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## Frugality as a Path to Contentment: Insights from the Risale-i-Nur

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### Abstract

This study explores the relationship between frugality and contentment through a qualitative content analysis of the chapter 'Frugality' in Said Nursi's Risale-i-Nur collection. Nursi, a distinguished Turkish intellectual and spiritual leader, profoundly influenced Islamic renewal in Turkey. The Risale-i-Nur, his principal work, provides a rational defense of Islam, demonstrating its compatibility with reason and science. By systematically examining recurring themes and ethical arguments within the treatise, the study elucidates how frugality functions as a pathway to enduring inner peace and satisfaction. The study highlights how Nursi's integration of theological reasoning, scriptural authority, and personal testimony functions as a didactic tool to foster virtues such as contentment, dignity, and generosity within economic behavior through practicing frugality. By aligning individual moral agency with universal principles of economy and justice, this approach offers a normative framework that challenges dominant materialistic economic paradigms and complements contemporary ethical economics.

**Keywords :** *Frugality, Contentment, Risale-i-Nur, Spiritual virtues, Ethical economics*

### Abstrak :

Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan antara sikap hidup hemat (frugality) dan rasa cukup (contentment) melalui analisis isi kualitatif terhadap bab "Frugality" dalam kumpulan karya Risale-i-Nur karya Said Nursi. Nursi merupakan seorang intelektual dan pemimpin spiritual terkemuka asal Turki yang memberikan pengaruh signifikan terhadap gerakan pembaruan Islam di Turki. Risale-i-Nur, sebagai karya utamanya, menyajikan pembelaan rasional terhadap ajaran Islam serta menegaskan kesesuaiannya dengan akal dan ilmu pengetahuan. Melalui penelaahan sistematis terhadap tema-tema berulang dan argumen etis yang terdapat dalam risalah tersebut, penelitian ini menjelaskan bagaimana sikap hidup hemat berfungsi sebagai jalan menuju ketenangan batin dan kepuasan yang berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini menyoroti integrasi antara penalaran teologis, otoritas teks keagamaan, dan kesaksian personal dalam pemikiran Nursi sebagai sarana didaktik untuk menumbuhkan nilai-nilai seperti rasa cukup, martabat, dan kedermawanan dalam perilaku ekonomi melalui praktik hidup hemat. Dengan menyelaraskan agensi moral individu dengan prinsip-prinsip universal mengenai ekonomi dan keadilan, pendekatan ini menawarkan suatu kerangka normatif yang menantang paradigma ekonomi materialistik dominan serta melengkapi wacana ekonomi etis kontemporer.

Kata kunci: *Hidup hemat, Rasa cukup, Risale-i-Nur, Kebajikan spiritual, Ekonomi etis*

## INTRODUCTION

Humans inherently strive to enhance their overall well-being and satisfaction, actively employing a diverse range of strategies and behaviors aimed at maximizing happiness in their everyday lives. Some individuals associate happiness with the accumulation of wealth, emphasizing the importance of being perceived as affluent by others. Others believe that happiness is derived from fully utilizing their financial resources, demonstrating their ability to spend effectively through consumption. A further perspective holds that possessing an abundance of material goods, such as food, clothing, or vehicles, constitutes true happiness. This raises the question: what truly constitutes happiness in the context of financial well-being, irrespective of one's economic status?

It is noteworthy that the Holy Quran provides specific clues to the question asked above through the verse “And [they are] those who, when they spend, do so not excessively or sparingly but are ever, between that, [justly] moderate”<sup>1</sup>. Quran promotes for a moderate economic mindset addresses the pressing issue of economic disparity by emphasizing balance and ethical responsibility. It discourages the pursuit of greed and excessive luxury, which often lead to social fragmentation and neglect of vulnerable populations. In short, as the true answer of above question, Quran unveil the concept of frugality. Instead, the Quran promotes frugality and the prudent use of resources, encouraging individuals and societies to avoid wastefulness and to share wealth equitably. This approach aims to create an economic environment where prosperity does not come at the expense of justice or sustainability, fostering social cohesion and reducing the gap between the rich and the poor.

Frugality, as a principle deeply embedded in ethical, spiritual, and practical dimensions of Islamic economics, has significant implications for individual well-being and social harmony. It is relevant for promoting

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<sup>1</sup> *The Qur'an* (Surah Al-Furqan, verse 67).

sustainable lifestyles and psychological well-being. This study aims to explore the relationship between frugality and contentment through a qualitative content analysis of the chapter 'Frugality' in *Risale-i-Nur* collection of Said Nursi (1877–1960)<sup>2</sup>. Nursi was a distinguished Turkish intellectual<sup>3</sup> and spiritual leader who profoundly influenced Islamic renewal in Turkey<sup>4</sup>. Born in the Kurdish village of Nurs in eastern Turkey, he was a child prodigy with deep knowledge of both traditional Islamic sciences and modern disciplines such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and astronomy. Nursi combined religious and scientific education, founding a madrasa in Van that integrated these fields. He believed that Islamic revelation and modern science were harmonious, advocating a rational foundation for faith<sup>5</sup>.

*Risale-i- Nur* (Epistles of Light) is Nursi's principal work, composed mainly between 1925 and 1945. It is a collection of essays, letters, and treatises that provide a rational defence of Islam, demonstrating its compatibility with reason and science<sup>6</sup>. Written initially in Ottoman Turkish and circulated clandestinely due to bans, the *Risale-i Nur* was hand-copied and distributed secretly. The work stresses faith, inner spirituality, social harmony, mutual consultation, and brotherhood. After decades of suppression, it was officially allowed publication and remains influential in Islamic thought worldwide.

Significantly, many studies have been published about Said Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*, which consists of books, article in various social<sup>7</sup>, religious,

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<sup>2</sup> Syed Farid Alatas and Vineeta Sinha, "Said Nursi (1877–1960)," in *Sociological Theory Beyond the Canon* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 205–36, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-41134-1\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-41134-1_8).

<sup>3</sup> Ramazan Balci, *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: Wonder of the Age* (Lanham: Tughra Books, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Ian S. Markham, Suendam Birinci Pirim, and Said Nursi, *An Introduction to Said Nursi: Life, Thought and Writings* (Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Prof. Dr. Ali Bakkal, "SUNNAH ACCORDING TO BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI," *Katre, Uluslararası İnsan Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 4 (May 2017): 13–25, <https://doi.org/10.31120/0.2018.37>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', ed., *Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought: The Case of Said Nursi* (Farnham, Surrey [England] ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Karim D. Crow, and Elmira Akhmetova, eds., *Islam and Diplomacy: The Quest for Human Security* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications (M) Sdn. Bhd., 2017).

spiritual<sup>8</sup>, economical<sup>9</sup>, educational, ethical<sup>10</sup>, environmental<sup>11</sup> and rational perspectives<sup>12</sup>. They show how important these works are for modern Islamic thought<sup>13</sup>. Nursi's ideas help connect faith and reason<sup>14</sup>. They focus on spirituality<sup>15</sup>, good behavior, and social unity. These works also deal with modern problems by mixing religious ideas with logical thinking<sup>16</sup>. Nursi's teachings are still important today for helping people grow morally. By systematically examining recurring themes and ethical arguments within the treatise of 'Frugality' of Said Nursi, the study seeks to elucidate how frugality functions as a pathway to enduring inner peace and satisfaction? or how frugality, as presented in Said Nursi's *Risale-i-Nur*, functions as a virtue leading to contentment, spiritual fulfillment, and ethical economic behavior?

Previous studies have analysed the Said Nursi's broad concept of social justice, drawing from Islamic philosophy and covering governmental, legal, and economic aspects. Studies 'Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Original Insights on Economy'<sup>17</sup>, 'Bedi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nūrsī on Social Justice: Analysis from Islamic Philosophy Tradition'<sup>18</sup>, 'Attaining Inner Peace in Islam: Said Nursi's

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<sup>8</sup> Zuleyha Keskin, *Attaining Inner Peace in Islam: Said Nursi's Perspective* (Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Siti Jamilah Mohd and Nurulhidayah Ahmad Fadzillah, "Elements of Eating Morality According to Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Views: A Complementary to The Basic Concept of Food in Islam," *Abqari Journal* 23, no. 1 (September 2020): 156–73, <https://doi.org/10.33102/abqari.vol23no1.262>.

<sup>10</sup> Hee Soo Lee, "As The Model Test of Asian Value System," *Millah* 5, no. 1 (August 2005): 37–53, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol5.iss1.art3>.

<sup>11</sup> İsmail Kocaçalışkan, "Risale-i Nur Un Yaklaşımı İle Çevresel Farkındalık," *Katre, Uluslararası İnsan Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 3 (January 2017): 113–25, <https://doi.org/10.31120/0.2018.30>.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Michel, *Insights from the Risale-I Nur: Said Nursi's Advice for Modern Believers*, 1st ed (Rutherford: Paramus Publishing, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Hakan Çoruh, *Modern Interpretation of the Qur'an: The Contribution of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Palgrave Series in Islamic Theology, Law, and History (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Malden (Mass.): Blackwell publ, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Hasan Horkuc, ed., *God, Man, and Mortality: The Perspective of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Perspective of the Risale-i Nur in Islamic Studies (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Peter Luff, "The 4th Industrial Revolution and SMEs in Malaysia and Japan: Some Economic, Social and Ethical Considerations," preprint, December 25, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.18901/0000001012>.

<sup>17</sup> Prof.Dr. Ali Bakkal, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi s Original Insights on Economy," *Katre, Uluslararası İnsan Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 3 (January 2017): 7–13, <https://doi.org/10.31120/0.2018.24>.

<sup>18</sup> Achmad Reza Hutama Al Faruqi, Rif'at Husnul Ma'afī, and Aria Nur Kamal, "BEDĪ'UZZAMĀN SA'ĪD NŪRSĪ ON SOCIAL JUSTICE: ANALYSIS FROM ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY TRADITION," *Kontemplasi: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 11, no. 1 (June 2023): 25–48, <https://doi.org/10.21274/kontem.2023.11.1.25-48>.

Perspective'<sup>19</sup>, 'Revitalization of Belief and Spiritual Development of Individuals against Materialist Philosophy: Appraisal on Risale-i-Nur'<sup>20</sup>, 'Elements of Eating Morality According to Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Views: A Complementary to The Basic Concept of Food in Islam'<sup>21</sup>, are worth mentioning. However, among them, while discussing frugality, few studies touched upon it as a component of community economics for achieving social justice. Therefore, this paper will provide a more in-depth and specialized analysis of, what are the relationship between frugality and contentment and how Nursi interconnected the role of spirituality in the development of ethical economics.

### **STUDY METHOD**

This study used a method called qualitative content analysis to look at hidden meanings and themes about 'frugality as a path to happiness'. Content analysis was chosen because it helps to systematically and objectively study communication to find patterns and understand the author's intentions and methods. For data collection, the chapter called 'Frugality'<sup>22</sup> in the Risale-i-Nur collection was chosen on purpose because it focuses directly on frugality, which matches the research topic. No other chapters or texts were included to keep the study focused. The chosen chapter was read several times to fully understand its content and context. The text was then broken down into parts that were important to the research. A coding system was created step by step, using categories based on the research questions, such as definitions of frugality, its benefits, and examples. The coding looked closely at how the author presented the ideas, including rhetorical devices, scriptural evidence, logical arguments, and narrative styles used to share the message.

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<sup>19</sup> Keskin, *Attaining Inner Peace in Islam*.

<sup>20</sup> Shumaila Majeed, Abid Naeem, and Muhammm Imran Malik, "Revitalization of Belief and Spiritual Development of Individuals against Materialist Philosophy: Appraisal on Risale-i-Nur," *Journal of Religious and Social Studies* 3, no. 02 Jul-Dec (December 2023): 42–59, <https://doi.org/10.53583/jrss06.03.2023>.

<sup>21</sup> Mohd and Fadzillah, "Elements of Eating Morality According to Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Views."

<sup>22</sup> Said Nursi, *The Nineteenth Flash on Frugality*, Risale-i-Nur Collection (n.d.), <https://www.erisale.com/?locale=en&bookId=203&pageNo=189#content.en.203.189>.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Said Nursi's treatise on frugality reveals that frugality cultivates contentment, which in turn fosters productive effort and social respect, while greed leads to dissatisfaction and dependence. Frugality is understood not merely as financial prudence but as a profound virtue aligned with cosmic and divine principles. It is ethically distinguished from stinginess and elevated to dignity and generosity. Contentment, as the psychological and spiritual outcome of frugality, motivates continued work and economic contribution rather than passive acceptance. This internal state of contentment allows individuals to feel wealthier than others despite having fewer material possessions.

This study differs from previous studies on Said Nursi's concept of frugality by emphasizing the idea, that frugality paves the way to contentment by using Said Nursi's personal experiences and storytelling as a method to concretize abstract religious teachings of frugality and the relation between and contentment. This approach authenticates the spiritual message by anchoring it in relatable, practical examples, thus making the principle of frugality tangible and credible for readers. Previous studies may have addressed the concept more theoretically and doctrinally in an extend, whereas this study focuses on the narrative technique and the practical, lived benefits of frugality as conveyed through lived examples.

### **Frugality and Contentment**

As mentioned above, Nursi demonstrates that frugality cultivates contentment, which in turn encourages productive effort and social respect, while greed results in dissatisfaction and dependence. This concept serves as the cornerstone of his economic and ethical philosophy. In his work, frugality is defined not merely as financial prudence but as a profound virtue aligned with cosmic and divine principles. Ethically, Frugality is explicitly differentiated from stinginess and is elevated to the status of dignity and generosity. Economically, frugality directly leads to 'plenty and good living' and blessings. Socially, Frugality promotes productivity and work, contributing to societal stability.

Frugality and economy result in contentment. It also encourages effort and work, increasing enthusiasm and leading to further labor. For instance, a person who worked for one day, content with the modest wage received in the evening, is motivated to work again the following day.

Contentment is depicted in his work as the psychological and spiritual outcome of practicing frugality and as a key motivator for positive economic behavior. Ethically, Contentment is a virtue that results in self-esteem and respect. Economically, Contentment is not passive resignation but an active encouragement for work and effort. He says that, a person content with their earnings is motivated to continue working, thereby contributing to the economy. This links an internal state of mind directly to productive economic action. It is the foundation upon which an individual can feel richer than others, even with fewer material possessions.

### **Personal Experiences and Quoted Stories**

Said Nursi adeptly elucidates the theme of frugality through personal experiences and storytelling, anchoring abstract religious teachings in relatable, concrete examples. For instance, he narrates his own refusal to accept zakat from affluent tribal leaders, highlighting how his frugality preserved his dignity and independence despite limited resources. This personal narrative not only authenticates his message but also illustrates the practical benefits of frugality, such as self-respect and contentment, thereby rendering the spiritual principle tangible and credible for readers.

The story of Abdullah bin Umar quoted in the treatise, offers a profound illustration of frugality as an ethical principle that balances careful resource management with purposeful generosity. His conduct in the marketplace, where he contested a minor sum of money, exemplifies frugality not as mere stinginess but as a deliberate practice of valuing resources and preserving integrity. This behavior reflects a disciplined approach to economic activity, emphasizing that every small amount matters and that prudent stewardship is essential for sustaining trust and efficiency in trade.

The story's second part, where Abdullah privately gives substantial gold pieces to the poor, highlights how frugality and generosity are not contradictory but complementary. His quiet philanthropy reveals that true frugality involves channeling saved resources toward genuine social benefit rather than personal accumulation or public display. This approach rejects ostentation, focusing instead on the ethical use of wealth to address real needs. The contrast between his meticulous bargaining and his lavish giving underscores the idea that frugality is a means to an end—enabling impactful generosity without compromising financial integrity.

In essence, the story of Abdullah bin Umar elevates frugality from a simple economic behavior to a nuanced ethical framework. It demonstrates that frugality, when practiced with wisdom and purpose, is integral to achieving both economic efficiency and profound social responsibility. This narrative thus serves as a powerful paradigm for organizations seeking to integrate ethical stewardship with impactful generosity.

### **Relevance of the Treatise in Contemporary Economics**

Said Nursi's treatise on frugality, even though it is not a formal academic study, offers a profound ethical framework that aligns closely with contemporary academic discussions on ethical economics. Its core emphasis on frugality as a virtue transcends mere personal morality, engaging with broader socio-economic implications such as sustainability, producer-consumer balance, and the moral consequences of wastefulness. The work articulates the idea that frugality is a genuine path to contentment by emphasizing its multifaceted benefits, both spiritual and practical. Frugality is presented as an expression of gratitude and respect for divine blessings, which leads to plenty and self-respect rather than degradation or dependency. By controlling the sense of taste and avoiding wastefulness, individuals maintain physical health and cultivate a true appetite grounded in necessity rather than artificial desire. This measured approach to consumption aligns with divine wisdom, fostering contentment through moderation and appreciation, rather than excess and dissatisfaction.

Moreover, the treatise contrasts frugality with wastefulness and greed, highlighting that contentment arising from frugality brings dignity, enthusiasm for work, and sincerity, while excess breeds dissatisfaction, laziness, and loss of self-respect. Historical and anecdotal evidence within the text and the reflections on the economic outcomes of frugal versus wasteful individuals, reinforce that contentment is a treasury of good living. The spiritual dimension is underscored by the idea that true pleasure and satisfaction come not from abundance alone but from a heart ruled by thankfulness and moderation, making frugality a profound and effective means of achieving lasting contentment.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights how Said Nursi's integration of theological reasoning, scriptural authority, and personal testimony functions as a didactic tool to foster virtues such as contentment, dignity, and generosity within economic behavior through practicing frugality. By aligning individual moral agency with universal principles of economy and justice, this approach offers a normative framework that challenges dominant materialistic economic paradigms and complements contemporary ethical economics. Future research could expand on this foundation by empirically examining the practical impact of such virtue-based frameworks on consumer behavior and corporate responsibility, as well as exploring comparative analyses with other ethical traditions to enrich interdisciplinary understanding of morality in economic contexts.

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