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## SOME REFLECTIONS ON BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI'S THOUGHT ON TASAWWUF

### Abstract

With the beginning of the Last Revelation to Muhammad (SAW), Tasawwuf has been a subject of Muslim scholarship of all shades. As an indispensable institution of Islam Tasawwuf has played a significant and positive role in the course of Muslim history. At the same time, and throughout, the institution of Tasawwuf has come under severe criticism at the pen of the Muslim scholars, thereby giving rise to two shades of thought—one completely endorsing anything and everything associated with it and the other squarely the opposite.

Yet there has been a significant Muslim scholarship that while recognizing Tasawwuf as an important institution of Islam and tracing its theoretical basis to the Qur'an and Sunnah, also criticise and negate many superfluous beliefs and practices associated with it. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960 AD) represents this trend of thought in Sufism. Said Nursi criticises those who completely reject Sufism and simultaneously condemn the centrifugal tendencies within Sufism. The paper attempts to highlight Said Nursi's thought on Tasawwuf with reference to his *Risale-i Nur*. The paper follows descriptive and comparative methodology.

**Key words:** Sufism, Said Nursi, Islam, Qur'an, Sunnah, *Risale-i Nur*, Muhammad (SAW), Tasawwuf, *Mujaddid Alf-i Thani*, Imam Rabbani.

### **Introduction**

Sufism or Tasawwuf,<sup>1</sup> “a quest for nearness to God”, has been one of the most important organ of Islam and a significant subject of learning, research and experience for centuries together. With the advent of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Arabia and the beginning of the last Revelation, Sufism has been a subject of Muslim scholarship of all shades. Tasawwuf, as an indispensable institution of Islam has played a major and significant role in its history, be it the plenteous conversions, or keeping together its spiritual ethos or the individuals' spiritual integrity. At the same time, and throughout, the institution of Sufism has come under severe criticism at the pen of the Muslim scholars who are very cynical about its various concepts and history, thereby

giving rise to two schools of thought—one completely endorsing anything and everything of it and the other squarely the opposite.<sup>2</sup>

Yet there has been a significant Muslim scholarship that while recognizing the Sufism as an important institution of Islam and tracing its theoretical basis to the Qur'an and Sunnah, also criticize and negate many superfluous beliefs and practices associated with it. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi represents this trend of thought in Sufism. Said Nursi criticizes those who completely reject Sufism and simultaneously condemn the centrifugal tendencies within Sufism.

The thought put forth by Said Nursi should be put in a perspective keeping in consideration his life, personality and milieu, all of which have undoubtedly influenced it profoundly. Also, on the important and vast subject like Sufism one needs to go through all the relevant books of history and the writings of Nursi to make some justice on the subject. So what is present here is a general overview of Nursi on the very institution of Sufism and some of its inner dimensions.

As a preliminary it is pertinent to mention that Said Nursi did not want to construct a distinct Sufi theory.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless he proposes a serious viewpoint on this very important institution of Islam. Not only the important personalities associated with Sufism but the cardinal concepts and precepts have been dealt by him with the mind and heart of a Sufi and an 'Alim. Also, Said Nursi was more concerned with the essence and spirit of Sufism rather going into its nuances. Still, having said that, he unlike many other scholars of Sufism, does not summarily reject its importance and contribution but analyze it objectively, detailing its merits and demerits, its role in the past and the present relevance.

At the outset what draws Nursi to Sufism are his spiritual cravings. As Bilal Kuspinar aptly puts it, Nursi, especially in his former days, had gone through a period of hesitation in quest of a way to reach the truth. In one of these hectic times, for instance, when he had been pondering upon the phenomenon of death, his heedless head, as he himself laments, had become a target of terrible and fateful blows. Such compelling situation eventually prompted him to look for a saviour who would cure his psychological illness.<sup>4</sup> And he found his saviour in the personality of the great saint-scholar of the Mughal period Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (971/1563-1034/1624) alias *Mujaddid Alf-i-Thani* (the Renovator of the Second Millennium) when he came across the following recommendation: "Make the Tawhid your point of direction (*qiblah*).<sup>5</sup> In other words, take one individual as your master and follow him strictly, do not concern yourself with anyone else." By this guidance, Nursi delivered his soul from the state of perplexity and bewilderment, and thus his heart finally found the peace and satisfaction in that the true one, namely Tawhid is only to be found in the Qur'an, which is the most sublime guide and the source for all the masters of Sufi paths.

Nursi, though being ever appreciative of all the Sufi schools furthered by the spirit of the Qur'an and of the Prophetic Tradition, nevertheless represents none of them.<sup>6</sup> What is important

for him is not to enter necessarily into a certain Sufi path, but rather to attain to the truths. This he has underlined by quoting one of the remarkable sayings of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, whom he describe ‘the hero and sun of the Naqshbandi Order’<sup>7</sup>: I prefer to be unveiled to me (*inkishaf*) of a single matter concerning the realities or truths of faith to thousands of intuitions, ecstasies (rapturous states), and wondrous deeds and works (*karamat*).<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, Nursi also concedes to the following fact, which has been stated again by Sirhindi: The ultimate point of all of the Sufi paths is the unveiling and elucidation of the truths concerning faith.<sup>9</sup>

After building a relationship with Sufism he first of all defines it by saying that Sufism, and the Sufi path as an institution, is the name of the spiritual way by which initiates seek knowledge of God and attain full perception of the truths of belief and the Qur’an. This way elevates initiates, at the end of the spiritual journeying and under the auspices of the Prophet’s Ascension, to the rank of the perfect person (*al-insan al-kamil*).<sup>10</sup> Its major goal and aim is to reach gnosis (*ma’rifa*). In other words, Sufism aims at perfecting man by letting him travel on a long spiritual path that leads ultimately to the manifestation of the truths as contained in the Qur’an. This journey takes place through the heart (*qalb*) of man, which is as Nursi describes the seed and the centre of the manifestation of innumerable realities of the universe. Sufism, according to Nursi, is known under various terms: *tariqa* (spiritual order or way), sainthood (being God’s friend), initiation, and following a spiritual order or way.<sup>11</sup>

In the next step, Nursi moves on to examine the inner dimensions and the psychological stations of the sufi path, following strictly the conventional doctrines of former Sufi Shaykhs, putting forth his view on some important issues and philosophies of Sufism like relationship between prophethood and sainthood, the status of Companions and on *wahdat al-wajud* and *wahdat al-shuhud*.

### **Prophethood and Sainthood**

Commenting on the relationship between Prophethood and Sainthood Nursi establishes an intrinsic connection between the two, making one complementary to the other. He states that sainthood is a proof of the Prophethood, so is the Sufi path for the Shari‘a.<sup>12</sup> And, the sainthood not only perceives but also confirms all the mysterious realities of Iman (faith) preached by the Prophethood through the contemplation of the heart and the intuition of the spirit at the level of certainty of sight (*‘ayn al-yaqin*). Again sainthood and the Sufi path, while both being a proof and evidence of the Prophethood and the Shari‘a, represent the mysterious perfection of Islam and the means leading to its lights, as well as the source of progress and the fountain-head of prosperity for humanity.<sup>13</sup> Nursi simultaneously maintains the superiority of prophethood over sainthood.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the Sufi path in particular, apart from its important and sublime values and spiritual results, serves as the most effective means to strengthening the brotherhood within the world of Islam.

## The Companions and the Saints

While responding to one of the questions concerning the status of the Companions vis-a-vis saints, Nursi first indicates that there is a consensus amongst the Orthodox Muslim Community (*Ahl-i Sunnat wa al-Jama'at*) on the superiority of the Companions over all mankind after the Prophet,<sup>15</sup> and then offers for it wise explanation. In this explanation, Nursi, resorting to the profound language of the Sufis, at first compares the Prophetic companionship or conversation (*sohbat-i nabawiyyah*) to the elixir:

The Prophetic companionship is just like an elixir; whosoever experiences it even for a minute, attains to the illuminations of the reality equivalent to years of mystical journey. For in Companionship there is a reflection and being coloured. As is well known, through reflection and submission one can rise to the highest rank in the Sublime Light of Prophethood. This is seen in the example of a Sultan's servant, who can rise through submission to the former to such a high level that a king cannot rise to it. Because of this mystery, therefore, the greatest saints cannot reach the level of the Companions. Even saints like Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti who, while they were awake, experienced many times the Prophetic companionship, even if they meet the most noble Prophet ﷺ while awake, and are thus honoured by his companionship in this world, they still cannot reach {the level of the} the Companions.<sup>16</sup> For the companionship and conversation of the Companions with the Prophet is through the light of the Prophethood of Ahmad (*Nabuwat-i Ahmadiyye*) as a Prophet (Nabi), whereas the saints seeing the most noble Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him) is a kind of companionship and conversation that takes place through the light of the sainthood of Muhammad ﷺ (*Velayet-i Ahmadiyye*) after his death. In other words, the most noble Prophet's appearance to them and his manifestation in their visions is due to the sainthood of the Prophet (may God's peace be upon him), not because of the Prophethood itself. This being the case, however, the degree the Prophethood is superior to the sainthood, the companionship and conversation of the former should be equally superior to that of the latter too.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, according to Nursi, the superiority of the Prophet's companions to all saints rests on both the Prophet's unique office and his supreme personality.

### ***Wahdat al-Wajud and Wahdat al-Shahud***

According to Said Nursi the two important philosophies of Sufism i.e., *wahdat al-wajud*—to imagine the universe as sheer non-existence to the extent that one is compelled to proclaim that there is no existent but He; and *wahdat al-shahud*—that there is nothing witnessed but He, which is the dictum of those who uphold the unity of perception, both fall in conflict with the teaching of the Qur'an, according to which the universe is regarded as real and not imaginary at all. Or if we put it in the context of Nursi's own principle that a thing ought to be taken in its existential sense, we are inevitably driven to submit to the same fact as the Qur'an

purports that is, all that exists in the universe are real beings, functioning as mirrors, in the concrete sense, for the manifestations of God's Beautiful Names and Attributes.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, according to Nursi, the Unity of Being though is considered to be the most sublime station by its exponents stands in fact in the lowest rank,<sup>19</sup> for it essentially reduces the being to the level of mere imagination; and in so doing, it equally reduces all the manifestations of God's attributes and names to the level of shadow-like realities, which is contrary to the truth as held in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. That is to say, the Names of the Necessary Existent, such as all-Merciful (*Rahman*), Sustainer (*Razzaq*), Creator (*Khaliq*), etc., all necessitate in reality and actuality a true application and manifestation according to their respective function. All of these names are as real as the term existent. Besides, the Companions and eminent scholars as well as the Imams of the Prophet's family have reinforced this truth by unanimously declaring that the true natures or realities of things are permanent (*haqaiqat al-ashya-i thabitatun*) and that God the Almighty manifests Himself truly through all His names.<sup>20</sup>

However one must bear in mind, warns Nursi, that although all the beings in the universe indeed exist, yet their existence in relation to God is too weak, dark, and shadow; but they are neither imaginary nor fancy at all, simply because God bestows upon them existence through His name, 'Creator.'<sup>21</sup> Besides God, who is absolutely and utterly beyond human comprehension, has nonetheless a relation to the beings, whether visible or invisible, as their Creator. The relationship between the Creator and His creatures, as far as Islam is concerned, rests on the six principles of belief each of which, as Nursi aptly puts it, requires the existence of contingent beings. These principles can in no way be built upon imagination or imaginary entities. Therefore, anyone who is engulfed with the unity of existence or witnessing, when he returns to the realm of sobriety (*'alam-i sahv*) from the realms of ecstasy (*istigraq*) and intoxication (*sukr*), should abandon that state of unity; otherwise, he could act contrary to the reality. Because of this reason, Nursi restores scrupulously the celebrated promulgation of *wahdat al-wajud*, *hama ust* (all is He) to its original form, *hama az-ust* (all is from Him), which may represent best the intimate relation between God and all other beings.<sup>22</sup>

Nursi's assessment of *wahdat al-wajud* becomes more substantial in his interpretation of the visions of the Sufis who are immersed in the unity of Existence. *Wahdat al-wajud*, Nursi says, is no doubt a very important mystical path and state, yet it is deficient and even sometimes perilous.<sup>23</sup> Despite this, most of the people who rose to that state did not want to leave it because of its attraction and pleasure; on the contrary, assuming it to be the highest stage, they remained there for good. These people, like other Sufis and saints, are the people of truth and reality; and they do witness the subtle realities especially in the state of ecstasy and intoxication. However, Nursi proceeds, so long as they remain in such a state, they cannot interpret what they see in their visions, unless they rise to the stage of the Asfiya, who are sober, having full control of themselves.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Nursi expounds the difference between the two above-mentioned states with the example of two shepherds, one sleeping and other awake. The one who was awake interpreted the other's dream in such a way that it entirely corresponds to reality, because he, unlike the sleeping one, was able to distinguish between the physical world and the world of images. Similarly, the people of *wahdat al-wajud* may witness, in their state of ecstasy, so many subtle images from the world of Similitudes, which resembles the physical world. And when they return to the state of sobriety, they may declare and even write exactly what they witness in their former state. However, due to their lack of balance, they unconsciously intermingle the images of the spiritual world with the actual entities of the material world.<sup>25</sup>

It is for this reason that the stages of witnessing (*shuhud*), Nursi declares, remains much inferior to that of faith in the Unseen.<sup>26</sup> Strictly speaking, all the intuitions, illuminations and unveilings that occur to the people of 'witnessing' are far behind the truths of belief of the sober saints and the true scholars who, as the heirs of the Prophet, rely on the Qur'an and Revelation. In short, all the mystical states, intuitions, visions, and illuminations, should be measured on the scale of the Qur'an and Sunnah.<sup>27</sup>

### **Critique of the Critiques of Sufism**

After delineating on some of the important aspects of Sufism, Nursi now comes openly in defence of the institution of Sufism by putting to sever criticism, the negative attitudes of the people who always show hostility to the Sufi path. Among them, he targets mainly two groups: The first group consists of what he calls certain devious sects (*firaq-i dalle*) who, due to their blindness to the illuminative lights of the Sufism, have gone as far as to its denial. In doing so, they have not only deprived themselves of this important path but also caused others to be deprived. Yet, it is not this group with which Nursi is very much concerned and for which he feels pity, since their denial of Sufism as a consequence of their blindness is to some extent understandable. However what is at stake, or as he himself laments, the most regrettable group are certain people who belong exclusively to the Community of Orthodox Islam (*Ahl-i Sunnat wa al-Jama'at*). Within this community, Nursi singles out two groups, one constitutes some literalist or externalist scholars (*zahiri- 'ulama*), the other some ignorant politicians (*ahl-i siyaset gafil*), both of them exert utmost attempt in order to close up and overthrow this important source of inspiration and water of life by means of such excuses that the followers of the Sufi path allegedly are abusive and mistaken in their practices of religion and that they hold views inconsistent with orthodox Islamic doctrines.<sup>28</sup> At any rate, there are very few things, ways, and paths which are immune to mistakes and faults; therefore, says Nursi, it would be unfair to judge a certain Sufi path on account of an error committed by its respective follower.<sup>29</sup> Besides, such faults and misuses are mostly committed not by the Masters or full-fledged experienced disciples but by the uninitiated and incompetent novices of the Tariqat. Therefore, the Sufi path cannot be condemned because of the evils and errors associated with the behaviours of certain orders and sects which have wrongly assumed the name of the Tariqat; in reality they remain far beyond the

bounds of the Shari'ah. So, what appears to be wrong in, lets us say, one particular Tariqat, cannot be generalized for the rest of the Sufi schools.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Place of Sufism within Islam**

Nursi assigns to Sufism a place of third rank after Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet. Before entering Sufism or Tasawwuf, he declares, one first must safeguard himself or herself from the standpoint of Iman, which is the only way leading to the eternal bliss. So, according to him, if the great Sufi Masters, like Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Gilani (known as Gawth al-A'zam, the founder of the Qadiri Order, 470/1077-561/1166), Shah Naqshband (Muhammad Baha-ud-Din Naqshband, the founder of the Naqshbandi Order d. 791/1389) and Imam Rabbani were today alive, they would exert all their efforts and works in order to reinforce and strengthen the truths of faith and the teachings of Islam.<sup>31</sup> For, they are the source of and the means to the eternal happiness. No one can enter Paradise without faith, whereas there are innumerable people who would go there without Sufism.<sup>32</sup> In that case, Islam is like bread, a basic sustenance, without which man cannot live, while Sufism is like a fruit with which man can dispense.<sup>33</sup> In olden days, one might elevate himself so as to reach the truths of belief through a spiritual journey of forty days or even sometimes of forty years; but now, says Nursi, through God's mercy if we can find a way to attain those truths in forty minutes we should not stay indifferent to it.

### **The Scope and Relevance of Sufism in the Modern Age**

In reply to a question on Sufism, Nursi responded that 'Islam is necessary; this is not the age of Sufism.' While going through spiritual upheaval, Nursi describes that his search led him to explore many alternatives, and "then I had recourse to the way of Sufism and studied it. I saw that it was truly luminous and effulgent, but that it needed the greatest caution. Only the highest of the elite could take that way. So, saying that this cannot be the way for everyone at this time".<sup>34</sup> Pertinently, when he was accused of having instructed in Sufism and even of having founded a Tariqa, his response was that he was always concerned with the truth and faith (*haqiqat* and *iman*).<sup>35</sup> Although after vigorous defence of the institution of Sufism and all that it entails, interestingly enough, Nursi does not find much scope for it in the modern times. This seems to be a trend in the modern times for many contemporary scholars also holds the same view, like Rashid Shaz, Javaid Ghamidi et al. For Nursi to hold such a stance has genuine and justified reasons, as according to him Sufi path is a spiral way upwards to the revelation of the divine truths but it is dangerous, illusionary and unsafe, because on it one relies only on one's self, being one's own criteria and judge.

Opposed to it is the ideal of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and his *Risale-i Nur*, where he convincingly proves that the society is superior to the individual and that personal justice may not always coincide with the communal one. In his view the only truthful and trustworthy leader to the eternal abode is the god-inspired wisdom of the Holy Qur'an. It is the universal light, leading the straightway and the only thing flawless and complete, granting not only earthly

justice and betterment but also absolution in the Day of Judgment. It is not merely a law, commanding moral life; it is an embodiment of justice—terrestrial and divine.

The ultimate point of all Sufi paths is the unveiling and elucidation of the truths concerning faith. But these truths are already revealed in the Qur'an so the role of Sufism is inferior one to that of the Shari'ah.<sup>36</sup>

So, according to Nursi Sufism is the exotic fruit, which only gives extraordinary taste and pleasure, but the strong and basic belief (Iman) is what is the “bread”, life- sustaining ingredient for the whole Ummah.

### **Qur'an-oriented Sufism—Nursi's alternative to Sufism in Modern Times**

Nursi's original path, as noted before, has its roots in the Qur'an, and advances steadily at four progressive steps and each can be explained in brief as follows:

In the first step, the initiate is required to comprehend the verse, *do not justify yourself*,<sup>37</sup> with a sincere attempt to see himself as he is, and not higher than he is. For, as Bediuzzaman says, man due to his innate nature and disposition, always tends to love and praise himself, and only himself, not anything else; so much so that he acts as if he is devoid of all faults and mistakes, and thus defends himself unreservedly as though worshipping himself, as the Qur'an articulates: *Have you seen the one who takes as his god his own desire? Then would you be responsible for him?*<sup>38</sup> So, his excessive glorification of himself causes him to rely only on himself and further sacrifice everything to his own soul at the exclusion of others. It is therefore the initiate, at the outset, must strive for the full discernment of his weakness.

In the second step, man is demanded to maintain the awareness of himself by persevering the awareness of God in mind and heart, as is displayed in the verse: *And be not like those who forget God, and He therefore makes them forget their own selves.*<sup>39</sup> In other words, man's forgetfulness of God, as Nursi expounds, results in the forgetfulness of his own soul, and even to some extent, his selfishness, in such a way that, whenever he sees something unfortunate or inconvenient, say, for instance, death, he takes it in relation to others, while forgetting that he may also encounter it too; and in the case of pleasure, however, he acts quite conversely and thinks first of himself. He can be liberated from such evil habit that emanates originally from his evil-commanding soul (*nafs-i ammara*) through the continuous recollection of God.

In the third step, the initiate begins to see his own imperfection before the most perfect Being, God. He strives to act in contrast to the demands of his evil-commanding soul by attributing all his good qualities to God and all his defects and faults to himself, as this verse teaches: *Whatever good, (O man!) happens to you, (happens to you) from God; but whatever evil happens to you is from your (own) soul (from yourself).*<sup>40</sup> At this stage, he remains ever thankful to God, and instead of being boastful of himself, he turns to lead an extremely humble life; so much so that, as Nursi articulates, he finds 'his perfection to lie in imperfection, his ability in ability, and his wealth in poverty.'



The initiate completes his journey as soon as he attains to the thorough comprehension of the wisdom that lies in the following famous Qur'anic verse: *Everything (that exists) will perish except His (own) Face (or Countenance)*.<sup>41</sup> The full understanding of this profound verse, according to Nursi, will save the person from being deluded by the appearance of the things, and thus facilitate him to see them in their true reality. In other words, a thing, declares he, has two aspects, one in respect to itself (*mana-yi ismi*), the other in regard to its Creator (*mana-yi harfi*). In its first aspect, the thing is transient (*fani*), absent (*mefkud*), temporal (*hadis*), and nonexistent (*ma'dum*), whereas, in its second aspect, it is like a mirror, reflecting God's names; and in this sense, therefore, it becomes both a witness (*shahid*) and the witnessed (*mashud*), and both an existent (*mawjud*) and the heedful of the existent (*wajud*).<sup>42</sup> A person at this stage will have completely given up his egotism, and thereby will be able to attribute all due existence to God, and then finally see that so long as he is a mirror of the manifestation of the true Donor of Existence, he procures an infinite existence.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

To sum up, the path designed and trodden by Nursi himself rests entirely on the Qur'an, and is relatively shorter, broader, safer and more universal than the other well-known Sufi paths. It is short, because it consists of merely four stages; again it is safer, since it paves no way for the ecstatic words (*shatahat*) and shocking utterances of the soul; and furthermore, the soul, being mindful of its incompetency, poverty and deficiency, may not trespass beyond its set-limit.

The striking characteristic of Nursi's spiritual path, so far it appears to me, lies in the afore-mentioned division of a thing into two aspects--which I may render roughly phenomenal (*mana-yi ismi*) and existential (*mana-yi harfi*). It is this division that brings Nursi's own Sufi path to a large extent closer to Ghazali's orthodox Tasawwuf and yet distinguishes him, though by no means sharply, from Ibn 'Arabi's *wahdat al-wajud* (the Unity of Existence) as well as from his counter-part mystical thought, *wahdat al-shahud* (the Unity of Witnessing), but not necessarily from his most-esteemed master, Ahmad Sirhindi, who is known as an adherent of the latter school of Tasawwuf.

## Notes and References:

<sup>1</sup> The term Tasawwuf is preferable to Sufism to some scholars, however in this paper they have been used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Different thinkers and movements have varied opinion about the institution of Sufism. Javaid Ahmad Ghamidi, of Pakistan, questions the whole edifice of Sufism. In a lengthy essay on Sufism in his *Burhan* Ghamidi argues that Sufism is a parallel doctrine to that of religion, that unity of being can't be corroborated from the Qur'an, that Sufi view of saint's access to divine truths puts the thesis of *khatm-i nabuwwat* in danger and that we can point out numerous statements in Sufi texts, including those on ethics and such notions as Tawhid of elites, that plainly contradict the Qur'an. He refutes to identify Tasawwuf with Ihsan. He states that great people have supported the view that it is a parallel religion—Ibn Tayyimia, Ibn Qayyim and Amin Ahsan Islahi. Maulana Mawdudi also was not a great supporter of Sufism although he made an attempt to categorize it when he says that "Tasawwuf is not one particular defined thing, but many different things have come to be known by this name. There is a Tasawwuf that

we confirm, and support; there is a Tasawwuf that we reject and condemn; and there is Tasawwuf we want to reform and purify.” (*A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*). The Wahhabi (Arabia), Deobandi (Pakistan and India), Jamaat-i-Islami and Ahl-i Hadith all are anti-Sufi, whereas the Barelvis are ardent pro-Sufi.

<sup>3</sup> Bilal Kuspinar.1995. “Nursi’s Evaluation of Sufism”, Istanbul.

[http://www.nur.org/en/islam/nurlibrary/Bediuzzaman\\_Said\\_Nursi\\_s\\_Evaluation\\_of\\_Sufism\\_187](http://www.nur.org/en/islam/nurlibrary/Bediuzzaman_Said_Nursi_s_Evaluation_of_Sufism_187)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. 2007. *Letters*. Pdf. New Jersey: The Light. 28<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>6</sup> Sukran Vahide. 2005. *Islam in Modern Turkey. An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. State University of New York Press, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Op cit., 5<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 28<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 29<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Although the Ummah and the Sufis in general have always held that the prophet is superior to the *wali*, but when comparing *wilayat* of a *nabi* with his *nabuwah*, many a sufi have extolled the former over latter. Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi contests the thought and asserts that the *nabi* is superior to *wali*, and even his *nabuwah* is superior to *wilayat* (Dr Afroz Ahmad Bisati. 2004. *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: A Study of his Thought and its Impact*. Srinagar Kashmir: Azad Publications, p. 122).

<sup>14</sup> The 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Word.

<sup>15</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> Flash, 2009, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Op cit., 19<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>17</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi is of the view that the Companionship of the Prophet (SAW) is superior to any other virtue or merit. And for that reason likes of Ovais Qarni and ‘Umr bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz though match the Companions in their virtues, are inferior to them on account of latter’s association with the Prophet (SAW). Sirhindi, *Maktubat-i Imam Rabbani*, Vol I, Letter No 120.

<sup>18</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Op cit., 18<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>19</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi is of the same view. He had passed through three stages in his mystic experience. Beginning from *wujudiyat* (unityism), he reached to *zilliyat* (adumbration) and then to *‘abdiyyat* (servitude). At this stage the error of *wujudiyat* became clear to him and he realises that it is only a lowest stage of mystic experience and therefore he denounces it. Dr Afroz, op cit, p 136.

<sup>20</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Op cit., 18<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Sirhindi propounds the same. “Although propounding dualism, Sirhindi however says that it (dualism) is not ultimate, for, although the world is not one with God (*ham ust*), it proceeds from God (*hama az-ust*). Sirhindi *Maktubat*, Vol II, letter 1.

<sup>23</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Op cit., 18<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Sirhindi opines the same. While explaining the essence of God he says “In short, God can never be apprehended through mystic experience. Therefore faith in unseen is unavoidable. Such a faith is possible only when in thought and imagination it becomes evident that God is unknowable, unapproachable and in-experienciable. (Sirhindi, *Maktubat*, Vol III, Letter No 17.)

<sup>27</sup> “To know anything besides His Beyondness etc., can be known through Divine guidance. The theologians ought to be followed as they frame their conception about the being and attributes of God from the Qur’an”, concludes Sirhindi. (Sirhindi, *Maktubat*, Vol I, Letter No 287).

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<sup>28</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Op cit., 29<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 5<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>32</sup> Sukran Vahide, op. cit., p. 223. Sirhindi has the similar view in the following words: ‘On the day of Resurrection, people will be questioned about their adherence to the Shari‘ah, not about Tasawwuf. (Sirhindi, *Maktubat*, Vol. I, Letter No. 48)

<sup>33</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Op cit., 5<sup>th</sup> Letter.

<sup>34</sup> Sukran Vahide, op. cit., p 167.

<sup>35</sup> His defence in court of Eskisehir would be enough to recall that he had no intention whatsoever for training in Sufism (*tariqat*), but instruction in the direct way to reality (*haqiqat*). (Ibid, p. 223)

<sup>36</sup> Bilal Kuspinar, op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Qur’an, 52/32.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Qur’an, 25/43, 45/23.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Qur’an, 59/19.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Qur’an, 14/79.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Qur’an, 28/88.

<sup>42</sup> See for the similar division of the thing into two, based on the same Qur’anic verse, by Ghazali, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, ed. Abul-‘Ala ‘Afifi, Cairo: Dar al-Qawmiyya 1964, 55-6.

<sup>43</sup> This idea may be traced back to Ibn ‘Arabi, who regards man as ‘the very principle of the manifestation of God in the universe,’ and also proclaims very eloquently, as does Nursi here, that man, the vice-regent of God, all-encompassing reality, is transient (*hadith*) in his form, and eternal (*azali*) in his essence. (See for detail Idem, *Fusus al-Hikam*, ed. Abul-‘Ala ‘Afifi, Beirut: Dar Kitab al-‘Arabi, 1946, 50 ff; for English translation, refer to *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R. W. J. Austin, New York: Paulist Press 1980, 51 ff.)