

Sincerity and Brotherhood

from the Risale-i Nur Collection
Humanity's Encounter with the Divine Series

Sincerity and Brotherhood

- * *Twentieth Gleam*
- * *Twenty-first Gleam*
- * *Twenty-second Letter*

Bediüzzaman
SAİD NURSI

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Bediüzzaman and the Risale-i Nur

In the many dimensions of his lifetime of achievement, as well as in his personality and character, Bediüzzaman (1877-1960) was and, through his continuing influence, still is an important thinker and writer in the Muslim world. He represented in a most effective and profound way the intellectual, moral and spiritual strengths of Islam, evident in different degrees throughout its fourteen-century history. He lived for eighty-five years. He spent almost all of those years, overflowing with love and ardor for the cause of Islam, in a wise and measured activism based on sound reasoning and in the shade of the Qur'an and the Prophetic example.

Bediüzzaman lived in an age when materialism was at its peak and many crazed after communism, and the world was in great crisis. In that critical period, Bediüzzaman pointed people to the source of belief and inculcated in them a strong hope for a collective restoration. At a time when science and philosophy were used to mislead young generations into atheism, and nihilistic attitudes had a wide appeal, at a time when all this was done in the name of civilization, modernization and contemporary thinking and those who tried to resist them were subjected to the cruelest of persecutions, Bediüzzaman strove for the overall revival of a whole people, breathing into their minds and spirits whatever is taught in the institutions of both modern and traditional education and of spiritual training.

Bediüzzaman had seen that modern unbelief originated from science and philosophy, not from ignorance as previously. He wrote that nature is the collection of Divine

signs and therefore science and religion cannot be conflicting disciplines. Rather, they are two (apparently) different expressions of the same truth. Minds should be enlightened with sciences, while hearts need to be illumined by religion.

Bediüzzaman was not a writer in the usual sense of the word. He wrote his splendid work the *Risale-i Nur*, a collection exceeding 5,000 pages, because he had a mission: he struggled against the materialistic and atheistic trends of thought fed by science and philosophy and tried to present the truths of Islam to modern minds and hearts of every level of understanding. The *Risale-i Nur*, a modern commentary of the Qur'an, mainly concentrates on the existence and unity of God, the Resurrection, Prophethood, the Divine Scriptures primarily including the Qur'an, the invisible realms of existence, Divine Destiny and humanity's free will, worship, justice in human life, and humanity's place and duty among the creation.

In order to remove from people's minds and hearts the accumulated 'sediment' of false beliefs and conceptions and to purify them both intellectually and spiritually, Bediüzzaman writes forcefully and makes reiterations. He writes in neither an academic nor a didactic way; rather he appeals to feelings and aims to pour out his thoughts and ideas into people's hearts and minds in order to awaken them to belief and conviction.

This book includes selected sections from the *Risale-i Nur* collection.

On Sincerity or Purity of Intention

The Twentieth Gleam [from *The Gleams*]

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

We have sent down to you the Book with the truth (embodying it, and with nothing false in it); so worship God, sincere in your faith in Him, and practicing the Religion purely for His sake. Be aware that it is to God alone that all sincere faith, worship, and obedience are due. (39: 2–3)

All may perish except the knowledgeable, and the knowledgeable may perish except those who practice, and those who practice may perish except the sincere, and the sincere are in grave danger.¹

The Qur'anic verses and the *hadith* quoted above show how essential sincerity is in Islam.

A very significant question

Why is it that while worldly people who are heedless of Divine guidance, and even misguided and hypocritical ones, can cooperate without rivalry, religious

¹ al-Ajluni, *Kashf al-Khafa'*, 2:415; al-Ghazzali, *Ihya' u 'Ulum ad-Din*, 3:414. (Tr.)

people and scholars, and followers of Sufi ways differ in rivalry. Agreement should naturally be on the side of the followers of truth, and discord and conflict are the natural consequences of hypocrisy and following divergent ways; how is it that they have changed places?

The answer

I will set forth seven of the many causes for this painful, tragic, and heartrending situation.

The first

Just as the disagreement of the people of truth does not come from their lack of the truth, so too the agreement of the worldly people who are heedless of Divine guidance is not based on following the truth. Rather, modern social life demands a division of labor and has caused the formation of social classes, professional groups, and political parties, each of which has its own particular duties, wages, renown, and popular respect.²

² A Reminder: Public attention and respect cannot be demanded, but may be given by people themselves. If it is given, one should not be pleased with it. If one admits it with pleasure, one loses sincerity and ostentation takes its place. If public attention and respect come in return for seeking fame and public honor, it is not a reward but a reproach and punishment for a lack of sincerity. Harmful to sincerity, which is the life of all good deeds, fame and public attention are only a temporary, slight pleasure that lasts until the door of

So, there is almost no point of rivalry, conflict, and dissension. It is for this reason that however evil the way that each follows may be, they can come together for their interests.

However, as for religious people, particularly scholarly ones, and those following Sufi ways, their duties are concerned with the whole people, and there are no worldly wages determined for them, nor do they have a specified place, or share of fame or popular acceptance. Many may demand the same position, and many hands may be stretched out for the same material and immaterial reward. This may cause conflict and rivalry, and discord and disagreement may take the place of concord and agreement.

The cure for this dreadful disease is sincerity. That is, by preferring attachment to the truth to self-love, always holding the truth over selfish motives, following the Prophetic rule, *My wage is only due from God (10: 72)*, remaining indifferent to any material or immaterial wage that comes from people;³ and in accordance

the grave, but takes on the form of torment in the grave. Therefore, one should not seek public attention or respect, but be wary of it and flee from it. Be warned, all you who are fame-seekers and who pursue public attention and respect!

³ One should take as a principle the altruism of the Companions or the quality of preferring others to one's own self, which the Qur'an praises. One should prefer others to one's own self in receiving gifts and alms, and not seek any worldly return for religious ser-

with the principle, *What rests with the Messenger is only conveying the Message* (24: 54), knowing that it is God Who will bestow popular respect and acceptance if He wills, and that obtaining popular respect and acceptance is not included in religious duties, one can attain sincerity. Otherwise, sincerity will vanish.

Second cause

The misguided people agree and cooperate because of their abasement, while the rightly-guided people disagree because of their dignity. That is to say, since the worldly people of heedlessness and misguidance do not base themselves on the truth, they are weak and abased. Because of their abasement, they need to find strength and power. This need leads them to hold fast to alliance with and help from others. However errone-

vice. If it comes without demanding, it should be considered as a Divine favor, and one should not place oneself under any obligation towards people. No wages should be demanded or received in return for religious service. Demanding any worldly return for religious service causes a loss of sincerity. The community should provide for people of religious service, who also have the right to receive a share from the *Zakah*. But they should not demand it. If it is given without having been asked for, it should not be regarded as a reward for the service done. Rather, one should act in perfect contentment, and prefer others who are qualified for the same service and who are more deserving of the reward to one's self. By acting so as to be able to be included among those whom the Qur'an praises, *Indeed, they prefer them over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot* (59: 9), one can attain sincerity.

ous their way, they can preserve agreement. It is as if they find some sort of partisanship of truth in wrongfulness, sincerity in misguidance, a religious fanaticism in irreligion, and concord in hypocrisy and dissension, which makes them successful in their cause. For sincerity is never fruitless, even if it is for the sake of evil. Whatever one seeks with sincerity, God will grant it to him or her.⁴

However, religious or rightly-guided people, including in particular scholarly ones and those who follow the Sufi ways, base themselves on the truth and each among them considers only their Lord on their way and relies on His assistance. Therefore, they are dignified, and when they feel they are in need, turn towards their Lord for help instead of towards people. Because of certain differences on the paths they follow, they do not feel in need of any help that comes from these other paths or alliance with their followers. If, in addition, they have a certain degree of egotism or self-centeredness, supposing themselves to be right and their opponents wrong, discord and rivalry will take the place of concord and love. This causes a loss of sincerity and utter failure in the fulfillment of duties.

The cure for blindness to the critical consequences of this dreadful state lies in following nine principles:

⁴ “Whoever seeks and strives earnestly shall find,” is a true principle.

- We should always act positively. That is, we should act out of love for our own way, and not allow enmity towards or criticisms of other true ways to interfere in the fulfillment of our duties or to play a part in our thoughts and actions.
- We should consider that, irrespective of the particular paths within the general sphere of Islam, that there are certainly numerous points of agreement and bonds of unity in Islam that generate and require love, brotherhood, and concord.
- On the condition that they do not criticize the paths of others, everyone who follows a true path has the right to say, “My path is true and more beautiful,” but they cannot imply the falsity or ugliness of the paths of others by saying, “Only my path is true,” or “The beautiful path belongs only to me.” We should adopt this just rule of conduct.
- We should consider that agreement with the people of truth attracts Divine help and success, and is a means of dignity in religious life.
- Realizing that even the most powerful individual resistance is subject to failure, and indeed fails, in the face of the attacks of the collective force of the people of misguidance and wrong, due to their solidarity, the people of truth should form a collective force through agreement in order to preserve right and justice against that dreadful collective force of misguidance.

- We must save the truth from the assault of falsehood. Therefore,
- We should renounce self-centeredness and egotism, and
- Abandon the mistaken concept of honor and self-esteem, and
- Give up worthless feelings of rivalry.

By following these nine principles, we can attain sincerity and fulfill our duties completely.⁵

Third cause

The disagreement among the people of truth does not emanate from a lack of zeal or aspiration, nor does the agreement of misguided people arise from having lofty ideals or great endeavors for the same. Rather, the disagreement of the rightly-guided arises from the misuse of the endeavor for their lofty cause, while the agreement of the misguided comes from weakness

⁵ A *hadith* informs us that towards the end of time, the true followers of Jesus' religion will cooperate with the people of the Qur'an and be able to resist their common enemies, namely materialists and heretics. So, at this time, the people of truth and religion need to agree and cooperate sincerely not only with their brothers and sisters in religion, but also with the true, sincere followers of Jesus' religion, especially with the spiritual leaders among them, temporarily refraining from disputing controversial matters among themselves to struggle against their common enemies—the aggressive enemies of religion.

and impotence that arises from not having an elevated cause and endeavoring for the same.

What causes the rightly-guided to misuse their endeavors for their cause and therefore leads to discord and rivalry among them is their extreme aspiration for eternal reward and the fulfillment of the duties pertaining to the Hereafter, which is regarded as a praiseworthy quality from the viewpoint of the eternal life. With the thought of "I will gain this reward; let me guide these people; let them listen to me," they take up a position of rivalry to their true brothers and sisters who are in real need of their love, assistance, and brotherhood. The egotism of scholarly people, which engenders in them the feelings, "Why do my pupils go to him for learning and guidance? Why do I not have as many pupils as he has?", makes them incline to taking up a place in people's opinions or a love of position, which is an evil quality, and causes them to lose sincerity, opening to them the door of ostentation.

The cure for this error, this wound, this appalling spiritual disease, is as follows:

One can gain God's good pleasure through sincerity, not through a multiplicity of followers or great success. For it is God Who will or will not confer these latter, and they cannot be demanded. It even sometimes happens that a single word may result in one's salvation and obtaining God's good pleasure. Therefore, quantity

should not be given much importance. For the guidance of a single person may sometimes be as pleasing to God as the guidance of a thousand. In addition, sincerity and attachment to the truth require that we should earnestly desire Muslims to benefit from anyone or any school or path of guidance they can. Thinking, “Let them take lessons from me and cause me to gain reward!” is a trick of the carnal soul and egotism.

O human, greedy for eternal reward and feeling discontent with what you have done pertaining to the Hereafter! There were several Prophets who had only a limited number of followers but received the limitless reward of the sacred mission of Prophethood. So, the true success is not having a vast following but rather is gaining God’s good pleasure. What do you imagine yourself to be that by thinking, “Let everyone listen to me,” you forget your own duty and interfere in God’s Will? It is only God Who, if He wills, will make people accept you and gather around you. So mind your own duty, and do not interfere in God’s Will.

Furthermore, it is not only human beings who listen to the preaching of the truth and earn reward for those who preach it. God Almighty has innumerable other conscious beings like angels and other spirit beings that inhabit every corner of the universe. Therefore, if you desire much reward, take sincerity as the foundation of your actions and consider only gaining

God's good pleasure so that all the reflections in the air of the blessed words that issue forth from your mouth may gain life through your sincerity and purity of intention, and reach the ears of countless conscious beings, illuminating them and earning you reward. For when, for example, you say, "All praise and gratitude are for God," millions of multiplied reflections of this statement are inscribed in the air by God's leave. The All-Wise Inscraper, Who wastes not and does nothing useless or in vain, has created many ears to listen to those blessed words. If they gain life through sincerity and purity of intention, these words enter the ears of spirit beings like some tasty fruit. If there is no sincerity and God's good pleasure does not give them life, they are not heard, and their reward becomes limited to the single, original utterance made by the mouth. This fact should particularly be considered by those who memorize the Qur'an but feel uncomfortable because their voices are not beautiful enough and few people listen to them.

Fourth cause

Just as contentious disagreement among the rightly-guided does not arise from their shortsightedness and failure to foresee consequences, so the sincere agreement among the misguided people does not result from their farsightedness and ability to take consequences into due consideration. Rather, although guided by the

truth and right and not being dragged by the blind impulses of the carnal soul the people of right guidance follow the farsighted inclinations of the heart and the intellect, they fail to preserve sincerity and straightforwardness and thus fall into disagreement.

As for the people of misguidance, under the influence of the carnal soul and lusts and driven by desires and impulses which are blind to consequences and prefer an ounce of immediate pleasure to a ton of future pleasure, they can come together in powerful, sincere alliances for the sake of instant benefits and immediate pleasures. Indeed, lowly and heartless worshippers of the carnal soul can sincerely come together around immediate worldly pleasures and benefits. The people of right guidance are in fact expected to preserve straightforwardness and perfect sincerity to form a powerful, selfless unity because they follow lofty intellectual and spiritual principles and aim at human perfections and the fruits of the Hereafter. But since they cannot be fully freed from egotism and self-centeredness or liberate themselves from going to extremes, they lose their agreement, which is a sublime source of power, and their sincerity is shattered. Thus, their duty concerning the Hereafter is harmed. This also makes gaining God's good pleasure truly difficult.

The cure for this grave disease is, with the guidance of the principle of *loving for God's sake*, proudly

accompanying those who follow the Straight Path, deferring leadership to them, renouncing egotism with the thought that whoever is following the Straight Path may be better than oneself, and thus gaining sincerity, knowing that an ounce of deeds done with sincerity is preferable to tons of deeds done without sincerity, and preferring being a follower to leadership, which brings responsibility and therefore is risky. By doing so, one can be saved from the disease of egotism, going to extremes, and insincerity, which was mentioned above; one is able to gain sincerity and properly fulfill one's duties pertaining to the Hereafter.

Fifth cause

The disagreement of the rightly-guided people does not arise from their weakness, nor does the powerful agreement of the misguided people arise from their strength. Rather, the lack of agreement among the rightly-guided people is due to their strength which results from the point of support that is provided by perfect belief, while the agreement of the people of heedlessness and misguidance comes from their weakness and impotence that results from the fact that they can find no point of support in their hearts. The weak form powerful unities because they desperately need alliance and agreement. But since the powerful do not feel this need much, their unity is weak. Lions do not

need union, nor do foxes, and therefore they live as individuals, whereas wild goats (and oxen) form herds to protect themselves against wolves and lions. This means that the community and collective personality of the weak is strong, while the community and collective personality of the powerful is weak.⁶ The Qur'an makes a subtle allusion to this fact. Although the feminine form of the verb should have been used for the community of women where there are two instances of femininity (women is a feminine noun, and as a plural subject requires the feminine form of the verb in Arabic), it uses the masculine form of the verb in, *And women in the city said* (12: 30). *While in The desert Arabs said* (49: 14) the feminine form of the verb for the community of men is used. This usage delicately implies that the community of weak, feeble, and tender women gains strength, toughness, and sternness with togetherness, and so acquires some sort of manliness. As it therefore appropriates the masculine form of the verb, the Qur'anic use of this form is the best suited. By contrast, since strong men, particularly those of the

⁶ Among the most powerful and influential organizations in the West is the American Organization for Women's Rights and Liberty, even though women form the fair and weak sex among humankind. Likewise, despite being the weakest and least populous among nations, the Armenian committees display the greatest sacrifice and commitment. These two facts provide another proof for our thesis.

desert Arabs, rely on their own individual strength, their community suffers from weakness, to which cautiousness and the feeling of a lack support only add. This is why their community takes on a kind of femininity and requires the feminine form of verb; again, the Qur'an has used this form most appropriately.

Thus, due to their submission to and trust in God, which is provided by belief in God, and which is a most powerful point of reliance, the people of truth do not display neediness before others or ask for their help. Even if they sometimes feel needy, they do not need to hold fast to this help. But since the worldly people are neglectful of the true source of support for humanity in worldly affairs, they suffer weakness and impotence, and therefore cooperate sincerely and even with self-sacrifice in dire need of external help and support.

In short, the people of truth, who do not consider or seek the rightful power that lies in agreement, fall into disagreement as an evil and harmful result of this lack of consideration. But the people of misguidance, who follow false ways, perceive the power of agreement due to their weakness, and attain agreement, and this is an extremely important means for the attainment of goals.

The cure for this disease of the people of truth is to adopt as guidance in life the powerful Divine prohibition in, *Do not dispute with one another, or else you may lose heart and your power and energy desert you*

(8: 46), and the wise Divine command for social life in, *Help one another in virtue and goodness, and righteousness and piety* (5: 2). We should also consider how harmful to Islam disagreement is, and how it facilitates the triumph of the misguided people over the people of truth, and join the caravan of the people of truth sincerely and self-sacrificingly in awareness of our innate powerlessness. Also, renouncing self-centeredness and forgetting individual selfish interests, we should be freed from ostentation and pretension, and thus acquire sincerity.

Sixth cause

The disagreement of the people of truth does not come from a lack of courage, lack of aspiration to a lofty goal, or lack of endeavor for its realization. Nor does the sincere cooperation of the heedless people of worldliness and misguidance in their worldly affairs arise from their courage, or from possessing a lofty ideal, or from endeavor for the realization of the same. Rather, as the people of truth mostly concentrate on the benefits that pertain to the Hereafter, they distribute their courage, aspirations, and endeavors among numerous important matters. Since they do not also devote their time, which is the most fundamental capital of humanity, to one single concern, their cooperation with others cannot be strong. They have numerous concerns over a broad sphere of duties.

As for the worldly people of heedlessness, since their only concern is the worldly life, they devote all their energy to the matters that are concerned with the worldly life and concentrate on them with all their feelings and faculties. They firmly cling to whatever may help them with their worldly concerns. Like a crazy diamond merchant who pays hundreds of dollars for a few cents' worth of glass, they spend all their time, which is everyone's greatest capital, on those matters, which are actually worth five cents and to which the people of truth may pay ten cents at the most. But as this sort of attachment and concentration, even if for the sake of falsehood, has the effect of sincerity, the worldly people succeed in those matters and triumph over the people of truth. This triumph of the worldly people drives the people of truth to humiliation, subjection, pretension, and ostentation, causing them to lose sincerity. They feel constrained to flatter and toady to certain despicable, selfish, and cowardly people of the world.

O people of truth! O truth-loving followers of the Divine way of life and true spiritual paths! Counter this awful disease of discord and disagreement by overlooking each other's faults and closing your eyes to each other's shortcomings. Act with the good manner described in the holy Criterion's verse, *When they happen to pass by anything vain and useless, they*

pass by it with dignity (25: 72). Abandoning internal disputes while you are subject to external attacks and regarding the deliverance of the people of truth from decline and humiliation as your primary, most urgent and important duty that pertains to your afterlife, realize among you brother/sisterhood, love, and cooperation, which are insistently enjoined by hundreds of Qur'anic verses and Prophetic Traditions. Establish with all your powers a much stronger unity with your fellows and brothers and sisters in religion than that which exists between the worldly people, and allow no disagreement or discord among you! Never think, "Rather than spending my valuable time on such insignificant matters, I would be better to spend it on valuable things such as religious recitals, invocations, and reflection," drawing aside and weakening unity! For something you may regard as insignificant may be very important for this spiritual *jihad*. In just the same way that under certain important and special conditions one hour's watch kept by a private may be equal to a whole year's worship, a valuable day you spend on a minor matter pertaining to religion at this time of the defeat of the people of truth may be worth a thousand days. Since whatever is done is for God's sake, it is not considered small or great, valuable or valueless. An atom expended for God's sake with sincerity becomes like a star. Besides, what is of importance is not the nature of the means employed, but the result

it yields. So long as the result intended is God's good pleasure, and whatever is done is religiously lawful and done with sincerity, that is, purely for God's sake, it is not small, but great.

Seventh cause

The disagreement and rivalry among the people of truth does not come from jealousy or greed for the world; nor does the agreement of the worldly and heedless people arise from magnanimity or nobility. Rather, the people of truth are unable to maintain magnanimity and zeal for endeavor, both of which originate in the truth and the praiseworthy form of competition in doing good on the way of the truth. Both because of this and because of the infiltration of some who are unqualified to work for the truth, they misuse that praiseworthy form of competition to a certain degree, and fall into rivalry and disagreement, thus doing great harm to both themselves and the community of Muslims.

As for the people of worldliness and heedlessness, in order not to lose the benefits to which they are so attached and not to offend the leaders and companions they adore for the sake of their benefits, in their humiliation, cowardliness, and due to the lack of a sublime goal or endeavor for the same, they form unity at all costs with their fellows, however abased, treacherous, and harmful they be, and sincerely come together with their partners in whatever way may be for their com-

mon interest. They benefit from this cooperation due to their sincerity.

So, O disunited, calamity-stricken people of truth! Since at this time of calamity you have lost sincerity and been unable to make God's good pleasure your sole aim, you have caused all the people of truth to suffer the present humiliation and defeat. In matters relating to the Religion and the afterlife there should be no rivalry or jealousy, and indeed there cannot be either from the viewpoint of the truth. For jealousy and the ensuing rivalry arise from the conflict, dispute and competition that are caused by many hands being stretched out to obtain the same object or many eyes being fixed on the same position, or many stomachs demanding the same food. Since in the world many desire and apply for the same thing, and the world is too narrow and temporary to satisfy the limitless desires of humanity, people fall into rivalry. However, there is no cause for rivalry in the Hereafter, where each individual will be given a Garden across which they can walk for five hundred years, with seventy thousand palaces, and where every one of the people of Paradise will be fully satisfied with his or her share.⁷

⁷ A significant question: It is related from God's Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, that in Paradise a person will be given a garden across which they can walk for five hundred years (*at-Tirmidhi*, "Janna" 8). How can we explain this in a way people can understand?

Therefore, there can be no rivalry or jealousy about good deeds done to gain eternal happiness in the Hereafter. One who shows jealousy is either a person of ostentation, who is pursuing worldly results in the fulfill-

The Answer: In this world everyone has a private, temporary world as spacious as the world itself. Everyone's life is the pillar of their private world, from which they benefit with all their external and internal senses and faculties. Each person can say, "The sun is my lamp, and the stars are my candles." All other creatures do not prevent them from privately owning and benefiting from these; rather, they add to the beauty and comfort of everyone's private world. Similarly, in addition to the private garden that contains thousands of palaces and houris, one incomparably richer and more beautiful than that in the world, every believer will have an area of benefit as spacious as a walk of five hundred years. Through their senses, which will develop to the utmost degree of each, they will have as great enjoyment as Paradise and eternity will allow them. The enjoyment of others will not harm another's share in the general enjoyment of Paradise; rather it will add to it, making his or her private Garden and share in Paradise more enjoyable. A person benefits in this world from a garden that is large enough to walk through in an hour, from an excursion area in which one can walk for a day, or from countryside that has enough room for a month's walk, or from a continent that can take a year to cross, with their mouth, ears, eyes, sense of taste, and all other senses and faculties. So too, in the realm of eternity, a person's senses of smell and taste, which can benefit in this world from a garden only as large as an hour's walk, will benefit in Paradise from a Garden as spacious as a year's walk. The faculties of sight and hearing, which can have limited benefit in this world, will benefit in Paradise from a Garden that is spacious enough to walk for five hundred years. Every believer's enjoyment will be in proportion to the developmental degree of their senses, feelings, and faculties through the rewards they earned in the world.

ment of good deeds, or an ignorant devotee who does not know the reason good deeds should be done, or perceive that the spirit or essence of good deeds is sincerity. By feeling some sort of enmity towards God's beloved servants because of this rivalry, such a person takes up a position by which they deny the limitless vastness of God's Mercy. What follows is an event that corroborates this reality:

One of our former companions cherished enmity towards a man. When that man was praised for his good deeds and even saintliness in the presence of our companion, he showed no signs of jealousy or discomfort. When, however, another one said to him, "That enemy of yours is courageous and strong," we saw a strong feeling of jealousy and rivalry provoked in him. We said to him:

Sainthood and righteousness are as valuable as a diamond with respect to eternal life, yet you felt no jealousy of your enemy on account of them. But worldly strength is to be found in oxen, and courage in wild wolves, and compared with saintliness and righteousness, they are like a piece of glass compared to a diamond.

The man answered:

We have both fixed our eyes in this world on a single thing, a single position. The steps by which we will reach it are things such as strength and courage.

This is why I was jealous of him. But there are countless positions in the Hereafter. Although he is my enemy here, there he may be a sincere, beloved brother of mine.

O people of truth and followers of spiritual paths! Serving the truth is like carrying and preserving a great, heavy treasure. The greater the number of powerful hands that rush to the aid of those who carry it on their shoulders are, the happier and more pleased they will be. Far from being jealous, though, one should proudly and lovingly applaud the superior strength, effectiveness and assistance of these true brothers and self-sacrificing helpers who come forward to offer their help; why then do we respond to them with rivalry, thus losing sincerity? Why in the eyes of the worldly, misguided people, who themselves are a hundred times lower than you, as their way is lower than yours, do you expose yourselves to appalling accusations such as earning the world by misuse of the Religion, exploiting the knowledge of truth to earn your livelihood, and ambitiously and greedily competing for worldly interests?

The sole remedy for this disease is condemning one's own soul and taking the side of the fellows against one's soul. One should also follow the following principle adopted and established by scholars in the art of debate: "A person who desires, in debate on a subject, his own thesis to be true and is happy with

its turning out to be right and the opposing side to be wrong and mistaken, is an unfair one.” Such a person is also in loss, for when they win the debate, they have learned nothing new; rather, their probable pride may cause them further loss. But if the truth turns out to be on the opposing side, they will have learned something previously unknown to them and thereby acquired something beneficial, as well as having been saved from probable pride. Therefore, a fair, truth-loving one wounds the pride of their carnal soul for the sake of the truth. When they see the truth in the hand of their opponent, they willingly accept it and support it.

If the people of the Religion, the truth, and knowledge, and the followers of spiritual paths take this principle as a guide, they will attain sincerity, and succeed in their duties pertaining to the Hereafter. They will also be saved through God’s Mercy from the present tragic decline and wretchedness.

All-Glorified are You. We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

On Sincerity or Purity of Intention

The Twenty-first Gleam [from *The Gleams*]

This Gleam should be read at least once a fortnight.

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

Stand in the presence of God in utmost devotion and obedience (2: 238). Do not dispute with one another, or else you may lose heart and your power and energy desert you (8: 46). He is indeed prosperous who has grown it in purity. And he is indeed lost who has corrupted it (91: 9–10). Do not sell My Revelations for a trifling price (2: 41).

O my brothers and sisters of the Hereafter, and companions in the service of the Qur'an! You should know—indeed you know—that in this world, and particularly in the services done for the afterlife, a most important foundation, and a greatest power, and a most acceptable intercessor, and a firmest point of reliance, and a shortest way to the truth, and a most answerable prayer, and a most blessed and marvelous means of achieving one's goal, and a most sublime virtue, and a purest form of worship is sincerity, or

doing something good or any religious deed purely for God's sake. Since sincerity has many varieties of power and light, such as those mentioned, and since at this terrible time, in the face of dreadful hostilities, under severe pressure, and amidst the forceful heretical innovations in the Religion and many forms of misguidance, an extremely heavy, important, comprehensive, and sacred duty of serving belief and the Qur'an has been placed on our shoulders by the Divine Grace despite our powerlessness, deprivations, and being few in number; we are certainly compelled more than everyone else to gain sincerity with all our strength and are in dire need of inculcating it in ourselves. Otherwise, our attainments in our sacred service will in part be lost and we will no longer be able to continue it; we will be held responsible. Furthermore, we will be a target of the severe threat contained in the Divine prohibition, *Do not sell My Revelations for a trifling price* (2: 41), and by damaging sincerity to the detriment of eternal happiness and for the sake of some harmful, depressing, egotistic, repulsive, hypocritical base feelings or insignificant benefits, we will violate the rights of our brothers and sisters in this service and transgress against the duty of serving the Qur'an, desecrating the truths of belief.

O my brothers and sisters! Numerous harmful obstacles appear before works of great good. Satans strive

very much against those who try to do these works. We should rely on the strength of sincerity against these obstacles and satans. We must avoid things that harm sincerity to the same degree that we avoid snakes and scorpions. As declared by the Prophet Joseph, upon him be peace, *“Yet I do not claim myself free of error; for assuredly the human carnal soul always commands evil, except that my Lord has mercy,”* (12: 53) the carnal, evil-commanding soul should not be trusted. Do not let egotism or the evil-commanding soul deceive you! In order to remove the obstacles before sincerity so that we gain and preserve sincerity, let the following principles be a guide for you:

Your first principle

You should pursue God’s good pleasure in your actions. If He is pleased with you, even if the whole world is displeased, it is of no consequence. If He approves, it has no effect even if all others reject your ideas and actions. When He is pleased and approves, even if you do not seek the approval of others, should He will it to be so and His Wisdom requires it, He will make others accept it and be pleased with you. For this reason, it is absolutely necessary to aim at God Almighty’s good pleasure in the service of the Qur’an and belief.

Your second principle

You should not criticize your brothers and sisters in their service of the Qur'an or belief, and do not provoke their envy by making a display of your attributes. For a person's hands do not compete with each other, nor do their eyes criticize one another, nor does their tongue oppose their ears, nor does their heart see the faults of the spirit. Rather, their members complete the deficiencies of one another, veil one another's shortcomings, assist one another in meeting their needs, and help one another with their duties. Otherwise, the life of that person's body would be extinguished, their spirit would go away, and their body would decompose.

Similarly, the components of a factory are not in rivalry with one another, nor do they attempt to take precedence over or dominate one another. Nor do they find faults with or criticize one another, destroying each other's enthusiasm for work or condemning the others to idleness. Rather they help one another to work with all their capacities for the achievement of a common goal, and proceed towards the realization of the purpose of their existence in true solidarity and unity. Should even the slightest encroachment or domination interfere, it would cause confusion in the working of the factory, making it dysfunctional. In consequence, the owner of the factory would demolish it completely.

And so, O students of the *Risale-i Nur* who serve the Qur'an! We are the members of a collective personality worthy of the title of "the perfect or universal human." We are like the components of a factory working for eternal happiness in the eternal life. We are also the crew of a blessed ship aiming to carry the Community of Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, to the shore of salvation, which is the shore of the Abode of Peace and Happiness. Therefore, we need and are compelled to realize true solidarity and unity, which can only be attained through sincerity and which can gain for four people the power of one thousand one hundred and eleven.⁸

If three 1's do not unite or come together, they will have only the value of 3. But if they unite or come together, they will gain the value of 111. Four separate 4's make 16. But if they come together in true brotherhood, along the same line for the fulfillment of the same duty, they will have the value of the power of 4444. History records numerous events which bear witness to the fact that 16 self-sacrificing people in true brotherhood have obtained the moral strength of more than 4000 people.⁹ This is because each individ-

⁸ Four 1's put side by side make 1111. (Tr.)

⁹ In addition to being the means to innumerable advantages and benefits, solidarity and unity based on sincerity is the strongest shield and point of support against fear, and even death. For when

ual in a true, sincere union can also see with the eyes of the other brothers and sisters, and hear with their ears. It is as if each of the ten persons in true solidarity and unity has the value and power of seeing with twenty eyes, thinking with ten intellects, hearing with twenty ears, and working with twenty hands.

Your third principle

You should know that all your power lies in sincerity and truth. Indeed, power lies in truth and sincerity. Even those who are wrong may have power through sincerity despite being wrong.

The service of the Qur'an and belief are evidence of the fact that power lies in truth and sincerity. What we have been trying to do here for seven or eight years of service has been a hundred times greater than my twenty years of service to learning and the Religion in my native region and in Istanbul. Moreover, while in my region and Istanbul I had hundreds more assistants than my brothers and sisters who work with me now,

death comes, it takes one soul. A person who strives in true unity with their fellows on the way of God's good pleasure for the realization of the purposes related to the Hereafter, has as many souls as their brothers and sisters. Therefore, such a person meets death with a smile and says, "Even though only one of my souls dies, my other souls will continue to live and cause me to gain as many rewards as they do. So by means of these souls, I will continue to live in respect of reward; I am only dying in respect of sin."

here I am alone, a stranger, and under the surveillance of unjust officials and am persecuted by them. Therefore, I have no doubt that the power which makes our seven or eight years of service here a hundred times more successful than my former twenty years of service comes from your sincerity. I also confess that through your profound sincerity you have saved me to an extent from the ostentation that results from the fame and renown which flattered my soul. I hope God will enable you to attain perfect sincerity and cause me to gain it as well.

You know that all heroes of spirituality support you due to your sincerity. If you want to receive their constant support, you should attain perfect sincerity as described in, *they prefer them (their brothers and sisters in religion) over themselves (59: 9)*.

Prefer the souls of your brothers and sisters to your own in honor, position, public approval, and even in things like the material benefits of which the carnal soul is enamored. Be so magnanimous that you are pleased that a friend of yours, not yourself, conveys a most subtle and fine truth of belief to those who are in need of it, thus saving you from feeling conceited. If you desire to gain a reward by conveying such truths, it is harmless and does not incur a sin, but the spirit of sincerity and magnanimity, which should always exist among you, may be damaged.

Your fourth principle

As if it were you who possess the merits and virtues of your brothers and sisters, take pride in them and be thankful to God for them.

The Sufis circulate among themselves such terms as “annihilation in the guide,” and “annihilation in the Messenger.” I am not a Sufi, but we should have this principle among ourselves as “annihilation in the brothers and sisters.” This is called among the brothers and sisters “mutual annihilation.” It means the brothers and sisters being annihilated in one another. That is to say, oblivious of their own merits and the pride which may arise from them, each person lives with the merits and feelings of their brothers and sisters in their mind. The basis of our way is brotherhood. My relation with you is not like that between a father and children or a Sufi guide and his pupils. It is rather a relation between brothers and sisters. At the very most, my position of teaching may have some part in it.

Our way is also the closest friendship. Friendship requires being the closest, most self-sacrificing friend, the most appreciative companion, and the most magnanimous brother or sister. The very basis of this form of friendship is heartfelt sincerity. One who destroys this sincerity falls from the pinnacle of friendship. They may possibly fall to the bottom of a very deep pit. They cannot find anything in between to cling on to.

There are two ways. It is possible that those who leave this way of ours now, which is the great highway of the Qur'an, unwittingly help the force of heresy, which is hostile to us. I hope that God will enable those who enter the sacred sphere of the Qur'an of miraculous exposition by way of the *Risale-i Nur* always to give support to light, sincerity, and belief, and never to fall into such pits.

O my friends in the service of the Qur'an! One of the most influential means of attaining sincerity and preserving it is "contemplation of death." While long-term worldly ambitions damage sincerity and cause ostentation and worldliness, the "contemplation of death" leads one to abhor ostentation and gain sincerity. By never forgetting death and always considering the transient nature of this worldly life, one can be saved from the tricks of the carnal soul. Followers of Sufi paths and the people of truth who follow the Qur'anic declarations, *Every soul is bound to taste death* (3: 185), and *You will surely die, and surely they (too) will die* (39: 30), have adopted contemplation of death as a principle in their spiritual journeying and have done away with the illusion of remaining in the world eternally. They imagine themselves to be dying, being washed, and buried in the grave. Influenced by this way of prolonged contemplation of death, to an extent they are able to give up long-term worldly

ambitions. There are numerous advantages to such contemplation. The Prophetic saying, “Frequently remember that which dispels pleasures and makes them bitter,”¹⁰ urges us to such contemplation. However, since our way is not a Sufi one, but rather the way of journeying directly to the truth, it is not necessary for us to do this in an imaginary or hypothetical form like the Sufis. Rather than concentrating on the future to bring it to the present, we should go to the future in the mind, and contemplate it.

Without the need for imagination or supposition, one can look at one’s own corpse, which is the single fruit on the tree of life. Not only will you see your own death, one can also see the death of one’s era at some distance. If one goes a bit further, one can observe the death of the world, and this opens the way to perfect sincerity.

Another important means of attaining sincerity is that, based on certain, verified belief and the lights of belief-guided reflective thought on God’s works of art—the whole creation—which leads to knowledge of the Maker, we can experience the omnipresence of the All-Compassionate Creator, and without seeking the acceptance or attention of any other than Him, and understanding that by looking to others for help in His presence is not right conduct in His presence, we can

¹⁰ *at-Tirmidhi*, “Qiyama” 86; *an-Nasa’i*, “Jana’iz” 3. (Tr.)

be saved from ostentation and attain sincerity. This kind of attainment has numerous degrees and stages. To whatever degree a person can benefit from their share, this much is beneficial. Many other truths are mentioned in the Risale-i Nur which can save a person from ostentation and gain them sincerity, so we will cut the discussion short here.

Things destroying sincerity

Out of numerous things which destroy sincerity and drive one to ostentation, I will briefly mention two or three as follows:

The first is that rivalry in material benefits gradually destroys sincerity. It also harms the results of any service done, and causes the loss of the desired material advantage.

Our people have always cherished respect for those who strive for the truth and the Hereafter and have helped them. With the intention of having a share in the service they do sincerely and devotedly, our people have tried to provide for them so that such people would not be preoccupied with earning their livelihood and thus wasting their time. However, help and respect should not be sought or demanded; they should be given willingly. Nor should they be expected or sought by giving the impression of being in need of them. Such support should come without expectations. Otherwise

sincerity will be damaged, and one may be a target of the Qur'anic prohibition, *Do not sell My Revelations for a trifling price* (2: 41), with the result that one's good deeds may not be acceptable to God.

Thus, the carnal soul, first desiring and expecting material benefit, then not wanting it to go to others, provokes a feeling of rivalry towards a true brother or sister or a companion in the same service. This damages sincerity, and is sacrilegious to the service done; the person becomes unlovable and disagreeable in the sight of the people of truth and discernment. It also causes the loss of the material benefit intended. This matter requires much elaboration. Therefore, I will cut it short here and relate two examples which will reinforce the sincerity of my true brothers and sisters and the unity between them.

The first example is that in order to have great wealth and power, the worldly people, and even some politicians, committees, and certain manipulators of social life, have adopted the principle of participation in or corporate ownership of wealth. Despite all the disadvantages and misuses such a practice can cause, they can also obtain an amazing power and benefit. However, participation in wealth has many disadvantages and does not change the nature of property. Although each participant enjoys theoretical ownership, they cannot benefit from it. But if believers adopt this

principle in deeds pertaining to the Hereafter, it will bring much benefit with no loss. For every partner will enjoy the full reward of the whole of those deeds.

For example, supposing four or five people own a single oil lamp. One brings oil, another a wick, another a mantle, another matches; they light the lamp. Each of them owns the lamp. If each has a mirror on a wall, he will own both a separate, reflected room included in their shared room, and a separate lamp reflected in it.

Similarly, as accepted by the people of truth and required by the comprehensiveness of Divine Mercy and Munificence, the whole of the reward and light that emanates from sincere participation in the wealth to be spent for the afterlife, and brotherly and sisterly solidarity and cooperation, and joint enterprise in full unity will be added to the record of each participant. Therefore, O my brothers and sisters! I hope that God will save you from rivalry in material benefits. However, it is possible that, like some followers of the Sufi paths, you might be deceived in respect of the benefits that pertain to the Hereafter. But you should understand that some personal, minor reward can never be compared with the reward and light to be brought by good deeds done by a group that supports one another, as in the example above.

Second example: In order to attain great results or products from their work, craftsmen join their skills

and labor and obtain great wealth. It is narrated that once ten men tried to make needles, each working on their own. As a result of their individual labor, each was able to make three needles a day. Then, adopting the principle of joint enterprise, they came together, one bringing iron, and another lighting the furnace, and another piercing the needles, and another placing them in the furnace, and another sharpening the point, and so on. Each was occupied only with the part of the work assigned to him, wasting no time and also acquiring a specific skill in the art of needle-making. Then they shared among themselves the result of their joint enterprises and division of labor. They saw that instead of three, each had three hundred needles a day as his share. This event was widely circulated among the craftsmen in order to urge them to join their efforts.

So, O my brothers and sisters! If unity and agreement in worldly affairs yield such great results, you can correlate this with how profitable it would be to join efforts in deeds that pertain to the Hereafter, the reward of which is not divided and is given to each participant wholly by Divine Grace. This huge profit should not be lost out of rivalry and insincerity.

The second thing which destroys sincerity is flattering the ego and giving a lofty position to the evil-commanding soul by pursuing public attention and acceptance in the name of fame, renown, or status in

people's eyes. This is the most perilous of spiritual diseases, one that leads to ostentation and self-centeredness, which is regarded as a hidden association of partners with God.

O my brothers and sisters! Our way which we try to follow in the service of the wise Qur'an is based on truth and requires true brotherhood. Brotherhood requires self-annihilation among the brothers and sisters and preferring them to oneself.¹¹ Therefore, there should not be rivalry among us that arises from seeking status in people's eyes. This is totally contrary to our way. Since every individual can enjoy the total honor of all brothers and sisters, I hope that the students of the *Risale-i Nur* are distanced from sacrificing that great collective honor for personal, selfish, competitive, and minor fame and renown. They should be rational and spiritually mature enough not to stoop to such lowly, harmful things. But everyone has an evil-commanding soul, and sometimes selfish impulses and desires can control a person to such extents, despite their heart, mind, and spirit. I never think of accusing your hearts, minds, or spirits. But the carnal soul, impulses, desires, and fancies sometimes deceive. For this reason, you are sometimes warned severely. The

¹¹ Happy is the one who, in order to have a large pool of sweet water flowing from the heavenly spring of the Qur'an, casts their ego, which is like a block of ice, into the pool and melts it.

severity in the warnings is because of these impulses, desires, and fancies. Therefore, act cautiously.

If our way had been based on submission to a *shaykh*, there would have been a single position or a limited number of inferior positions. Numerous capacities would have been candidates for these positions, and this would have provoked envy and selfishness. But our way is based on brotherhood. No brother or sister can be another's parent or assume the position of spiritual guide. Brotherhood entails a broad range of positions, and allows no rivalry or contest. Brothers and sisters are helpers and supporters of one another, each completing another's service. This demonstrates how harmful it would be to cherish greed for personal reward; competing for personal reward in ways that are based on a fatherly position or that of a spiritual guide, despite whatever personal excellence or spiritual attainments they may possess, causes followers on some Sufi paths to suffer greatly from rivalry and disagreements among themselves. Their vast, sacred power cannot withstand the gales of heresies.

The third obstacle to gaining sincerity is fear and avarice. Referring you to the Six Human and Satanic Intrigues (The Fourth Section of the Twenty-Ninth Letter in *The Letters*), where this obstacle has been explained together with some others, I make all His All-Beautiful Names our intercessor with Him, and

entreat the Most Compassionate of the compassionate that He will enable us to attain perfect sincerity.

O God! For the sake of Surat al-Ikhlās (the Qur'anic Chapter of Sincerity), include us among Your servants sincere and endowed with sincerity. Amen. Amen.

All-Glorified are You. We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

A confidential letter to some of my brothers

I will mention an aspect of two hadiths to my brothers who appear bored and reluctant to serve the Qur'an and belief by writing and making multiple copies of the Risale-i Nur's parts, and prefer certain supererogatory acts of worship in these three months, namely Rajab, Sha'ban and Ramadan, which are the months of concentration on worship more than other times. Serving the Qur'an and belief is actually a sort of worship in five respects.¹²

¹² We asked our teacher about these five respects. The answer we received is below:

- Such efforts strive to defend the Qur'an and belief against the people of misguidance and heresy, which is the most important jihad at the present.
- They serve our teacher by helping him to communicate the truths of belief.
- They serve Muslims in respect of belief.
- They provide religious education and knowledge through writing.
- They ensure worship in the form of reflective thought, one hour of

The first *hadith* is, “(At the Last Judgment,) the ink spent by true scholars of the Religion is equal in weight to the blood of the martyrs.”¹³

The second *hadith* is, “Whoever follows my Sunna when my Community is corrupted, there is for him (or her) the reward of a hundred martyrs.”¹⁴

O brothers and sisters who show boredom and reluctance. These two *hadiths* together show that a drop of the black light—ink, which is like the water of life—that flows from the blessed pens serving the truths of belief, the essentials of the Islamic life, and the elevated Sunna of the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, at this time may be of use to you on Judgment Day as being equal to a hundred drops of the blood of martyrs. Therefore, try to gain this!

If you say: The *hadith* mentions the scholars, but some of us are only scribes.

The Answer: One who carefully studies these treatises for a year to understand them fully can be an important, eminent scholar of this time. Even if they do not understand them fully, the students of the *Risale-i*

which may sometimes be equal to a year’s supererogatory worship.
Signed: Rüşdü, Husrev, Rafet

¹³ al-Ghazzali, *Ihya’u ‘Ulum ad-Din*, 1:6, 8; Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Lisan al-Mizan*, 5:225; al-Munawi, *Fayd al-Qadir*, 6:466. (Tr.)

¹⁴ at-Tabarani, *al-Mu’jam al-Awsat*, 5:315; al-Bayhaki, *Sunan*, “Zuhd” 118. (Tr.)

Nur have a collective personality, and this is surely a scholar of this time. Your pens are the fingers of that collective personality. Although, in my view, I am not entitled to be regarded as such, due to your good opinion of me you have regarded me as your teacher and as a religious scholar. Since I have difficulty in writing, your pens may be regarded as mine, and you will receive the reward indicated in the *hadith*.

Said Nursi

Islamic Brotherhood and Sisterhood

[from *The Letters*, the Twenty-second Letter]

In His name.

There is nothing that does not glorify Him with His praise.

(This letter has two chapters. The first one calls believers to brotherhood [and sisterhood] and mutual love.)

First chapter

In the name of God, the All-Merciful,
the All-Compassionate.

The believers are but brothers, so make peace between your brothers. (49:10)

Repel the evil with what is the best (of what you can do); then see: the one between whom and you there was enmity has become a bosom friend. (41:34)

Ever-restraining their rage, and pardoning people. God loves the people devoted to doing good. (3:134)

Dispute, discord, partisanship, obstinacy, and envy, which cause rancor and enmity among believers, are distasteful, vile, harmful and wrongful for personal, social, and spiritual life, and from the viewpoint of truth, wisdom, and Islam, which is supreme humanity. Moreover, they poison human life. Out of this truth's numerous aspects, we mention only six.

First aspect: They are wrong from the viewpoint of truth.

O unjust one who nourishes rancor and enmity for a believer, imagine yourself on a ship or in a house with one criminal and nine innocent persons. If someone tried to make the ship sink or set the house on fire (because of that one criminal), you would understand the magnitude of such an injustice and protest and decry his injustice as loudly as you could. Even if there were one innocent person and nine criminals on that ship, it would still be unjust to sink it.

A believer may be compared to a house or a ship belonging to God. Such a person has not nine, but as many as twenty innocent attributes such as belief, Islam, and neighborliness. If you cherish rancor and enmity for him (or her) because of one criminal attribute you do not like, which means desiring the destruction of that ship or house, your crime would be most atrocious.

Second aspect: They are wrong from the viewpoint of wisdom. Love and enmity are opposites, like

light and darkness, and so their true nature cannot be combined in a single heart. If love is truly felt in a heart due to the predominance of the causes that engender it, hostility assumes the form of pity. Believers should love—and indeed do love—their brothers and sisters in faith and be pained by any evil seen in them. They should try to help them reform themselves only with gentleness, for a Prophetic Tradition states, “Believers should not be angry with each other, nor refuse to speak to each other for more than three days.”¹⁵ If the causes producing enmity predominate and hostility invades the heart, love becomes merely formal and no more than pretense and flattery.

O unfair people, see how great an injustice is rancor and enmity toward a brother believer! If you regard worthless pebbles as more valuable than the Ka‘ba and greater than Mount Uhud, you are guilty of a repugnant folly. Since all Islamic attributes like belief (as valuable as the Ka‘ba) and Islam (as splendid as Mount Uhud) demand love and concord between believers, it is an enormous disgrace, folly, and injustice to give less weight to belief and Islam than to certain faults and shortcomings which arouse hostility toward a believer but in reality are like worthless pebbles compared to Mount Uhud or the Ka‘ba.

Unity in belief requires unity of hearts, and unity in following the same principles of creed and action

¹⁵ Bukhari, *Adab*, 57; Muslim, *Birr*, 23; Abu Dawud, *Adab*, 47. (Tr.)

demands social agreement and solidarity. If you are in the same squadron as someone else, you will feel friendly toward him and so form a mutually friendly relation because you are commanded by one commander. You also will experience a fraternal relationship with another due to being from or living in the same town. Given this, there are ties of unity, bonds of accord, and fraternal relationships generated by the light and consciousness of belief as many as the Divine Names which belief makes manifest to you. For example:

Both of you serve the same One Creator, Sovereign, Object of Worship, Provider... so there are as many ties between you as there are Divine Names. Your Prophet, religion [Islam], and *qibla* are one and the same, and the number of such ties amount to almost a hundred. Your town, country, and state is one, and tens of things are one and the same for you.

These ties require unity and oneness, union and concord, love and brotherhood. Such immaterial chains are strong enough to link all the planets together. If, despite all this, you prefer things as frail and trivial as a spider's web and that cause dispute, discord, and rancor, and cherish enmity and grudges toward fellow believers, you must understand—unless your heart is dead and your intelligence extinguished—how great is your disregard for those ties of unity, and how seri-

ously you are offending those causes of love and transgressing against those brotherly relationships!

Third aspect: According to *No soul bears and is made to bear the burden of another* (6:164), which expresses absolute justice, nurturing rancor and enmity for believers is like condemning all of their innocent attributes on account of one criminal attribute—a very great injustice indeed! If you extend your enmity to their relatives, you are the object of the verse *People are much given to wrongdoing* (14:34). Since truth and Islam’s law and wisdom warn you against such a great injustice, how can you consider yourself to be right?

In the view of truth, the forms of evil that arouse enmity are in themselves evil, and they are dense like earth. They should not infect or be passed on to others. But if others see those who commit them and imitate them, it becomes a different matter entirely. [For such people do so more from their own inclination toward such evils than to those evils’ effective powers.] In contrast, good actions and qualities that give rise to love are luminous like love itself, and are by nature transmittable. This is why we have such proverbs as, “The friend of a friend is a friend” and “Many eyes are loved for the sake of one eye.”

So, O unjust ones! Consider how great an offense it is to harbor enmity toward innocent fellow believers who are worthy of love, or toward their relatives because you do not like individual believers.

Fourth aspect: It is wrong from the viewpoint of personal life. Consider the following four principles that are the basis of this aspect:

FIRST PRINCIPLE: When you know your way to be right and your opinions to be true, you may be justified in saying, “My way is right and better.” But you cannot say, “Only my way is right.” According to the principle, “The eye of contentment is too dim to perceive faults, whereas the eye of anger exhibits all vice,” your unjust view and distorted opinion cannot judge between the ways, and should not condemn another’s way as wrong.

SECOND PRINCIPLE: Whatever you say should be true, but you have no right, nor is it true, to say (carelessly and on every occasion) whatever is true. For those who are not so sincere as you may be irritated by your advice and react unfavorably.

THIRD PRINCIPLE: If you want to nurse your hostility, direct it against the enmity in your heart and try to remove it. Also, be an enemy to your evil-commanding soul and its fancies and try to reform it, for it is your most dangerous enemy. Do not nurse anger and hostility toward believers to please that harmful soul. If you cannot remove this enmity, there are many unbelievers and heretics deserving enmity. As the attribute of love deserves to receive love, enmity deserves to receive enmity.

If you want to defeat your enemy, meet evil with good, for responding with evil increases enmity. Even though outwardly defeated, such people nurture rancor and enmity in their hearts. Believers are noble by nature and so will submit to you if you treat them nobly. Even if one believer seems to be ignoble, he or she is yet noble with respect to belief. If you respond with good, they will repent and become your friends, as expressed in the couplet:

If you treat the noble nobly, they will be yours,

But if you treat the ignoble nobly, they will revolt.

If you repeatedly tell someone that he or she is good or bad, it is often observed that he or she becomes good or bad respectively. So heed the following sacred principles established by the Qur'an, for happiness and salvation are found therein:

When they happen to pass by anything vain and useless, they pass by it with dignity. (25:72)

Yet, if you pardon, forbear, and forgive, God is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (64:14)

FOURTH PRINCIPLE: Those who indulge in rancor and enmity wrong and transgress their own souls, fellow believers, and Divine Compassion. For they condemn their souls to torment whenever they see their enemies obtain a blessing or advantage, and suffer pain because they fear their enemies. Enmity arising from envy is

the severest torment, for envy consumes and destroys the envious while leaving the one envied untouched or largely untouched.

If those ensnared in such envy want to be cured, let them ponder the fate of what or who engenders such envy. Doing so will cause them to see that the physical beauty and strength, and the worldly rank and wealth, which they see their enemies have, are transient. Their benefit is slight, but the trouble they cause is great. If you envy others because of their merits with respect to the Hereafter, you are either a hypocrite who wants to use up here the rewards to be paid in the Hereafter, or unjustly consider the object of your envy a hypocrite or ostentatious.

If you rejoice when those you envy suffer misfortune and grieve when they receive a bounty, you are being offended by the good done to them by Destiny and Divine Compassion and thus indirectly criticize and object to them. Those who criticize Destiny strike and break their heads on an anvil; those who object to Compassion are deprived of it.

How can justice and sound conscience accept that you elevate something unworthy of even one day's enmity to cause a year of rancor and enmity? Moreover, you cannot attribute any evil you have suffered at his or her hand to a fellow believer alone for three reasons: Destiny has a part in allowing it, so accept it quietly;

consider the share of Satan and the evil-commanding soul, which will cause you to pity—and not resent—your fellow believer who was defeated by them; and God may use such people to punish you for a defect which you tend not to see or you keep secret.

By responding to the remaining small share with tolerance, forgiveness, and magnanimity, you will conquer your enemy swiftly and safely, and will avoid any wrongdoing and harm. Otherwise, you will be like a drunken or crazed merchant who buys ice and glass fragments at the price of diamonds. In other words, you will respond to worthless, transient, and insignificant affairs with violent, persistent hostility and permanent rancor, as if you and your enemy would remain in this world forever. Such an attitude leads to excessive wrongdoing, drunkenness [in the sense of being unaware of reality], and a kind of insanity.

If you care about yourself, do not allow enmity and desire for revenge, both of which are so harmful to your life, to enter your heart. If they are already in your heart, do not heed them; instead, heed the words of Hafiz ash-Shirazi: “The world is not a commodity worth contending for.” The world is worthless because it is transient. Given this, understand how insignificant are its petty affairs! Hafiz also says:

The tranquility of both worlds lies in two things:
Magnanimity toward friends and the wise manage-
ment of enemies.

If you say, “But I have no choice, for enmity is part of my nature. Moreover, these things angered me and so I cannot overlook them,” I respond, “If you do not act badly, such as backbiting, or under the influence of such impulses toward those for whom you cherish enmity, and if you are conscious that you err, it is harmless. For awareness of your error and admission that your evil impulse is wrong means repenting and seeking God’s forgiveness, which will deliver you from its evil consequences. This is why I wrote this section—so that you might seek forgiveness, distinguish right from wrong, and might not publicize your enemy who is in the right as being in the wrong.”

A case worthy of notice: I once saw a partisan yet pious scholar of Islam condemn another pious scholar of a different political opinion by implying that the latter was an apostate, and then respectfully praise a fellow partisan hypocrite holding his own view. Appalled at such an evil result, saying, “I seek refuge in God from Satan and politics,” I withdrew from political life.

Fifth aspect: Obstinacy and partisanship only harm social life.

If it is said: A Tradition says, “Difference among my community is a mercy.”¹⁶ Difference requires partisanship. Although a disease, it also relieves the op-

¹⁶ Al-Munawi, *Faydh al-Qadir*, 1:210.

pressed masses from an oppressive elite that, if united, tends toward tyranny. If there are [political] parties and partisanship, the oppressed may protect themselves by joining one. Also, the confrontation of opinions and the disagreement of ideas allow the truth to emerge in its full measure.

Answer: The difference intended in the hadith is a positive difference. That is, it allows each side to promote and propagate its own argument, to improve and reform a competing view instead of destroying it. The Prophet rejects a negative difference, for it seeks to destroy another side because of partisan bias and hostility. Those who are at each other's throats cannot act positively (toward each other).

As for the second part of the question, if partisanship is in the name of truth, it can be a refuge for those seeking their rights. But the current biased and self-centered partisanship is only a refuge and a focus of support for the unjust. If Satan appears to support those engaged in biased partisanship, such partisans will call God's blessings upon him. Moreover, if angelic people join another side, the same partisans will call God's curses upon them.

As for the third part of the question, if people argue in the name of truth, this is only a difference of means. In reality, it is an agreement upon the basis of the matter and the basic purpose. Such an argument can re-

veal all aspects of truth, and so serves justice and truth. But a confrontation between biased, partisan opinions driven by egotism and fame-seeking, one engendered by a tyrannical, carnal soul, only can bring forth the flames of dissension. Failing to agree on a purpose, opposing views of this kind cannot find a point of convergence anywhere on earth. Since they do not differ in the name of truth, they split into extremes and give rise to irreconcilable divisions.

In short, if one's conduct is not based on exalted principles, "Loving for God's sake; disliking for God's sake; judging for God's sake," dispute and discord will result. If one ignores these principles, attempts to do justice will result in injustice.

An important, instructive event: Imam 'Ali once felled an unbeliever in a war. Just as he was about to kill him, the unbeliever spat at him. 'Ali released him. When the unbeliever asked why, 'Ali replied, "I was going to kill you for God's sake. But I became angry when you spat at me, and so my intention's purity was clouded by my soul's inclinations. So, I did not kill you." The unbeliever replied, "I spat at you so that you would become mad and kill me instantly. If your religion is so pure and disinterested, it must be the truth."

An incident worthy of notice: Upon seeing a judge display signs of anger while executing a sentence, his just superior fired him. If the judge had performed his

task in the Sacred Divine Law's name, he would have felt pity on the culprit and shown neither mercy nor anger in executing the sentence. Since his soul's inclinations had some share in his deed, he could not perform this task with justice.

A regrettable social condition and a terrible social disease fit to be wept over by the heart of Islam: A harmonious social life requires that internal enmities be forgotten and abandoned when the nation is confronted with foreign enemies. While even the most unsophisticated people recognize and practice this, why do those who claim to be serving the Muslim community fail to forget their petty hostilities at a time when numerous enemies are taking up positions to attack, one after the other, and thereby prepare the ground for the attacks of the enemies? This is nothing less than corruption, barbarity, and treachery directed against the social life of Islam!

An instructive anecdote: The tribe of Hasanan bedouins had two mutually hostile clans. Although more than 50 had been killed on each side, whenever another tribe (e.g., the Sibkan or the Haydaran) attacked them, they would forget their tribal enmity and unite until the enemy was repelled.

O people of belief! There are more than a hundred enemy "tribes," like a series of concentric circles, ready to attack the "tribe" of believers. At a time of as-

suming defensive positions and supporting each other, how can believers insist on pursuing their biased partisanship and hostile rancor and thereby facilitate the enemy's assault and grant access to the fold of Islam?

As many as seventy circles of hostile forces, ranging from the misguided, the heretics and the people of false belief, to the vicissitudes of worldly life, are watching you with greed and hatred. Each one looks for ways to hurt you, and studies you with anger and hatred. Your firm weapon, shield, and citadel against all of these is Islamic unity. So be aware of how flagrantly it contradicts conscience and the common interests of Muslims to pursue your petty enmities and other pretexts and thereby to shake this citadel of Islam, and come to your senses!

Prophetic Traditions report that such harmful and terrible people as *Dajjal* and *Sufyan* will lead the unbelievers and hypocrites at the end of time.¹⁷ Although they will have only a small force, they will reduce humanity to anarchy and the Muslim world to slavery by exploiting people's worldly ambitions and dissension.

O people of belief! If you wish to avoid such a fate, come to your senses. Take refuge in the citadel of *The believers are but brothers* (49:10) against those op-

¹⁷ Dajjal is the Islamic counterpart of the "Anti-Christ" in Christianity. Sufyan is a type of Dajjal. Both will cause great havoc and confusion among believers.

pressors who exploit your differences. If you do not, you cannot preserve your lives or defend your rights. While two champions fight each other, even a child can beat them. If two mountains are balanced in the scales, even a small stone can cause one to rise and the other to fall. So, O people of belief! Control your passions and hostile partisanship, otherwise your strength will weaken so much that even a small force can beat you. If you have any commitment to a collective life of social harmony and solidarity, make the principle of “The believers are together like a firm building, one part of which supports the other” your guiding principle in life!¹⁸ This will deliver you from humiliation in this world and wretchedness in the next.

Sixth aspect: Enmity and rancor spoil spiritual life and worship, for they spoil your sincerity and purity of intention—the means of salvation. Biased partisans seek superiority over their opponents while performing good deeds and so do not act purely for God’s sake. Slanting their judgments and dealings toward their supporters, they cannot be just. Their intention becomes impure, and their justice becomes injustice, both of which void their good deeds. This aspect requires elaboration, but we keep it short because this is not the place to discuss it further.

¹⁸ Bukhari, *Salat*, 88; Muslim, *Birr*, 65; Tirmidhi, *Birr*, 18. (Tr.)

Second chapter

In the name of God, the All-Merciful,
the All-Compassionate.

Surely God—it is He Who is the All-Providing, the
Lord of all might, the All-Steadfast. (51:58)

How many a creature there is that does not carry
its provision (in store), but God provides for them,
and indeed for you! He is the All-Hearing, the All-
Knowing. (29:60)

O people of belief, now you understand how harmful enmity is. Greed is another great disease, and just as harmful for Islam's [social] life. It causes disappointment, sickness, humiliation, deprivation, and misery to arise. The humiliation and misery of some peoples, who leap at this world more avidly than any other people, proves this.

Greed shows its evil consequences wherever there are animate beings. In contrast, seeking one's provision with contentment and trust in God is a means to tranquility and displays its good effects everywhere. For example, fruit trees and plants need provision and yet remain stationary, "contentedly trusting in God and showing no impatience." And so their provision hastens to them and they reproduce more vigorously than animals. Animals attain only an insufficient provision after great effort, since they pursue it with impatience.

Only the young among living beings, who “demonstrate their trust in God through their weakness and impotence,” receive in full measure their rightful and delicious provision from Divine Compassion’s treasury. On the other hand, wild beasts that leap greedily at their provision obtain “illicit” and coarse food at the cost of great effort. These examples show that greed causes deprivation, while trusting God and contentment are the means to Divine mercy.

Those people who cling greedily to this world and are passionately attached to worldly life exert great efforts to secure control over usurious and therefore illicit wealth of little benefit. In return they suffer international humiliation, misery, death, and insult. This shows that greed is a source of humiliation and loss. This has so many examples that “Greedy people are exposed to disappointment and loss,” is proverbial and a universally accepted truth. Thus if you love wealth, seek it with contentment so that you may earn it abundantly.

Contented and greedy people can be likened to two people entering a great one’s audience. One thinks, “It is enough that he admits me so that I can escape from the cold outside. Even if he seats me in the lowest position, it will be a favor.” The second person arrogantly hopes for the highest position, as if he had some right to it and as if everyone were obliged to respect him. He enters with greed and, fixing his gaze upon the

highest position, attempts to advance toward it. But the owner, who dislikes his manner, turns him back and seats him in a lower position. Instead of thanking the owner, the man is angered and criticizes him in his heart. The first one enters most humbly and shows his willingness to be seated even in the lowest position. His modesty pleases the owner, who invites him to sit in a higher position and thereby causes his gratitude to increase. This world is like the All-Merciful One's audience hall. The earth's surface is like a banquet laid out by the Divine Compassion, with the different degrees of provision and grades of bounty corresponding to the seating positions.

Everyone can experience the evil effects of greed even in most minor affairs. For example, you are offended by a beggar who importunes greedily and are inclined to refuse the request, whereas you give to the peaceable one out of pity. Or you may fall asleep quickly if you do not think about sleeping, instead of trying to fall asleep immediately. If you are impatient, you might lose your whole night's sleep. Or, if you impatiently wait for someone and complain continually, finally you will lose patience and leave. But a minute later the person will come, and so your purpose will remain frustrated.

The reason for this is as follows: A loaf of bread is made only after tilling the field, harvesting the crop,

taking the grain to a mill, and baking the loaf. Similarly, Divine Wisdom arranges everything according to a certain deliberation. If you do not comply with this deliberation and neglect to follow all the arranged steps, you cannot achieve the desired result.

O brothers and sisters dizzied with earning your living and stupefied by greed for this world! When greed is so harmful and injurious, why do you humiliate yourselves for it? Why do you accept wealth without distinguishing between the allowed and the forbidden, thereby sacrificing many things necessary for the afterlife? To satisfy your greed you even abandon *Zakah*,¹⁹ one of Islam's most important pillars, a means of being blessed with increase and fertility and of repelling misfortune. Those who neglect it lose an equal amount of wealth either through spending on useless things or suffering misfortune.

I had a true, highly interesting dream during the fifth year of World War I. In it, I was asked the reason for this hunger, financial loss, and bodily trial afflicting the Muslims. I replied:

¹⁹ *Zakah*: This word literally means purification and growth, for Muslims believe that it purifies their possessions. For most purposes, it consists of setting aside 2.5 percent of one's capital, provided that this capital reaches a certain minimum amount after its owner's needs have been met, to help those who qualify for it and to benefit the local community in general. *Zakah* is considered so important that those who ignore it are not considered part of the Muslim community. (Tr.)

From the wealth He grants to us, God Almighty requires, as *Zakah*, either a tenth or a fortieth so that we may benefit from the poor people's grateful prayers and avoid their rancor and envy.²⁰ As our greed did not allow us to pay, God Almighty removed its accumulated amount: three-fourths where a fortieth was owed, and four-fifths where a tenth was owed.

He asks us to fast for a month each year so that we may benefit from as many as seventy beneficial purposes. But we pitied ourselves and did not fast. And so God Almighty compelled us to fast for five years with a hunger that combines almost seventy kinds of afflictions.

God requires believers to spend no more than one hour out of twenty-four in the Prayer, a pleasing and lofty, illuminating and beneficial form of Divine training. But we were too lazy to observe the five daily Prayers and so wasted all twenty-four hours. In return, God Almighty chastened us by making us undergo a form of training and physical exertion for five years.

I awoke after this and, pondering over it, realized a very important truth. As The Twenty-fifth Word indicates, by comparing modern civilization's principles to the Qur'an's commands, all immorality and disturbances in human social life proceed from two sources and

²⁰ A tenth of wealth that annually yields a new crop; a fortieth of whatever yields a financial surplus during the year, or of at least forty pasturing animals (e.g., sheep or goats). (Tr.)

two attitudes: “Once I am full, what do I care if others die of hunger?” and, “You work and I will eat.”

These attitudes are perpetuated by the prevalence of usury and interest and the abandonment of *Zakah*. The only remedy is to implement *Zakah* as a universal principle and duty and then ban usury. *Zakah* is a most essential pillar for individuals, particular communities, and humanity to live a happy life. Humanity usually comprises two classes: the elite and the masses.²¹ Only *Zakah* can arouse the elite’s compassion and generosity toward the masses, and the masses’ respect and obedience toward the elite. Without *Zakah*, the elite cruelly oppresses the masses and thereby often engenders grudges and revolt. Such a development gives rise to constant struggle and opposition, finally resulting in labor and capital confronting each other, as in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century.

O people of nobility and fairness, of munificence and liberality! If you do not act generously in the name

²¹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi uses *elite* for those who can give *Zakah*, and the masses for those eligible to receive it. These designations are relative, for they depend upon local standard of wealth. As Islam does not allow a deep socioeconomic gap to form between Muslims, the gap between these groups is not very great. In many Muslim societies today, members of both groups can be found within the middle class. As the main purpose for *Zakah* is for the poor to receive enough money to provide for their families, we should consider the living standard envisaged by Islam when considering *Zakah*. (Tr.)

of *Zakah*, your acts are useless and potentially harmful. If you do not give in God's name, you make poor people feel obliged to you and so deprive yourself of their prayers, which are acceptable in God's sight. Also, although you are an official charged with the distribution of God Almighty's bounties among His servants, your subsequent belief that you own your wealth shows great ingratitude. But if you give *Zakah*, you are rewarded for giving for His sake and thank Him for the bounties received. What is more, its recipients will not feel obliged to flatter or fawn, and thus damage their self-respect. Moreover, their prayers for you will be accepted.

See the vast difference between giving to earn fame and impose obligation, and giving as *Zakah* to fulfill your religious duty, gain a reward, be sincere, and have poor peoples' prayers for you accepted.

All-Glorified You are! We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. You are All-Knowing, All-Wise.

O God, bestow blessings and peace on our master Muhammad, who said, "Believers are together like a firm building, one part of which supports the other," and, "Contentment is a treasure that will never be exhausted," and on his Family and Companions. And all praise and gratitude are for God, Lord of the worlds.

Addendum: Concerning backbiting

In His Name.

There is nothing that does not glorify Him with His praise.

The verse *Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?* (49:12) induces an aversion to backbiting in six miraculous ways and shows how disgusting this practice is. Thus there is no need or possibility for further explanation. It reprimands backbiters with six degrees of reprimand and restrains them with six degrees of severity. Read as addressed to backbiters, it means:

The *hamza* (') at the beginning of the original Arabic sentence is interrogative. This sense penetrates the verse like water, so that each word carries an interrogative accent. Thus the first word following the *hamza* asks, "Do you have no intelligence with which to ask and answer, to discriminate between good and bad, so that you cannot perceive how abominable such a thing is?"

The second word *like* asks, "Is your heart, with which you love or hate, so spoiled that you love such a repugnant thing?"

Third, the phrase *any of you* asks, "What has happened to your sense of social responsibility and civilized life, which derives its meaning and energy from living together as a community, that you dare to accept something so poisonous to social life?"

Fourth, the phrase *to eat the flesh* asks, “What has happened to your sense of humanity that you tear your friend to pieces with your teeth like a wild animal?”

Fifth, the phrase *of your brother [sister]* asks, “Do you have no human tenderness, no sense of kinship, that you sink your teeth into an innocent person tied to you by many links of brotherhood [sisterhood]? Do you have no intelligence that you so senselessly bite your own limbs?”

Sixth, the word *dead* asks, “Where is your conscience? Is your nature so corrupt that you commit so disgusting an act as eating the flesh of your dead brother [sister] who deserves great respect?”

In its totality, this verse shows that slander and backbiting are repugnant to one’s intelligence, heart, humanity, conscience, human nature, and religious and social unity. Its six degrees of condemnation are very concise and precise, and restrain people in six miraculous ways.

Backbiting is a shameful weapon commonly used by people of enmity, envy, and obstinacy. No self-respecting, honorable person has anything to do with it. A celebrated person once said:

I hold myself in so great esteem as not to punish (my enemy) with backbiting,

For backbiting is the weapon of the weak and the low.

Backbiting means speaking about absent people in ways that would repel and annoy them if they were

present. If the words are true, it is backbiting; if they are not, it is both backbiting and slander and thus doubly loathsome.

In a very few cases, speaking about others is permissible. Four of these are:

- A wronged person presents a formal complaint to right a wrong and restore justice.
- If someone thinking about cooperating with someone else asks what you think of that person, and you say to him disinterestedly and for the good of both, and in order to counsel him properly, “Do not cooperate with him; it will be to your disadvantage,” it is not sinful.
- If you describe a fact and are not exposing someone to disgrace or notoriety, as in, “That disabled, homeless person went to such-and-such a place.”
- If the person being criticized is an open and unashamed sinner who glories in sin and enjoys doing what is wrong.

Speaking about another may be permissible in such cases if done disinterestedly and purely for the sake of truth, and in the collective interest. Otherwise, it is like a fire that consumes good deeds as a flame consumes wood.

If you have engaged in backbiting or listened to it willingly, seek God’s forgiveness: “O God, forgive me and the one about whom I talked.” When you meet the person, ask for forgiveness.

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