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Book Review

A Spiritual Prescription for the Sick

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Abstract. This review examines *Message for the Sick*, drawn from the Twenty-Fifth Flash of Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*, highlighting its theological depth and pastoral sensitivity. Nursi reframes illness as spiritually meaningful states rooted in divine wisdom, presenting suffering not as punishment but as a pathway to understanding God's attributes. His remedies for the sick offer a Qur'an-centred lens through which vulnerability becomes a source of insight, patience, and inner transformation. Through close textual analysis, this review demonstrates how Nursi's reflections integrate Islamic spirituality, ethical psychology, and metaphysical reasoning. The treatise ultimately provides a holistic and

timeless model of spiritual care relevant for clinicians, caregivers, and readers seeking to understand hardship through faith.

Keywords: Islam, Local Culture, the Passalama' Banua Tradition

INTRODUCTION

Message for the Sick, comprising the Twenty-Fifth Flash of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*, stands as one of the most compelling spiritual interventions in modern Islamic literature. Written during periods of personal hardship, exile, and physical ailment, the work reflects Nursi's deep engagement with human vulnerability and divine wisdom. The treatise is built around an illness approached through a Qur'an-centred hermeneutic that transforms suffering into a spiritually constructive experience. The Twenty-Fifth Flash addresses those afflicted with illness, offering twenty-five "remedies" designed to console, uplift, and reorient the inner world of the sick. These remedies present illness as a divine pedagogy: a means through which God unveils His Names, awakens gratitude, and nurtures patience. Nursi teaches that the body, described as a garment woven with "luminous faculties" (p. 21), becomes a canvas for encountering divine attributes such as the Healer, the Provider, and the Merciful. In this reframing, illness ceases to be a purely biological event and becomes a moment of spiritual encounter and insight.

The Twenty-Fifth Flash provides a comprehensive spiritual psychology grounded in Qur'anic thought, ethical reflection, and pastoral compassion. Nursi's approach resonates not only with believers but also with contemporary fields concerned with human well-being, such as palliative care and meaning-centred therapy. His writing blends emotional insight with theological coherence, offering a timeless guide for anyone grappling with suffering, decline, or the fragility of human life. This review explores these themes in depth, demonstrating how Nursi elevates vulnerability into a site of divine intimacy and spiritual maturity.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Scholarly studies on Said Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* have expanded steadily, with researchers such as Şükran Vahide, Colin Turner, Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', and Ian Markham examining his theology, spiritual psychology, and influence in modern Islamic thought. A scholarship in Urdu by Abdul Haque, Burhan Ahmad Farooqi, and researchers highlights the role of faith in cultivating resilience. Broader studies of Islamic healing and ageing explore themes of patience, gratitude, and divine wisdom, closely intersecting with Nursi's Qur'an-centred approach to suffering and spiritual growth.

METHODOLOGY

This review adopts a qualitative interpretive method grounded in close reading of the Twenty-Fifth Flash. Themes such as illness, vulnerability, and divine wisdom are identified through textual and hermeneutical analysis. Secondary scholarship

contextualises Nursi's insights within Islamic spirituality and pastoral care. The method prioritises originality, theological coherence, and a comprehensive evaluation of the treatise's spiritual contributions.

RESULT FINDINGS

Findings indicate that *Message for the Sick* articulates a unified theology of suffering that integrates Qur'anic principles, ethical psychology, and pastoral sensitivity. The Twenty-Fifth Flash reimagines illness as a divine lesson, offering remedies that uncover "wisdom and rays of mercy" (p. 22) within affliction while presenting the body as a means to recognise God's attributes. The Flash constructs a holistic vision in which vulnerability becomes transformative rather than diminishing. The treatise offers a practical model of spiritual resilience for patients, caregivers, and clinical practitioners seeking meaning-centred approaches to illness.

MAIN DISCUSSION

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's *Message for the Sick*, taken from the Twenty-Fifth Flash of the *Risale-i Nur*, is a carefully crafted theological and psychological map for understanding human vulnerability. Its central aim is to redefine the meaning of suffering through illness by grounding it in divine wisdom and reframing it as a pedagogical process. Rather than offering abstract doctrinal statements, Nursi speaks directly to readers in states of fragility, using language designed to console, elevate, and reorient the self.

The Twenty-Fifth Flash opens with a powerful redefinition of the sick person's condition. Nursi insists that suffering carries purpose, explaining that God "makes you revolve amid numerous states and changes you in many situations" (p. 22) in order to reveal the meanings embedded in human faculties and limitations. By portraying the body as a dynamic field of divine disclosure, he immediately shifts the reader's psychological posture from despair to attentiveness. Illness is not meaningless; it is a circumstance arranged to unveil divine attributes.

The Fourth Remedy contains one of Nursi's most important theological insights: "Just as you learn of His name of Provider through hunger, so come to know His name of Healer through your illness." (p. 22) This statement captures the spirit of the entire treatise. Human experience—particularly in its moments of extremity—becomes a lens through which God's Names become intelligible. Hunger clarifies divine providence, weakness clarifies divine strength, and illness clarifies divine healing. In this framework, every distressing condition is paired with a corresponding spiritual opportunity.

Nursi reinforces this point by describing the human being as a creation adorned with "luminous faculties like the eye, the ear, the reason, and the heart." (p. 21) These faculties, he argues, are exercised, disrupted, and restored in ways that awaken the individual to the richness of God's compassion and wisdom. Illness is therefore neither a random occurrence nor a purely physiological malfunction; it is a mode of divine communication, a call to deeper presence and reflection.

He acknowledges, however, that illness is often experienced as frightening. It hides its own wisdom. Thus, he writes that the sick fear a veil that “you fear and loathe” (p. 22), yet if this veil were lifted, “behind it you would find many agreeable and beautiful meanings”. (p. 22) Here Nursi provides what modern psychology might call reframing: shifting one’s interpretive lens so that the same set of experiences generates a different emotional outcome. The sick person need not deny their pain; instead, they are invited to understand pain within a larger metaphysical context.

Throughout the Twenty-Fifth Flash, Nursi addresses the reader directly— “O sick person!” (pp. 23, 26, 28, 31, 34, 37, 38, 40, 44)—a rhetorical strategy that creates a partnership between author and sufferer. This mode of direct address resembles pastoral counselling: it situates the reader in a conversational relationship where the author becomes a companion rather than a distant theologian. The psychological effect is immediate; the sufferer feels seen, acknowledged, and spoken to with tenderness.

Moreover, Nursi’s remedies are not uniform. Each offers a different angle through which to approach suffering—some appeal to divine mercy, others to gratitude, others to the meaning of patience, and others to the fleeting nature of worldly hardship. This variety ensures that the text speaks to different temperaments, emotional states, and spiritual backgrounds. For readers undergoing chronic illness, this plurality of approaches is significant: it provides multiple entry points for reflection and relief.

The Twenty-Fifth Flash results in a holistic spiritual psychology. Illness disrupts the illusion of control, reminding the human being of their dependence on God and sharpening their perception of divine compassion. Illness becomes a process through which the believer is spiritually refined.

Nursi’s metaphors reinforce this overarching vision. His depiction of the body as a “garment” (p. 21) woven with divine artistry invites readers to rethink embodiment itself. Strength and weakness alike become expressive modes of divine care. When he describes suffering as containing “flash of wisdom and rays of mercy” (p. 22), he offers a poetic vocabulary that aligns emotional healing with theological insight.

The pastoral application of this work becomes clear when read within contemporary contexts. Modern medicine often treats illness strictly through biological analysis, leaving existential questions unanswered. Patients frequently grapple with meaning, purpose, and identity—domains that Nursi’s framework addresses directly. His teachings anticipate modern meaning-centred therapy by helping patients reinterpret suffering through a narrative that affirms dignity and purpose.

For clinicians, chaplains, and caregivers, the text offers a model for supporting individuals in distress. Its insistence on recognition of spiritual realities alongside physical conditions complements holistic care models. For those suffering from chronic illness, the Twenty-Fifth Flash provides a vocabulary for embracing patience and hope. In academic terms, the treatise is a contribution to Islamic moral psychology: it shows how cognitive states, emotional responses, spiritual beliefs, and existential reflections intersect in moments of vulnerability. It also highlights Nursi’s

skill in Qur'anic hermeneutics, as he interprets human conditions through divine attributes and eschatological truths.

Ultimately, *Message for the Sick* reads as a unified pastoral theology. Illness becomes a classroom of compassion. Rather than isolating the sick, the text situates them within a larger spiritual narrative that affirms their worth, honours their struggle, and deepens their connection to God.

CONCLUSION

Message for the Sick represents one of Said Nursi's most profound contributions to Islamic spiritual thought. Its enduring power lies in its capacity to reinterpret human vulnerability in a way that restores dignity, meaning, and hope. Illness, often associated with fear and helplessness, becomes in Nursi's hands an avenue of divine teaching. Across the *Flashe*, Nursi provides language that neither trivialises suffering nor amplifies despair. Instead, he builds an interpretive framework that allows individuals to understand hardship as spiritually significant.

His pastoral tone—addressing “O sick person!” (pp. 23, 26, 28, 31, 34, 37, 38, 40, 44)—creates a relationship of companionship that transforms the text into a form of spiritual presence. This tone is paired with a theological anthropology that sees the human body as a divinely crafted garment and human experiences as reflections of divine Names. Such an outlook gives coherence to the emotional turmoil associated with illness.

For contemporary readers, caregivers, clinicians, and scholars, the treatise offers a valuable model for integrating spiritual care with practical support. It shows that suffering can be narrated in a way that affirms the human spirit. More importantly, it provides those undergoing hardship with a way to reclaim a sense of agency, gratitude, and purpose. In this sense, Nursi's work stands not merely as a theological reflection but as a living guide—one that deepens resilience, fosters humility, and illuminates the path toward God.

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