

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL PRESCRIPTIONS IN MANAGING PHYSICAL ILLNESS: A STUDY OF THE ‘EPISTLE FOR THE SICK’ IN RISALE-I NUR^(*)

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ABSTRACT

This study explores *Epistle for the Sick* by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877–1960), part of the *Risale-i Nur* collection, which offers spiritual guidance for managing physical illness through Qur’anic insights. Nursi interprets health and sickness as complementary aspects of human existence, where illness serves as a means of purification, reflection, and closeness to Allah. In the post-COVID-19 era, global health challenges have not only affected the body but also weakened mental and spiritual resilience due to prolonged isolation and fear. Adopting Nursi’s framework, this paper examines illness as a spiritual opportunity rather than a misfortune. Using a qualitative-inductive methodology, data from primary and secondary sources were analyzed thematically. Findings reveal that illness, when viewed through a Qur’anic lens, should not be feared but embraced as a divine blessing that brings lessons, patience, gratitude, and moral refinement. Nursi emphasizes that sickness can serve as an investment for eternal success in the Hereafter, teaching believers reliance on divine mercy and avoidance of sinful behavior. The paper further argues that modern secular educational models, particularly those influenced by Western philosophies, have overshadowed spiritual and moral development. In contrast, Nursi’s Qur’anic perspective promotes balance between material knowledge and spiritual wisdom. His teachings provide a holistic approach to healing—uniting body, mind, and soul. In the post-pandemic context, this spiritual framework offers individuals renewed faith, resilience, and inner peace while underscoring the need for educational reform that integrates Islamic and modern paradigms.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Risale-i Nur, known as the *Treatises of Light*, represents the magnum opus of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877–1960). Comprising a comprehensive 12-volume compilation, it includes major works such as *The Words (al-Kalimat)*, *The Letters (al-Maktubat)*, *The Flashes (al-Lama'at)*, *The Rays (al-Shu'a'at)*, *Signs of Miraculousness*, and *The Staff of Moses (Asa al-Musa)* (Risale-i Nur, 2012). Collectively, the Risale encompasses over 130 treatises, many of which are written in languages beyond Turkish and Arabic. Thematically, it functions as a unique form of Qur'anic exegesis, designed to inspire Muslim readers toward moral excellence and righteous action in accordance with Qur'anic principles (Nursi, n.d). Notably, the work seeks to harmonize science and religion by offering a balanced interpretation of Islamic doctrine that aligns with and supports contemporary scientific advancements (Nur Sakinah, 2019). One of its core objectives was to initiate a religious revival within Turkey, particularly in response to the sociopolitical upheaval following the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate. It also aimed to counter secular, atheist, and communist ideologies during the early years of the Turkish Republic (Risale-i Nur, 2012; Muhammad Faiz, 2017; Nabilah et al., 2022). Accordingly, Said Nursi is widely recognized by Muslims across the globe as one of the prominent *mujaddids* (renewers) of the twentieth century.

In addition to addressing religious and lifestyle matters, Said Nursi gives considerable attention to the human experience of physical illness in his work *Kitab al-Lama'at (The Flashes)*, particularly in the treatise known as the “Epistle for the Sick”. Here, he explores the spiritual dimensions of physical suffering and offers faith-based remedies rooted in Qur'anic teachings. As Thomas Michel (n.d.) notes on the *Risale-i Nur* website, spirituality is defined as “the internalisation of religious instruction and practices so that it influences, informs, and alters an individual's behaviour.” From this perspective, Nursi argues that without a firm spiritual foundation, individuals lack the resilience necessary to withstand adversity, including physical ailments. His approach to spirituality is practical and accessible, tailored to the needs of everyday believers. By grounding the believer's response in Qur'anic principles, he encourages a reorientation of attitudes toward suffering. According to Nursi (2022: 12–13), illness should not be viewed solely as a source of hardship, but as a potential means of spiritual refinement and a path to deeper submission to the divine will. Through this

perspective, Nursi shows how divine guidance can transform affliction into a vehicle for personal growth and closeness to God.

Therefore, the *Epistle for the Sick* is produced as spiritual healing prescriptions that comprise the *Twenty-Five Flashes*. Written in 1935, this volume contains twenty-five spiritual remedies (Nabil, Tahir, Thomas & Gulerce, 2019: 181). The central tenet of treatise serves as a remedy, consolation, and prescription for the sick and etiquette of visiting the sick while wishing them a speedy recovery. Nursi demonstrates the concept of health and illness through different dimensions that are viewed in the light of the Qur'an that the notion of illness is not something to be feared, but it brings goodness which contains many benefits, advantages and instances of wisdom (Nabil et. al, 2019: 182). His students, Rusdu, Refet, and Husrev, acknowledged that the treatise was written in only four and a half hours. It was written in such a short amount of time because there was insufficient time for corrections and research, leaving it "natural" like the first draft (Nursi, 2022: 12). Therefore, one should not anticipate a logical and well-organised thesis on remedies for illness; rather, it is a collection of 26 remedies from which a sick person could potentially benefit.

This aligns with modern spiritual therapy, which also emphasizes the integration of faith, mindfulness, and positive reinterpretation of suffering as therapeutic tools—particularly in post-traumatic contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Koenig, 2020; Pargament & Exline, 2021).

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

As the title suggested, this paper therefore set out to gain further understanding of the message of the *Epistle to the Sick* as articulated in *Risale-i Nur* regarding the spiritual management of physical illness. The paper is divided into three main discussions. The first main discussion defines the spiritual aspect of human beings which comprises the heart and intellect that viewed from Islamic point of view. It also discusses the interdependence between the interconnected *a'ql*, *fu'ad*, and *qalb*. The second discussion examines the relationship between physical disease and spiritual demotivation in the post-COVID-19 period via global mental health concerns. Besides that, the following discussion describes the remedies of physical illness through spiritual prescription, based on Said Nursi's *Epistle to the Sick*. In the final part, the study concludes with recommendations.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative research methodology based on an inductive approach. This methodology is chosen to help the study generate relevant and significant information based on the collected data and establish a clear understanding between research objectives and findings (Thomas, 2006). The method of data collection includes a combination of primary and secondary sources. These sources, including the texts from *Epistle for the Sick* and other relevant articles and journals available in the literature, are thoroughly examined to derive insights and interpretations before coding and organising using thematic analysis. This approach is designed to facilitate a deep understanding of Nursi's perspectives on managing physical illness by enhancing the spiritual aspect and proposing solutions from the Qur'anic perspective.

Thematic analysis is conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. Key themes identified through this process include illness as divine mercy, spiritual gratitude and patience, and transcending fear through faith, which collectively reflect Nursi's vision of spiritual healing and resilience in the face of physical suffering.

4.0 DISCUSSION: THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF HUMAN BEINGS

4.1 *Conceptualizing the Heart and Intellect*

In Islamic anthropology, the human spiritual and cognitive framework is a complex, interconnected system, comprising the *qalb* (heart), *fu'ad* (heart-core), and *'aql* (intellect). While modern science often views these as separate physiological organs, Islamic literature offers a more integrated perspective. These entities are not isolated, but rather interwoven units of awareness, emotion, and moral reasoning. This study will delve into terminology from classical and contemporary sources to further elucidate the interconnectedness and significance of *qalb*, *fu'ad*, and *'aql*, especially within modern psychospiritual perspectives.

In general, according to Raudlotul and Asma' (2022), the spiritual side of human beings consists of two main components, namely the heart and mind. In anatomic terms, the heart is a critical organ whose duty is to pump blood from

the veins into the arteries, thus sustaining blood flow throughout the entire circulatory system (Olatoye, 2013). As a definition of the mind, Oxford Dictionary (2023) denotes mind as an individual's intellectual capacities that allow them to experience thought processes. In psychological terminology, the mind is an all-encompassing faculty responsible for all mental processes, including cognition, memory, will, sensation, and imagination, which correspond to specific parts of the brain. However, the terminology is generally confined to cognitive activity and functions (American Psychological Association [APA], 2023). Regardless of the functional distinction between the heart and the mind, both are required to comprehend Allah's revelation.

The *qalb*, derived from the Arabic root *qalaba*, which means “to turn”, “to transform,” “to change”, “alter”, “transform”, and “transmute”. This illustrated in the Qur'an and Hadith where heart has been addressed based on variety of causes and purposes in various contexts and viewpoints such as *qalb* (eleven times), *'aql*, *lubb*, and *fu'ad* (three times) (Raudlotul & Asma', 2022; Olatoye, 2013; Loukas et al., 2009). Such nuance is also evident in the remark of Prophet Muhammad in Sahih al-Bukhari, which states that the word “heart” comes from the notion that it is a component that changes quickly (*taqallub*):

“There is a piece of flesh in the body, if it becomes good (reformed), the whole body becomes good, but if it gets spoiled, the whole body gets spoiled, and that is the heart”. (Status: Sahih)

It is crucial to note that the heart is not merely a physical organ, but also the spiritual and moral essence of an individual. According to Raudlotul and Asma' (2022), the *qalb* is the centre of faith (*īmān*), intention (*niyyah*), and spiritual insight, serving as the tool for understanding divine revelation. Its ‘changeable’ nature represents a dynamic state that alternates between health and illness based on individual activities and spiritual maintenance. From a Qur'anic perspective, humans are endowed with different types of hearts, each reflecting their ‘nature inclination’: the vibrant, receptive heart of the believer (*mu'min*), the lifeless heart of the disbeliever (*kāfir*), and the afflicted, hypocritical heart of the munafiq (*munāfiq*) (Qur'an 2:74; Loukas et al., 2009). Thus, the role of the heart in Islam is accorded far greater significance and emphasis than the physiological function and purpose attributed to the heart in conventional science.

The term *fu'ad*, frequently used interchangeably with *qalb*. However, it carries a unique connotation. The term is found in the Qur'an, denoting the heart

in a condition of profound emotional intensity or passion. For instance, this is demonstrated in the Qur'an 25:32, where Allah states that He revealed the Qur'an incrementally to "fortify your *fu'ad* (heart)" with comfort.

"The disbelievers say, 'If only the Qur'an had been sent down to him all at once!' 'We have sent it' as such 'in stages' so We may reassure your heart with it. And We have revealed it at a deliberate pace" (Qur'an, 25:32).

On that note, Mirfat (2017) explains that *fu'ad* might be interpreted as the heart's intense emotional reaction to stimuli, a notion that aligns with contemporary psychology's examination of emotional arousal and its influence on decision-making. Likewise, this interpretation has been concurred by Raudlotul and Asma' (2022), where they assert that *fu'ad* denotes the heart's ability to experience profound emotions—such as fear, courage, desire, and wrath—stemming from its activities.

In contrast to the emotional *qalb* and *fu'ad*, the *'aql* represents cognitive and thinking abilities. In the Qur'an, the term appears 49 times in linguistic forms (e.g., *'aqala*, *ya'qilun*, *'aqalu*, *ta'qilun*, *na'qilu*, and *ya'qilu*), implying a dynamic process of thought, comprehension, and intellectual contemplation (Kocabas, 1987; Sulaiman, 2017). According to Sulaiman (2017), the protection of the *'aql* is a fundamental aim of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shari'ah), emphasising its critical role in interpreting divine messages and making moral decisions. The *'aql* is the faculty that analyses, infers, and distinguishes truth from lies, working in tandem with revelation. Besides that, Aminuddin et al. (2018, p. 472) contend that a healthy intellect will always align with true revelation because both are derived from the Divine. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every individual to labour incessantly to retain their mind (intellect). The inability to think results in frustration not just for the individual but for society as a whole. The following Qur'anic passages in Surah al-Hajj and Surah al-Anfal make apparent the reasons for mental preservation:

"Have they not travelled throughout the land so their hearts may reason, and their ears may listen? Indeed, it is not the eyes that are blind, but it is the hearts in the chests that grow blind" (Qur'an, 22:46).

"Indeed, the worst of all beings in the sight of Allah are the 'wilfully' deaf and dumb, who do not understand" (Qur'an, 8:22).

The interaction between these capacities is central to Islamic psychospirituality. The *qalb* provides moral and spiritual discernment, the *fu'ād* conveys sincere belief, and the *'aql* delivers rational judgment. A spiritually sound individual sustains equilibrium between intellect and heart, wherein reason enlightens faith and faith governs reason. This integrative framework resonates with contemporary transpersonal and integral psychology, both of which seek to unify cognitive and affective domains to promote holistic well-being. The concept of a “sick heart” (*qalbun marīd*)—characterized by cognitive distortions such as mistrust and hypocrisy (Raudlotul & Asma', 2022)—parallels modern understandings of how emotional disequilibrium (*fu'ād*) can compromise rational cognition (*'aql*), resulting in impaired judgment and psychological distress.

In summary, while *qalb*, *fu'ād*, and *'aql* are interdependent, they denote distinct yet complementary dimensions of human consciousness: the spiritual-moral, emotional, and rational faculties, respectively. Their significance within contemporary psychospiritual discourse lies in this integrative model, which refutes any dichotomy between emotion and reason or spirituality and intellect. From an Islamic perspective, mental and spiritual well-being depends on the purification of the heart (*tazkiyat al-qalb*), regulation of desires, and the prudent application of reason. The subsequent subsection examines this triadic relationship as articulated by classical and contemporary scholars, including Tulving (1983), Tirmizi (2009), Heer (2009), Mirfat (2017), and Raudlotul and Asma' (2022).

4.2 Exploring the Interrelationship between 'Aql, Fu'ād, and Qalb in Islamic Thought

According to Raudlotul and Asma' (2022), the terms *'aql*, *fu'ād*, and *qalb* are each defined with distinct yet interconnected meanings within the Islamic intellectual tradition. They provide concise definitions as follows:

Table 1
Concise Definitions of 'Aql, Fu'ād, and Qalb

Term	Definition	Description
'Aql (Intellect or Reason)	Faculty of intellect and	The intellect (<i>'aql</i>) is both a natural faculty and a regulatory tool that governs human behaviour through a comprehensive understanding of

Term	Definition	Description
	rational discernment	physical and material realities. A sound and well-grounded mind serves as the foundation for all virtuous actions, provided it can transcend emotional impulses and maintain control over one’s conduct.
<i>Fu’ād</i> (Inner Core of Emotion)	Faculty of emotional perception	Feeling (<i>fu’ād</i>) functions as the repository of emotions, encompassing all affective responses triggered by sensory perception. These emotions include fear, love, hope, anger, hatred, desire, contentment, joy, and sorrow. When unchecked, such emotions may override rational judgment, leading to impulsive or undesirable behaviour.
<i>Qalb</i> (Heart)	Spiritual and cognitive center	The <i>qalb</i> serves as the meeting point between reason and emotion, enabling individuals to maintain rational thought even amidst intense desires or to balance emotion and cognition. It acts as the cognitive and spiritual center from which consciousness is shaped and decisions are made, integrating intellectual insight with moral and emotional awareness.

Note. This table defines three key concepts—*‘aql*, *fu’ād*, and *qalb*—within Islamic psychology, highlighting their interrelated roles in human cognition, emotion, and spirituality.

In light of the intricate relationship between *‘aql*, *fu’ād*, and *qalb*, some scholars have sought to define the heart (*qalb*) in conjunction with these terms to present a more holistic understanding that aligns closely with its usage in revelation. Within this framework, the *qalb* is not viewed in isolation but as a central component that integrates the functions of both intellect (*‘aql*) and emotional perception (*fu’ād*). Moreover, the heart is also associated with its physical location in the human chest (*al-ṣadr*), as referenced in the Qur’an, particularly in Surah al-Ḥajj (22:46):

“Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts may thus learn wisdom and their ears may learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts (ṣudūr).”

This verse affirms that the *qalb*, while rooted in the physical body, serves as the seat of perception, reflection, and spiritual awareness—a concept that encompasses the totality of human consciousness in Islamic epistemology.

The concepts of *‘aql* (intellect), *fu’ād* (emotion), and *qalb* (heart) in Islamic psychology reflect a holistic understanding of the human psyche. *‘Aql* governs rational thought and moral judgment, *fu’ād* encompasses deep emotional responses, and *qalb* serves as the spiritual and cognitive center that integrates intellect and emotion to guide ethical behavior. This tripartite framework parallels modern psychospiritual models emphasizing the integration of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions for mental well-being (Haque, 2004; Abdallah, 2020). It underscores internal balance, aligning with contemporary approaches that view mental health as harmony between thought, feeling, and spiritual awareness.

Imam al-Tirmidhi (2009) presents a nuanced understanding of the heart in his *Bayān al-Farq bayna al-Ṣadr wa al-Qalb wa al-Fu’ād wa al-Lubb* (“Explanation of the Difference between the Chest, Heart, Fu’ād, and Lubb”). He identifies *qalb*, *fu’ād*, *ṣadr*, and *lubb* as distinct yet interconnected aspects of the inner faculty: *qalb* denotes the heart generally, *fu’ād* highlights its emotive capacity, *ṣadr* refers to the chest as its encompassing space, and *lubb* signifies its purest essence. He classifies the heart into four levels, each reflecting a degree of divine light (*nūr al-hidāyah*) or guidance (Raudlotul & Asma’, 2022).

Supporting this view, Nicholas Heer (2009) observes that this layered conception of the heart was systematized by early Muslim scholars and later deepened through Sufi insights, synthesizing theological, psychological, and mystical thought within the Islamic tradition.

The fourfold division of the heart can be summarised as follows:

Table 2
Degrees of the Heart’s Illumination by the Divine Light of Allah (SWT)

Aspect	<i>al-Ṣadr</i> (The Chest)	<i>al-Qalb</i> (The Heart)	<i>al-Fu’ād</i> (The Inner Heart)	<i>al-Lubb</i> (The Core/Innermost Heart)
Light	The Light of <i>Islām</i>	The Light of <i>Īmān</i>	The Light of <i>Ma’rifah</i>	The Light of <i>Tawḥīd</i>

Aspect	<i>al-Ṣadr</i> (The Chest)	<i>al-Qalb</i> (The Heart)	<i>al-Fu'ād</i> (The Inner Heart)	<i>al-Lubb</i> (The Core/Innermost Heart)
Spiritual Status	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Mu'min</i>	<i>Al-ʿĀrif</i> (The Gnostic)	<i>Muwahhid</i> (The Monotheist)
Type of Knowledge	<i>Sharīʿah</i> Knowledge	Inner Knowledge	<i>Al-Ru'yā</i> (Spiritual Vision)	A Divine Gift and Grace
<i>Nafs</i> (Self)	<i>Nafs Ammārah bi al-Sū'</i>	<i>Nafs Mulhamah</i>	<i>Al-Nafs al-Lawwāmah</i>	<i>Al-Nafs al-Muṭma'innah</i>

Note. This table illustrates the hierarchical relationship between the spiritual faculties of the human heart, showing how divine illumination (*nūr ilāhī*) increases with spiritual refinement—from the chest (*ṣadr*) to the innermost heart (*lubb*). Each stage reflects a higher degree of faith, self-purification, and proximity to Allah (SWT).

According to the definitions provided above, *al-Ṣadr* is synonymous with *al-Qalb* and should not be confused with *al-Fu'ād*. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between *qalb* and the physical heart. Allah SWT clarifies this distinction through several Qur'anic verses. The Qur'an highlights that the heart (*qalb*) is the central faculty governing the intellect (*ʿaql*), whereas the physical heart, located in the chest, is separate from the brain. Consequently, it is possible for an individual to lose cognitive function while the heart continues to operate (Abdul Mun'im, 2017).

In modern psychospiritual frameworks, this layered model mirrors contemporary theories of self-actualization and spiritual development, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and transpersonal psychology. Just as one moves from basic religious understanding to deep spiritual realization in the Islamic model, modern approaches emphasize progression from ego-bound awareness to self-transcendence and inner peace. This Islamic framework provides a rich, spiritually grounded paradigm for therapeutic practices that integrate faith, cognition, emotion, and the soul's journey toward wholeness and divine connection (Haque, 2004; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, in authentic hadiths, affirmed that the heart's position is within the chest. The heart possesses the quality of *riqqah*

(kindness), whereas feelings or emotions embody *lawayin* (tenderness). A sound heart nurtures gentleness, and gentleness naturally arises from a good heart. This nuanced understanding is exemplified in Surah Al-‘Imran, where Allah SWT describes the mixed intentions of some Muslims who approached the battlefield with a combination of sincere jihad and a desire for worldly gain. The verse clearly differentiates between what lies in the chest and what is truly in the heart:

“Through this, Allah tests what is within you and purifies what is in your hearts. And Allah knows best what is ‘hidden’ in the heart.”
(*Surah Al-‘Imran*, 3:154)

Modern scientific research has corroborated this distinction between the physical heart and the ‘emotional heart’ associated with the brain. The hippocampus, a seahorse-shaped structure located deep within the human brain, derives its name from the Greek word for seahorse (Tulving, 1983). The hippocampus plays a crucial role in the storage of human memories throughout life, encompassing experiences of joy and sorrow that deeply affect the soul and emotions. In contrast, the biological heart is primarily responsible for the physical functions necessary for sustaining human life and health. Both entities—the hippocampus and the physical heart—are integral to maintaining the balance of an individual’s spiritual and physical well-being.

5.0 THE IMPACT OF PHYSICAL ILLNESS ON SPIRITUAL MOTIVATION

5.1 *Sin: Definition, Types, and Its Implications on the Human Being*

Sin is defined as a grievous transgression resulting in divine condemnation for those who commit acts prohibited by Allah SWT. It is an undeniable aspect of human nature that individuals inevitably err throughout their lives. However, acknowledging and taking full responsibility for these mistakes is essential for personal growth and spiritual refinement. Imam al-Ghazali (2005) classifies sin into three primary categories, reflecting aspects of human nature. The first category subdivides into four groups: *rububiyyah*, *shayitaniyyah*, *bahimiyyah*, and *sabu’iyah*. The second category encompasses sins committed by servants against God, including the failure to fulfill human obligations (Mek Wok, 2022), such as neglecting zakat, violating others’ rights, engaging in slander, and cyberbullying. The final category distinguishes between major and minor sins, where major sins are limited and threatened with punishment by God, while minor sins are comparatively less severe (Mek Wok, 2022).

Sin serves as a barrier that disrupts the servant's relationship with the Creator. The more sins one commits, the greater the estrangement from Allah SWT's Light and Blessings. This is affirmed in Surah al-Tawbah (9:67):

"... They neglected Allah, so He neglected them..."

Moreover, sin detrimentally impacts human spirituality, psychology, and physical well-being. Commonly, people assume a one-directional relationship, where physical illness leads to spiritual demotivation. In truth, these aspects influence each other reciprocally. A deficiency in spiritual motivation can equally jeopardize physical health. Abdul Latif (2022) explores the effects of sin on the spiritual, mental, and physical levels, relating them to the inherent weaknesses and ignorance of human nature (p. 324).

5.2 Spiritual Consequences of Sin

Spiritually, sin diminishes human dignity and taints one's soul. Humans are created in the best form (*ahsani taqwim*) conditioned upon *taqwa* (piety). When Allah SWT resides in a person's heart through obedience, one attains true grandeur. Conversely, sin reduces humans to a state more pitiable than animals, whose existence revolves around satisfying physical desires. The presence of sin breeds a restless, uneasy heart. Initially, guilt accompanies sinful acts, but over time, guilt fades and sinful behavior becomes habitual. Imam al-Ghazali (1990: 689) likens sins to harmful foods that accumulate and eventually cause death, stating:

"Sins are like harmful foods for the human body. Just as harmful foods endanger the health of the human body, these harms accumulate within the body until they cause the person to die."

Sin erodes the joy derived from worship and breeds a diseased heart that feels innocent despite sinning, making it difficult to avoid Allah's prohibitions. While physical illness culminates in death, spiritual sickness caused by sin extends beyond death to eternal punishment in Hellfire, described as sixty times hotter than worldly fire (Abdul Razak, 2018). Divine punishment serves as an expression of Allah's mercy, aiming to awaken the sinner to repentance. A heart corrupted by sin is blind to humility and divine guidance, even if one's external perception remains literate. As Allah SWT states in Surah Al-Mutaffifin (83:14):

"But no! In fact, their hearts have been stained by all 'the evil' they used to commit!"

5.3 Mental Impact of Sin

Sin also impairs mental faculties by diminishing intelligence and fostering ignorance. Allah endows mankind with knowledge to illuminate life's path, but sin tarnishes the heart—likened to a mirror—until it is darkened and unpolished. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained that every sin creates a black spot on the heart, allowing Satan to lead humans astray. Ignorance, stemming from sin, renders the mind irrational and is a root cause of many psychological disorders. For example, *riya'* (showing off) and jealousy are manifestations of ignorance. The Prophet warned of *riya'* as a subtle form of shirk (polytheism):

The thing I fear most will happen to you is minor shirk (associating partners with Allah). The companions asked, 'What is minor shirk, O Messenger of Allah?' The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: 'That is showing off (riya')'.
(Riwayat Ahmad, no 23630, Status: Hasan).

Jealousy, similarly, brings no joy but only distress, disrupting peace and happiness. The remedy is sincere repentance and seeking forgiveness. Allah SWT assures those mindful of Him in Surah al-Talaq (65:2-3):

"And whoever is mindful of Allah, He will make a way out for them. And provide for them from sources they could never imagine. And whoever puts their trust in Allah, then He 'alone' is sufficient for them. Certainly, Allah achieves His Will. Allah has already set a destiny for everything."

Despair also emerges from sin, as chronic disobedience leads people to abandon hope when tested. Allah SWT states in Surah al-Rum (30:36-37):

"If We give people a taste of mercy, they become prideful 'because' of it. But if they are afflicted with an evil for what their hands have done, they instantly fall into despair (36). Have they not seen that Allah gives abundant or limited provisions to whoever He wills? Surely in this are signs for people who believe."

5.4 Physical Consequences of Sin

Physically, sin weakens a person's spirit and self-confidence. Humans are inherently weak and depend entirely on the strength and wisdom granted by Allah SWT. Yet, sin strains this divine connection. Some individuals arrogantly believe they can handle problems through their own efforts alone—relying on vitamins, medication, study, or physical activity—while neglecting reliance on Allah SWT. They unconsciously elevate their own abilities above Allah's decree. In reality, all success and health stem from Allah's will and permission. Sin deteriorates one's vitality, dampens motivation, and makes individuals vulnerable to despair.

6.0 PHYSICAL ILLNESSES AND SPIRITUAL DEMOTIVATION IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA

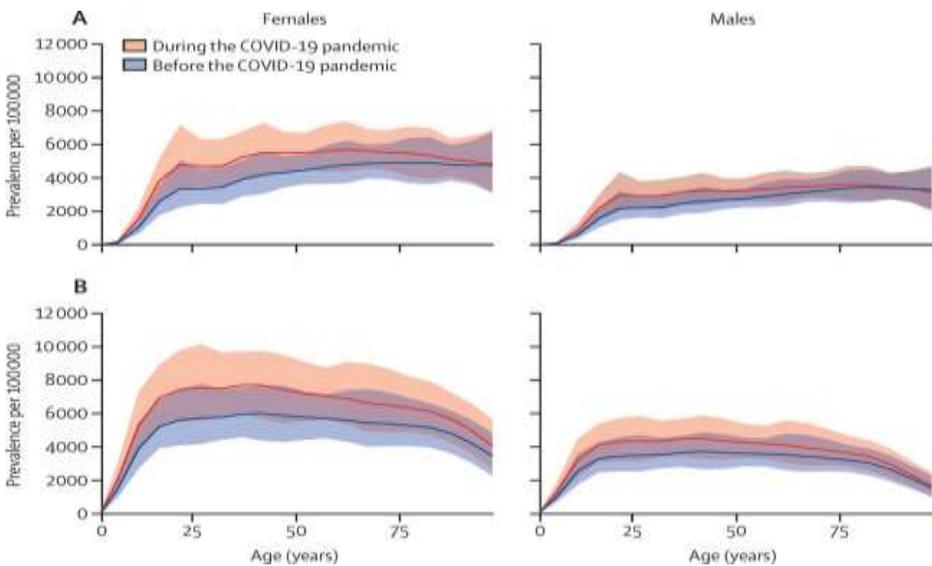
Descriptive literature on Said Nursi's influence—particularly concerning the treatment of physical ailments and spiritual demotivation through spiritual prescriptions—remains limited, especially regarding historical perspectives. In contemporary intellectual discourse, numerous Muslim scholars and even some Western thinkers have explored the spiritual remedies outlined in the *Epistle for the Sick*, highlighting its underlying wisdom and practical applications for the Ummah to incorporate into daily life; nevertheless, such studies are still relatively scarce (Thomas, 2019). Many academics regard Said Nursi's teachings as revivalist, as they bridge both the theoretical and practical dimensions of Islam, offering holistic solutions to the aforementioned challenges. Amid today's global vulnerabilities, physical and spiritual ailments have become increasingly prevalent. The Covid-19 pandemic, which led to worldwide quarantines affecting 220 countries and territories since late 2019, has profoundly reshaped daily life. As of 31 January 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported 753,479,439 confirmed cases and 6,812,798 deaths globally (WHO, 2023). The pandemic has necessitated significant lifestyle adjustments, including wearing face masks outdoors and frequent handwashing. Additionally, except for pregnant women, infants, and individuals with certain high-risk conditions at the pandemic's outset, widespread vaccination has been strongly recommended to curb viral transmission.

Nursi explicitly urges the Muslim community to reframe their understanding of trials to align with the Qur'anic perspective during such experiences (Nurul Asiah et al., 2022). He vividly illustrates this through the narrative of Prophet Yunus AS, highlighting the nature of tests and the appropriate spiritual response to them. To fully grasp the concept of divine

testing, one must first understand what it means to be a servant of Allah, as referenced in Surah Ali Imran (3:173), Surah At-Tawbah (9:83, 87), and Surah Al-Anbiya (21:129). The notion of test extends beyond merely physical health and illness; it encompasses a broader, more comprehensive understanding. In light of the recent Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a notable increase in mental health issues, including self-harm, suicide, and depression. This viral outbreak can be interpreted as one of Allah’s tests, predominantly affecting physical and psychological well-being. Ultimately, the pandemic has exerted profound and far-reaching impacts on healthcare systems, economies, and societies at large.

Mental health constitutes a fundamental human right and is an integral aspect of overall human health and well-being. Without sound mental health, individuals face significant challenges in forming connections, performing daily functions, coping with adversity, and achieving personal growth. The COVID-19 pandemic has been associated with a 25% increase in the global prevalence of anxiety and depression (WHO, 2020).

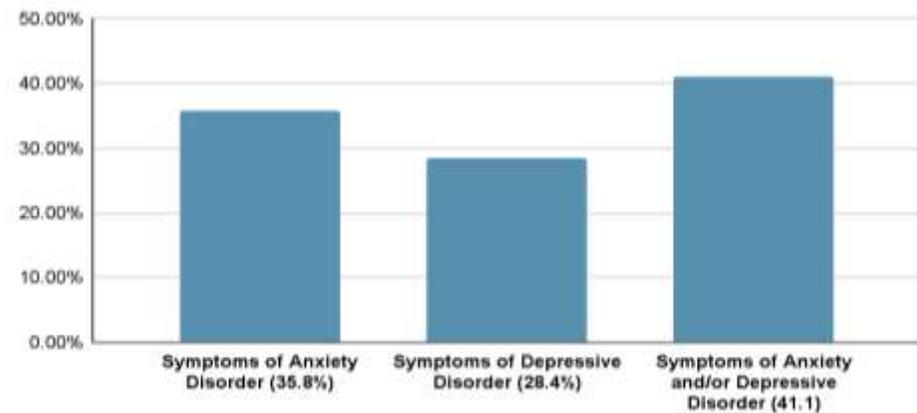
Figure 1
Global Prevalence of Major Depressive Disorder (A) and Anxiety Disorders (B) before and after Adjustment for (ie, during) the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020, by Age and Sex.



Source: COVID-19 Mental Disorders Collaborators (2021)

Despite the significant need for mental health support, responses have remained insufficient and inadequate, leading to numerous unprecedented challenges. Prolonged social isolation during the pandemic has given rise to multiple stressors, including profound loneliness, fear of infection, grief over personal or loved ones' suffering and death, as well as financial instability. These factors collectively contribute to heightened despair and anxiety within affected populations (WHO, 2022). In severe cases, such distress has tragically culminated in suicide. For instance, during the first two weeks of the COVID-19 outbreak in China, 53.8% of 1,210 respondents reported moderate to severe psychological impact. Similarly, Xiao et al. (2020) documented poor sleep quality and elevated stress levels among 170 participants. In the United States, another heavily impacted nation, adults have reported worsening chronic health conditions (12%), increased alcohol or substance use (12%), and difficulties with sleep (36%) and eating habits (32%) (KFF Health Tracking Poll, 2020). Alarmingly, drug overdose, suicide, and related deaths surged from 4.1% in 2018 to 18.2% in 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). These figures underscore the urgent and growing mental health crisis within healthcare systems worldwide.

Figure 2
Symptoms of Anxiety and Depressive Disorder during the COVID-19 Pandemic among Adults



Source: U. S Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, 2020-2021

According to Nursi, anxiety and depression are among the most significant challenges faced by individuals suffering from poor health. Anxiety

arises from feelings of helplessness, the inability to influence one's condition, and the persistent fear that the illness will not be temporary but rather a chronic or recurring affliction (Michel, n.d.). Indeed, when a person experiences a health crisis, time may seem to stretch interminably compared to when one is healthy. This altered perception often leads to impatience and frustration, as the individual feels that time is passing too slowly and being wasted—time that could otherwise be devoted to more meaningful activities—thus intensifying the desire for a rapid recovery (Raudlotul, 2022). Drawing from the *Epistle for the Sick*, Nursi emphasizes that both health and illness are blessings from Allah, for which the servant should express gratitude. He further elaborates on how spiritual prescriptions can serve as effective means for treating illness (Raudlotul, 2022).

7.0 RESULTS: SPIRITUAL PRESCRIPTIONS AS REMEDIES FOR PHYSICAL ILLNESS IN -I NUR

The term "remedy" may be somewhat misleading in this context. The insights presented by Nursi do not refer to remedies in the conventional pharmacological or biomedical sense aimed at eradicating physical illness. Rather, they serve as spiritual remedies addressing the despair and anguish commonly experienced by individuals suffering from deteriorating health. For such cases, the "sick" are encouraged to seek spiritual treatment to heal the ailments of the soul that often accompany bodily suffering. Nursi's guidance should not be understood as promoting passive acceptance or fatalism, interpreting his exhortations as an encouragement to simply resign to illness. Rather, it is imperative that the sick follow medical advice from qualified physicians, maintain proper self-care, and pray earnestly for recovery. Nursi rejects a passive acceptance of illness. He emphasises that the Almighty, the Possessor of healing and wisdom, has created the universe like a vast pharmacy, wherein every ailment has its remedy, and he advises that such cures should be sought out. He also stresses the importance of patients using medicine for treatment, while firmly recognising that the true efficacy comes only from Allah. (Nursi, 2022) For when a patient recognises from whom the illness has come, he also understands in whose hands the cure lies. This awareness becomes a source of trust and hope for the patient. It is now a well-known fact that those who maintain good morale during illness recover more quickly.

So it is crucial to recognize that medical interventions cannot always guarantee rapid healing or enhance one's innate ability to combat disease. Nevertheless, when combined with sincere religious faith, medical science often achieves outcomes beyond the reach of secular approaches alone. Experts

emphasize that the emotional and psychological state most conducive to physical recovery is one of mental tranquility.

The majority of Nursi's remedies aim to help the sick overcome anxiety by fostering a calm acceptance of their condition and cultivating patience through reliance on God. Nursi places greater emphasis on spiritual illness—the sickness of the soul—rather than on physical ailments alone. Nursi observed that some young patients who visited him at one time kept themselves more distant from carnal desires and worldly passions. He stated that the illness in their bodies had bestowed upon their hearts and souls a spiritual maturity and piety. Moreover, he noted that these youths, compared to their peers, were more cautious about engaging in behaviours that could disrupt the order of society. (Nursi, 2022) Indeed, it is an observable reality today that when young and healthy individuals in a society become distant from the religion of Allah, they engage in many deviant behaviours that disturb the peace of the community. Therefore, the true illness is not physical sickness, but rather spiritual and moral diseases.

He asserts that social, spiritual, and religious maladies can be healed through adherence to Divine commands and the therapeutic guidance found in “the pharmacy of the Qur'an.” It follows that the root cause of the heart's sickness is a deficiency of faith. By internalizing the meanings of faith in God, a sick individual can attain mental tranquility, which in turn supports physical recovery. This state is achieved through four core prescriptions: managing physical illness by relying on and understanding the wisdom that diseases and ailments are blessings and gifts from Allah; recognizing illness as an investment for success in the Hereafter; cultivating spiritual contentment through patience while facing illness; and refraining from sinful behavior during times of suffering (Nursi, 2022).

7.1 Coping with Physical Illness through Trust and Insight: Viewing Diseases and Ailments as Divine Blessings and Gifts

According to the teachings of Said Nursi, managing physical illness requires a deep spiritual realignment that is grounded in trust in divine wisdom. From this perspective, illnesses are not arbitrary misfortunes but are instead perceived as blessings and divine gifts from Allah, intended to convey essential spiritual insights and foster inner growth in His servants.

Said Nursi encouraged the Muslim community to respond to the divine trial of physical illness with patience, grounded in a conscious effort to

understand and rely on the divine wisdom behind it. Illness, in this view, serves as a means of prolonging one's life in a meaningful and spiritually productive way (Nursi, 2022). Life devoid of hardship or testing may pass without substance, preventing individuals from uncovering the deeper lessons that such trials are meant to convey. Often, it is only through difficulty that one learns gratitude for blessings otherwise taken for granted. Illness, then, becomes an opportunity to cultivate a heightened reverence for life and a deeper awareness of divine mercy (Nursi, 2022). As Nursi stated, illness is itself a form of health—an experience that reveals the value of well-being by contrast. He asserted that sickness is a divine gift, as it fosters humility and reflection. Those in constant good health may fail to appreciate this blessing, attributing it solely to their own efforts rather than recognising it as a favour from Allah. Illness, therefore, not only highlights the fragility of life but also invites renewed gratitude for previous periods of well-being (Nursi, 2022).

Moreover, the concept of physical illness serves a profound purpose in reminding individuals of their mortality. Without this subtle yet powerful reminder from Allah, people may spend their lives in heedlessness and fall into the trap of self-satisfaction and complacency. Life experiences such as sickness, ageing, and natural disasters often act as wake-up calls for those who have become self-centred or spiritually misled, helping to reorient them toward a more meaningful existence. Said Nursi articulates this message clearly in his treatise, emphasising that such trials are not punishments but rather divine interventions aimed at awakening the human soul from neglect and guiding it back to its true purpose:

“Since old-age, illness, disaster, and death open up frightful pain and are a reminder that even if the people who follow misguidance and vice enjoy a hundred thousand pleasures and delights, they most certainly experience a sort of hell in their hearts, although a profound stupor of heedlessness temporarily makes them insensible to it” (Risale-i Nur, 2012).

Since the precise moment of death is unknown to any individual, illness acts as a profound reminder to remain spiritually vigilant. The physical discomfort experienced during sickness often prompts reflection on the afterlife, fostering greater consciousness of mortality. This awareness, in turn, cultivates a deeper fear of God and encourages increased devotion and obedience, thereby preparing the believer for the Hereafter. In this light, illness becomes not a

burden, but a divine blessing—an opportunity for spiritual awakening and readiness for eternal life.

Nursi also regards the arrival of illnesses as a period that serves as a means for some servants, who are weak in turning to Allah, to engage in supplication. For, according to him, prayer signals the coming of illnesses, afflictions, and calamities, and thereby directs a person towards supplication. Through such prayer and entreaty, one recognises and understands his own shortcomings and weakness, freeing himself from pride and arrogance. Thus, when a person forgets to pray, Allah sends certain illnesses to lead him back to supplication. (Nursi, 2022)

Rather than succumbing to despair or resentment, the afflicted are encouraged to reflect on the temporary nature of their condition and place their trust in Allah, who alone grants healing and lasting happiness (Nursi, 2022).. Illness humbles individuals, revealing the limits of their strength and the illusion of self-sufficiency. It becomes a means through which the believer recognises his or her absolute dependence on the Creator. Through this dependency, one comes to understand that true dignity is not found in worldly achievements, but in one's status as a servant of God. Illness, therefore, becomes a gift that deepens the believer's spiritual connection by inspiring sincere prayer and heartfelt submission to Allah (Nursi, 2022).

In the bottom line, the message for the sick conveyed the insight that the illness teaches one to value the gift of health. Nursi cited the saying, "*Light owes darkness; pleasure owes pain; there is no health without illness*" (Risale-i Nur, 2012). It is understood that those who are in perfect health can easily take this magnificent gift from God for granted and assume it is the norm for all humans. It is only accessible and achievable genuinely after experiencing a period of poor health, therefore it would appreciate the wonderful blessing that is good health.

7.2 Diseases and Illnesses as Spiritual Investments for Eternal Success in the Hereafter

Illness often serves as a powerful reminder of one's sins and spiritual obligations towards God. It creates a moment of introspection, allowing individuals to reassess the true purpose of life. Said Nursi emphasises that, for many, sickness is not merely a physical condition but a divine mercy—an invitation to spiritual transformation. As he states, for some, "illness is excellent health," while for others, sustained health may lead to spiritual complacency and thus becomes a

kind of ailment in itself (Nursi,2022). The fear of death—commonly experienced by those who are ill—is, in essence, a spiritual concern. However, Nursi encourages believers to overcome this fear by reflecting on the hopeful realities promised in faith: reunion with loved ones, a return to the soul's true abode, and the acceptance of God's invitation to the eternal gardens of Paradise. With such spiritual perspectives, death can be viewed not as an end to be feared, but as a transition toward divine fulfilment for those who remain steadfast in faith.

According to Nursi (2022), Nursi explains how illness can be viewed not as a burden but as a form of spiritual pleasure, an act of worship (*ibadah*), and an investment toward ultimate success in the Hereafter. ~~She~~ He highlights that illness has the potential to transform each passing minute of a person's life into the spiritual equivalent of an hour of worship. In this context, ~~she~~ he distinguishes between two types of worship: **active** and **passive**. Active worship refers to deliberate religious acts such as daily prayers and supplications. In contrast, passive worship occurs during times of hardship or illness, when an individual becomes fully aware of their own weakness and vulnerability, and turns inwardly to acknowledge God's mercy and omnipotence. In doing so, the ill person engages in a deeply meaningful act of submission and trust in divine healing—one that is highly esteemed in Islamic tradition.

Furthermore, illness often leads the sufferer to reflect more deeply on the Hereafter, in contrast to the heedlessness and indulgence often associated with youth. It tempers worldly desires and detaches one from the distractions of daily life (Nursi, 2022). For many, the solitude experienced during illness becomes a moment of spiritual awakening, where the presence of the Creator is felt most intimately. Unlike the experience of spiritual loneliness described in some Christian narratives, the believer in Islam—through trust in Allah—never experiences true isolation. The greatest form of loneliness, Raudlotul notes, is estrangement from God, not physical solitude.

This perspective reinforces the idea that the purpose of human existence is not merely to seek worldly pleasure, but to prepare earnestly for eternal life. In this light, illness serves as both a reminder of death and a means of reorienting the soul toward the ultimate goal: nearness to God. For those immersed in worldly distractions, illness offers a wake-up call—prompting serious contemplation about the true meaning and purpose of life.

7.3 *Spiritual Contentment through Patience while Facing Illness and Prevention from Committing Sinful Acts*

Nursi concluded that spiritual contentment is attained through patience in illness. The patient who accepts disease with endurance and seeks refuge in God is, in essence, praising Him. In *Risale-i Nur* (2012), Nursi advises the sick not to complain, offering three reasons. First, sickness resembles hunger: through it, Allah manifests His glorious names—He is the Merciful, the Healer, and the Provider. This aligns with al-Ghazali's (1937) concept of *ṣabr 'alā al-maṣībah* in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, where patience reflects awareness of divine wisdom.

Second, illness highlights the meaning of life. Constant health can breed monotony, while illness awakens vitality and gratitude (*Risale-i Nur*, 2012). For al-Ghazali, such patience transcends endurance, becoming gratitude for concealed blessings within trials.

Third, life is a realm of testing and worship (*'ibadah*). Illness reveals human helplessness and dependence on God (*Risale-i Nur*, 2012). Through prayer and surrender, the patient attains rewards in the Hereafter. Nursi (2022) notes that twenty days of sickness may grant the spiritual progress of twenty years. Thus, refraining from complaint ensures divine rewards beyond imagination, fulfilling al-Ghazali's aim of *tawakkul*—turning every state into devotion.

Nursi also warns that spiritual diseases, like disbelief and disobedience, are worse than bodily ailments. Accepting illness (*riḍā*) with patience guards against such sins (Nursi, 2022). Al-Ghazali (1937) concurs that enduring hardship strengthens the soul's resistance to transgression.

Illness also inspires compassion. It enables others to perform good deeds—visiting, helping, and praying for the sick—strengthening community and faith (*Risale-i Nur*, 2012). Moreover, the prayer (*du'ā'*) of the ill holds special merit. Though not always answered literally, sincere supplication—especially when joined with repentance (*tawbah*)—is always accepted in the best way.

Nursi (2022) outlines conditions for effective prayer: begin with repentance, send blessings upon the Prophet (SAW), pray for others, and supplicate sincerely and consistently—particularly after *ṣalāh* and during blessed times. A comprehensive example is the Qur'anic prayer:

“Our Lord! Grant us the good of this world and the Hereafter, and protect us from the torment of the Fire” (al-Baqarah, 2:201).

Ultimately, Allah accepts all sincere *du‘ā*’ from a faithful heart. For both al-Ghazali and Nursi, *ṣabr* is not passive submission but active trust—channeling helplessness into prayer and patience. Together, patient acceptance and heartfelt supplication form a complete spiritual response to illness, transforming suffering into a path toward divine closeness.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In both theory and practice, Malaysia’s higher education system remains deeply influenced by Western philosophical frameworks, often at the expense of the Islamic worldview on education. The dominance of these models has shaped national human capital development, yet Nurulwahidah (2014) notes a worrying moral decline among youth, questioning the system’s effectiveness. She stresses *tarbiyah*—holistic Islamic nurturing—as vital to revitalizing education.

Scholars argue that secularism and educational dualism have infiltrated curricula, marginalizing spiritual teachings (Nurulwahidah, 2014; Raudlotul & Shah Jani, 2013). Modernism and modernization further redefined Malaysia’s education structure, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which hastened the shift to technology-based learning (Siti Farahin et al., 2021).

Even before the pandemic, conventional methods contributed to moral and spiritual erosion. Krettenauer (2020) observes that while education shapes morality, sincerity and spirituality are vital to forming ethical individuals.

In addressing these challenges, Said Nursi’s *Risale-i Nur* identifies sincerity (*ikhlas*) as a remedy for moral and psychological ailments such as egotism and hypocrisy. He exemplified *ikhlas* during efforts to revive Islamic spirituality amid secularism’s rise (Siti Farahin et al., 2021). In today’s secular education, sincerity has become increasingly rare (Said Nursi, 2012).

In Islam, *ikhlas*—acting purely for Allah without seeking praise—forms the foundation of spiritual growth (Said Nursi, 2012; Abdullah, 2020). Nursi emphasizes that it restores divine connection, fostering social harmony and inner peace. He advocates integrating *ikhlas* into education by uniting scientific and religious knowledge (Sempo, 2020), cultivating holistic individuals. The *Risale-i*

Nur, therefore, merits inclusion in university curricula for its capacity to nurture faith-based intellectual and moral development.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

As a summary of the message of *Epistle to the Sick*, the study concludes that spiritual medicine is an essential component for curing spiritual illness and aiding in healing physical illness. It can be divided into three basic points: providing *syukur* in the midst of patience; sickness being a gift from God and a manifestation of His mercy upon an individual; and putting away fears and worries and internalising Allah's mercy upon His followers.

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