A WINDOW ONTO DIVINE UNITY THROUGH EVERY DISCIPLINE

WOULD THE OWNER OF THE UNIVERSE LEAVE HUMAN BEINGS UNAWARE OF THEIR DUTY? (I)

Why Have We Been Entrusted with the Capital of Life?

Salahattin Altundağ[1]

Imagine someone who can account for every penny of the money entrusted to them. They know exactly how much they received, what they spent it on and how much remains. Yet when asked a single question, they find themselves unable to answer:

Why was this money given to you?

Sometimes, even when every account is correct, the real error lies in the answer to this very question.

A similar situation may arise in the accounting records of a business. Income, expenses, liabilities and receivables may all have been recorded in full, and every expenditure documented. Yet the resources allocated to a particular activity may have been used for a purpose other than the one for which they were intended.

The figures are correct and the documents are in order. Yet what has been done does not serve the purpose for which the resources were provided.

Knowing how resources have been used is not the same as knowing why they were provided. Accounting records show the transactions that have taken place. Assessing whether those transactions are consistent with the assigned duty also requires knowledge of the purpose for which the resources were allocated and the relevant criteria.

Thus, keeping accurate accounts and faithfully fulfilling a duty are two different matters.

In *The Eleventh Word*, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi presents a particularly thought-provoking comparison that illustrates this distinction while explaining the purpose of human creation.

A man gives one of his servants twenty gold pieces to buy himself a suit of clothes. To another servant, he gives a thousand gold pieces, puts a piece of paper containing certain instructions in his pocket and sends him out to conduct business. Without reading the instructions in his pocket, the second servant spends his entire capital on a suit of clothes (Nursi, 1989, p. 127).

There is capital, an owner who provides it and a duty to be fulfilled. Yet because the servant has not read the instructions entrusted to him, he has failed to learn what is expected of him.

[1] **Dr. Assistant Professor Salahattin ALTUNDAĞ**
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6198-7959
Dicle University Diyarbakir Vocational School of Social Sciences Department of Accounting and Taxation
21280 / DIYARBAKIR / TÜRKİYE

Following the example of the first servant, he has spent his capital on something other than its intended purpose.

Bediuzzaman applies this comparison to human life. He explains that the span of life, reason, will and countless faculties bestowed upon human beings have not been given merely to satisfy the transient needs of worldly life.

In our previous article, we asked, "Does Ownership Mean Creation?" Drawing upon the accounting concepts of ownership, economic rights and control, we examined the distinction between human ownership and God's true ownership. Through Bediuzzaman's proofs of Divine Unity, we also reflected upon the truth that God is the True Owner and Creator of everything in the universe.

This truth now leads us to another question.

Since human beings themselves belong to God's dominion and have not brought their own lives, reason, will or other faculties into existence out of nothing, for what purpose have these precious bounties been bestowed upon them? To what end should they use the capital of life entrusted to them?

More importantly, where are they to learn what that purpose is?

THE CAPITAL OF HUMAN LIFE AND THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

The characteristics with which a living being has been endowed tell us something about its way of life and its needs. The wings of a bird, the fins of a fish and the roots of a tree perform functions essential to sustaining life.

When we turn our attention to human beings, however, we encounter a far greater range of faculties.

Human beings see, yet they also seek the meaning of what they see. They hear, yet they question the truth of what they hear. They remember the past, contemplate the future and wonder about their own existence. Though their lives are finite, they reflect upon eternity. They seek to understand justice, compassion, goodness and evil.

Can the entire purpose for which human beings were created, endowed as they are with reason, heart, imagination, memory, will and conscience, really be reduced to eating, drinking, finding shelter and perpetuating the human race?

In *The Eleventh Word*, Bediuzzaman identifies two fundamental purposes for which these human faculties have been bestowed. Translated from the Turkish original, these read as follows:

The first is to enable you to perceive every kind of bounty bestowed by the True Bestower and thereby lead you to give thanks. You, in turn, should perceive those bounties and respond with gratitude and worship.

The second is to make known to you, through these faculties, all the various manifestations of the sacred Divine Names throughout the world, one by one, and to enable you to taste them.

SALAHATTIN ALTUNDAĞ

You, in turn, should recognise them through tasting them and attain belief. (Nursi, 1989, p. 126; see also Nursi, n.d., p. 141)

The senses and faculties that God has bestowed upon human beings enable them not only to benefit from His bounties but also to recognise their True Owner. By appreciating the value of the bounties they receive and recognising them as gifts from God, human beings are led to give thanks. At the same time, by reflecting upon the artistry, beauty and wisdom displayed throughout the universe, they seek to recognise the manifestations of the Divine Names in created beings.

We perceive the beauty of a flower with our eyes and examine its structure with our reason. Its beauty also touches our hearts. But if we look beyond its material properties and seek the true source of the artistry displayed in its creation, that flower directs us towards God, its Maker.

In Bediuzzaman's understanding of Divine Unity, human faculties thus become means of attaining knowledge of God.

In *The Twenty-Third Word*, after explaining human powerlessness (impotence) at birth and the lifelong need for learning, Bediuzzaman reaches the following conclusion:

"This means that man's innate duty is to be perfected through learning and to proclaim his worship of God and servitude to Him through supplication" (Nursi, n.d., p. 332).

Human beings attain maturity through learning and turn towards their Sustainer by recognising their own powerlessness and needs. As they develop the faculties bestowed upon them, they also strive to recognise the True Owner of those faculties.

The reasoning we have pursued thus far shows that there is a purpose to human creation and that the bounties bestowed upon us call for a response of gratitude.

Yet recognising the need to give thanks for a bounty is one thing; knowing how God wishes us to worship Him is another.

Human reason can recognise the need to thank God, who created us and bestowed His bounties upon us. Yet reason alone cannot determine in every detail the acts of worship through which we should express our gratitude, the conduct with which God is pleased, the commands He has given or the actions He has forbidden.

For this, we need knowledge.

But where is this knowledge to come from?

References

Nursi, S. (n.d.). *The Words*. Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture. https://iikv.org/en/kulliyat/the-words

Nursi, S. (1989). *Sözler* [The Words]. Envar Neşriyat.

SALAHATTIN ALTUNDAĞ

Translation note: *The English translation of this article follows Şükran Vahide's terminology for the Risale-i Nur. The passage concerning the two purposes of the human faculties in The Eleventh Word has been independently translated from the Turkish original, with reference to the English edition available through the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture, which credits Şükran Vahide and others as translators. The quotation from The Twenty-Third Word follows the English text reproduced in that edition. Page references correspond to the respective editions cited.*

English source passages:

The Eleventh Word: https://iikv.org/en/kulliyat/the-words/141

The Twenty-Third Word: https://iikv.org/en/kulliyat/the-words/332

SALAHATTİN ALTUNDAĞ