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## Spiritual Relevance of the Twenty-Fifth Flash of the Risālah-i Nūr in Ameliorating the Socio-Economic Effects of Corona Virus 2019 (Covid-19) in Nigeria

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## **Spiritual Relevance of the Twenty-Fifth Flash of the Risālah-i Nūr in Ameliorating the Socio- Economic Effects of Corona Virus 2019 (Covid-19) in Nigeria**

### **ABSTRACT**

The world is hit with a deathly disease that for a very long period it could not experience. The disease is among the several viral epidemics such as severe respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) which emerged in 2002 and 2003. But the new virus, which is tentatively called Covid-19, seems to be very contagious and has quickly spread globally. Over the past few months of its emergence, several cases, with hundreds of thousands of deaths were reported by various governments and agencies across the regions of the world. In Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, the virus has severe effects on the socio-economic life of the people regardless of their wealth and social status, and due to the high cost of health care and greater economic fragility of the country, many have surrendered to the virus or lost hope in sustaining their life after it. However, understanding the frailty of human nature, Ustāz Badī'uz-Zamān, has predicted a similar situation in their existence and provides what he called 'remedy' in the twenty- Flash of his Risālah-i Nūr. This study, therefore, studies the content of the twenty-fifth flash and verifies the effectiveness of the remedies in curing of the disease. It also examines the spiritual relevance of the remedies in ameliorating the effects of the disease on the socio-economic life of Nigerians. The study also shows how the remedies can help in coping with the predicaments during and after the Covid-19 pandemic and other similar sicknesses. Hence, it extols the significance of the

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Risālah-i Nūr and the need for human sober reflection over its meaning and teachings on issues related to human's spiritual and material existence.

**Keywords:** *Badī'uz-Zamān, Risālah-i Nūr, twenty-fifth flash, Covid-19, effects, remedy.*

## **Introduction**

Badī'uz-Zamān Sa'īd Nūrsī is one of the most prominent Muslim scholars in the twentieth century, whose intellectual achievements led to the production of the Risālah-i Nūr collections (Epistles of Light). Therein, he puts forward the essence of life, faith and human beings among other things. Though, he gives priority to the fundamentals of faith and ethics to safeguard the Islamic faith by proper explanation to the principles of the religion. In the Flashes, one of the Risālah collections and the twenty-fifth flash, in particular, Nūrsī focuses on human nature as regards calamity and exquisitely outlines steps to serve as a remedy for man in the face of a divine test in order not to lose his essence and faith in the sight of God.

At the moment, the world is hit with the most dangerous infectious disease called Corona Virus 2019, widely known as Covid-19. The disease was first reported in December 2019, and by late January 2020, a large number of cases had been reported with many fatalities. The epidemiology investigation shows that the disease was associated with animals leading to a severe respiratory syndrome that includes fever, dizziness, and a cough. The characteristics of the disease show that it is transmitted from human to human through respiratory fomites, which is occurring during the asymptomatic incubation period estimated to be between 2 to 10 days. The absence of effective antiviral treatment for Covid-19 made the health community, through the World Health Organization, suggest ways of preventing and containing the disease from spreading. This includes quarantining, social

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distancing, and home staying, which not long after put in use their consequences manifested on various aspects of human life.

Nigeria, as one of the countries that were severely affected by the disease, similar measures were adopted by the government across all levels. This led to the complete closure of the economy by restricting people's movement and banning mass gatherings, even in mosques and churches. The overstretched long-age neglected Nigerian health sector with a large number of people contracted with the disease, and the closure of the economy could not allow people to bear the cost of the treatment. This led to difficult situations that people can no longer withstand, and many were about to or already want to be safe from the disease and its consequences. Thus, the paper rekindled the hope of people by studying the content of the twenty-fifth flash of the *Risālah-i Nūr* to outline the remedy of the situation as envisaged by *Badī'uz-Zamān Sa'īd Nūrsī*. The paper did not only find the remedy effective but also a necessity for all Nigerians to hold on to them if their existence has meant anything to them. It finally emphasizes the spiritual relevance of the twenty-fifth flash, like the rest of the *Risālah-i Nūr*, to human social, economic, and spiritual wellbeing at every time and place.

### **Covid-19, its meaning, emergence, and effects**

In December 2019, there have been a series of reported cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, China. After an intensive investigation by the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the illness is attributed to a novel virus belonging to the coronavirus (CoV) family.<sup>1</sup> This being the third, several viral epidemics such as the acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) in 2002 to 2003 have been recorded and the middle east respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) that was identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012.<sup>2</sup> In February 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the disease caused by the new CoV was a

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Covid-19, which is the acronym for coronavirus 2019.<sup>3</sup> CoVs are positive-stranded viruses with a crown-like appearance under an electronic microscope, as the term *corona* in Latin is used for crown and this is due to the presence of spike glycoprotein. The CoV has become a major pathogen of emerging respiratory disease belonging to a family of single-stranded RNA viruses that can be isolated from animal species causing illness ranging from the common cold to more severe disease and death.<sup>4</sup> The new virus seems to be very contagious and has quickly spread globally.

The first cases of Covid-19 disease were linked to direct exposure to the seafood market in Wuhan, China, making animal-to-human transmission the presumed main mechanism. However, subsequent cases were not associated with the presumed mechanism, thus concluded that the novel virus could be transmitted from human to human, and symptomatic people are the most frequent source of the Covid-19 spread. The transmission is believed to occur through respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing.<sup>5</sup> But, as more cases of infection of the disease were reported with a high number of fatalities, the World Health Organization raised the threat of the CoV epidemic to a very high level and declared it as Pandemic.<sup>6</sup> The potential of the virus to become a worldwide health crisis, guidelines were issued on how to prevent and contain the spread of the disease that include isolation of subjects suffering from acute respiratory infection, frequent washing of hands, avoiding unprotected contact with farm and wild animals, strict hygiene and avoiding public gatherings among others.<sup>7</sup> World governments were forced to establish measures to stem out possible devastating effects from the novel disease.

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## **Effects of Covid-19 pandemic on the Socio-economic Life of Nigeria**

Nigeria witnessed its first coronavirus case on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020, when an Italian citizen tested positive for the disease in Lagos. On 19<sup>th</sup> March, a second person from Ogun state, who had contact with the Italian citizen was also confirmed positive. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the same month, there were ten new cases; six in Lagos, three in Federal capital territory Abuja, and one in Edo state, and from which the country recorded the first death.<sup>8</sup> From then, the virus spread to other parts of the country the government had to impose stricter measures to prevent and contain it from further spreading. The national lockdown declared by the federal government led to total shut down of the dwindling economy as movements were restricted, schools, both private and public were closed, financial institutions partially operated for few services, markets were put under lock and key and mass gatherings in mosques and churches were banned among others. This made the Covid-19 pandemic place immense pressure on Nigeria's poor health care system that further compounded the socio-economic impact of the pandemic in the country.<sup>9</sup> Today, as the spread of the disease intensifies, the following are its glaring effects on the socio-economic life of the people:

### **Fear and Grief**

There is a lot of anxiety and fear among the Nigeria populace, irrespective of their age, religion, and social status, on the rate of the spread of the novel disease in the country and particularly the reports of the number of people dying from the disease on daily basis, even during the lockdown. This led to social disruptions due to uncertainty about people's safety.<sup>10</sup> However, the incapability of the health sector of the country to show its will in containing the disease led to the extension of lockdowns which destructs the lives and livelihood of the society's poorest and

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most vulnerable people without efforts of the government to help in cushioning the situation.<sup>11</sup>

## **Loss of Jobs**

The large scale of the spread of Covid-19 in the country forced governments to lock down the country which prevents people from traveling to conduct their businesses.<sup>12</sup> Local vendors and traders have expressed fears over their inability to feed their families during the lockdown with their daily earnings as the only source of sustenance.<sup>13</sup> This led to social insecurity and instability as a large number of youths turned unemployed and were forced to join the unemployment class thereby making the rate rise by 55% higher. This affects the livelihood of the Nigerians as the rise in the inflation index of the country led to a high rate of foodstuff caused by increases in prices.<sup>14</sup>

## **Lack of Moral and Spiritual Nourishment**

Covid-19 pandemic led to the restriction and banning of social gatherings leading to the total closure of schools and religious centers of worship and their services.<sup>15</sup> The *Fatwā* of the Nigerian Supreme Council of Muslims' Affairs, for instance, in the suspension of this year's congregational *Tarāwīh*, *ʿīd ul fīṭr* prayers, and the *Tafsīr* sessions have denied many Muslims from benefiting from various religious sermons to be delivered during such momentous gatherings, which no doubt, if were allowed, are important sources of moral and spiritual exhortation to people on issues in general and on Covid-19 disease in particular.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the absence of such services has made many Nigerians emotionally and spiritually respond negatively to the situation and many were unable to see the divine wisdom of the Creator at this moment of their lives, hence to ponder on its cure.<sup>17</sup>

## Loss of Lives

Since the emergence of coronavirus disease in Nigeria there are reports of more than twenty thousand confirmed cases, out of which more than five thousand were reported the death. Though, investigations have shown that most of those infected by the disease are suffering from mild-moderate symptoms as some recovered without specific treatment. Yet, there is a great concern on a reported mass death for a mysterious disease in some parts of the country.<sup>18</sup> Health organizations, both within and outside the country, have pointed out that the number of deaths to the disease could multiply if authorities are unable to swiftly contain the outbreak.

## Remedy to the effects of Covid-19 on the Socio-economic life in Nigeria from the Twenty-fifth Flash of the Risālah-i Nūr

The above-painted situation of the world and Nigeria during this pandemic disease and its effects on the social and economic life of the people could be mitigated if proper and necessary steps are taken. One of these steps is reading, pondering over, and putting into practice the teachings of the Risālah-i Nūr (Epistles of Light) written by Badī'uz-Zamān Sa'īd Nūrsī, one of the modern Islamic scholars, as exegeses on the Qurān. The Risālah is a collection of books starting with the Words (*Sozler*), the Letters (*Maktūbāt*), the Flashes (*Lem'alār*), and the Rays (*Sualār*) among others.<sup>19</sup> In the Flashes, and the twenty-fifth flash, in particular, Nūrsī envisaged a similar situation and provides a remedy that will help humanity to not only pass the calamity but also benefited from it, socially and spiritually. The remedies are, but are not limited to the followings:



## 1. Covid-19 is not an Illness but a Cure

Sa'īd Nūrsī believes that the first cure to a disease such as Covid-19 should be seen as a cure not an ailment. Thus, he says:

Unhappy sick person! Do not be anxious, have patience!  
Your illness is not a malady for you; it is a sort of cure.<sup>20</sup>

In expatiating how illness can be a cure, he says:

Those afflicted realized their impotence and weakness,  
they beseech their All-Compassionate Creator and take  
refuge in Him.<sup>21</sup>

In the above, Nūrsī depicts that 'impotence' and 'weakness' are two dare diseases embedded in human nature by the Creator, and that people are fond to forget, the Almighty sends mild disease, in form of conventional ailments, to reminds man of the severe ones, that is impotence and weakness, for him to remember and take refuge in Allah. Though Covid-19 is the most dreadful disease the world has seen in recent times, this could be because of our distance with the Creator and therefore should never be a source of worry and disdained, but a path that draws us to our Maker. The journey of human souls to this spiritual state is a sterling position that cures and that is what Sa'īd Nūrsī wants us to cultivate in this kind of situation. This sage opinion has been amplified by the Qurān in various places, one, in particular, is the saying of the Almighty Allah:

Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on  
account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He  
(Allah) may make them taste a part of that which they  
have done, so that they may return (to Him).<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Patience

The second remedy to the socio-economic effects of Covid-19 pandemic disease, which Sa'īd Nūrsī advocates is patience. Being calm and persistent to the toes of life lessens one's sufferings. On this, he says:

O ill person who lacks patience! Be patient, indeed, offer thanks! Your illness may transform each minute of your life into the equivalent of an hour's worship.<sup>23</sup>

In another place he says:

It is even established by sound narrations and by who uncovers the realities of creations, that one minute's illness of some who are completely patient and thankful becomes the equivalent of an hour's worship, and a minute's illness of certain perfected men is the equivalent of a day's worship.<sup>24</sup>

In the above passages of the Flash, Nūrsī points out that an illness is not punishment but a form of worship that would be rewarded if the ill person is completely patient and thankful. This thought of the renowned sage emanates from the fact that human life is an investment meant for a profitable venture. Such a venture can be simple or difficult as the forms of our worship are. The simple is the 'positive' like the daily five prayers, and the difficult is the 'negative' like illness and calamity, in each, one should be faithful and sincere to make his suffering a form of worship. Therefore, Nigerians should endeavor to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic with patience as they do to other religious rites, through which they can find the cure of the disease and earns the reward of worship.

### **3. Complacency with Divine Pleasure**

Another important remedy to the indigent socio-economic condition of the Nigerians due to the Covid-19 pandemic can be allayed by returning things to the Creator without complaint. This is the reason why Nūrsī harps that, being content with Allah's pleasure of the hereafter cures the pain of what one may lose in a state of sickness in the world, both physical and materials. Thus, he says:

One day's illicit pleasure sometimes causes a year's sufferings in the spirit, and with the pain of a fleeting day's illness are many day's pleasure and recompense in addition to the pleasure at being relieved at its passing and saved from it, think of the result of this temporary illness with which you are now afflicted, and of the merits of its inner face, say: "All is from God! This too will pass! and offer thanks instead of complaining."<sup>25</sup>

He, however, adds:

O sick person who has lost the pleasure of health! Your illness does not spoil the pleasure of Divine bounties, on the contrary, it causes them to be experienced and increases them. For if something is continuous, it loses its effect, the people of reality even say that "Things are known through their opposites".<sup>26</sup>

It is a crystal that Nūrsī raised strong points to establish that complaining about what one loses during suffering like this Covid-19, is itself an ailment. But, to dismiss complain through submitting to the wills of the Creator relieves one's pain and even earns him the pleasure of the day after. To this, what Nigerians have lost in terms of time, health, and other physical and material things, should not be a reason for complaint and disdained, for surely the Creator in His plans and wisdom will recompense them in full, and this should be the ultimate goal.

#### **4. Death is not terrifying as it seems to be**

One of the common effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the social and economic wellbeing of the Nigerians is fear of death and grief for the lost ones. This has utterly turned the social serene of the country to be gloomy and most scary, that majority are only thinking that this could be the end of life. No matter how precious

and enjoyable life is, according to Nūrsī, losing it should not be as fearful as people think, rather it is a state of rest from the troubles of this life. Thus, he says:

Death is not terrifying at it appears to be superficial, through the light afforded by the All-Wise Qurān, in many parts of the Risālah-i Nūr, we proved in a completely certain and indubitable fashion that for believers, death is to be discharged from the burdensome duties of life.<sup>27</sup>

There is no doubt that if the above advice could be adhered to by the people of Nigeria, their fears, anxieties, and worries from the Covid-19 could be alleviated, and quickly the disease and its impending consequence will be over with. This, Nūrsī assures, where he says:

O sick person who worries unnecessarily! You worry about the severity of your illness and that worry increases it, ... worry causes an immaterial illness of the heart beneath the physical illness, the physical illness rests on that and persists... The cure for it is to know the wisdom in illness and the purpose of it. Since you have learnt the purpose and benefit, apply that salve to your worry and find relief! Say: “Ah!” instead of “Oh!” and “All praise be to God for every situation” instead of sighing and lamenting.<sup>28</sup>

## **5. Be faithful, Dutiful and Thankful to God**

Nūrsī is of the perception that one of the roots of calamity is absolute heedlessness to God’s commands and despair in His pleasure. To dispel man from such a state of forgetfulness, time after time, God afflicts him with pain to remind him of death and his awaited journey to the hereafter. The Covid-19 and its impending socio-economic effects are no doubt a pointer to people’s distance to their Lord’s command, and thus should be retracted back by returning to Him through sincere faith and constant asking of His forgiveness, for that, according to Nūrsī, is a most beneficial cure to all illness, Covid-19 inclusive. He says:

My sick brother! If you want a most beneficial and truly pleasurable scared cure, develop your belief! That is through repentance and seeking forgiveness and five daily prayers and worship, make use of belief, that scared cure- and of the medicine which arises from belief.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the simplicity of the sacred cure and its effect, Nūrsī reminds that persistent in being heedless, vice, the lust of the souls, and illicit amusement prevent the effectiveness of the remedy. Therefore, for Nigerians to benefit from the remedy in curing the ravaging Covid-19 disease and its consequence on their socio-economic life there is a need for renewal of belief in their hearts and heeding to His commands through carrying out religious obligations as far as possible, if at all they are willing to come out of their present predicaments.

## Conclusion

It is no more hidden Corona virus 2019, known as Covid-19, is the most dreadful disease that hit Nigeria in the history of its existence, as other parts of the world. The mutant characteristics of the disease that prevent the health community to provide its cure in time led the Nigerian government at all levels to take stringent measures to prevent and contain the disease from spreading. But it turns out that the measures taken lead to other impending socio-economic consequences among people that include fear and anguish, hunger, loss of jobs, and death to mention a few. Taking from the light of the All-Wise Qurān, Badī'uz-Zamān Sa'īd Nūrsī, in one of his Risālah-i Nūr collections, The Flashes, and in particular, the twenty-fifth flash, predicts a similar moment in human existence on earth and provides remedies to such predicaments. It is based on the effectiveness of the outlined remedies, this paper emphasizes that sincere faith and dutiful to God, patience, and self-contentment in divine bounties are no doubt the sacred cure of the ravaging disease and its socio-economic predicaments, if Nigerians would sincerely adhere to them, of which Badī'uz-Zamān Sa'īd Nūrsī strongly believed.

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