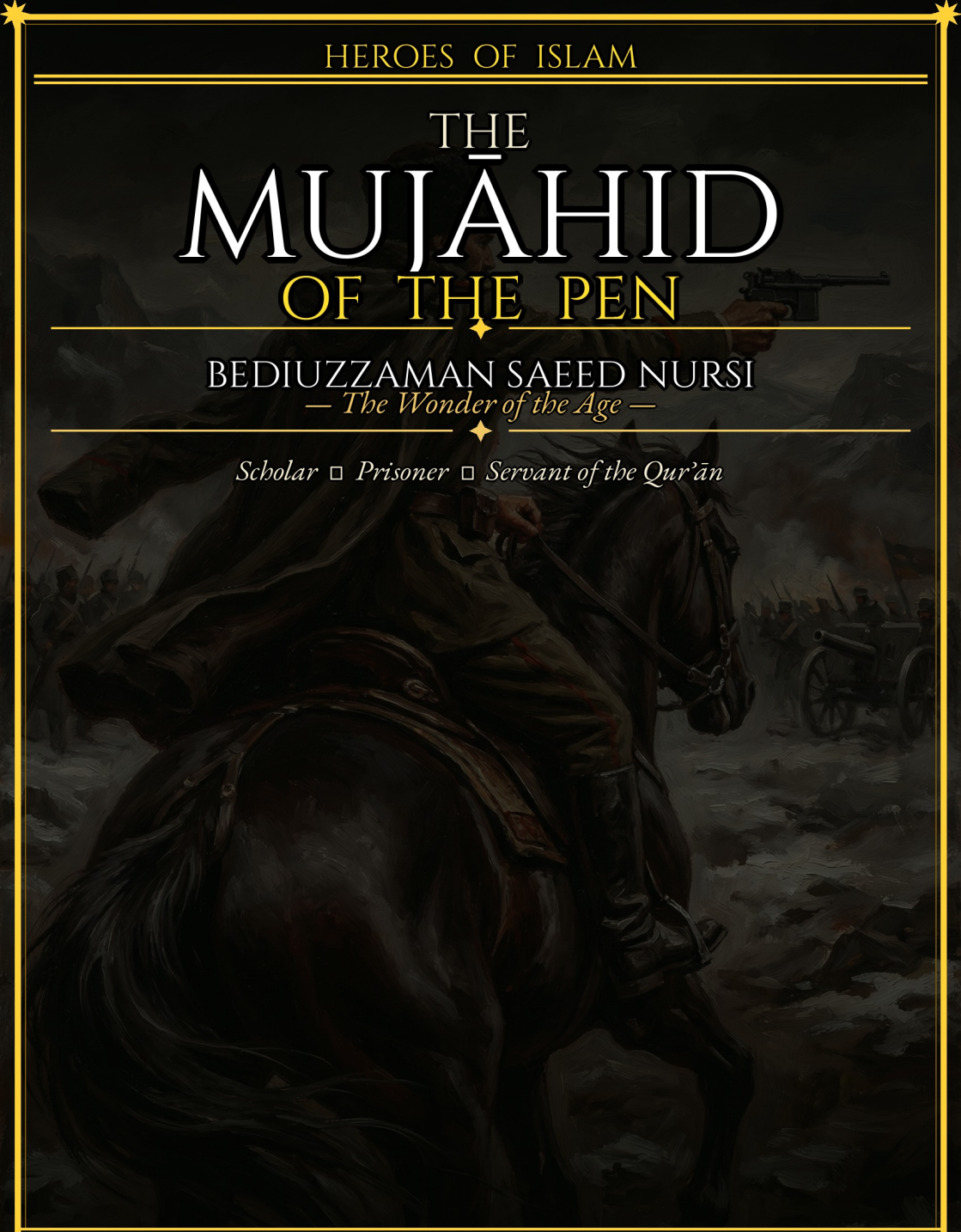
HEROES OF ISLAM

THE MUJĀHID OF THE PEN

BEDIUZZAMAN SAEED NURSI

— The Wonder of the Age —

Scholar ◻ Prisoner ◻ Servant of the Qur'ān



Authored by

MOHAMMED BIN THAJAMMUL HUSSAIN MANNA

HEROES OF ISLAM — A SERIES ON THE SCHOLARS AND SOLDIERS OF THE UMMAH

The Mujāhid of the Pen

بديع الزمان سعيد النورسي رحمه الله

Bediuzzaman Saeed Nursi— The Wonder of the Age

Scholar, Prisoner, and Servant of the Qur'ān

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> *"I am not a hero who fights with the sword. I am a servant of the Qur'ān who fights with the truth."*
>
> **— Bediuzzaman Saeed Nursi**

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Authored by Mohammed bin Thajammul Hussain Manna

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Author's Note

Foreword

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In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

This booklet is one in a series I have been compiling under the title Heroes of Islam — a collection of biographical sketches of the scholars, soldiers, and servants of this Deen who shaped the history of the Muslim Ummah, and whose stories the world, and indeed many Muslims themselves, have largely forgotten.

I write these not as a historian — though I have endeavoured to be accurate and to draw from reliable sources. I write them as a Muslim who is deeply troubled by the spiritual and intellectual state of our Ummah today — an Ummah that has largely lost its connection to its own magnificent past. When we do not know our heroes, we have no models. When we have no models, we have no direction. When we have no direction, we drift — and we have been drifting for far too long.

The story of Bediuzzaman Saeed Nursi رحمه الله is one that moved me profoundly when I first encountered it in its fullness. Here was a man who faced the complete collapse of the Islamic civilisation he had grown up in — the Ottoman

Empire, the Caliphate, the madrasahs, the adhan in Arabic, all of it — and who responded not with despair, not with surrender, and not with a sword, but with a pen. A pen dipped in certainty. A pen that continued to write through imprisonment, exile, poisoning, and decades of isolation. A pen whose ink, it seems, was never truly dry — for his words still illuminate hearts in every corner of the world today.

My deepest hope in sharing this story is simple: that it will inspire in you, the reader, a renewed love for this Deen, a renewed awe for the men and women who gave their lives in its service, and a renewed commitment to carrying this trust forward in whatever capacity Allah has given you.

May Allah accept this effort, forgive its shortcomings, and make it a source of benefit for every soul that reads it. Āmeen.

-Mohammed bin Thajammul Hussain Manna
محمد بن تجمّل حسين منّاع
29th Ramadan 1447 / 2026

Section I

When the Pen is Mightier than the Sword

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When we speak of the heroes of Islam, the mind rushes instinctively to the battlefield. We picture the early Muslims, barefoot and outnumbered, charging across the sands of Badr. We picture Khalid ibn al-Walid رضي الله عنه — the sword of Allah — carving through the ranks of the greatest empires of his age. We picture Salahuddin, his eyes patient and his heart resolute, reclaiming al-Quds after nearly a century of Crusader occupation. These images are true. They are real. They deserve to live in our hearts as long as we breathe.

But there is another kind of hero — one whose battlefield is invisible, whose weapons leave no blood on the ground, and whose victories take not hours or days but decades to reveal themselves. This is the hero of ilm — of knowledge — the scholar who stands in the path of ignorance the way a mountain stands in the path of a flood. The scholar who, when the lights of an entire civilisation are being extinguished one by one, sits

down in the darkness and begins, with trembling hands, to light a candle.

The twentieth century was, for the Muslim world, a century of catastrophe without parallel. In the span of a single lifetime, the last Caliphate was dissolved. The Ottoman Empire — that vast, imperfect, but profoundly Islamic civilisation that had for six centuries held together the political, spiritual, and cultural life of hundreds of millions of Muslims — crumbled to dust. The Arabic adhan was silenced from minarets. The madrasahs were shuttered. Islamic dress was outlawed. The very script in which the Qur'ān had been taught to Turkish children for a thousand years was banned overnight and replaced with Latin letters. The aim was explicit and openly stated: to sever the Muslim people from their roots, from their faith, from their identity, from their God.

Into this catastrophe stepped a Kurdish scholar from a mountain village whose name very few in the West, and tragically far too few Muslims, have ever heard. His name was Saeed Nursi. And what he did in response to the greatest assault on Islamic faith and identity in the modern era was not to raise an army or to call for rebellion. It was to pick up a pen — in a tiny room in a remote mountain village, under the watch of government spies, on whatever scraps of paper he could find — and to begin writing the most

comprehensive rational defence of Islamic faith ever composed in the modern era.

This is his story. It is a story of genius and suffering, of exile and prayer, of poisoned bread and court-room defiance, of a tree-house built in the branches of a mountain plane-tree where a scholar communed with his Lord in the silence of an Anatolian dawn. It is a story that will, in sha' Allah, break your heart and heal it in the same breath. It is a story every Muslim in the twenty-first century needs to know.

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Before we enter his story, let us be clear about what was at stake. The challenge facing the Muslim world in the early twentieth century was not merely political. It was existential. The philosophy of materialism — the belief that nothing exists except matter and energy, that the universe is without purpose and without God, that religion is a relic of primitive superstition — had swept through the educated classes of Europe like a wildfire and was now leaping the borders of the Muslim world. Darwinism, Marxism, Positivism, and Secular Nationalism were not merely political theories. They were, in effect, rival religions — complete systems of meaning that were actively and aggressively seeking to replace Islam in the hearts and minds of the rising generation of Muslims.

The traditional Islamic scholarship of the day was largely unprepared for this challenge. The scholars of the madrasahs knew their Islamic sciences — Qur'ān, hadith, fiqh, Arabic — with great depth and sincerity. But many of them had never engaged seriously with modern philosophy, modern science, or modern intellectual challenges. When a young Turkish intellectual, freshly returned from Paris or Berlin, asked them how to reconcile Islam with Darwinism or how to respond to the arguments of Nietzsche, too many fell silent, or offered answers that satisfied no one. Into this vacuum, the philosophies of atheism and materialism poured like water into a cracked vessel.

It was precisely this crisis that Saeed Nursi had spent a lifetime preparing to address. For he was, uniquely among scholars of his age, a man who had mastered both worlds — the world of the Islamic sciences and the world of modern thought. He knew the arguments of the materialists not from hearsay but from deep study. And he knew, with the certainty of a man who had spent a lifetime in the company of the Qur'ān, exactly how to answer them. Not with anger. Not with condemnation. With light.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

> *Ask yourself honestly: in our age, when the doubts and challenges to faith are greater*

> *than ever, are we preparing our young people to meet them? Are we equipping them with the intellectual and spiritual tools to carry their Islam with confidence into the universities, the workplaces, and the public squares of the twenty-first century? Or are we handing them a flame and sending them into a hurricane, and then wondering why it goes out?*

Section II

The Village of Nurs: A Star is Born

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In the year 1877, in the depths of a harsh Anatolian winter, a child was born in a tiny Kurdish hamlet called Nurs — a village so small and so remote, nestled in the mountains of the Bitlis region of eastern Anatolia, that few maps of the time bothered to record its name. His father was Mirza, his mother was Nuriye, and both were of noble lineage — among those blessed families traced back through the generations to the household of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, descended through both of his grandsons, Hasan and Husayn رضي الله عنهما . They were poor in the things of this world, but rich — extraordinarily, profoundly rich — in taqwa, in love of the Qur'ān, and in the quiet, unshakeable dignity of people who know who they are and whose they are.

The child they named Said entered this world differently from other children. He did not cry. While every newborn announces its arrival with wailing, this child did not. He clenched his small fists, and he peered around the room with a look of such startling attentiveness that those present were taken aback. It was, they later recalled, as if he was not a helpless infant arriving in an

unfamiliar world — but as if he had arrived with a purpose already fully formed, and was simply taking stock of his surroundings before beginning his work. The women who attended the birth were unsettled by that gaze. There was something in it, they said, that was not quite like other children.

We do not make claims of prophethood or sainthood for any man after the seal of the Prophets ﷺ. But the people of knowledge have always recognised that Allah Almighty distinguishes certain souls from the very beginning — that there are those who are sent into the world bearing a particular light, a particular mission, and upon whom the marks of that mission are visible from the first breath. The child who peered around that cold mountain room without crying in the winter of 1877 was one of those souls. History would bear this out.

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From his earliest years, the young Said displayed a restless, questioning intelligence that neither his parents nor his teachers could contain. He was, from childhood, a child who would not accept easy answers. One night, when the moon vanished behind the shadow of an eclipse, the family rushed outside to discover the cause. Saeed asked his mother: "Why has the moon gone like that?" His mother, like most village mothers of her time, offered the folk explanation: "A snake

has swallowed it." Saeed fixed her with his gaze and asked, with the quiet patience of a child who already suspects the answer is wrong: "Then why can it still be seen?" His mother improvised: "The snakes in the sky are like glass — they show what they have inside them." Saeed fell silent. But the look on his face made clear that this answer had satisfied him no more than the first. Even as a small child, he had no patience for explanations that did not hold together under examination. This, we shall see, became the hallmark of his entire life's work — a relentless insistence that the truth must be able to withstand every question, and that faith defended by reason is a fortress that no intellectual storm can topple.

There is another story from his childhood in Tillo that reveals the extraordinary tenderness concealed beneath his formidable intellect. He was observed regularly dipping his bread into his soup and then feeding the crumbs to the ants that lived around the base of the building where he studied. When asked why, he replied with characteristic seriousness: "I have observed that they have a social life, and work together diligently and conscientiously. I want to help them as a reward for their republicanism." There is something almost unbearably beautiful in this image — a young child of the mountains, half-starved himself in the spartan conditions of a rural Turkish madrasah, setting aside the crumbs

of his own meagre meal for the smallest of Allah's creatures, because he had noticed and admired their industry and their community. The child who fed ants in Tillo would one day write six thousand pages in defence of the dignity of every created thing.

✦ The Minaret of Mardin

> In the town of Mardin, the young Saeed demonstrated another quality that would define his life: a complete absence of fear. While visiting the Ulu Mosque, he climbed the narrow staircase of the minaret, stepped out onto the exterior gallery parapet — a ledge barely wide enough for a single foot — and proceeded to walk calmly around the entire circumference of the minaret, high above the rooftops of the town. His companion, Kasim, shut his eyes in terror, certain that Saeed would fall to his death. Instead, Saeed appeared from the other side of the minaret and called out cheerfully: "Kasim! Kasim! Come on, let's walk round together!" Kasim, trembling, declined. The anecdote reached the scholars of Mardin before Saeed himself did. They took note. A child who could walk a minaret parapet without flinching was a child who feared nothing on this

> earth — which is the only state in which a man can truly serve Allah.

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Saeed entered the traditional Islamic school system — the madrasah — as other boys of his village did, studying under local scholars the disciplines that formed the backbone of Islamic learning: Arabic language and grammar, Qur'ānic sciences, hadith, fiqh, theology, and logic. But from his very first days as a student, it was clear that the normal pace of learning was wholly inadequate for his mind. He memorised books that other students laboured over for months in the span of days. He not only memorised but analysed, questioned, debated — and not infrequently, outargued the very scholars who were supposed to be teaching him.

The traditional madrasah curriculum — the same curriculum that in normal circumstances took a dedicated student between ten and fifteen years to complete — was completed by Saeed Nursi in approximately three months. He was thirteen or fourteen years of age. His teachers, one after another, arrived at the same conclusion: there was nothing left they could teach him. Word spread through the scholars of eastern Anatolia of this extraordinary young student from Nurs. They gave him a title — not as a courtesy, but as a statement of fact — that would remain with him

for the rest of his life: Bediuzzaman. The Wonder of the Age.

But the young Bediuzzaman was not satisfied with the boundaries of classical Islamic learning alone. He had a prescient understanding — remarkable for a village boy in eastern Anatolia in the 1890s — that the coming age would demand something more. That the scholars who would serve Islam in the twentieth century could not afford to be strangers to the intellectual world that was reshaping human civilisation. When he was invited by the Governor of Van to reside at his residency, he seized the opportunity with both hands. In the Governor's library — an archive of modern knowledge unlike anything accessible in the villages and madrasahs of his youth — he taught himself, entirely without formal instruction, the principles of history, geography, mathematics, geology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, and philosophy. He absorbed these subjects with the same ferocious speed with which he had consumed the Islamic sciences, emerging from that library as perhaps the only scholar in the Ottoman Empire who stood equally at ease in both worlds.

When scholars in Istanbul later heard of this young man who had mastered the entire range of classical Islamic sciences and then independently mastered the modern sciences, many were

sceptical. They devised tests — presenting him with complex questions in different disciplines, attempting to catch him out, to expose the limits of his knowledge. They failed. Every test strengthened the title he already carried. He was Bediuzzaman. And he was coming to Istanbul.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

> *The combination that Saeed Nursi embodied — deep rootedness in the Islamic sciences alongside confident mastery of the knowledge of his age — is not merely an interesting biographical footnote. It is a template. It is the exact combination that every Muslim scholar, student, and intellectual of our age needs to strive for. To know our Deen deeply is not enough if we cannot speak to the world that surrounds us. And to understand the world is not enough if we have abandoned the anchor of Revelation. Bediuzzaman was shaped by both — and it was precisely this combination that made him effective where so many others were not.*

Section III

The Old Saeed: Scholar, Soldier, and Voice of the Ummah

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He arrived in Istanbul with a proposal and a vision. The proposal was for the establishment of a great university — which he called Medresetüz-Zehra — to be built in the eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire. But this was to be no ordinary institution. His vision was audacious, even revolutionary: he proposed that the Islamic sciences and the modern sciences should be taught together, under the same roof, by the same institution, to the same students. "If the students in the secular schools are taught religious sciences," he argued, "they will be saved from irreligion. If the students in the religious schools are taught the modern sciences, they will be saved from bigotry and superstition." It was a simple idea. It was a necessary idea. And it was, in the political climate of a declining Ottoman Empire, an idea that found no shortage of admirers — but very few with the political will to implement it.

The Sultan's government did not ignore him. What they attempted instead was more insidious: they tried to buy him. The Minister of Public

Security, Shafiq Pasha, was dispatched bearing the Sultan's personal greeting, a royal gift, and a promise — the very promise that should have been irresistible to a scholar devoted to education — that Saeed Nursi would be appointed rector of his own proposed university, with his salary paid immediately. It was everything he had asked for. It was offered at precisely the moment when refusing it meant imprisonment.

He refused it. He looked at the royal gift, at the Minister's smooth and diplomatic face, at the implicit message behind the offer — take this, be grateful, be quiet — and he refused. He called it what it was: hush money. He chose prison instead. It was not the last time he would make this choice, and each time he made it, the choice became easier — because with each refusal, with each willingness to suffer rather than be silenced, the chains of worldly ambition fell away from him, one by one, until he stood completely free — free in a way that no prison cell could ever undo.

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When the First World War came to the Ottoman Empire in 1914, Saeed Nursi did not retreat to his books. He took up arms. He organised and led a militia regiment on the eastern front, fighting the advancing Russian forces in the mountains of the Caucasus alongside regular Ottoman troops. He fought not as a

distant commander issuing orders from a safe headquarters, but in the thick of battle — personally leading charges, personally holding positions, personally inspiring his men in those brutal mountain winters where the cold alone claimed as many lives as the enemy's rifles.

His beloved nephew Ubeyd — who was also among his closest students — was killed fighting beside him. Let us pause for a moment and let that land. This was not an abstract historical event. This was a young man, likely barely out of his teens, whom Saeed Nursihad taught and loved and formed — gone, in the violence of a mountain battle, in a war that his Ummah did not ask for and could not win. Saeed Nursi buried him, and continued fighting. The scholar who had been raised to value every drop of ink also knew the weight of every drop of blood.

And yet — and this is one of the most extraordinary facts in all of Islamic intellectual history — even in the trenches, even on horseback in the middle of an active military campaign, he could not stop writing. He dictated his Qur'ānic commentary, İşârâtü'l-İ'câz — the Signs of Miraculousness — to a scribe while simultaneously commanding his troops on the battlefield. The image this conjures is almost surreal: a scholar in military dress, on horseback, bullets and snow in the air around him, his lips

moving — not in orders to his men, but in the cadences of Qur'ānic exegesis. As if to say: the love of the Qur'ān will not wait even for war. As if to say: there is no situation so dire, no circumstance so extreme, that the service of Allah's Book must be suspended.

✦ **Eyewitness: The Last Battle of Bitlis — narrated by Ali Çavuş**

> "The Russian soldiers held us in a tight circle. The four of us ran behind Ustādh in a row and loaded rifles with magazines full of bullets and handed them to Bediuzzaman. He used them so quickly and with such agility that we thought his weapons had become automatic machine guns. Without stopping he rained down a constant stream of bullets upon the heads of the Russians. Then when we gave him another fully loaded rifle, it seemed that we stopped caring about our own safety. Yet when the rifle refused to fire, Ustādh got so angry that he smashed the rifle against a rock so hard that it shattered into pieces. Quickly, we handed him another full rifle.
>
> "Right at that time we managed to breach the defenses of the Russians. Our aim was to head towards the side of 'Kizil Mosque'. As we made our way we encountered a high wall and old aqueduct that blocked

> our path. Ustādh climbed the wall and jumped down. It seemed that there was a great stone lying underneath the snow, for as he landed, his foot struck against it and he became injured. We followed him and jumped down, soon finding him sitting, and shouting: 'Brothers! Fate has held us captive!'
>
> "We gathered together immediately and took Ustādh into a closed water-duct and furrow drain. 'You go! Save yourselves. I give you my blessings,' Bediuzzaman said — but this caused all of us to cry loudly and sob. 'Seyda!' we cried. 'Where can we go and leave you like this? Have our efforts and honour come to nothing? Whether we die or we stay, we will be at your service.' After taking a short while to reflect on this, Nursi responded: 'Then one of you should go. Go and tell the Russians news that we are here. Let them come and get us!'"

Read that account again. Read it slowly. Here is a man of extraordinary learning and extraordinary courage, his foot broken on a hidden rock in a frozen stream, surrounded by the enemy, telling his weeping students — who refuse to abandon him even to save their own lives — to summon the enemy themselves. There is no self-pity in this. There is no drama. There is only the

quiet resignation of a man who has placed his life so completely in the hands of Allah that he is free of the clutching fear of death. Brothers! Fate has held us captive! As if it were merely an interesting turn of events. As if the outcome were already known, and known to be good, because it was in the hands of the One who knows all ends.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

> *The great scholars of this Ummah have never been armchair theorists disconnected from the realities of their people. From the Prophet ﷺ himself, who commanded armies and dug trenches, to the great imams who filled prisons rather than compromise their fatwas, our tradition of scholarship has always been one of embodied courage. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله fought, bled, lost his nephew, broke his foot in a frozen stream — and then, in captivity, began to teach. This is the tradition. This is what it means to carry knowledge as a trust.*

Section IV

The Prisoner Who Would Not Bow

Russian Captivity, 1916–1918

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The Russians took him first to Van, then began a long, punishing journey that carried him across the vast frozen expanses of Russia — first to the isolated town of Kologrif in the north, where he was held for six months in a makeshift camp housed in an old cinema hall, and then onward to Kostroma, where he would spend nearly two years as a prisoner of war. The distance between Bitlis and Kostroma, measured in miles, is almost three thousand. Measured in the suffering of that journey — on foot, in winter, as a wounded prisoner — it might as well have been the distance to the edge of the world.

There are men who, placed in such conditions — far from their homeland, their people, their books, their purpose — are broken by the sheer weight of purposelessness. There are men who survive captivity only by going numb, by shrinking themselves into the smallest possible target for suffering. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله was not such a man. Every place he occupied, he transformed. The old cinema hall in Kologrif — a building devoted, in its former life, to

entertainment and distraction — he converted into a mosque. He organised prayer. He gathered his fellow Muslim prisoners. He taught. He spent his own military captain's salary on the other captives to ease their suffering, distributing what little money he had with the quiet generosity of a man who has genuinely detached himself from the things of this world. He later became the guarantor of a small mosque along the Volga River for the local Tatar Muslim community — because even in captivity, in a foreign land, his instinct was to build, to serve, to light lamps wherever he found himself in darkness.

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But it is one particular incident from his captivity that has become, perhaps rightly, the most celebrated story of his entire life — the story that captures, in a single moment, the essence of who this man was and what he stood for.

One day, the Russian Commander-in-Chief, Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, came to inspect the prisoner-of-war camp at Kostroma. He was a man of enormous power and presence — the supreme military commander of the Russian armed forces, nephew of the Tsar, a figure before whom generals trembled. He walked the rows of prisoners — and the prisoners, as was expected, stood in his presence. Every prisoner rose. Every prisoner, that is, except one.

Saeed Nursi remained seated.

The Grand Duke passed him once. He remained seated. He passed him again. He remained seated, calm and unhurried, his eyes holding the steady composure of a man at perfect peace with whatever was about to happen. Nikolaevich stopped. He demanded to know whether this prisoner was aware of who he was.

> *"I know who you are. But I am a Muslim scholar. A person who possesses faith is superior to one who does not. To stand for you would be to show disrespect to my own faith."*
>
> **— — Saeed Nursi, to Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, Kostroma, 1917**

Saeed Nursi replied with complete composure that he knew exactly who the Grand Duke was — and that it was precisely because he knew who he himself was that he would not stand. A Muslim scholar, he explained, possesses iman — faith — and a person who possesses faith is, in the sight of Allah, superior to a person who does not, regardless of worldly rank or power. To rise from his seat before a non-believer, in a gesture of submission, would be to denigrate his own faith.

And that — whatever the consequences — he would not do.

The Grand Duke was not a man accustomed to defiance. He ordered Nursi brought before a military court. The court pronounced its sentence: death by firing squad.

They came for him. He asked for a few minutes to perform his final prayer. They waited, perhaps expecting the prayer to be brief — a hasty, terrified last rite. Instead, they witnessed a man performing his wudhu with careful, unhurried deliberateness, then standing before his Lord with the full, focused composure of someone not bidding farewell to life, but simply fulfilling an obligation due at its appointed time. When he had finished, he rose. They moved to blindfold him, as was the custom before execution. He declined.

> *"I want to look at paradise."*
>
> **— — Saeed Nursi, refusing the blindfold at his execution**

Three words. I want to look at paradise. Not: I am afraid. Not: Please spare me. Not even: I am ready to die. Simply — I want to look at paradise. As if paradise were a view that became visible from this particular position, at this particular

moment, and he was not going to miss it by covering his eyes.

Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich was shaken. Perhaps he had never in his life encountered a man who stared at death with that particular expression. He recognised, in that moment, what his officers had failed to recognise in the earlier confrontation: that this man's refusal to stand had never been an insult. It had been something he had no category for. It had been iman. Absolute, unqualified, unperformable certainty in Allah. He ordered the execution halted. He offered his apology. Saeed Nursi nodded, and returned to his captivity — as unhurried returning as he had been departing.

He escaped from Russian captivity in 1918, making his way through St. Petersburg, Warsaw, and Sofia before finally arriving back in Istanbul — a free man, returning to a world in flames.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

> *What is tawakkul? We translate it as "reliance on Allah," but this story gives the word flesh and bones. Tawakkul is not passivity. It is not fatalism. It is the active, lived, demonstrated certainty that the outcome of every situation rests with Allah alone — and that when you have fulfilled your duty, the consequences belong to Him. A man with true tawakkul does not perform it in moments of comfort. He*

> *performs it when the firing squad is assembled and the blindfold is offered. He refuses the blindfold, because he wants to look at paradise. That is tawakkul. May Allah grant us even a fraction of it.*

Section V

Ankara: The Offers of the World, and the Man Who Refused Them All

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He returned to Istanbul in 1918 to find an empire in its final agonies. The Great War had broken the Ottoman state beyond recovery. By 1922, the Ottoman Sultanate was abolished, and a new political reality — the Turkish Republic, led by Mustafa Kemal and his circle of secular nationalists — was taking shape in Ankara. The world that Saeed Nursi رحمه الله had grown up in, the world of Ottoman Islamic governance and culture and learning, was being dismantled piece by piece, with a speed and thoroughness that took most people's breath away.

The new government in Ankara, whatever its ideological direction, was politically astute enough to recognise the value of the most famous Muslim scholar in Anatolia. They extended repeated invitations to Saeed Nursi to come to Ankara. He arrived on the 9th of November 1922, welcomed with an official ceremony at the Grand National Assembly — a reception reserved for figures of genuine national significance. He was received with the honours due to a hero of the

War of Independence, a recognised scholar, and a man whose reputation had spread throughout the Muslim world.

He sat. He observed. He listened. And very quickly, he understood what he was seeing. The leaders of the new regime were not merely building a new state. They were building a new civilisation — one consciously modelled on secular European lines, and one that had, at its philosophical core, no room for Islam as a living, public, governing force. The Islam they were willing to tolerate was the Islam of private devotion, of personal piety, safely confined to the mosque and the bedroom — not the Islam of law, of public morality, of education, of political life. The Islam that had built the empire they were inheriting was, in their vision, to be politely retired.

Saeed Nursi رحمه الله prepared a declaration of ten articles — a plea to the new government to ground the new Republic in Islamic principles. He submitted it. It was noted, and largely ignored. Then came the offer. The new government made Saeed Nursi the most generous proposal at their disposal: the position of General Preacher of the East — the highest religious office of the Grand National Assembly government — together with a generous salary. And, should that be insufficient, a seat in parliament itself. The most powerful

religious post in the new state. A voice in the legislature. Wealth, honour, and influence.

He declined both. He saw them for what they were — not genuine invitations to serve Islam, but sophisticated attempts to domesticate it. A government-employed preacher is a preacher who preaches what the government permits. A parliamentarian who owes his seat to the ruling party is a parliamentarian constrained by that party's agenda. He would not be the respectable Islamic face on a project he fundamentally opposed. He left for Van in early May of 1923, quietly, without fanfare, carrying nothing of the world with him.

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What followed was, from a worldly perspective, a period of watching everything he had known and loved destroyed. The madrasahs were closed. The religious courts were abolished. The religious centers were banned. The adhan — the call to prayer that had rung from the minarets of Anatolia for a thousand years in the language of the Qur'ān — was changed to Turkish. The very Arabic script in which every Turkish Muslim child had learned to read the Book of Allah was abolished overnight and replaced with Latin letters, severing an entire generation from their religious heritage in a single bureaucratic stroke.

This was the crucible in which the New Saeed was forged. Something was dying in him — the political activist, the Ottoman intellectual, the man who believed the system could be reformed from within. And something new was being born: a man who had stripped away every worldly ambition, every political aspiration, every desire for recognition or influence or power, and who stood before Allah with nothing but his pen, his faith, and the Qur'ān.

In 1925, a Kurdish religious leader named Sheikh Saeed رحمه الله of Palu led an armed rebellion against the secular government in Diyarbakır. He sent messengers to Saeed Nursi رحمه الله, urging him to join. Here was, one might think, the natural response to the destruction being visited upon Islam — a rebellion, a reclaiming by force of what had been taken by force. Saeed Nursi refused. He told the messengers plainly that armed rebellion was not the answer, that it would only bring more blood and more suffering, and that the protection of the Muslim people and their faith required a different kind of struggle. He was not afraid of the government. He simply knew that this was not the path.

The government thanked him for his non-participation by exiling him anyway. When the rebellion was crushed, the authorities cast the

widest possible net, arresting and exiling anyone with religious influence they considered a potential threat. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله — the man who had explicitly refused to join the rebellion — was sent to internal exile. He had refused to fight with a sword, and was punished as though he had. He accepted it. He picked up his pen. The twenty-five-year ordeal was beginning.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

> *The courage to say no to power — especially when power comes bearing gifts — is among the rarest of human virtues. It requires a man to have already determined, in the quiet of his own heart and in his relationship with his Lord, what he is for and what he will not compromise. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله had made that determination so thoroughly, so completely, that when the moment came — the official ceremony, the highest office, the parliamentary seat — the refusal required no agonising deliberation. He simply knew. May Allah grant us the clarity to know our own purpose, and the spine to protect it.*

Section VI

Barla: The Exile That Became a Garden of Light

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Barla. Even the name sounds like the end of the world. A tiny village — barely a hamlet — tucked into the mountains of Isparta Province in south-western Turkey, accessible only by rough mountain tracks, home to a few dozen families of farmers and shepherds. It was here that the authorities sent Saeed Nursi رحمه الله in 1926. He was forbidden to leave. He was forbidden to receive visitors without permission. He was watched by government informants. His correspondence was monitored. He was to live out his days in this remote, forgotten corner of Anatolia — his voice silenced, his influence severed, his mission ended.

The authorities in Ankara were not to know — as the official biography of Bediuzzaman would later record with quiet satisfaction — that "in unjustly exiling Bediuzzaman to this distant spot, they were serving the very cause they intended to extirpate." They were not to know that their act of oppression would be transformed, by the mercy of Allah Almighty, into one of the most fertile

periods of Islamic scholarship in the twentieth century. They had intended to bury him. Instead, they had planted him.

He was given a small, two-roomed house that had previously served as the village meeting hall. By the standards of the scholars' residences in Istanbul, it was a hovel. By the standards of Saeed Nursi رحمه الله, who had spent years sleeping on the ground of madrasahs and in the trenches of a world war, it was sufficient. In front of the house stood a majestic ancient plane tree — one of those vast, patient Anatolian trees that seems to have been rooted in the earth since before history. In the great boughs of this tree, Saeed Nursi built himself a small, simple tree-house. It was, for the springs and summers of his exile, his place of solitude, his observatory, his oratory — the place where he sat above the world, in the branches of a tree, and received the light of the Qur'ān. One imagines him there in the early mornings, the mountains golden with first light, the pine forests beginning to stir, the sounds of the village drifting up from below — and the old scholar in his tree, writing.

His diet throughout his time in Barla was almost ascetic in its simplicity. He ate just enough to keep body and soul together — generally a small bowl of soup and a small piece of bread. This had always been his practice. Those who

visited him over the years would remark on it with a mixture of awe and concern. He was not performing austerity. He had simply detached himself from the pleasures of eating so thoroughly that food had become, for him, merely fuel for the work that Allah had assigned him. He was lean, and intense, and utterly focused. And he wrote.

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The Risale-i Nur — the great collection that would eventually exceed six thousand pages — was born in Barla. It began as a trickle of handwritten treatises passed between Nursi and a small circle of devoted students. The Words — treatises on the existence and unity of Allah, on the resurrection, on the nature of the Prophet ﷺ and the miracle of the Qur'ān. The Letters. The Flashes. Each one dictated or written in the cramped conditions of his two-room exile home, or in the tree-house above the plane tree, or in the pine forests of the nearby mountains where he sometimes spent weeks alone in contemplation.

The students who received these treatises copied them by hand — with whatever paper they could find, by whatever light they had — and passed them on. There were no printing presses available to them. The Risale-i Nur was, for years, a completely handwritten literature, reproduced by the labour of devoted young men and women

who knew that if they were caught, they faced imprisonment. They were caught, regularly. They were imprisoned. They served their sentences. And then they came out and copied more. The government burned the copies it found. The students wrote more. There is something in this that echoes the earliest days of Islam, when the Companions رضي الله عنهم transmitted the words of the Prophet ﷺ from heart to heart at the risk of their lives — except here, the transmission was of ink on paper, in a mountain village in Anatolia, in the middle of the twentieth century.

✦ **Süleyman the True**

> One day, in the grey rain of an Anatolian autumn, a villager named Süleyman watched the old scholar returning to the village from his walks in the mountains. He was drenched to the skin. His shoes were torn and caked with mud. He walked slowly, alone, with the careful dignity of a man who has long since learned to carry his suffering without complaint. Süleyman, without a word, came forward from the group of villagers watching from a doorway. He stepped up behind Bediuzzaman, gently took the ruined shoes from his feet, and carried them to a nearby trough, where he washed them carefully, then returned them.

He served Saeed Nursi رحمه الله faithfully for eight years after that. Not because he was paid. Not because he was compelled. Because he had seen, in that old man walking alone in the rain, something that he recognised — without being able to name it — as holy. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله named him Sıddık Süleyman — Süleyman the True. The Twenty-Eighth Word of the Risale-i Nur, one of the most beautiful treatises on the reality of paradise ever written, was composed in Süleyman's garden.

✦ The Chemist Who Turned White

Not everyone who came to Barla came with humility. On one occasion, a District Official arrived to visit Nursi, bringing with him the District Doctor, the Finance Officer, and a chemist — the latter a man of a materialist and atheist persuasion, who came, it seems, with the intention of testing or confounding this famous scholar. The chemist put to him the classic challenge of the unbeliever: "You say God exists — so why did He create evil?"

Saeed Nursi رحمه الله listened to the question without any apparent agitation. Then he replied with his characteristic clarity: consider a surgeon who

> amputates an arm infected with gangrene. The amputation appears to be evil — it is painful, it is violent, it destroys a part of the body. But it is, in reality, good — because without it, the infection spreads and the whole body dies. What appears to be evil is, in the greater scheme, mercy. Allah, the All-Knowing and All-Wise, does not create evil for its own sake. What we call evil exists in the service of a greater good that we, in our limited vision, cannot always perceive.
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> The chemist, the official biography records, "turned as white as chalk." He was completely tongue-tied. The visiting party left in a silence that said more than words could have.

Eight and a half years. Eight and a half years of exile, surveillance, poverty, and isolation — and in those eight and a half years, Saeed Nursi رحمه الله produced the core of 130 treatises that would constitute the heart of the Risale-i Nur collection. The more the government oppressed him, the more the collection grew. The more they burned, the more was written. The official biography captures this with a single line that deserves to be inscribed in gold: "The spread and successes of the Risale-i Nur were in direct proportion to the continual increase in the severity of the treatment meted out to Bediuzzaman and his students. All

this oppression and tyranny of theirs is like pieces of wood for the fire of ardour and endeavour which illuminates the lights of the Qur'ān; it makes them flare up and shine."

They had tried to bury a seed. It had become a forest.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

> *There is a divine law at work in history that the oppressors of every age have failed to grasp: you cannot extinguish light by adding darkness. You can only intensify the contrast. Every prison that has held a sincere scholar has produced a body of work. Every exile has deepened a vision. Every attempt to silence the truth has given it a louder voice. This is not an accident. This is the promise of Allah Almighty — that His light will be completed even if the disbelievers detest it. Barla was designed to be a grave. Allah made it a womb.*

Section VII

The Chain of Prisons

Eskişehir · Kastamonu · Denizli · Emirdağ · Afyon

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If Barla was the first act of the long drama of Said Nursi's persecution, then the years that followed were its second and most brutal act — a seemingly endless chain of prisons, exiles, court cases, and attempts on his life that stretched from 1935 to 1950. To read through this period of his biography is to be left with two simultaneous and almost contradictory feelings: a burning outrage at the cruelty and injustice of what was done to this man, and a profound awe at the way he bore it. He was not merely enduring. He was transforming. Every prison became, in his hands, a school. Every trial became a pulpit. Every attempt to silence him became an occasion for the most memorable of his utterances.

He called the prisons his Madrasatul Yūsufiyyah — the School of the Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام . The parallel was not merely rhetorical. The Prophet Yūsuf was cast into a well by his own brothers, sold into slavery, imprisoned on false charges, forgotten in a dungeon — and emerged to be the saviour of his people and the instrument of Allah's great plan. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله, cast into prison on false charges by a government that

feared his pen more than it feared any sword, found in that great Qur'ānic story not merely a consolation but a model: that the darkest depths of human injustice are, in the sight of Allah, the antechambers of His mercy.

Eskişehir, 1935: The Matchstick Defence

In 1935, Saeed Nursi رحمه الله was arrested along with approximately one hundred and twenty of his students and brought to trial in Eskişehir. The charge, as stated by the prosecution, was the establishment of a secret organisation with the intent to undermine and overthrow the regime. The penalty being sought by the prosecutor was nothing less than death.

Let that register for a moment. An old scholar, living in a remote village, writing philosophical treatises on the existence of God and the nature of the soul, was brought before a court and accused of plotting to overthrow the state — and the prosecutor was asking for his execution. This was not a legal proceeding. It was political theatre, designed to eliminate a voice that could not otherwise be silenced.

Saeed Nursi رحمه الله rose to speak. He looked at the court, at the prosecutor, at the gallery — and he began his defence with a question that has the deceptive simplicity of a master rhetorician:

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> *"It is possible for everyone to kill several people. But would anyone stage a trial because of this possibility? It is possible that a matchstick causes a house to be burnt down. Should all the matches, then, be destroyed because of a probability of fire?"*

— — Saeed Nursi رحمه الله, defence speech, Eskişehir Court, 1935

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The court found the charges of conspiracy to be baseless and lacking in any substantial evidence. He was acquitted of the capital charges. He was, however, sentenced to eleven months in prison — an apparently lesser punishment, intended to give the appearance of legality while still removing him from circulation.

Saeed Nursi رحمه الله protested this verdict with a vigour that astonished those present. He declared, in the hearing of the entire court, that he would rather be executed or sentenced to life imprisonment than accept a penalty of eleven months — a sentence, he said with magnificent contempt, that was appropriate only for someone who had stolen a mule. He was not asking for mercy. He was refusing the pretence of justice. If

the court was going to punish him, it should at least be honest about what it was doing, and do it properly.

Kastamonu, 1936–1943: The Policeman's Shadow

After Eskişehir, he was exiled to Kastamonu — a town in northern Anatolia — where the conditions of his surveillance were calibrated to be maximally humiliating. He was required to live in a house directly opposite the police station, so that his movements could be monitored at all times. He could not receive visitors without permission. He could not travel. He was a free man in the formal legal sense, and a prisoner in every practical sense — a condition that the secular Turkish state was to prove very skilled at manufacturing over the coming years.

In Kastamonu, he continued to write. Under the watch of the policemen opposite his window, with government informants monitoring his correspondence, he produced more of the Rays collection — treatises on the Divine Names, on the nature of faith, on the relationship between the human soul and its Creator. The shadow of surveillance fell across his writing desk every day. He wrote anyway. The policemen watching him saw an old man writing. They did not know they were watching the composition of works that

would be read in dozens of languages by millions of people for generations to come.

Denizli, 1943–1944: The Poison and the Providence

In 1943, Saeed Nursi رحمه الله was arrested again, this time along with one hundred and twenty-six of his students, and brought to trial at the Denizli Criminal Court. The charge was, as before, the usual grab-bag of allegations — distributing forbidden literature, forming a secret religious organisation, undermining the secular state. The court proceedings dragged on for months.

It was during his imprisonment in Denizli that the authorities made their first serious attempt to kill him. He was poisoned. That is the plain and documented fact. An old scholar, over sixty years of age, in prison on fabricated charges, was poisoned by his jailers. He survived — his students considered it a miracle, and not without reason. The court eventually acquitted all one hundred and twenty-seven of the accused. But the poisoning had taken its toll. He emerged from Denizli weakened, older, and seemingly more indestructible than ever.

Emirdağ, 1944–1948: Writing Under Guard

After Denizli, he was exiled to Emirdağ, where the terms of his confinement were the most overt yet: two armed guards were posted permanently at his door, day and night, as if he were a dangerous criminal rather than an elderly scholar. He could not leave without permission. He could not receive visitors without scrutiny. Every letter he sent or received was read by the authorities before it reached him.

He wrote anyway. He continued to dictate and to compose from within his house arrest, and his students continued to copy and distribute the results. The guards at the door saw what they were assigned to see: a contained and compliant old man. They did not see what was actually happening — that the walls they were supposed to be enforcing were entirely irrelevant to the work being done within them.

Afyon, 1948–1950: Madrasatul Yūsufiyyah

And then came Afyon. Of all the prisons Saeed Nursi رحمه الله endured in his long life, Afyon was the darkest. He was over seventy years of age. He had been in and out of prisons and exiles for more than two decades. He was in poor health. And the authorities, it seems, had decided that this time, they would not simply imprison him — they would destroy him.

He was placed in solitary confinement. The cell was cold — bitterly, bone-penetratingly cold, as Anatolian winters can be — and he was denied adequate heating. His diet was intentionally inadequate. He was over seventy years old, petrified with cold, weakened by lack of food, and alone. The official biography records him as being, on more than one occasion, "on the point of death." And then came the poison.

He refused to eat the bread provided by the prison administration. He had, by this point, reason to be careful — the attempt in Denizli had taught him that his jailers were not above using food as a weapon. Despite this precaution, he was poisoned at least three times during his imprisonment in Afyon. He documented it himself, in letters smuggled out to his students. One such letter, preserved in the notebooks of his student Zübeyr Gündüzalp, reads with a quiet horror that no amount of historical distance can diminish:

> *"My Brother! My life is in danger... I can no longer endure it, due to being poisoned as part of a conspiracy, and illness, and old age, and solitary confinement... And now for the third time was yesterday's incident — a plot."*

— — Saeed Nursi رحمه الله, letter from Afyon Prison

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Three poisoning attempts. On an old man. In a prison. On fabricated charges. Let this register. And then consider what he was doing while this was being done to him: Writing. Dictating. Teaching. When the court sessions came, he appeared — gaunt, weakened, but fully present, fully articulate, and entirely unbroken.

✦ **"I Have the Right to Speak for Eight Hours"**

> On one occasion during the Afyon court proceedings, Saeed Nursi رحمه الله rose to deliver his defence. He spoke for some time, and the judge — presumably wearied by or nervous of what he was saying — attempted to cut him off and direct him to sit down. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله's response was immediate and forceful. He rose fully to his feet, traced a deliberate circle in the air with his forefinger, pointed it directly at the judge, and declared in a voice that carried through the entire courtroom: "I have the right to speak for eight hours. I will speak for as long as I want." The judge did not press the matter further.

✦ **Walking Out for Prayer**

On another occasion during the court proceedings, the time for one of the daily prayers arrived while the session was still in progress. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله was not granted a recess. He stood up from the defendant's bench, addressed the Public Prosecutor directly, and said in a clear and firm voice: "We are here in order to protect the rights of the prayers. We are not guilty of anything else!" And without waiting for permission, he walked out of the courtroom to perform his prayer. The court sat in silence until he returned.

✦ **The Turban That Fell Off**

After one of the court sessions, a crowd of his supporters pressed forward to kiss his hand — a traditional expression of respect for a scholar in the Turkish-Islamic tradition. The Public Prosecutor, incensed by this display, came storming out of the courthouse and roared at the police and gendarmes to disperse the crowd. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله heard him, turned to face him, and confronted him in a voice loud enough for all to hear: "What's this? What's this? I'll meet with my brothers if I want!" He grew so animated and indignant that in the midst of his protest, his turban — that symbol of Islamic scholarly dignity — fell clean off

his head. He retrieved it, replaced it, and continued his protest.

✦ **Turning the Flag Against Them**

One Republic Day, the Governor of the Afyon prison had the national flag hung specifically on Said Nursi's prison ward — an act of deliberate provocation, designed to embarrass or discomfit the old scholar. The authorities apparently expected him to react with protest or bitterness. Instead, Saeed Nursi رحمه الله wrote the Governor a calm and devastatingly dignified letter. He thanked him warmly for having the flag of the Independence Holiday hung on his ward, and pointed out — with perfect logic — that as a veteran of the War of Independence who had fought alongside those who secured the nation's freedom, flying that flag was not an imposition on him but his right. The Governor's provocation had been turned, with characteristic elegance, into a statement of patriotic pride.

He was eventually acquitted in Afyon as well — as he had been acquitted at every trial. Every single court case brought against him over twenty-five years of persecution ended in his acquittal on the substantive charges. The system could imprison him, exile him, poison him, and surveil him — but it could not, in the end, produce

a single legitimate conviction. Because there was nothing to convict him of. He had spent his life writing about God.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

> *The Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام spent years in an Egyptian dungeon for a crime he did not commit, and emerged to become the most powerful man in the empire that had imprisoned him. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله spent years in Turkish prisons for works he had written in the service of Allah, and emerged — spiritually, intellectually, and historically — as the most enduring Islamic voice in modern Turkey's history. The lesson is the same across the millennia: when a man's cause is the truth, no prison built by human hands can contain it. The walls only make the voice echo louder.*

Section VIII

The Risale-i Nur: A Tafsir Written in Dungeons

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What, exactly, is the Risale-i Nur? The name translates as the Epistles of Light, or the Compendium of the Letters of Light. It is a body of Qur'ānic commentary and rational theology that, in its complete form, exceeds six thousand pages — written across the prisons, exile villages, mountain hideaways, and house arrests of Said Nursi's last three decades of life. It is, in the history of Islamic thought, unlike anything that came before it — not because it contradicts the classical tradition, but because it speaks to a specific historical moment that the classical tradition could not have anticipated: the moment when atheism and materialism mounted their most serious intellectual challenge to the faith of the Muslim world.

The questions the Risale-i Nur addresses are not obscure theological puzzles of interest only to specialists. They are the questions that every thinking Muslim faces when the waves of doubt begin to lap at the foundations of their faith. Does Allah truly exist? And if He does, how do we

know? What is the purpose of this life, with all its suffering and injustice? What happens when we die? Is the Qur'ān truly the word of God, or is it merely the product of a brilliant human mind? Why does a compassionate God permit evil and pain? These are not new questions. But Saeed Nursi answered them in a new way — not by appealing solely to transmitted authority, not by simply saying "the Qur'ān says so, therefore believe it," but by deploying the full machinery of reason, logic, analogy, and scientific observation to demonstrate that the truths of Islamic faith are not merely dogmas to be accepted on authority, but realities that the human mind, properly guided, can arrive at through its own faculties.

He was addressing, above all, the young Muslim who had been educated in the modern secular system and who had absorbed — often without realising it — the materialist assumptions of that system. He was reaching out to the medical student who had been told that science had made God unnecessary. To the university graduate who had been taught that religion was a crutch for the intellectually weak. To the young professional who still felt the pull of faith in his heart but had been given no intellectual framework in which to accommodate it alongside his modern education. For these souls — and there were millions of them in Turkey, and tens of millions across the Muslim world — the Risale-i Nur was a lifeline.

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Consider the conditions in which this masterwork was produced. The Words — the first major division of the collection — were written largely in Barla, by a scholar in his fifties living under internal exile on the bare minimum of food, writing by hand with whatever materials were available, dictating to students who then copied the texts themselves by hand and distributed them at the risk of imprisonment. The Letters followed. The Flashes. The Rays — the last major section — were written in the various prisons of Eskişehir, Kastamonu, Denizli, Emirdağ, and Afyon: some under guard, some in solitary confinement, some while the author was actively recovering from poisoning.

The distribution of the Risale-i Nur in the years before printing became possible is itself a story of extraordinary devotion. Young men and women — students, farmers, teachers, tradespeople — copied the texts by hand in their homes at night, after long days of work, by lamplight. They hid the copies in their clothing, in the false bottoms of carts, under floorboards. When they were caught — and many were — they were imprisoned. They served their sentences, came out, and copied more. There are accounts of students who copied the same treatise so many times that they had memorised it inadvertently.

There are accounts of village women who could not read the Ottoman Arabic script in which the early texts were written, learning to copy the letters purely as shapes — not understanding the words, but forming each letter with such care that the copies were flawless.

Today, the Risale-i Nur has been translated into more than fifty languages. It is available in print, online, and in audio form. Study circles — the dershanes (study centers) that Saeed Nursi رحمه الله established as the primary vehicle for his teaching — number in the thousands across Turkey and around the world, with an estimated five to nine million people regularly engaging with his works. Oxford University's Centre for Islamic Studies has described him as the most influential Islamic scholar in modern Turkish history. Academic institutions from the United States to Malaysia have produced doctoral dissertations on his thought. In the streets of Istanbul, one can find signs advertising the Risale-i Nur — described, with perfect accuracy, as "the tafsīr written in dungeons."

The man they sent to Barla to be forgotten has not been forgotten. He never will be.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

The Risale-i Nur is more than a book. It is a testimony. It is the testimony of a man who, stripped of everything the world considers necessary for intellectual productivity — access to libraries, to colleagues, to peace, to safety, to health — continued to produce, because he understood that the source of his light was not any of those things. The source was Allah. And from that source, no exile and no prison could sever him. When you read the Risale-i Nur, you are not merely reading theology. You are reading the product of a life fully surrendered to Allah. Every page is an act of worship. Every sentence was written as though it might be the last. That is why, after more than a century, they still carry light.

Section IX

The Final Journey: Urfa, the City of the Prophets

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There are those who know, with a knowledge that transcends ordinary human foresight, where their journey will end. The Prophet ﷺ saw his own death coming with a clarity that allowed him to prepare his Ummah with deliberate, loving care in his final days. The great scholars of this Ummah — those who have spent their lives in close communion with the divine — have often demonstrated a similar awareness of their own approaching end, an awareness born not of melancholy but of readiness, of a soul that has completed its appointed work and knows it.

In 1950 — ten years before his death — Saeed Nursi رحمه الله sent some of his personal belongings ahead to Urfa, telling his students quietly that he himself would be going there. Urfa. The ancient city in south-eastern Anatolia known to Muslims as the city of the Prophets — the city where, tradition holds, Ibrahim al-Khalil عليه السلام was born, where the great enemy of monotheism Nimrod had him cast into a fire, and where Allah

commanded the fire: O fire, be coolness and safety for Ibrahim.

He sent his belongings there ten years early. He knew. He waited. He continued to write, to teach, to suffer the harassment of a government that even in the more liberal political climate of the 1950s could not quite bring itself to leave him in peace. The Democrat Party government that came to power in 1950 was more sympathetic to religion than its predecessors, and there was a period in which Saeed Nursi رحمه الله enjoyed a degree of freedom he had not known for decades — freedom to travel, to receive visitors, to see his students without the ever-present shadow of the police. He used every moment of it.

By March of 1960, he was eighty-two years old, severely ill, and fading. His students urged him to rest. He refused. On the 21st of March 1960, in a condition that those around him recognised as critical, he insisted on travelling to Urfa. He was carried more than driven. The journey was an act of will rather than of physical strength. His students, watching him, understood what was happening: this was not a sick man travelling for medical treatment. This was a man going home.

He arrived in Urfa on the 21st of March. Two days later, on the morning of the 23rd of March 1960, Bediuzzaman Saeed Nursi رحمه الله breathed

his last. He died in the city of Ibrahim عليه السلام, the great breaker of idols, the great caller to Tawhid — the oneness of Allah. He was buried in a tomb directly opposite to what people called 'the sacred cave', in the shadow of the sanctuary of the Prophet who had been thrown into fire for his faith and emerged unburned.

The symmetry is not accidental. It is, for those who believe in the mercy and wisdom of Allah Almighty, a signature — the kind of divine punctuation that marks the end of a life well spent. The man who had spent his entire adult life calling the Muslim world back to the pure Tawhid of the Qur'ān was laid to rest in the city of the father of Tawhid. The man who had been thrown, again and again, into the fires of prison and exile and poison and oppression, and had emerged, again and again, unburned — was buried in the city where the most famous fire in history had been rendered cool.

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But the story did not end at the graveside. Even in death, Saeed Nursi رحمه الله was not to be left in peace. On the 27th of May 1960 — barely two months after his burial — a military coup overthrew the Turkish government. The new junta, in one of its first acts, ordered the exhumation of Saeed Nursi's body from his tomb in Urfa and its removal to an unknown location.

The authorities wanted to prevent his grave from becoming a site of visitation by the masses, a gathering point for his millions of students and admirers, a living monument to a man whose memory they feared as much as they had feared the man himself.

Let us dwell on this for a moment. A man dies, peacefully, at the age of eighty-two, after a lifetime of scholarship and suffering. He is buried in a humble tomb. And within two months of his death, the government digs him up and hides his body, because they are afraid of a dead man.

In that fear, they paid him the highest possible tribute. They confessed, in the most eloquent way available to them, that Saeed Nursi رحمه الله was not merely a man. He was a force. He was an idea. He was a light. And lights, as every child knows, cannot be hidden by closing your eyes. They are still there when you open them.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

Think of the men who oppressed Saeed Nursi رحمه الله. Think of the politicians who signed his exile orders, the generals who ordered his imprisonment, the jailers who administered his poison, the bureaucrats who burned his books. Where are they now? Their names are footnotes in history at best, forgotten at worst. And Saeed Nursi رحمه الله — the man they tried to erase — is read today in fifty languages, taught in universities on every continent, and carried in the hearts of millions. The scholars who serve Allah are never truly gone. Their books remain. Their students remain. Their light remains. This is the promise of sadaqah jariyah — a continuous charity that flows beyond the grave, for as long as the knowledge benefits souls.

Section X

His Legacy: The Tree That Could Not Be Uprooted

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It is now more than sixty years since Saeed Nursi رحمه الله drew his last breath in Urfa. Sixty years is not a long time in the life of a civilisation. And yet the world he left behind is, in the dimension that concerned him most — the dimension of living, vibrant, rational, heart-anchored Islamic faith — profoundly different from the world that his persecutors intended to create. The Turkey that the secular nationalist revolution designed was to be a Turkey in which Islam would slowly wither — confined to the private sphere, deprived of intellectual sustenance, cut off from its intellectual and spiritual heritage, and gradually replaced in the public square by the values and assumptions of materialist modernity.

That Turkey did not come to pass. Not entirely. Not permanently. And among the most significant reasons it did not come to pass is the work of a Kurdish scholar from a mountain village in Bitlis, who spent twenty-five of the most productive years of his life in exile and

imprisonment, and who used every one of those years to write.

Today, the Nur movement — the network of study circles, educational institutions, publications, and community organisations inspired by the Risale-i Nur — is one of the most significant forces in Turkish society. Millions of ordinary Turkish Muslims have had their faith deepened, strengthened, and intellectually anchored by engagement with Said Nursi's رحمه الله writings. The young university student who encounters the Risale-i Nur and finds, perhaps for the first time, a framework in which his Islamic faith and his modern education can coexist in harmony — that student is the living fulfilment of exactly the vision that Saeed Nursi رحمه الله carried from the mountains of Bitlis to the prisons of Afyon. Oxford University's Centre for Islamic Studies has recognised him as, simply, "the most influential Islamic scholar in modern Turkish history." The institution that housed the greatest scholars of the Western intellectual tradition acknowledges the man that the Turkish state spent decades trying to destroy.

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What does the life of Saeed Nursi رحمه الله teach the Muslim Ummah of the twenty-first century? It teaches many things. But let me distil the most essential lessons — the ones that burn

brightest when held up against the reality of our own age.

The pen is a weapon of jihad. This is not a metaphor. It is a statement of historical fact, demonstrated across fourteen centuries of Islamic civilisation and confirmed most recently by the life of Saeed Nursi رحمه الله. The jihad of the scholar — the patient, painstaking, intellectually rigorous work of defending, clarifying, and transmitting the truths of this Deen — is not a lesser form of jihad than the sword. In many eras, and certainly in ours, it is the more necessary one. The fitnah of our age is not primarily military. It is intellectual. It is the fitnah of doubt, of materialism, of spiritual hollowness dressed in the clothes of progress. This fitnah requires a response in kind — clear, courageous, well-reasoned speech and writing, in whatever medium reaches the hearts that need it.

Tawakkul is not passivity — it is fearlessness. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله did not sit in his prison cell waiting for Allah to rescue him. He sat in his prison cell writing. Tawakkul means entrusting the outcome to Allah while spending every ounce of your capacity in the service of your purpose. It means refusing the blindfold before the firing squad, because you have already chosen where to look. It means walking out of a court in the middle of a proceeding to perform your prayer, because

the rights of Allah come before the comfort of men. It means planting seeds in exile, knowing that you will not live to see the forest.

Every prison can be a madrasah. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله did not wait for ideal conditions to serve Allah. He did not say: when I am free, when I have a proper library, when I have peace and security, then I will do my work. He worked in the dark, in the cold, on whatever paper was available, while being poisoned, while being watched, while being alone. The lesson for us is not exotic or remote: wherever Allah has placed you — whatever your circumstances, however limited your resources, however hostile your environment — that is where your work is to be done. The madrasah is wherever the student sits down and opens his heart.

The Qur'ān is sufficient for every age. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله did not introduce new doctrines or novel theological positions. He did not compromise the truth of Islam to make it palatable to modernity. What he did — with extraordinary skill and extraordinary sincerity — was demonstrate that the answers to the deepest questions of the modern human soul are already in the Qur'ān, waiting to be unlocked by a mind willing to look at them with fresh eyes. The Qur'ān spoke to seventh-century Arabia. It speaks to twenty-first-century humanity. It will speak to

whatever century follows. This is its miracle. And it is a miracle that every generation of Muslims has the responsibility to demonstrate anew.

Sincerity is the foundation of all lasting work. Saeed Nursi رحمه الله refused every position, every title, every salary, every honour that the world offered him. He refused them not because worldly things are intrinsically evil, but because he recognised — with a clarity that is given only to those who have truly given themselves to Allah — that the work he had been assigned required a heart free of worldly ambition. He wanted nothing from anyone except from Allah. And this sincerity — this ikhlas — is why his work lasted. Work done for Allah, from a heart that wants only Allah, carries a quality that no amount of worldly cleverness can manufacture. It carries light. And light, as we have seen, cannot be hidden.

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And now I turn to you, dear reader — to you personally, wherever you are reading these words, whatever circumstances surround you. You have just spent time with the story of a man who was exiled, imprisoned, poisoned, and had his grave desecrated — and who spent every year of that ordeal serving Allah with every capacity he possessed. What do you take from this story? What changes, in your heart, in your priorities, in your understanding of what your life is for?

You may not be a scholar. You may not be called to write six thousand pages of theology. But you have been given something — some capacity, some platform, some influence, some knowledge, some skill — that can be placed in the service of this Deen. And the question that the life of Saeed Nursi رحمه الله presses upon you, unavoidably, is: are you using it? Are you using what Allah has given you for the purpose He gave it to you? Or are you holding it in reserve, waiting for conditions that are perfect, for a moment that is comfortable, for a path that is safe?

The scholars of this Ummah did not wait for perfect conditions. They worked in the imperfect conditions that Allah provided, with the imperfect tools that were available, in the imperfect bodies that housed their souls, and they produced work that outlasted every empire that persecuted them. They are gone now. Their bodies are in the earth. But their books are in our hands. Their ideas are in our minds. Their legacy is in our ability to carry this Deen forward — or to fail it.

We pray that Allah makes us worthy of the trust they carried and passed to us. We pray that He makes us worthy of the sacrifices they made on our behalf. We pray that the story of Bediuzzaman Saeed Nursi رحمه الله — this wonder of the age, this mujāhid of the pen, this tree that

could not be uprooted — burns in our hearts long after the last page of this booklet has been turned.

◈ Reflection for the Reader ◈

> *The man who fed ants as a child "as a reward for their industry" spent his life feeding the hungry hearts of millions. The child who refused to accept his mother's superstitious explanation of the eclipse grew up to write rational proofs for the existence of Allah that convinced the most sceptical of minds. The young man who walked a minaret parapet without flinching faced firing squads without flinching. The pattern was set from the beginning. The soul that arrives in this world with its fists clenched and its eyes open, already looking — that soul has work to do. It does not rest until the work is done. And when it is done, it does not end. It multiplies. It echoes. It illuminates.*

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We call upon Allah — Lord of the Throne — to shower mercy upon Bediuzzaman Said Nursi رحمه الله and grant him and his students the highest stations in Jannatul Firdaws, making every soul his words have touched a continuous charity for him. We ask Allah to honour all the scholars and servants of the Ummah who were imprisoned, exiled, and killed for their knowledge. We ask Allah to bless the author of this booklet and its readers and accept its shortcomings. O Turner of hearts, keep our hearts firm upon Your Deen. Āmeen.

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END NOTE

Sources & Attribution

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Body exhumed after May 1960 coup	Wikipedia; New York Times	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Said_Nursi

Note on Methodology: This booklet draws primarily from the Tarihçe-i Hayat (official biography of Said Nursi), the Risale-i Nur collection itself (as primary source), and the scholarly biography by Sukran Vahide. Quotations attributed to Said Nursi represent either direct translations from the original Turkish/Arabic, or close paraphrases from documented English translations. This article is written as an inspirational biographical sketch in the tradition of Islamic biographical literature (tarājim).

About The Author

Mohammed (bin) Thajammul Hussain Manna - is a student of Islamic Studies, a teacher, an author and a small-time translator and author. He completed his Bachelors in Aeronautical Engineering from MVJCE, Bangalore (VTU) in 2012, during and after which he started studying The Quran and Sunnah under the guidance of local scholars and students of knowledge. In 2024 he completed his Bachelors in Islamic Studies from Preston International College, Chennai (TNOU), and an Advanced Diploma In Islamic Studies from the Aspire College of Excellence, Bangalore (TNOU). (As on 2024, he is currently pursuing a Masters in Social Work from Tamil Nadu Open University, Alhamdulillah.)

His other works include:

1. The Biography of The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) From Reliable And Credibly Established Narrations (3 Volumes, 1245 pages). [This is the first Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that uses only authentic narrations for the story line.]

2. The Authentic Biography of Bilal bin Rabah (Radi Allahu Anhu).

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In order to avail the books please email: getauthenticseerah@gmail.com .

ABOUT THIS BOOK

In an age of crumbling empires and collapsing certainties, one man took up his pen as others took up their swords. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi — imprisoned, exiled, and relentlessly persecuted — never once surrendered his faith or his mission. Through decades of suffering, he produced the Risale-i Nur, a monumental defence of Islamic belief that illuminated the hearts of millions across Turkey and beyond.

This biography traces his extraordinary journey: from the mountains of eastern Anatolia to the battlefields of WWI, from firing-squad death sentences to solitary exile, and from a prison cell to the most widely-read Islamic work of the twentieth century. A story of unbreakable will, undying faith, and the enduring power of the written word.

BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI

1878 – 1960 | Eastern Anatolia, Ottoman Empire

- Scholar · Soldier · Prisoner · Author of the Risale-i Nur
- Survived three decades of exile and imprisonment
- Wrote over 6,000 pages in captivity by candlelight
- His works today reach tens of millions of readers worldwide

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohammed bin Thajammul Hussain Manna is a researcher and author dedicated to reviving the lives of Islam's forgotten heroes for contemporary Muslim readers.
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