# On Sincerity[[1]](#footnote-1)

This Gleam should be read at least once a fortnight.

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.*

*Do not fall into dispute, lest you lose heart and your power depart*. (8:46) \* *And stand before God in a devout [frame of mind]*. (2:238) \* *Truly he succeeds that purifies it, \* And he fails that corrupts it*. (91:9-10) \* *Nor sell my signs for a small price*. (2:41. etc.)

O my brothers of the hereafter! And O my companions in the service of the Qur’an! You should know – and you do know – that in this world sincerity is the most important principle in works pertaining to the hereafter; it is the greatest strength, the most acceptable intercessor, the firmest point of support, the shortest way to reality, the most acceptable prayer, the most wondrous means of achieving one’s goal, the highest quality, and the purest worship. Since sincerity comprises much strength and many lights like those mentioned above; and since at this dreadful time, despite our small number and weak, impoverished, and powerless state and our being confronted by terrible enemies and suffering severe oppression in the midst of aggressive innovations and misguidance, the extremely heavy, important, general, and sacred duty of serving belief and the Qur’an has been placed on our shoulders by divine grace, we are certainly compelled more than anyone to work with all our strength to gain sincerity. We need more than anything to instil sincerity in ourselves. Otherwise what we have achieved so far in our sacred service will in part be lost and will not persist; and we shall be held responsible; we shall manifest the severe threat contained in the divine prohibition,

*Nor sell my signs for a small price*. (2:41, etc.)

We shall otherwise destroy sincerity, thus harming eternal happiness for the sake of meaningless, unnecessary, harmful, sad, self-centered, tedious, hypocritical base feelings and insignificant benefits. And if we were to do that, we would violate all our brothers’ rights, transgress against the duty of service to the Qur’an, and be disrespectful towards the sacredness of the truths of belief.

My brothers! There are many obstacles before significant good works. Satans put up a powerful struggle against those who assist in them. In the face of those obstacles and satans you have to rely on the strength of sincerity. You should avoid things that harm sincerity as you avoid snakes and scorpions. In accordance with the words of Joseph (Upon whom be peace),

*Nor do I absolve my own self [of blame]; the [human] soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Sustainer do bestow His mercy*, (12:53)

the evil-commanding soul cannot be relied upon. Do not let egotism and the soul deceive you! To gain sincerity and preserve it you should take as your guide the following rules:

# Your First Rule

You should seek divine pleasure in your actions. If Almighty God is pleased, it is of no importance if the whole world even is displeased. If He accepts an action and everyone else rejects it, their rejection has no effect. Once His pleasure has been gained and He has accepted an action, even if you do not ask it of Him, should He wish it and His wisdom requires it, He will make others accept it. He will make them consent to it too. For this reason, to seek divine pleasure should be the sole aim in this service.

# Your Second Rule

This is not to criticize your brothers who are employed in this service of the Qur’an, and not to excite their envy by displaying superior virtues. For just as one hand cannot compete with the other, so one eye cannot criticize the other, nor the tongue object to the ear, nor the heart see the spirit’s faults. Each of a person’s members completes the deficiencies of the others, veils their faults, assists their needs, and helps them out in their duties. Otherwise his life would be extinguished, his spirit flee, and his body fall apart.

Similarly, the components of a factory’s machinery cannot compete with one another in rivalry, take precedence over each other, or dominate each other. They cannot spy out one another’s faults and criticize each other, destroy the other’s eagerness for work, and cause him to become idle. They rather assist each other’s motions with all their capacity in order to achieve the common goal; they march towards the aim of their creation in true solidarity and unity. If even the slightest aggression or desire to dominate were to interfere, it would throw the factory into confusion, cancelling its products and results. The factory’s owner would then demolish the factory entirely.

O Risale-i Nur students and servants of the Qur’an! You and I are members of such a collective personality, worthy of the title of the perfect man. We are like the components of a factory’s machinery which produces eternal happiness within eternal life. We are hands working on a dominical boat which will disembark the community of Muhammad (UWBP) at the realm of peace, the shore of salvation. So we are surely in need of solidarity and true union, obtained through gaining sincerity – for the mystery of sincerity secures through four individuals the moral strength of one thousand one hundred and eleven – indeed, we are compelled to obtain it.

Yes, if three alifs do not unite, they have the value of three, but on uniting, through the mystery of numbers they acquire the value of one hundred and eleven. If four times four remain apart, they have a value of sixteen. But if, through the mystery of brotherhood and having a common goal and joint duty, they unite coming together shoulder to shoulder on a line, they acquire the strength and value of four thousand four hundred and forty-four. Indeed, numerous historical events testify that the moral strength and value of sixteen self-sacrificing brothers have exceeded that of four thousand.

The underlying reason for this mystery is this: each member of a true, sincere union may see with the eyes of the other brothers, and hear with their ears, as if each person of a true union of ten acquires the value and strength to see with twenty eyes, think with ten minds, hear with twenty ears, and work with twenty hands.[[2]](#footnote-2)

# Your Third Rule

You should know that all your strength lies in sincerity and truth. Yes, strength lies in truth and sincerity. Even those who do wrong gain strength from their sincerity in their wrongdoing.

Evidence that strength lies in truth and sincerity is this service of ours. A small amount of sincerity in our work proves this claim and is evidence for itself. For seven or eight years of service to learning and religion here has surpassed a hundredfold the twenty years of service I performed in my native region and in Istanbul. And in these places the people assisting me were a hundred or even a thousand times more numerous than my brothers who work together with me here, where I am alone, with no one, a stranger, semi-literate, under the surveillance of unfair officials and persecuted by them. I have absolutely no doubt that the service I have carried out with you these seven or eight years and the moral strength which has resulted in success a hundred times greater than formerly, has arisen from your sincerity. I have also to confess that by your heartfelt sincerity, you have saved me to an extent from the hypocrisy which used to flatter my soul under the veil of fame and renown. God willing, you will be successful in gaining absolute sincerity, and you will cause me to gain it too.

You should be aware that it is because of this mystery of sincerity that ‘Ali[[3]](#footnote-3) (May God be pleased with him) and Ghawth al-A‘zam[[4]](#footnote-4) (May his mystery be sanctified) honor you with their miraculous wonder-working and wondrous vision of the Unseen. They offer you consolation in protecting manner and applaud your service. Yes, you should have no doubt that this attention of theirs is because of sincerity. If you knowingly harm it, it is from them that you will receive punishment. You should bear in mind *“the blows of compassion”* in the Tenth Flash.

If you want to be backed by the support of such spiritual heroes, and have them as masters at your head, gain complete sincerity in accordance with the verse,

*But give them preference over themselves*. (59:9)

Prefer your brothers’ souls to your own soul in honor, rank, acclaim, and in the things your soul enjoys like material benefits, and even in such innocent, harmless benefits as informing a needy believer about one of the fine truths of belief. If possible, encourage one of your disinclined companions to inform him, so that your soul does not become conceited. If you have the desire to tell him the edifying matter to gain the reward, it surely is not a sin and there is no harm in it, but the essence of sincerity between you might be damaged.

# Your Forth Rule

This is to imagine your brothers’ virtues and merits in your own selves, and to thankfully take pride at their glory. The Sufis have terms they use among themselves, *“annihilation in the shaykh,” “annihilation in the Prophet;”* I am not a Sufi, but these principles of theirs make a good rule in our way, in the form of *“annihilation in the brothers.”* Among brothers this is called *“tefânî;”* that is, “annihilation in one another.” That is to say, to forget the feelings of one’s own carnal soul, and live in one’s mind with one’s brothers’ virtues and feelings. In any event, the basis of our way is brotherhood; it is not the relationship (lit. means) between father and son, or shaykh and follower; it is that of true brotherhood. At the very most a Master [Ustad] intervenes. Our way is the closest friendship. This friendship necessitates being the closest friend, the most sacrificing companion, the most appreciative comrade, the noblest brother. The essence of such friendship is true sincerity. The person who spoils this true sincerity falls from the high pinnacle of this friendship, possibly to the bottom of a deep depression. There is nothing onto which he may cling in between.

Yes, the way is seen to be two. There is the possibility that those who part now from this way of ours, the great highway of the Qur’an, are unknowingly helping the forces of irreligion, who are hostile to us. God willing, those who enter the sacred bounds of the Qur’an of Miraculous Exposition by way of the Risale-i Nur will always add strength to light, sincerity, and belief, and will avoid such pitfalls.

# Two means of attaining and preserving sincerity:

**The First Means:** O my companions in the service of the Qur’an! One of the most effective means of attaining and preserving sincerity is *“contemplation of death.”* Yes, just as worldly ambition damages sincerity and drives a person to hypocrisy and the world, so the contemplation of death causes disgust at hypocrisy and gains sincerity. That is, to think of death and grasp that this world is transient, and so be saved from the tricks of the soul.

Yes, the instruction the Sufis and people of truth received from such verses of the All-Wise Qur’an as,

*Every soul shall taste death*. (3:185) \* *Truly you will die [one day], and truly they [too] will die [one day]*, (39:30)

led them to make the contemplation of death fundamental to their spiritual journeying; it dispelled the illusion of eternity, the source of worldly ambition. They imagined themselves to be dead and being placed in the grave. With prolonged thought the evil-commanding soul becomes saddened and affected by such imagining and gives up its far-reaching ambitions and hopes to an extent. There are numerous advantages in this contemplation. It is taught by the Hadith which says something like, *“Frequently mention death which dispels pleasure and makes it bitter.”*[[5]](#footnote-5)

However, since our way is not that of the Sufis but of reality, we are not compelled to perform this contemplation in an imaginary and hypothetical form like they do. To do so is anyway not in conformity with the way of reality. Our way is not to bring the future to the present by thinking of the end, but to travel in the mind to the future from the present in respect of reality, and to gaze on it. Yes, dispensing with the need to imagine, one may look on one’s own corpse, the single fruit on the tree of this brief life. One may look on one’s own death, and if one goes a bit further, see the death of this century, and going further still, observe the death of this world, opening up the way to complete sincerity.

**The Second Means:** By attaining a sense of the divine presence through the strength of certain, affirmative belief and through the lights proceeding from reflective thought on creatures which leads to knowledge of the Maker; by thinking that the Compassionate Creator is all-present and seeing; and by not seeking the attention of any other than He, and realizing that looking to others in His presence or seeking help from them is contrary to right conduct in His presence, one may be saved from such hypocrisy and gain sincerity. However, this comprises many degrees and stages. Whichever degree a person reaches, he will profit to that extent. There are numerous truths in the Risale-i Nur that will save a person from hypocrisy and gain him sincerity, so referring him to those, we cut short the discussion here.

# Three obstacles destroying sincerity: Rivalry, flattering the ego, fear and greed

Of the very many things that destroy sincerity and drive one to hypocrisy, we shall briefly explain two or three.

**The First:** Rivalry towards material advantages slowly destroys sincerity. It is also detrimental to the results of our service. So too it causes the material benefits to be lost. This nation has always nurtured respect for those who work for reality and the hereafter, and has assisted them. With the intention of actively sharing in their genuine sincerity and in the work they carry out devotedly, it has always showed respect by assisting them with material benefits like alms and gifts to save them from preoccupation with securing their material needs and wasting their time. But such assistance and benefit may not be sought; it is given. It may not even be sought through the tongue of disposition by inwardly desiring it or awaiting it. It should rather be given unexpectedly, otherwise sincerity will be harmed. It would otherwise bring a person close to the prohibition stated by the verse,

*Nor sell* my *signs for a small price*, (2:41, etc.)

and in part destroys the action.

The evil-commanding soul selfishly excites a feeling of rivalry towards a true brother and companion in that particular service by first desiring and expecting such a material benefit, then not allowing it to go to someone else. Sincerity is damaged, and the sacredness of the service is lost, and the person becomes disagreeable in the eyes of the people of reality. He also loses the material benefit. This subject needs much discussion, but I shall curtail it and only mention two examples which will strengthen sincerity and true union between my true brothers.

**First Example:** ‘The worldly,’ and even certain politicians and secret societies and manipulators of society, have adopted as their guiding principle, that of shared property, in order to procure wealth and power. They do acquire an extraordinary strength and advantage, despite all their exploitation and losses. However, the nature of common property does not change with sharing, despite its many harms. Although each partner is as though the owner and supervisor of the rest in one respect, he is unable to profit from it.

Nevertheless, if the principle of shared property is applied to the works of the hereafter, it accumulates vast benefits and produces no loss. For it means that all the property passes to the hands of each partner. For example, there are four or five men. With the idea of sharing, one of them brings paraffin, another a wick, another the lamp, another the mantle, and the fifth matches; they assemble the lamp and light it. Each of them becomes the owner of a complete lamp. If each of those partners has a full-length mirror on a wall, he will be reflected in it together with the lamp and room, without deficiency or being split up.

Just the same are mutual participation in the goods of the hereafter through the mystery of sincerity, and co-operation through the mystery of brotherhood, and joint enterprise through the mystery of unity: the total obtained by those joint acts, and all the light, enters the book of good deeds of each person taking part. This is a fact and has been witnessed by the people of reality. It is required also by the breadth of divine mercy and munificence.

My brothers! God willing, material benefits will not provoke rivalry among you. You may possibly be deceived in regard to the benefits of the hereafter like some of those who follow the Sufi path. But how can some personal, minor merit be compared with the merit and light manifested in respect of the shared actions mentioned in the above example?

**Second Example:**Craftsmen are obtaining significant wealth by co-operating so as to profit more from the products of their crafts. Formerly ten manufacturers of sewing needles all worked on their own, and the fruit of their individual labor was three needles a day. Then following the rule of joint enterprise the ten men united. One brought the iron, one lit the furnace, one pierced the needles, one placed them in the furnace, and another sharpened the points, and so on; each was occupied with only part of the process of needle-making. Since the work in which one man was employed was simple, he did not waste time; he acquired skill and performed the work with considerable speed. The manufacturers divided up the work performed in accordance with the rule of joint enterprise and the division of labor: they saw that instead of three needles a day for each man, it worked out at three hundred. This event was widely published among the craftsmen of ‘the worldly’ in order to encourage them to pool their labor.

My brothers! Since union and accord in worldly matters and in dense materials yield such results and advantages, you can compare how vastly profitable it is for each to reflect in his own mirror through divine grace the light of all, which is luminous and pertains to the hereafter and does not need to be divided up and fragmented, and to gain the equivalent reward of all of them. This huge profit should not be lost through rivalry and insincerity.

**The Second Obstacle Destroying Sincerity:** This is to flatter the ego and give high status to the evil-commanding soul by attracting attention to oneself and public acclaim, driven by the desire for fame, renown, and position. This is a serious spiritual sickness that also opens the door to the hypocrisy and self-centeredness called the hidden association of partners with God, and damages sincerity.

My brothers! Our way in the service of the Qur’an is reality and brotherhood, and the true meaning of brotherhood is to annihilate one’s personality among one’s brothers[[6]](#footnote-6) and to prefer their souls to one’s own. Rivalry of this sort arising from desire for rank and position should not therefore be provoked. It is altogether opposed to our way.

The brothers’ honor may be all the individuals’ generally; so I am hopeful that sacrificing that great collective honor for personal, selfish, competitive, minor fame and renown is far from being something the Risale-i Nur students would do. Yes, the heart, mind, and spirit of the Risale-i Nur students would not stoop to such lowly, harmful, inferior things. But everyone has an evil- commanding soul, and sometimes the soul’s emotions affect certain veins of character, and predominate to an extent in spite of the heart, mind, and spirit; I am not accusing your hearts, minds, and spirits. I have confidence in you because of the effect of the Risale-i Nur. But the soul, desires, emotions, and imagination sometimes deceive. For this reason you sometimes receive severe warnings. The severity looks to the soul, emotions, desires, and imagination; act cautiously.

Yes, if our way had been subjection to a shaykh, there would have been a single rank, or limited ranks, and numerous capacities would have been appointed to them. There could have been envy and selfishness. But our way is brotherhood. Among brothers there is no position of father among them, nor can they assume the position of spiritual guide. In brotherhood ranks are broad and cannot be the cause of envious jostling. At the most brother helps and supports brother; he completes his service. Evidence that much harm and many mistakes have resulted from the envy, greed for spiritual reward, and high aspirations of the paths of spiritual guides are the conflict and rivalry among those who follow them despite their vast attainments, perfections and benefits, which have had the disastrous consequence of their vast and sacred power being unable to withstand the gales of innovation.

**The Third Obstacle:** This is fear and greed. This obstacle has been explained comprehensively in *The Six Attacks[[7]](#footnote-7)* together with other obstacles. We therefore refer you to that, and making all the most beautiful names of the Most Merciful of the Merciful our intercessor, we beseech that He will grant us success in attaining complete sincerity.

*O God! For the sake of Sura al-*Ikhlas*, place us among Your servants who attain sincerity. Amen. Amen.*

*Glory be unto You! We have no knowledge save that which You have taught us; indeed, You are All-Knowing, All-Wise*. (2:32)

# A Confidential Letter to Some of my Brothers

I shall mention a point concerning two Hadiths to my brothers who become bored of writing, and prefer other recitations during the Three Months, the months of worship, to writing out the Risale-i Nur, although to do this is worship in five respects.[[8]](#footnote-8) The two Hadiths are these:

**The First: *“****At the Last Judgment, the ink spent by the scholars of religion will weigh equally to the blood of the martyrs.”*[[9]](#footnote-9)

**The Second**: “Whoever adheres to my Sunna when my community is corrupted shall earn the reward of a hundred martyrs.”[[10]](#footnote-10) That is, those who adhere to and serve the Prophet’s (UWBP) practices and the Qur’an’s truths when innovations and misguidance are rife may gain the reward of a hundred martyrs.

O my brothers who weary of writing out of laziness! And O my brothers who lean to Sufism! These two Hadiths show that the black light flowing from your blessed, pure pens serving the truths of belief and mysteries of the Shari‘a and practices of the Prophet (UWBP) at a time such as this – even a drop of their water- of-life-like ink – may win for you on the Day of Judgment reward equal to a hundred drops of martyrs’ blood. So try to win it!

**If you say:** It says scholars in the Hadith and some of us are only scribes.

**The Answer:** Anyone who reads these treatises for a year and comprehends and accepts them, may become a valuable, exacting scholar at this time. Even if he does not understand them, since the Risale-i Nur students have a collective personality, doubtless it is learned. As for your pens, they are the immaterial fingers of that collective personality. With your good opinion of me, you have afforded me the position of Master (Ustad) and religious scholar, and attached yourselves to me although in my view I am unworthy. I am unlettered and have difficulty in writing, so your pens may be thought of as mine; you will receive the reward indicated in the Hadith.

*Said Nursi*

1. From the 21st Gleam, The Gleams, BSN [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Yes, through the mystery of sincerity heartfelt solidarity and union produce innumerable benefits, and are also an effective shield and point of support against fear, and even death. For if death comes, it takes one spirit. But since through the mystery of true brotherhood on the way of divine pleasure in works connected with the hereafter there are spirits to the number of brothers, if one of them dies, he meets death happily, saying: “My other spirits remain alive, for they in effect make life continue for me by constantly earning me reward, so I am not dying. I live in respect of merit through their spirits; I am only dying in respect of sin.” And he lays down in peace. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib: the son of the Prophet Muhammad’s (UWBP) uncle, who from a young age was brought up by the Prophet (UWBP), who later married him to his daughter, Fatima. ‘Ali was one of the first to believe in the Qur’anic revelation, and was famous for his heroism in battle. He became the fourth caliph. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sayyid ‘Abd al-Qadir Gilani (Geylanî), known as the Gawth al-A‘zam, was the eponym of the Qadiri Order and a towering spiritual figure in the history of Islam. He lived 470/1077-561/1166 and is buried in Baghdad. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Tirmidhi*, Zuhd, 4; Qiyama, 26; *Nasa’i*, Jana’iz, 3; *Ibn Maja*, Zuhd, 31; al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak*, iv, 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Yes, happy is he who, in order to gain access to a large pool of fresh water filtered from the spring of the Qur’an, casts his personality and egotism – which are like blocks of ice – into the pool and melts them. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Letters 1928-1932* (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat, new edn. 2009) the Sixth Section of the Twenty-Ninth Letter, pp. 474-90. (Tr.) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. We asked for an explanation of the five sorts of worship which our Master indicates in this valuable letter. The explanation we received is below: To strive against the people of misguidance, the most important struggle. ii. To serve our Master in the form of helping him spread the truth. To serve *Muslim*s in respect of belief. To obtain knowledge by means of the pen. To perform worship in the form of reflective thought, one hour of which may sometimes be equal to a year’s worship. Signed: Rüştü, Hüsrev, Re’fet [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. al-Ghazali, *Ihya ‘Ulum al-Din*, i, 6; al-Munawi, *Fayd al-Qadir*, vi, 466; al-‘Ajluni, *Kashf al- Khafa’*, ii, 561; al-Suyuti, *Jami‘ al-Saghir*, No: 10026. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibn ‘Adiyy, *al-Kamil fi’l-Du‘afa’*, ii, 739; al-Mundhiri, *al-Targhib wa’l-Tarhib*, i, 41; Tabarani, *al-Majma‘ al-Kabir*, 1394; ‘Ali ibn Husamuddin, *Muntakhabat Kanz al-‘Ummal*, i, 100; al-Haythami, *Majma‘ al-Zawa’id*, vii, 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)