121124 - A brief look at the Nursiyyah group – the followers of Shaykh Sa‘eed an-Nursi

the question

I would like to ask about the Nursiyyah group – what are their good and bad points, and are their books regarded as Islamic books? Is it permissible for us to read them?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It says in al-Mawsoo‘ah al-Muyassarah fi’l-Adyaan wa’l-Madhaahib wa’l-Ahzaab al-Mu‘aasirah (1/328-333):

The Nursiyyah is an Islamic religious group, which is closer in its setup to Sufi tariqahs than to organised movements. Its founder focused on calling people to the truths of faith and striving to purify the soul, creating an Islamic trend, in an attempt to stem the tide of Kemalist Masonic secularism which was sweeping Turkey following the fall of the Ottoman caliphate and the takeover by Kamal Ataturk.

The founder of this movement was Shaykh Sa‘eed an-Nursi (Said Nursi, 1873-1960 CE). He was born to Kurdish parents in the village of Nurs, close to Lake Van in the Hizan district of Bitlis province, in eastern Anatolia. His early education was in his hometown, but when he grew older he showed signs of intelligence and brilliance, to such an extent that he was given the nickname of Badee‘ az-Zamaan ("Bediuzzaman", meaning "The most unique and superior person of the time") and Sa‘eedi Mashhoor (the famous Sa‘eed).

At the age of eighteen years, he acquired religious knowledge and studied many philosophical fields of study. He also learned shooting, wrestling and horseback riding, in addition to memorising the Holy Qur’an. He also adopted a lifestyle of asceticism and minimalism.

When the Allies occupied Istanbul, he was in the forefront of the mujaahideen who fought against them.

In 1908 CE, after the toppling of Sultan ‘Abd al-Hameed by the conspiracy of the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti), whose slogan was “Unity, Freedom, Reform”, behind which they concealed their evil plots and conspiracy against Islam and the Muslims, Badee‘ az-Zamaan founded the Muhammadi Union (al-Ittihaad al-Muhammadi), and used the same slogans as the Committee of Union and Progress, but with Islamic meanings, so as to expose the deceitful slogans behind which they were hiding and highlight their Masonic reality.

The secularists who ruled Turkey after the demise of the caliphate were afraid of his call and vehemently opposed it with everything they could come up with. They caused Badee‘ az-Zamaan to spend his life in prison, and tortured him; they moved him from prison to exile, and from exile to further trials in court.

He spent the end of his life in Isparta, isolated from people. Three days before his death, he went to Urfa (Şanlıurfa) without official permission, where he lived for only two days. He died on the twenty-seventh of Ramadan, 1379 AH (1960).

Badee‘ az-Zamaan told the court, when he was imprisoned in Iskashir: You wondered whether I am one of those who follow the Sufi tariqahs. I say to you: Our era is one of preserving the faith, not preserving the tariqah. There are many who will enter Paradise without a tariqah, but no one will enter Paradise without faith.

The official charges directed against Badee‘ az-Zamaan in the courts may be summed up as follows:

1.Working to destroy the Ottoman state and Kemalist revolution.

2.Reviving the religious spirit in Turkey.

3.Forming a secret society.

4.Criticising Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

But he refuted all these charges on the basis of proof and evidence, to the extent that these trials became an opportunity to propagate his ideas and increase the number of his followers.

He focused all his efforts and his call on resisting the secularist tide, which had led to the following:

1.Abolishing the Ottoman caliphate.

2.Replacing Islamic sharia with man-made laws, especially Swiss civil law.

3.Abolishing religious education.

4.Banning use of the Arabic alphabet and making use of the Latin alphabet compulsory.

5.Changing the adhaan (call to prayer) from Arabic to Turkish.

6.Imposition of Turanism (belief in the racial unity and future greatness of the Ural-Altaic peoples) and the belief that the Turks were the origin of all civilisations.

7.Forcing people to wear European headgear.

8.Making Sunday the official day of rest instead of Friday.

9.Limiting wearing of the black jubbah and white turban to clergy only.

10.Translation of the Qur’an into Turkish, which happened in 1350 AH/1931 CE, and copies were distributed to the mosques.

11.Prohibition on the celebration of the two Eids of al-Adha and al-Fitr, abolishing of the Hijri calendar, and introducing changes in the system of inheritance.

12.Adoption of Western lifestyles, trying to imitate the traditions, customs and other cultural activities of the West.

13.Attempts to erase Islamic beliefs from people’s hearts in general, especially young people.

The young people of this group (the Nursiyyah) were distinguished by their chastity and cleanliness; they were young people who were committed to Islam at a time when there was a great deal of confusion, temptation and promiscuity.

However, there were some criticisms that could be made about this group:

1.

This group did not pay attention to spreading the beliefs (‘aqeedah) of the early generations of Islam, and pure monotheism (Tawheed), among its followers and among the Muslims in general, who need to correct their beliefs before getting involved in other issues.

Rather they adopted the Maturidi ‘aqeedah, which had been supported by the Ottoman state before them, and they did not try to get rid of this innovated ‘aqeedah.

2.

They were not able to establish organised Islamic work that could stand up to the Jewish conspiracy that infiltrated much of political life at that time and was hostile to Islam and the Muslims. But – to be fair – we should acknowledge the fact that circumstances surrounding the establishment of this group were not conducive to the group presenting itself in any way other than the way in which it did present itself.

3.

Badee‘ az-Zamaan’s participation with others in forming the “Muhammadi Union” was no more than a reaction that soon faded away. Moreover, it led to the Committee of Union and Progress focusing their conspiracy on him and plotting to put an end to him and his call.

4.

The group abandoned politics and Sa‘eed an-Nursi adopted the slogan “I seek refuge with Allah

from the Shaytaan and politics.” That occurred from 1921 CE onwards. This had a negative impact on the group’s followers, as some of them fell prey to secularist parties.

5.

The shaykh may be criticised for letting down Shaykh Sa‘eed al-Kurdi and not supporting him when he launched a revolution against Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1925 CE, in support of the caliphate. There were huge battles between him and the Kemalists in the region of Diyarbakır, in which thousands of Muslims were killed.

6.

That was because he believed that striving to purify oneself took precedence (over physical jihad), followed by the call to enlighten one’s thoughts. Thus the group called for purification of the heart and not getting involved in internal conflicts with Muslims with whom they differed, whether they were rulers or subjects; they also called for adhering to peaceful methods of da‘wah, taking a gradual approach and not resorting to armed struggle except against an external enemy such as the disbelievers or the heretics.

7.

Some of the followers of the Nursiyyah group have recently developed isolationist and supremacist feelings, which has caused them to lose the ability to infiltrate different levels of Muslim society in order to call them and spread awareness.

The number of members has reached more than one million, and one of them may spend his entire lifetime making copies of Risale-i Nur (Risaalat an-Noor – a tafseer by Sa‘eed an-Nursi) and distributing them; younger women were very active in that field.

End quote.

Based on the above, we do not advise reading the books of this group, except for specialists and seekers of knowledge who have reached an advanced level, because of what they contain of

beliefs that are contrary to the views of Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah. But the efforts of their Shaykh in spreading Islam are to be praised, and we ask Allah to reward him for that. But that does not make us praise his beliefs that were contrary to the Sunnah, and we do not praise those followers of his group who came after him. His followers split into many groups, and they cannot all be regarded as being the same; rather each individual or group is to be judged on its own merits, according to what it shows of beliefs or methodology.

And Allah knows best.