people in secular “modern societies.”⁷ Emotional stability is one of the key components of wellbeing.

There is no single definition of emotional stability. Although there has been significant progress in identifying emotions, many are still unknown. Thus, the definition varies in scholarly works.⁸ Emotional stability is defined by the APA Dictionary of Psychology as “predictability and consistency in emotional reactions, with absence of rapid mood changes. Compare emotional instability.”⁹

The very root of the word emotion is motere the Latin word which means ‘to move,’ plus the prefix ‘e’ to connote ‘move away’ suggesting that a tendency to act exists in every emotion. In this way, emotions are the primary source of human energy, aspiration and drive, activating our innermost feelings and purpose in life and transforming them into the things we think, to the values we live by.¹⁰

To Salovey and Goleman, emotional stability is the ability to understand and manage your emotions, as well as recognise and influence the emotions of others. It is a key skill for success in personal and professional relationships.¹¹ Judge argues, “Emotional stability or neuroticism is perhaps the most enduring personality concept in psychology.”¹²

For emotional stability, the purpose-driven life plays a highly important role in individual daily life. To understand this role, it is important to answer three questions that philosophers and theologians have discussed in the past and present: Where did I come from? What is the purpose of life? Where am I heading? Consequently, is there any relationship between the answers to these questions and emotional stability? This article focuses only on the purpose of life for wellbeing and emotional stability, particularly from Said Nursi’s¹³ perspective. Nursi’s

⁶ Yaseen Ally and Sumaya Laher, “South African Muslim Faith Healers Perceptions of Mental Illness: Understanding, Aetiology and Treatment,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 47, no. 1 (2008): 58, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-007-9133-2>.

⁷ Malik Badri, *Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual Study*, new ed. (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2013), xix.

⁸ Yan Li and David Ahlstrom, “Emotional Stability: A New Construct and its Implications for Individual Behavior in Organizations,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 33, no. 1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-015-9423-2>.

⁹ American Psychological Association, “Emotional Stability,” *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, April 19, 2018, accessed June 3, 2024, <https://dictionary.apa.org/emotional-stability>.

¹⁰ M. Chaturvedi and R. Chande, “Development of Emotional Stability Scale,” *Industrial Psychiatry Journal* 19, no. 1 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.4103/0972-6748.77634>.

¹¹ Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, “Emotional Intelligence,” *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 9, no. 3 (1990), <https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG>.

¹² Timothy A. Judge, “Emotional Stability, Core Self-Evaluations, and Job Outcomes: A Review of the Evidence and an Agenda for Future Research,” *Human Performance* 17, no. 3 (2004).

¹³ Said Nursi (1887-1960) is a prominent Islamic scholar who left a lasting impact on contemporary Islamic thought. He lived during a tumultuous period that witnessed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the European colonisation of the Muslim World and the establishment of a strict secular system in Turkey. Nursi’s exceptional character and enduring influence solidified his status as a significant figure in 20th

philosophy of emotional stability centres on a purpose-driven life. To him, every emotion is God's gift and created with a purpose. If used wisely in accordance with these purposes, then there will be emotional stability.

While Nursi did not explicitly write about emotional stability, his responses to persecution, tyranny, imprisonment and exile served as a living testament to his unwavering emotional strength. This study examines the relationship between emotional stability and a purpose-driven life in Nursi's works. Having a purpose-driven life necessitates being conscious of the meaning of life.

Islamic theology puts faith at the centre for the meaning of life. Nursi discusses the meaning of life in his works. He also embodied emotional stability in his life. He argues "the human being is on a journey which passes from the World of Spirits through the mother's womb, youth, old age, the grave, the Intermediate Realm, the resurrection, and the Bridge of Sirat towards eternity."¹⁴ Therefore, the purpose of life is not just to gain worldly happiness but also prepare for eternal life. When Nursi's works are examined, it can be said there is a relation between a purpose-driven life and emotional stability. Nursi says, "If there is no imagined goal, or if it is forgotten or pretended to be forgotten, thoughts perpetually revolve around the 'I.'" He means that, without a purpose-driven life, a human being's thoughts revolve around 'I,' which leads to egoism, self-servedness, contempt of others, arrogance and hypocrisy to harm others for their benefit.¹⁵

The concept of 'I' or 'self' is extensively discussed in Sufi literature, where different levels of the self are explored. These levels include *nafs al-ammara* (the commanding self), *nafs al-lawwama* (the self-reproaching self) and *nafs al-mutma'inna* (the contented self). While exploring how Nursi's philosophy can be applied at each level could be a topic for further study, this has not been explored in this article. However, Nursi particularly addresses the *nafs al-mutma'inna*.

century Islam. Nursi was a profound representative of Islam's intellectual, moral and spiritual strengths. Throughout his life, he demonstrated unwavering love and devotion to Islam, employing a wise and measured approach grounded in sound reasoning and drawing inspiration from the Qur'an and the Prophetic example. His simplicity, austerity, tenderness, loyalty, chastity, modesty and contentment were widely acknowledged. Although he appeared outwardly simple, many of his ideas and activities were remarkably original. Said Nursi, *The Words*, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: The Light, 2005), xi-xiii. He was deeply concerned with humanity and actively opposed unbelief, injustice and religious deviations. Nursi also courageously confronted tyranny, even when it meant risking his life. His profound faith, coupled with his rational ideas and problem-solving methods, created a remarkable example of love, passion, positive thinking and wellbeing.

The government was determined to keep Said Nursi away from the public and prevent him from spreading his teachings. They did this by exiling him, denying him amnesty when others were granted it and watching, following and harassing him continuously. He was also under surveillance, followed and harassed continuously during his exile and imprisonment. Despite facing incredibly challenging circumstances in Jacoban secularism in the newly established Republic of Turkey, Nursi never compromised his theological and philosophical principles. He wholeheartedly lived by these principles and strived to enable others to do the same. Salih Yucel, "Serving Islam Peacefully during the Aggression and Said Nursi's Kalamisation of Positive Action for Social Harmony," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2018).

¹⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 336.

¹⁵ Said Nursi, *The Letters*, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: The Light, 2007), 449.

This article first examines how ‘I’ness impacts a purpose-driven life to cause emotional stability or instability. Second, it discusses the relationship between a purpose-driven life and emotional stability from Nursi’s perspective and comparing it with Ibn Sina’s theory of intellectual satisfaction. Third, this article elaborates Nursi’s “zawq ruhani” or spiritual pleasure that leads to emotional stability.

‘I’NESS AND ITS IMPACTS ON EMOTIONAL STABILITY

Without fully understanding human beings, including their spiritual, physical and emotional aspects, any decisions or judgements made about them will be incomplete. In addition, a human being has thousands of emotions¹⁶ and only a small portion of these have been identified by psychologists. Nursi argues, “Human being is a small universe or the universe is a big human.”¹⁷ To understand the spiritual or metaphysical aspects of human humans, it is necessary to discuss “ana” or “I”. Ana means the “I” self or ego is the ability of a person to be aware of their existence and attributes. To Nursi, it is the key and framework to understanding the Divine Names, which are hidden treasures for happiness.¹⁸ For example, an individual can say, “I own this house. This is my child, my car etc.” Nursi says, “Through this imagined lordship, ego can understand the Lordship of the Creator of the universe. By means of its own apparent ownership, it can understand the real Ownership of its Creator, saying: “As I am the owner of this house, the Creator is the Owner of this creation.” “Through its partial knowledge, ego comes to understand His Absolute Knowledge. Through its defective, acquired art, it can intuit the Exalted Fashioner’s primary, originative art.”¹⁹ For example, ego says: “I built and arranged this house, so there must be One Who made and arranged this universe.”²⁰ Ego contains thousands of states, attributes and perceptions that, to some extent, disclose and make knowable the Divine Attributes and Essential Qualities. It is like a measure, mirror or instrument for seeing or finding out an entity with an indicative function. It has no meaning in itself but discloses meaning outside itself.²¹

Nursi elaborates on the dual aspects or facets of the ego, which serve as the fundamental origins for two distinct lines of thought. The prophets and philosophers embody these two aspects, each group representing one aspect, leading to their divergence.²²

The aspect symbolised by prophethood is the source of pure worship and acknowledgement of servitude to God, as the ego recognises itself as His servant. It understands that it exists to serve a higher being and its core purpose is to indicate this subservience. The ego comprehends that its significance is derived from something beyond itself and its meaning is only realised

¹⁶ Ibid., 52.

¹⁷ Nursi, *The Letters*, 248.

¹⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 552.

¹⁹ Sofia Gallant, “The Nature of the Closeness of God,” *Fountain Magazine* 61 (2008), accessed June 9, 2024, <https://essay.fountainmagazine.com/all-issues/2008/issue-61-january-february-2008/the-nature-of-the-closeness-of-god>.

²⁰ Nursi, *The Words*, 552.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 551-56.

when it points to the One on whom its existence relies. The ego firmly believes its existence and life are contingent on the creativity and existence of that One. Its sense of ownership is an illusion, as the ego knows it merely has a temporary and apparent ownership granted by the true Owner's permission. It recognises that it possesses a shadow-like reality, representing an insignificant and dependent entity that manifests the true and essential Reality. Its role as a measure and balance for the Attributes and Essential Qualities of its Creator is a conscious and willing act of service. In this aspect, the ego is a valuable gift, but it must be used wisely. It should remember that it acts on behalf of a Higher Authority and should fulfil its responsibilities faithfully. It must not be driven by personal, unrighteous opinions or unlawful desires.

The second aspect, represented by philosophy, sees the ego as having an intrinsic and independent meaning. It asserts that the ego exists on its own, solely pointing to itself, and works entirely for its own benefit. This perspective considers the ego's existence as necessary and essential, wrongly assuming the ego possesses its being and is the true ruler of its domain. Philosophy views the ego as a permanent reality with the duty of pursuing self-perfection for self-esteem. This flawed viewpoint has led philosophers to build philosophical frameworks on corrupt foundations.

Even notable philosophers like Plato (d. 348 BCE), Aristotle (d. 322 BCE), Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (d. 1037) and al-Farabi (Alfarabius) (d. 950) maintained that the ultimate goal of human beings is to become like the Necessary Being, essentially resembling God. This conclusion is fundamentally mistaken and has led to the ego's unchecked desires, opening the path to associating partners with God through practices such as the worship of causes, idols, natural forces and stars. These views have closed the doors to recognising and acknowledging human beings' inherent qualities of powerlessness, weakness, insufficiency, neediness, deficiency and imperfection, which are fundamental aspects of human nature. Consequently, they have obstructed the way to genuine worship and servitude to God. Entrapped in naturalism and unable to break free from the act of associating partners with God, they failed to discover the wide-open doors leading to gratitude.

This type of ego wants infinite freedom and wishes to achieve all its desires, but this is impossible. Therefore, when it cannot achieve this, it becomes emotionally weak or, in order to achieve this, it harms other people or creatures. There is a desire for eternity in every emotion of a person. For example, if the world and everything in it were given to a person, they would not be satisfied with that and would want a second one.²³ If ego always pursues this, then it will eventually become like a pharaoh or Nimrod. A person has some kind of desire for eternity in every emotion, but if it is not achieved, this material possession causes deep emotional instability.

²³ In a *ḥadīth*, "If Adam's son had a valley full of gold, he would like to have two valleys, for nothing fills his mouth except dust. And Allah forgives him who repents to Him." Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. M. Muhsin Khan, accessed November 10, 2023, *ḥadīth* no. 6439, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6439>.

For Nursi,

the *ana* (ego) is a great blessing, a great capital... But on condition that it is used appropriately... On the condition that it does not forget that it is the caliph of the Earth (Qur'an 2:30) and acts on behalf of the Sultan of the Universe, and uses His trust in the way of His consent... It does not allow any of its actions. Provided that he does not confuse his personal opinion, desires and desires...²⁴

He says,

All human instincts, such as curiosity and love, passion and desire, are implanted in people to help them earn a happy life in the Hereafter. If one exploits them for the sake of this life, they only buy brittle glass at the price of diamonds.²⁵

“He who knows himself knows his Lord.”²⁶ To reach its secret, on the condition of being able to say “I” as a key and say “It”...

As mentioned above, ego is a great blessing if it is used appropriately and wisely. For example, God created infinite love in the human heart as an emotion. The heart is a luminous substance with two aspects. On one side, it constantly gazes at the world of spirits, while on the other side, it observes the world of bodies. When the body is under the guidance of the soul in the unification of religious measures, the heart conveys the blessings it receives from the world of spirits to the body and soul. It creates an atmosphere of peace and security in both realms. However, to achieve this, it is necessary that the ego must be purified and guided by an illuminated heart and soul. This is given to love “The Infinite One” or love any creation in the name of God. Nursi says,

In terms of human nature, people are inherently connected to a wide range of beings, and they possess an unlimited capacity for love. This leads to humans nurturing a love for all things, treating the vast world as their home and eternal Paradise as a beautiful garden. However, the objects of their affection are transient, leading to continuous suffering due to separation. This boundless love, when misdirected, becomes a source of immense torment.²⁷

By misusing the emotion of love, humans face emotional instability and suffer in their lives.

Another example is fear. Nursi argues, “fear is given as preserving life. But when it is misused or having excessive fear, it becomes a torment.”²⁸ Similarly, this can be argued for all other emotions.

According to Nursi, spiritual happiness is real happiness. This happiness creates peace in people's hearts. The heart is such a luminous substance that has two aspects. On one side, it constantly looks at the world of spirits, and on the other side, it looks at the psychological aspect of the world. If the human body is under the command of the soul in the unification of religious

²⁴ Nursi, *The Letters*, 52-53.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'* 10/208, cited in Abu Amina Elias, “Whoever Knows Himself, Knows his Lord,” Faith in Allah, February 11, 2020, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/whoever-knows-himself-knows-his-lord/>.

²⁷ Said Nursi, *The Gleams*, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Tugrah Books, 2008), 29-30.

²⁸ Nursi, *The Letter*, 401.

measures, the heart carries the blessings it receives through the world of spirits to the body. It creates breezes of peace and security there too.

Emotions in humans have three aspects. The first is to use these emotions like animals, the second is to use these emotions only to obtain worldly things, that is, to own property and work power, and the third is to use these emotions appropriately, with the awareness that they are given to humans by God and to obtain eternal happiness in the afterlife.²⁹

THE RELATION BETWEEN A PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE AND EMOTIONAL STABILITY

In this section, the relationship between human emotions and a purpose-driven life will be discussed, particularly by focusing on Nursi's works. Many articles and books have been written on this subject in academia. It is argued that people with a purpose-driven life are emotionally healthier.³⁰ While Nursi supports this view, he also expands on the spiritual aspect of it and perhaps this is the most important feature that makes him different in this regard. Nursi says, "If there is no imagined goal, or if it is forgotten or pretended to be forgotten, thoughts perpetually revolve around the 'I.'"³¹ Unal asserts that, for Nursi, the absence or forgetting of a purpose-driven life causes people to concentrate on themselves and their self-interest.³² To Nursi, God created humanity as a single, comprehensive species, intending for each person to fulfil the roles and functions of all animal species. As a result, unlike animals, human emotions and abilities have no inherent limits and operate within an infinite realm. Since each individual reflects the Creator's numerous attributes, their potential is boundless. For instance, if someone possessed the entire world, their desire might still ask: "Is there more?" Furthermore, their self-centredness could lead them to sacrifice the wellbeing of thousands for their personal gain. Consequently, people can become increasingly wicked, akin to figures like Nimrod or Pharaoh, or they can enhance their virtuous conduct and ascend to the ranks of the truthful or even become prophets.³³

According to Nursi, each person has thousands of emotions. They have two aspects: figurative and real.³⁴ For example, everyone worries about the future even though they have no guarantee that they will be alive tomorrow. Then, they realise that they will die only at their appointed time. As a result, they stop worrying about their uncertain future here and focus on

²⁹ Nursi, *The Gleams*, 29-30.

³⁰ Different research supports Nursi's purpose-driven life philosophy for wellbeing. See Martin Seligman, *Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being and how to Achieve Them* (London: Free Press, 2011); Nazila Isgandarova, "The Role of Practice-Based Education in Islamic Spiritual Care: The Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Training," *The Muslim World* 108, no. 2 (2018); Courtney E. Eckerman, "What is the Meaning of Life According to Positive Psychology?," *Positive Psychology*, February 2, 2018, accessed April 19, 2024, <https://positivepsychology.com/meaning-of-life-positive-psychology/>.

³¹ Nursi, *The Letters*, 546.

³² *Ibid.*, 449.

³³ *Ibid.*, 346.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

their eternal future beginning with death. That is a future worth worrying about, especially for those who do not heed the Divine commandments.³⁵

According to Nursi, if a person does not have a purpose-driven life, they become inactive and lazy. And a lazy person does not enjoy life,³⁶ because everything in the universe is in motion. If a person does not comply with this law, that is, if they are not in motion, then they fall into depression, knowingly or unknowingly, because they act against the law in the universe. This causes emotional instability. On the other hand, an active person enjoys life. Nursi says,

Know, O friend, who does not know the pleasure and happiness in labor and giving service, that out of His perfect Mercy, God the Ultimate Truth has included part of the reward for service in serving, and part of the reward for action in acting. Thus, even lifeless creatures obey God's commands of creation and the operation of the universe with perfect zeal and pleasure. Everything, from bees, flies, and chickens to the sun and the moon carries out its duties with perfect pleasure. This means that they receive pleasure from their work so that they perform it perfectly, even though unconsciously and without considering the consequences.³⁷

Nursi asserts that God has embedded a sense of pleasure and happiness in labour and serving others. Even inanimate objects, like the sun and moon, fulfil their roles with joy and enthusiasm. This implies that all living and non-living things derive satisfaction from their actions, even when they do so without conscious intent or consideration of the outcomes. Constantly aspiring to noble ideals and lofty goals in a purpose-driven life, the actions and manoeuvres achievable in this context mould individuals, shaping and transforming them into spiritual satisfaction. An aimless life can cause dissatisfaction and emotional instability. When Nursi's works are examined and the goals of a purpose-driven life, it looks like he was influenced by Ibn Sina's theory. Ibn Sina categorises pleasure into three types: (i) sensual pleasure (*al-ladhdha al-hissiya*), including activities like sex and eating; (ii) inward (or imaginary) pleasure (*al-ladhdha al-batina*), which pertains to preserving one's dignity and self-respect; and (iii) intellectual pleasure (*al-ladhdha al-aqliyya*). Among these, Ibn Sina significantly emphasises intellectual pleasure, considering it the highest form of pleasure. He mentions the prevailing notion that sensual pleasure is predominant, but he finds it easy to disprove this belief. According to Ibn Sina, inward pleasures hold a higher status than sensuous pleasures. However, both are considered lower in comparison to the true and highest pleasure, which is intellectual pleasure. This is best exemplified in the achievement of the spiritual elite. Intellectual pleasure is permanent because it is part of human nature.³⁸ The animals have sensual pleasure and this shows the animal side of human beings.

Nursi categorises pleasure into two: metaphorical and true pleasure. To him, sensual and inward pleasure are metaphorical. True pleasure is combining the soul and intellect, which he

³⁵ Ibid., 52-53.

³⁶ Nursi, *The Gleams*, 171.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Idris Zakaria, Ibn Sina on "Pleasure and Happiness," *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 6, no. 8 (2012): 1283.

calls ‘*zawq ruhani*’ (spiritual joy). This is permanent because it fits human nature. In my view, by renaming and reframing intellectual pleasure as *zawq ruhani*, Nursi infuses strong spirituality into Ibn Sina’s theory of intellectual satisfaction. Thus, *zawq ruhani* is not just the satisfaction of intellect but the heart and soul.

According to Nursi, “One worldly pleasure yields many pains”³⁹ to a certain extent but *zawq ruhani* is permanent and true pleasure. Sensual and imaginary pleasure provide metaphorical emotional stability and not real emotional stability. Otherwise, the people who live in developed countries or rich people in the world would have perfect emotional stability because they have the opportunity to have sensual and inward pleasure. Nursi argues that people often pursue wealth, fame and position, but they eventually realise that these things are not worth it and turn to spiritual pursuits. This is because wealth, fame and position can lead to arrogance, hypocrisy and dependence on others. They are also temporary, while spiritual pursuits are eternal. People’s spiritual faculties can be used for good or evil. If they are used to satisfy worldly desires, they will lead to immorality and waste. But if they are used to pursuing the Hereafter, they will lead to good moral qualities and happiness in both worlds.⁴⁰

As mentioned above, the third is *zawq ruhani* or spiritual pleasure, which is called intellectual satisfaction by Ibn Sina. According to Nursi, belief in God is the highest goal of creation and humanity’s most noble achievement is knowing Him. The greatest happiness and blessings for jinn and humans come from love of God, which is intertwined with knowledge of Him. The purest joy of the human spirit and the deepest delight of the human heart is found in spiritual ecstasy that arises from the love of God. All genuine happiness, true joy and sweet blessings are rooted in knowledge and love of God. Those who truly know and love God can experience endless happiness, enlightenment and mysteries. In contrast, those who do not recognise and love God suffer from spiritual and material misery, pain and fear. If a person was to rule the world without knowing and loving God, it would hold little value. People who fail to acknowledge their Creator and Master are miserable and lost. But those who do recognise Him, seek His mercy and rely on His power find this desolate world transformed into a place of peace, happiness and a means for the Hereafter.⁴¹ The consequence of comprehending the wisdom behind the challenges and illnesses leads to gradual emotional stability then *zawq ruhani*, a spiritual pleasure. Nursi suggests that belief in God provides a framework for understanding suffering, recognising the greater purpose behind it and finding emotional stability through faith.⁴² Nursi says,

KNOW, O FRIEND, that out of His perfect Mercy, the Truth has included part of the reward for service in serving, and part of the reward for action in acting. Thus, even lifeless creatures obey God’s commands of creation and operation of the universe with perfect zeal and pleasure.⁴³

³⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 165.

⁴⁰ Nursi, *The Letters*, 52-53.

⁴¹ Nursi, *The Letters*, 239-40.

⁴² Nursi, *The Gleams*, 296.

⁴³ Said Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuri* [Seedbed of the Light] (New Jersey: The Light, 2007), 225.

Nursi gives bees as an example. Can bees work hard and make honey if they don't get pleasure? Everything in the universe, animate or inanimate, gets pleasure when they do their tasks. A tree eats mud but gives fruits.⁴⁴

What Nursi means is that he considered the results of love of God rather than setting a goal. He argues that true happiness, pure bliss, the sweetest blessing and pure pleasure are found in the knowledge and love of Allah, and points out that, if a person reaches the horizon of knowledge and love, they will often deeply feel and taste the spiritual pleasure.

Nursi considers spiritual pleasure to be permanent as the soul of humans is permanent but the body decays. The purpose of the creation of human beings is to gain spiritual pleasure through servanthood to God. He says, "If you are a good servant wholly submitted to God, everything is subjugated to you. If you have not submitted to God, everything is hostile to you."⁴⁵

When Nursi examines human emotions, he asserts that they often prioritise immediate pleasure over long-term happiness, disregarding the consequences. To help those who have succumbed to vice, we must make them aware of the pain hidden in their current pleasures and strive to overcome their impulsive emotions. Despite believers' knowledge of the abundant rewards in the afterlife, some still favour transient worldly pleasures, akin to fragile pieces of glass.⁴⁶

To Nursi, if emotions are used wisely and according to the purpose of creation, there will be emotional stability. Individuals use their spiritual faculties to indulge their worldly desires and live as if they will be here forever, but these faculties can lead to immoral qualities and wastefulness. Yet, if they harness these faculties to prosper in the Hereafter while also attending to their essential needs in this life, they will cultivate commendable moral qualities and find happiness in both worlds, guided by wisdom and truth.⁴⁷ The more a person uses their emotions to achieve spiritual happiness, the happier they will be.

For Nursi, the first, which is using emotions like animals, and second, allocating emotions to obtain worldly things, do not bring permanent emotional stability, because human beings are not created for this purpose.

ANALYSIS

Said Nursi's approach to a purpose-driven life and emotional stability is highly idealistic, especially in a secular society. Putting it into practice is challenging. Moreover, to achieve it, a person must constantly struggle with their carnal soul, a feat attainable mainly by individuals with strong spirituality. In addition, human beings need a spiritual environment where they practice spirituality. However, even a secular person can have a worldly purpose-driven life,

⁴⁴ Nursi, *The Words*, 81.

⁴⁵ Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuri*, 182.

⁴⁶ Nursi, *The Gleams*, 215.

⁴⁷ Nursi, *The Letters*, 52-53.

which can help emotional stability to a certain extent, research shows.⁴⁸ It is highly difficult to accomplish this alone; therefore, one needs a good spiritual leader to discipline and purify one's carnal soul. Knowledge alone is insufficient in this regard. In other words, a person may possess knowledge but may not reach the desired spiritual degree. To use one's emotions in line with the purposes of creation, robust God conscience is essential. Furthermore, a role model who employs their emotions appropriately is required. This necessitates constant vigilance. According to Said Nursi, any action performed with good intentions and the right methodology can be considered an act of worship as long as it is not a sin. Worship is not limited to praying, fasting or reading the Qur'ān. A person can transform every hour and even every minute of their life into an act of worship. Such a way of life leads to greater emotional stability.

On the other hand, some Muslims restrict the purpose-driven life to a narrow mould. They believe, if a Muslim prays, fasts, goes on pilgrimage and gives alms, this is sufficient for emotional stability. While this may be partially true, it is not entirely accurate. In reality, individuals who pray five times a day and fast during the month of Ramadan may still experience emotional instability. This is because praying five times a day and fasting for a month each year, along with going on pilgrimage once in a lifetime, only account for about six or seven per cent of a person's life. What about the remaining 93 per cent? For a person to use their emotions in a spiritual manner, as Nursi argues, a purpose-driven life should not be limited to Islamic rituals alone. In addition, a Muslim should lead a life in accordance with Islamic principles.

Nursi offers spiritual insights that reframe death as a passage to mercy, happiness, reuniting with loved ones and eternal abodes. This perspective can potentially provide comfort and emotional stability by shifting the focus from fear to hope and positive outcomes. This viewpoint implies that individuals can find meaning and purpose in their suffering, which can contribute to emotional stability by fostering a sense of resilience and optimism. These qualities can contribute to emotional stability by helping individuals manage their emotions and maintain a balanced mindset during challenging times. Nursi's emphasis on empathy can create a sense of interconnectedness and emotional stability by fostering supportive relationships. In his works, Nursi believes that promoting a positive mindset even in the face of difficulties can assist with emotional stability.

Nursi's new outlook can transform emotional instability into stability. According to Said Nursi, if a person can contemplate the consequences of the hardships, calamities and illnesses that they encounter and the rewards they will receive in the end, they can shift their negative emotions to positive ones. Said Nursi categorises beauty into two: absolute beauty, such as

⁴⁸ See Seligman, *Flourish*; Edward F. Diener, "Pioneer in Subjective Quality of Life Research," *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 9 (2014); Harold G. Koenig and Saad Al Shohaib, "Religion and Positive Emotions in Muslims," in *Health and Well-Being in Islamic Societies* (Cham: Springer, 2014); Sarah Greenberg, "The Importance of Living a Purpose-Driven Life," VIA Institute on Character, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.viacharacter.org/topics/articles/the-importance-of-living-a-purpose-driven-life>; Douglas LaBier, "Why it's so Hard to Find Your Life's Purpose," *Huffington Post*, July 17, 2011, accessed April 19, 2024, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/life-purpose_b_862192.

Paradise, and relative beauty, which is beautiful due to its consequences.⁴⁹ For example, the hardships faced while studying ultimately lead to relative beauty, as a person earns a degree and finds a good job. Illness serves as a reminder that one's existence in this world is temporary and encourages them to do good. It is also an important factor in understanding the value of health. This perspective is elaborated in the 25 gleams, which delve into various aspects of dealing with illness, hardship and challenges from spiritual and emotional standpoints. The analysis of the 25th gleam regarding emotional stability can be summarised as:

1. **Positive outlook on challenges:** Viewing challenges, illnesses and calamities as opportunities for growth, purification and spiritual development. This perspective can contribute to emotional stability by helping individuals find meaning in their suffering and providing them with a sense of purpose during difficult times.
2. **Resilience through belief:** Nursi suggests that having strong faith and belief in a higher power can serve as a source of strength and comfort. Belief is portrayed as a healing remedy that can bring solace and help individuals cope with their physical and emotional struggles. This outlook can provide a sense of emotional stability by fostering hope and trust in a greater purpose.
3. **Appreciation of life:** Nursi contrasts monotonous, comfortable states with dynamic, changing ones. He suggests that hardships and challenges can make life more valuable and meaningful. This perspective encourages individuals to embrace life's fluctuations and find value in pleasant and difficult experiences.
4. **Mindset shift in facing illness:** He encourages a shift in mindset when facing illness. Rather than focusing on complaints or feeling victimised, the text advocates for recognising the potential benefits of illness, such as purifying one's life, appreciating the support of others and strengthening one's character.
5. **Social support and compassion:** Nursi highlights the importance of social support, especially in times of illness or hardship. It acknowledges the compassion and care that can arise from others' empathy and kindness. This emphasis on human connection can contribute to emotional stability by reminding individuals that they are not alone in their struggles.
6. **Acceptance and patience:** Nursi promotes acceptance of challenges and hardships as part of the human experience. By encouraging patience and a positive attitude in the face of adversity, the text offers a way to navigate difficulties with emotional stability and resilience.
7. **Avoidance of imaginary illnesses:** The text cautions against giving too much importance to imaginary illnesses or anxieties, which can worsen the perceived severity of the situation. This advice can help individuals manage their emotional responses to stressors and maintain a balanced perspective.
8. **Focus on the eternal perspective:** The text emphasises the temporary nature of life's challenges and the eternal rewards that await believers. This perspective can provide

⁴⁹ Nursi, *The Words*, 243.

emotional stability by helping individuals shift their focus from immediate discomfort to the greater spiritual and metaphysical context.

9. **Gratitude and contentment:** The text suggests that being grateful for the blessings one has, even amid challenges, can lead to emotional stability. Expressing gratitude for life's experiences and lessons can help individuals maintain a positive mindset.
10. **Connection to spiritual practices:** The text encourages engaging in spiritual practices, such as prayer, repentance and seeking forgiveness, as sources of solace and healing. These practices can provide emotional stability by offering structured ways to process emotions and seek guidance during difficult times.⁵⁰

In summary, the text offers a comprehensive perspective on how to approach illness and challenges from an emotional stability standpoint. It emphasises the role of belief, gratitude, a positive mindset, resilience and spiritual practices in maintaining emotional wellbeing during difficult times.

LIMITS OF THIS STUDY

This study delves into Nursi's philosophy concerning emotional wellbeing among individuals who embrace spirituality, as well as societies with a profound spiritual orientation. While the application and adaptation of this philosophy in secular society are pertinent, they warrant exploration in separate research endeavours.

CONCLUSION

For optimal wellbeing, individuals should strive for intellectual satisfaction. Islamic spirituality imbues human psychology with purpose, guiding individuals to define and pursue their goals. This purpose-driven life becomes the impetus for goal achievement, fortifying one's journey and ultimately fostering emotional stability. Drawing from a *ḥadīth*, the Prophet asserted, "...There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment."⁵¹ This encompasses spiritual ailments like anger, jealousy, hatred and arrogance, which are all detrimental to wellbeing. Consequently, recognising emotional instability prompts the search for a remedy.

Aligned with the universal law of motion, human existence demands action—compliance with the Divine or adherence to the law of nature. Thus, a purpose-driven life becomes imperative.

Nursi advocates spiritual practices such as prayer, repentance and seeking forgiveness as sources of solace and healing. These structured approaches aid emotional stability by guiding individuals through challenging times. Offering a comprehensive perspective, Nursi guides readers toward emotional stability through patience, gratitude, spiritual understanding and a deepened connection with faith. Transforming suffering into personal growth fosters a closer

⁵⁰ For details, see Nursi, *The Gleams*, 289-310.

⁵¹ Ibn Maja, *Sunan Ibn Maja*, book 31, *ḥadīth* no. 1, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:3436>.

relationship with the Divine, contributing to emotional stability and wellbeing. Nursi emphasises that belief in a higher power provides strength and comfort, acting as a healing remedy during physical and emotional struggles. For emotional stability and satisfaction, Nursi reminds and guides humans to contemplate the numerous blessings from God, including a variety of foods for the stomach, myriad emotions for enjoying life and the diverse positions that humans hold on Earth. By endowing you with a stomach, God has provided you with unlimited sustenance and bestowed on you the gift of life, transforming this tangible, material world into a banquet of abundance for you. Through the gift of human selfhood, He has turned the seen and unseen realms into tables laden with blessings. By instilling belief in you, He has granted you access to these tables and others stored in the treasuries of His Names.⁵²

To appropriately harness natural emotions, living a purpose-driven life is essential. Without a purpose-driven life, one's existence can feel meaningless. This purpose can manifest in three forms: the pursuit of animal desires, worldly goals for imaginary happiness or intellectual happiness. According to Ibn Sina, prophets exemplify the pinnacle of experiencing intellectual happiness. Nursi infuses spirituality into Ibn Sina's theory, which he calls *zawq ruhani* or spiritual joy. To him, animals and plants perform their duties properly because of the spiritual pleasure that God has instilled in their service. Nursi's view on a purpose-driven life and emotional stability is highly idealistic, but it can be achieved to a certain extent by individuals based on their level of spirituality.

⁵² Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuri*, 290.

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