# The Two Dynamics That Keep Religious Life Alive

[*Dinî Hayatı Canlı Tutan İki Dinamik*](http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/kirik-testi-dini-hayati-canli-tutan-iki-dinamik/)

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**Question: It was previously stated that the method of supporting religious life and maintaining its vitality has two important aspects; the first is “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil” and the second is *raqaiq*—the matters that soften the heart. Could you explain these two aspects, particularly in terms of their relevance to our time?**

**Answer:**“Enjoining the good and forbidding the evil,” means enjoining others to what religion enjoins, and averting them from what religion forbids. According to the Maturidi School of Islamic Theology and Hanafi scholars, it means enjoining people to what sound reason welcomes, and averting people from what sound reason dislikes. In other words, “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil” means letting whatever is good and beautiful in truth become widespread among people, as well as encouraging them to give up, and protecting them against, whatever is evil and ugly.

**The Most Important Obligation**

In order to carry out this duty in a way that is systematic and embraces the entire society, from the Prophet’s time onward, different means were utilized. They gave sermons, counsels and established circles of spiritual lessons; these activities have continued up until the present day in different forms. The most lively, striking and effective examples occurred in dervish lodges, because generally the guides who served there addressed the people with the true voice of their hearts. With their consciences that predominated over their logic, they tried to influence hearts, through the tongue of the Spiritual Intellect (*latifa Rabbaniyya*), the secret (*sirr*), the hidden (*khafi*), and the most hidden (*akhfa*), and they reached into people’s spirits. The guides always stirred up the religious vitality of those they addressed by greatly inspiring them with the Divine Names, Attributes and the Divine Essence.

Since “Enjoining the good and forbidding the evil” is an important factor that helps keep religious life fresh, its neglect caused religious life to gradually lose its vitality and the people to be alienated from their religious values. For example, during a certain period in Turkey, they locked up the mosques. Likewise, during another period, the mosques lost their real function; they caused the pulpit to lose esteem and effectiveness by covering irrelevant topics in sermons. Therefore, this important factor was in a way packed up and put aside, condemned to inaction and oblivion. There used to be certain days of privation in terms of religious feeling and thought. Relatively speaking we may claim to be in a better state today on the issue of “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil.” However, it is a reality that we are actually still at a very rudimentary level in comparison to the time of the blessed Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and the early days of the Ottomans. Since it had been neglected in our era, Bediüzzaman referred to this duty as an obligation of primary importance. Therefore, this duty is upon the shoulders of each Muslim today as an obligation of the utmost priority. In terms of our revival it is a dynamic that cannot be replaced by anything else.

***Raqaiq*: Matters That Soften the Heart**

As for *raqaiq*, it is the narration of the issues that will soften hearts, activate the spirit, direct people’s attention to the afterlife, evoke concern in hearts about the weighing of deeds, and will also enkindle hope from God, may His glory be exalted, in hearts; all of which help in observing a flawless religious life. In this respect, *raqaiq* is a different form of guidance that is special to believers. *Raqaiq* pertains to the issues related to faith and Islam, particularly to subjects that concern their ultimate ending. For example, the encounter with the Angel of Death, what happens after the burial, the punishment of the grave, life in the Intermediate Realm (*barzakh*), the Day of Judgment, weighing of deeds and the like.

At the same time, *Tanbih al-Ghafilin* (Admonition for the Neglectful) by Abu’l-Lays Samarqandi, a significant Hanafi scholar, is accepted as one of the most important works in this field. In the first chapter of this work, he deals with the topic of sincerity (*ikhlas*), then other topics such as Paradise, Hell and the weighing of deeds. In the final chapter, he tells of Satan’s encounter with the noble Prophet. While dealing with these topics, he may not have been as scrupulous as Imam Bukhari, Muslim and an-Nasa’i were. The same situation holds true for Imam al-Ghazali’s *Revival of Religious Disciplines*. In terms of methodology, they saw no harm in relating weak hadith which pertain to religious encouragement or discouragement. However, Imam Qurtubi, who also authored such a work, was much more meticulous and careful on this issue. Being a leading Islamic scholar of jurisprudence, at the same time his proficiency in Qur’anic exegesis is apodictic. Another astonishing quality is that, although he lived in Andalusia, he had knowledge of all scholarly works authored in the East. The same thing can also be observed in Ibn Hayyan. Although they lived at the far west of the Islamic world, they had knowledge of the works from different Islamic lands such as Central Asia, Damascus, Egypt, Medina and Baghdad. One cannot help but appreciate with astonishment and admiration this religious zeal of theirs.

So many scholars so far have dealt with the topics of *raqaiq*, which is a very important factor for keeping religious life alive, and authored works about this issue. However, in order for these to have the desired effect on hearts and impact on spirits, one needs to have a sound faith in the first place. However much progress people make in terms of their faith and its levels of certainty, they will be receptive to what is told and written in the same degree, keep away from vices and be eager for acts of worship. Undoubtedly, the attitudes of people who have gained such a degree of responsiveness on religious matters will be every different. Otherwise, the words uttered will bump against a bronze wall and not have any influence on those addressed.

**“It Is Being So Hard on Us!”**

At this point, I would like to narrate certain memories of mine, in order to give you an idea. I was about 15 years old when I preached in my village for the first time. Reconsidering those days now, it is a thing of surprise; those villagers were so good mannered and modest! People as old as my father or grandfather would respectfully listen to someone so much younger than them! In the early afternoon, I would preach from *Tanbih al-Ghafilin*, and in the late afternoon, from *Durrat al-Waizin*. Sometimes, I would interpret Qur’anic verses by benefiting from works of exegesis like the one written by Baydawi, and sometimes I would relate parables to them. In the evening, I would preach to them about Islamic rules from the *Munyat al-Musalli* by Ibrahim Halabi.

I started with the topic of “*ikhlas*” (sincerity) for the first time and was explaining it. They must have felt so overwhelmed with a deep feeling of self-criticism because some of them said, “Come on, who can really practice it at such a level!” They were the generation of the fifties who upheld the Ottoman religious culture. Despite the fact that they were sledgehammered in order not to practice religion and went through successive traumas, it is so astonishing that they still perceived the issue thus only with the remnants of the Ottoman understanding. After the chapter on sincerity, I passed to the one about Hell. It continued for one day or two, and then some of them burst into tears. While leaving the mosque one day, a few people, whose names I still have not forgotten, approached me and said, “My dear *hodja*, for God’s sake! Does God not have a Paradise as well! It is being so hard on us!” Although more than fifty years have passed ever since, I never forget this situation, and the state of those people materializes before my eyes. In later years, even while preaching at great mosques, I met very few people among those crowds who received the matters I explained with such immensity of conscience.

Then, perception is very important. If you do not perceive the matter this way, it means you still stand outside of the issue and do not take it to heart. In order for the matters of *raqaiq* to have an influence on the person, one must take that address to heart and listen as if it were being particularly addressed to them. For example, it is very important to have the following considerations: while Paradise is being mentioned, thinking that it is always possible for oneself to be favored with it; when there is mention of Hell, shuddering at the thought that one might also suffer in it; and when the subject is sincerity, revising one’s deeds and fearing that one may have fallen to affectation, which is a secret form of associating partners with God. Otherwise, if someone preaches as if he is merely relating a story, and the listeners flatly listen to the narrative, then referring to the *raqaiq* or being busied with such topics will not have any good effect.

The blessed Abu Bakr was a model of genuine belief and he always feared about his end. Those who are not anxious about their ending will meet an end to be anxious about. With the same understanding, Umar ibn al-Khattab was also concerned about his fate.

Aswad ibn Yazid an-Nakhai, who was one of the important imams of the Nakhai School in Kufa, felt much afraid on his deathbed. His face changed from one troubled state to another. Waiting near him, Alqama asked: “Are you afraid of your sins?” With a bitter smile, he answered: “Sins? I am afraid of dying as an unbeliever.” Here is a real believer and a person worried about his ending!

**Death, Which Makes Pleasures Bitter**

The exercise of imagining death is one of the issues related to *raqaiq* and merits contemplation. It is an act of thinking about death and beyond, bringing to mind the dread and loneliness of the grave, remembering the perils that await a person on the road to the afterlife and living with the consideration that death may come at any moment. In other words, not thinking, “I am still young anyway. Given that I am twenty, I probably have some sixty more years before I die. Some people live to see their eighties,” but seeing death as a surprise visitor that can appear at anytime, and making preparations accordingly. As an Arab poet said, “Death comes all of a sudden; and the grave is a chest of deeds.” So, whatever a person has gained so far will be the provisions he takes along with him.

Such a sentiment is very important for the sake of the afterlife, for if a person did not walk on a safe road in the worldly life, then the road will not be safe for him in the afterlife either. Thus, that person will have to travel a very dangerous road in the afterlife. Since the exercise of imagining death makes a person gain constant awareness in this respect and makes him think about what will be beyond the grave, it is an important factor that needs to be made use of.

Considering the statements he relates in the “Twelfth note” of “The Seventeenth Gleam,”[[1]](https://www.herkul.org/weekly-sermons/the-two-dynamics-that-keep-religious-life-alive/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn1) it is seen how vigilant master Bediüzzaman was about this issue before he wrote the *Risale-i Nur* Collection. There, he criticizes his own soul so severely. When the self-critical supplications of such personages as Abu’l-Hasan ash-Shadhili, Abdulqadr al-Jilani, or Hasan al-Basri are studied, it is seen that they also shared the same feelings.

As it is known, during the early period of Islam, the noble Prophet prohibited believers from visiting graves, probably due to the improper practices relating to graves that remained from the Age of Ignorance. However, after some time, when this mistaken understanding was abolished, he stated: “I prohibited you from visiting graves. Now visit graves, for it reminds you of the afterlife.”[[2]](https://www.herkul.org/weekly-sermons/the-two-dynamics-that-keep-religious-life-alive/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn2)

In short, both fulfilling the duty of “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil” and constantly remembering the matters of *raqaiq*, resembles the arteries and veins in a body. Just as the entire body’s vitality depends on them, the continuity of vitality in religion similarly depends on fulfilling these two factors. This way, a person will concentrate on his own ending, become sober-hearted, take every step with self-possession and spend every moment of his life with a consideration of self-criticism.

[[1]](https://www.herkul.org/weekly-sermons/the-two-dynamics-that-keep-religious-life-alive/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref1) Nursi, Bediüzzaman Said, *The Gleams*, New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2013, p. 178.

[[2]](https://www.herkul.org/weekly-sermons/the-two-dynamics-that-keep-religious-life-alive/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref2) *Sahih Muslim*, Janaiz, 32, 14, 15.

*This text is the translation of “**[Dinî Hayatı Canlı Tutan İki Dinamik](http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/kirik-testi-dini-hayati-canli-tutan-iki-dinamik/).”*