

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE MEMORIES OF MADRASA

NACI THE TEACHER

Synopsis

In this work, Muallim Naci elaborates on what he learned in the madrasa, the religious Islamic school, under eighteen titles. Therefore, the book focuses on specific concepts and people rather than events. Here, the titles are not taken as they are; they are arranged according to the contents.

People

Abd al-Malik ibn Qurayb al-Asmaî	Arabic literary scholar
Abdullah Vassaf	Ottoman Sheikh-ul-Islam
Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali	Arab poet and grammarian
Ahmad ebn Hasan Meymandî	Vizier to the Ghaznavid sultans
Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf	The most notable governor who served the Umayyad Caliphate
David Teniers	Flemish painter
Fakhruddin Razi	Persian polymath, Islamic scholar
erdowsî	Author of Shahnameh [Book of Kings]
Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud	The ruler of the Turkic dynasty of Ghaznavids
Hasan of Basra	Preacher, ascetic, theologian, exegete, scholar, judge, mystic
Imam Abu Hanifa	Sunni Muslim theologian in 8 th century
Luis Vaz de Camoes	Portuguese poet
Nâili	Persian poet in the 17 th century
Nasreddin Hodja	A famous satirist in the 13 th century
Omar bin Abdulaziz	The eighth Umayyad caliph
Rabia al-Adawiyya	A Muslim saint and Sufi mystic
Said ibn Jubayr	One of the leading jurists of his time
Sayyid Sharif Jurjânî	Persian encyclopedic writer and theologian
Selman Saveci	Persian poet
Sufyan al-Thawri	Founder of the Thawri sect
Sunbulzade Vehbi	Poet in the 18 th century
Thumama ibn Ashras	A Mu'tazila theologian
Yahya ibn Aktham	Arab Islamic jurist in the 9 th century

Events

Mind

Under this title, Muallim Naci explains what the mind is. He opposes the idea that intelligence is related to age, saying that the fathers of intelligent sons are not as brilliant. He divides the mind into two types, innate and acquired, and presents the former with a story of the famous Arab writer al-Asmaî. According to the story, while chatting with an intelligent child, al-Asmaî asks the child if he would give up his intelligence and become a fool if he were to give him a hundred thousand gold coins. The boy says he would not because he would lose the hundred thousand gold coins he had because of his stupidity.

Muallim Naci states that the perfect mind, that is, the mature mind, consists of the combination of the innate and the acquired and that the most virtuous of people are those who have it. However, he states that some researchers note that the word "mind" has other meanings.

The first is the feature that distinguishes humans from animals.

The second is based on being able to distinguish between what is possible and what is not. For example, knowing that a person cannot be in two places at the same time.

Third, it is based on knowledge gained through experience.

Fourth, it is based on instinct.

Muallim Naci accepts the first of these as the main one. He states that the second is a sub-branch of it, the third is a mixture of the first and the second, and the fourth is the last destination of the mind.

Love

Muallim Naci says that although the poet can describe poetry, the lover cannot describe love, but he states that some intellectuals have commented on what love is.

When the Abbasid Caliph Harun Rashid asks the noted scholar al-Asmaï what love is, al-Asmaï replies that love fills one's heart with the beauties of the loved one, so even if the loved one smells onion, the lover perceives it as a unique scent.

When al-Mamun, the son of Harun Rashid, asks the same question to the Muslim judge Yahya ibn Aktham, he says that love is just lovely things coming to mind. However, Thumama, who is present there, tells him that he is not the one to talk about love and defines love as a useful friend, a woman to whom one feels close, and something powerful. Then, al-Mamun bestows a thousand gold coins on him.

Apart from them, Muallim Naci shares Aristotle's definition of love too. Aristo sees love as a kind of ignorance falling on an empty heart and states that love first invades the heart, spreads to other organs, and even causes stutter while speaking.

Finally, he asserts that Sayyid Sharif Jurjânî interprets love in two ways; according to theologians, theological philosophers, and philosophers, in his book, *Kitab al-Tarifat*. For the theologians, love is a luminous substance that increases or decreases for various reasons, while for the philosophers, it is a disease that ameliorates or worsens.

After giving these definitions, Muallim Naci asserts that everyone experiences love differently and says various definitions of love exist.

Juha

Muallim Naci states that Juha is a naive man from the Fazara tribe and is the hero of humorous Arabic folktales. Although it is thought that Juha in Arabs corresponds to Nasreddin Hodja in Turks, the only similarity between them is humor. Because while Nasreddin Hodja is a witty personality, Juha is an idiot.

In one of the folktales, while Juha is walking in a field, a man asks what he is doing. He replies that he buried some money there and is looking for it. Then, the man asks him if he left a mark where he buried the money. Juha says that there was a black cloud just above the place where he buried the money.

Juha has a porter carry his flour sack in another tale, but the porter escapes with the flour. After a while, when Juha sees the porter, he hides. When asked why he is hiding, he says that the porter carried his load before, now he is afraid that he will ask for his fee.

Women

When one of the philosophers whose wisdom can be trusted in every matter sees a hunter talking to a beautiful woman, he advises the hunter not to be the prey. For he has been deceived by women before. Having told this story, Muallim Naci states that everyone who goes to Hasib, a place in Yemen standing out with the beauty of its women, is advised not to spend too much time there to avoid the deception of women.

In a story attributed to Caliph Omar, Omar hears a beautiful woman say, "O men! Women are basil balls created for you. You, on the other hand, always want to smell the basil." Upon this, he says, "Women are demons created for us. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil of Satan."

In another story, while talking to Zayd ibn Harithah, the prophet of Islam asks him if he is married. When Zayd says he is still single, he declares to him that five types of women are not suitable for

marriage; the blue-eyed and abusive one, the thin and tall one, the drunken one, the short and ugly one, and finally, the one who has a child with her first husband.

When Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali tells his sons that he was good to them before they were born, his sons ask how this is possible. He replies that he chose a woman they would not hate as their mother. Then he states that it is an excellent source of happiness for a child to have a mother who can raise her children so that they avoid saying ugly words about their mother and a father who chooses such a woman.

Muallim Naci states that the most suitable choice for marriage is a virgin with a good temperament and says that even Sunbulzade Vehbi, in his book, *Lutfiye*, tells his son not to marry a widow.

Envy

When Ferdowsi comes to Ghazni to complain about the governor of his town, he sits in a garden and sends someone to his friends to inform them about his arrival. While he is praying in the garden, three people are chatting a little further away. These three people are the leading figures of the council of the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud. When Ferdowsi finishes his prayer and walks toward these three men, the three men begin to look for a way to drive this stranger away from them. One of them suggests treating him like a drunk. The other refuses and offers to recite three rhymed lines and ask him for a fourth. If he can't say it, they'll be able to kick him out. This offer is accepted. However, Ferdowsi sings the fourth rhymed line. The three men are surprised and ask him other questions. Ferdowsi impresses them with his knowledge and style, and the three men envy him because Sultan Mahmud is busy preparing a book in the manner of *Shahnameh*, and the presence of someone like Ferdowsi among them is a threat to them. As a matter of fact, after a short time, Sultan Mahmud hands over the writing of the book to Ferdowsi. However, Vizier Hasan Meymandi, from the Kharijites sect, has an attitude against Ferdowsi, who is a devout Shia Muslim. Everyone who envies Ferdowsi is encouraged by the vizier and attributes many things to him. Some claim that he is a Mu'tazila; some argue that he is a materialist; some say that he is a Rafizite, showing what he wrote as evidence. But some defend him. They ask how a man can be a Mu'tazila, a materialist, and a Rafizite simultaneously, but they cannot prevent him from falling out of favor with the sultan.

Muallim Naci states that he tells this story to express that people envy a virtuous person.

Said ibn Jubayr

Said ibn Jubayr is a man from Basra who is involved in the science of hadith and is killed by al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf at the age of forty-nine. Muallim Naci says that his words before al-Hajjaj are proof of his religious endurance and intellectual strength.

Al-Hajjaj first asks Said his name. When Said answers, he says, "No, you are Shaqiy ibn Kusayr." In doing so, al-Hajjaj plays with words. Said means auspicious, while shaqiy means bandit. Jubayr means one who binds broken bones, while kusayr means one who breaks them. After a few questions, he finally wants to know why he never laughs. Said replies that he cannot find anything funny.

Upon this answer, al-Hajjaj brings an oud to play. This time Said starts to cry. Al-Hajjaj asks why he is crying. Said says he is thinking about the Day of Judgment. Al-Hajjaj orders him to be killed. Said laughs when al-Hajjaj's men grab him. Al-Hajjaj asks why he is laughing this time. Said explains that his audacity toward Allah and the gentleness of Allah toward him surprise him; that is why he laughs. Then his head is turned away from the qibla to be killed. When he is about to be killed, he reads a verse from the Qur'an and curses al-Hajjaj. After that day, al-Hajjaj cannot sleep comfortably. He constantly dreams of Said, who asks why he had him killed. He dies six months later.

Muallim Naci says that no abusive person can reach happiness in the end and tells a memory of his own. One day, while the students are reading the Qur'an in turn in front of their hodja, one reads the following verse: "And do not be inclined to the wrongdoers or you will be touched by the Fire." Just then, a man who is famous for his cruelty comes in and sits next to the hodja. He takes out tobacco and offers it to the hodja. Hodja says, "I will not thank you. Because I understand that you want to honor the judgment of the verse that was read when you came in." However, the man does not understand this witty interpretation and replies, "Yes, sir, yes!" After the man leaves, the hodja turns to the students and states that a person cannot be cruel without being ignorant.

Rubai

Muallim Naci complains that no one writes rubai among the Ottoman poets while many Persian poets do, and Omer bin Khayyam is their best. Khayyam, the son of a tentmaker from Nishapur, is a famous tavern keeper, and most of his words are said drunk. Although seemingly disrespectful, his words show the truth. One of the other Persian poets who write rubai is Abu Sa'id Abe'l-Khayr. The different religious orders generally love his writings. Ibn al-Farid is one of the Arab rubai writers.

Muallim Naci describes rubai, stating that the Ottomans do not even know what rubai is. He explains that rubai consists of two couplets. Rhyme is observed in the first and second lines of the first couplet and the second line of the second couplet. Sometimes in all four of the verses, the rhyme is noted. Since the first line of the second couplet doesn't have to have rhyme, it is often not rhymed.

Sheikh Ismail Ankaravî describes rubai in his book, *Miftahül-Belağ'a ve Misbahül-Fesaha*, and shows an example from a Persian poet. Then he gives an example of what he wrote. Muallim Naci criticizes Ankaravî by saying that the example he offers is not rubai but a stanza. He states that some people may find his criticism of such a great person improper, but what wrong is not to ignore such a great person's words.

Surah An-Nahl [The Honey Bees] Verse 90

Muallim Naci says that many people do not know the meaning of verse 90 of Surah An-Nahl, although it is read at the end of every Friday sermon and tells the story behind the verse.

The verse is as follows: "Surely Allah enjoins justice, kindness and the doing of good to kith and kin, and forbids all that is shameful, evil and oppressive. He exhorts you so that you may be mindful."

Ibn Abbas reports that Uthman bin Madhoon converts to Islam because he is ashamed of Muhammad. But one day, when he is with him, the prophet of Islam looks at the sky and his right side a few times, then states that a verse has just been revealed and reads this verse. Under the event's influence, Uthman bin Madhoon goes to Abu Talib and tells him what happened. Thereupon, Abu Talib addresses the Quraysh tribe and asks them to believe his nephew, Muhammad, whether he tells the truth or not since he orders good morals. Following this, Muhammad asks Abu Talib why he does not believe in Islam even though he advises everyone to believe in it and tries to persuade him but cannot succeed.

After this narration, Muallim Naci cites Fakhruddin Razi's explanations about the verse. Accordingly, the verse commands justice, kindness, and helping relatives and prohibits ugly things, misconduct, and rebellion. Justice is necessary to avoid exaggeration in every business. There is compulsion in Moses' religion, ease in Jesus's, and the middle way in Muhammad's. The Ummah of Muhammad is described in the Qur'an with the term "mediocre." Therefore, they are expected to follow the middle path in every business.

What remains outside of justice is either good or evil. One day, when the prophet of Islam asks Gabriel what kindness is, he defines it as worshiping Allah as if you see him because even though people cannot see him, he always sees them. If justice consists of fulfilling the obligatory good deeds, then kindness means more worship than required in terms of quantity and quality. For this reason, kindness is to respect divine orders and to have compassion for people. The highest compassion is presented to relatives.

The three forbidden things, shameful, evil, and oppression, can be explained as follows. Humans are entrusted with four different powers; the force of lust, the wrathful force of predation, the illusory force of the devil, the mental force of angels. Ugly things are known as "fahisha," meaning indecency. Since adultery is defined as "fahisha" in the Qur'an, the first prohibition means not to have sexual relations with anyone except what is permitted. The force of predatory wrath, on the other hand, is associated with harming people. The power of evil delusions is always seeking to invade people and lead them to exceed the implied limits.

Having shared these explanations, Muallim Naci states that after the caliphate is passed to the Umayyads, Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, is insulted at the end of each Friday sermon. But, Caliph Omar bin Abdulaziz changes this tradition and makes it mandatory to read the 90th verse of Surah An-Nahl at the end of the sermons. Since then, this verse has been read at the end of every

Friday sermon. And Muallim Naci, pointing out its meaning, invites people to think about its significance.

Rosy

One day, at a meeting, someone reads a famous couplet by Nâili and says that he would prefer Naili to all living Ottoman poets. Then he reads the first couplet of the ghazal, which includes the couplet he read. Some declare that they could not understand the second verse of the couplet and demand an explanation. The translation of the second verse is as follows: "I am the strange mountain digger, the stone of the pink road." Nâili Pesend Efendi claims that the expression "mountain digger" is Farhad's nickname and the verse means, "I am a lover like poor Farhad. I am the stone of the bloody road, the road of love. I am rolling on that road." A dervish asks for permission to speak about this interpretation and explains that Shirin is a good rider and her horse is called rosy and that Nâili likens himself to Farhad, his beloved one to Shirin, and her red horse to a rose. He adds that the horse of Khosrow, Shirin's other suitor, is also called midnight, and Persian poets often use these two expressions to describe horses. Upon this explanation, everyone expresses their gratitude, and when the dervish responds, "There is always someone who knows more than any knower," they feel delighted.

On Education

One day, Muallim Naci sees a quote by Imam Ali in the foreword of a translated book of the Iranian Arab lexicographer Fîrûzâbâdî. However, he cannot understand it because the passage has not been translated. Searching the dictionaries, he translates it himself and figures that it means: "Sit here nicely. Take the pen. Turn your face to my face. Be so careful that whatever comes out of my mouth, your heart can fully grasp it." Accordingly, Muallim Naci states that looking at the speaker's face enables the listener to learn better and says that the speaker's state also affects the listener.

To illustrate this, he tells a story he heard from a teacher in Varna as a child. In the story, one of the viziers of a ruler cannot pronounce the sound R, and the ruler has a lot of fun with this situation. As the vizier speaks, he always smiles. One day, he asks one of his attendants to write a text full of words with the R sound and hand it over to the vizier to be read. The attendant does what he is told, and when the vizier starts to read the text, the ruler orders him to read it aloud. Then he reads it aloud, but the text he reads is not the text that the attendant has prepared. As soon as he sees the text, he replaces the words with synonyms without the sound R. As the ruler realizes his vizier's trick, he rewards him.

Editing

Muallim Naci writes a ghazal in Varna. There is an expression in the ghazal: "O Naci's pen, poets are envious, shut up!" He wants to show his ghazal to a poet who stays there for a short period. But the poet has already learned about this ghazal. People have told him that the envious person implied in the line is him. One day, the poet comes to Naci's place, talks about poetry, reads couplets, and praises himself. When he gets tired of talking, he asks Muallim Naci about his ghazals. Then, Muallim Naci writes a couplet and shows it to him. The poet expresses his appreciation but takes the pen and changes the words. Muallim Naci objects to this situation because the meaning of the couplet has changed. Finally, the poet tells him that wherever he goes, he wants to see famous people there, that he likes him very much and leaves. Having shared this memory, Muallim Naci underlines that pretending to know something makes a person look ignorant.

Raffaello

One day, Muallim Naci comes across a story about Raffaello in a French book written for children. Raffaello is very ill but longs to finish a painting he started. He goes to his workshop, leaning on the shoulder of a student. When he sees the picture he wants to finish among the unfinished works, he starts to cry and collapses. There is no sound in the workshop for two minutes. Then he suddenly gets up, and a student puts the brush in his hand. When he is happy with what he has created, he feels dizzy, and his brush falls from his hand. They immediately put him to bed, and he dies shortly after.

When Muallim Naci reads this story, he convinces himself that everyone can be like Raffaello by working hard. Talent is vital because unless a person has talent, no matter how hard he works, he cannot be successful in a field, but a talented person cannot be successful without working hard

either. Thus, it is pathetic to see a person, who has the quality of a good entertainer, become a water seller, and the Ottoman Empire has been the grave of many such talents.

Die to Live

In the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth century, a painter named David Teniers lives in Europe. This painter, envied by his contemporaries, can never earn enough to support his family. Finally, he decides to sell all the works he has finished and spreads the news throughout the town. On the day of the sale, many people come from different places. One of them tries to devalue the artist by claiming that all the paintings cost only ten francs. After arguing with this person for a while, Teniers disperses the crowd saying that he has given up selling his works. When his wife asks how they will survive, he says he will die. He spreads the news of his death. His family organizes a funeral. This time, everyone, including the person trying to devalue the paintings, starts to tell how great a painter Teniers is, and all his works are sold far above their value. After they're all sold, Teniers returns to town and lives a prosperous life with his family.

Having shared this anecdote, Muallim Naci states that Teniers' adventure confirms Abdullah Vassaf's statement: "A wise man never be appreciated in his age." He says that people always dismiss new ideas. Only after the creator of the idea dies can people understand it because the idea is a reality now. Therefore, he claims that dismissal or acceptance of an idea is a judgment of time.

Form and Content

Muallim Naci, sharing couplets from an ode of Selman Saveci, a famous Persian poet, states that another couplet is formed with words removed from two or three couplets. Hence, the poet tried hard to make the ode look artistic but left it lacking in meaning. He likens a meaningless poem consisting of beautiful words to a mannequin in a beautiful dress and a poem, which expresses colorful meanings with pale words to an improper dress on a beautiful woman. He explains that Saadi and Hâfez are socially accepted names because they give importance to meaning and form.

Love Between Poets

Muallim Naci says that if a man is not a poet, he should not love a poet. Because lovers write a lot of poetry in letters, and if one party fails, he can put himself in a difficult situation. To give an example of this, he cites a story he encountered in literature books.

A young Arab man falls in love with a beautiful young girl. However, the girl's father does not permit them to marry because the young man is poor. The girl secretly writes a letter to her lover to tell him that she will wait for him for two years and that he should leave the country to work and earn money. The young man does what the girl suggests. But after a while, the young girl hears that her lover got married. After that, a correspondence begins between them, and both respond to each other with couplets. Finally, when the girl's father is about to die, the girl asks her lover to come back, and the young man comes back.

Muallim Naci states that people should not judge the young girl for announcing her father's death as if it was the good news because for a father to expect full loyalty from his child, he must first recognize the rights of his child. For if a man is corrupt as a father, his child also has the right to corrupt.

Curiosity

Muallim Naci says that no matter how talented a man is, he must be curious to become a master in a field. Whoever has become a master of something is because of his curiosity. Accordingly, at a meeting, someone recounts a story that he saw in a French book. In his youth, the Portuguese poet Camoes falls in love with the daughter of a noble family. Although he comes from a respectable family, he is exiled from Lisbon because he is poor and lonely. While dealing with his work, *The Lusíads*, he writes an effective satire against the governor's mismanagement in exile. Then, he is exiled from there, too. After spending four or five years, he completes *The Lusíads*. When the ship he boards to return to Lisbon is caught in a storm, he jumps into the sea with other men. To not lose his completed work in the water, he lifts it with one hand and swims with the other. In the end, he saves both himself and his work.

Those who listen to this story say that if the poet were to lose that work, there would be no one to mention his name, and then one of them tells another story. Rûhi Dede is a ney player. Because of his interest in neys, he always carries a bag full of neys. One day, the boat he is on is capsized. When people take him to the shore, they see that he holds a bag full of neys.

Having listened to both stories, people at the meeting decide that what makes the poet and the ney player master in their fields is their curiosity.

Anecdotes

Muallim Naci shares a few religious anecdotes without any comment.

Hasan of Basra has a disciple who throws himself on the ground whenever he hears the Qur'an being recited. One day, Hasan says to him, "If you are capable of not doing what you are doing, you are a hypocrite. If you are not able, let me give you the good news, you have exceeded your sheik."

When one of the Basra sheiks insults the worldly pleasures before Rabia al-Adawiyya, Rabia says, "I think you love the world very much. If you didn't like it, you wouldn't mention it so much. If you have renounced the worldly pleasures, you would not mention them much."

When Sufyan al-Thawra's neighbor dies, he goes to the funeral. After the prayer, someone says about the deceased, "He was a very good man. No one is displeased with him." Sufyan replies, "Why didn't you tell me beforehand that he was a hypocrite? I wouldn't come to the funeral prayer. To please everyone means to be a hypocrite."

One day, someone asks Sheikh Abul-Abbas Ibnul Kasab to show miracles. He replies, "I was a butcher who wandered around the city in the hope of making some money every day. Now I am in a place where many men from all over the world come to visit me. Do you seek a greater miracle than this?"

When Imam Abu Hanifa sees a boy trying not to step on the mud on the road, he warns him not to fall. The boy responds to him: "If I fall, I won't hurt anyone but myself. But if your foot slips, the feet of thousands of people of Islam who follow you will also slip. Then it will be difficult to lift you."

Appearance

Muallim Naci asserts that one of the strange features of people is that they pretend to be someone different and says that he saw an article in the newspaper, *Tarik*, about an article he wrote under the title, *Madrasa Memories*, in the newspaper, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. In this article, it is claimed that he mistranslated a couplet. Muallim Naci points to the signature under the article and states that it was written by someone else because the signature belongs to a fifteen-year-old boy. By expressing that a fifteen-year-old child cannot know the correct or incorrect translation of a couplet, he implies that the child's teacher wrote the text. After criticizing the correction made on his translation in the article, he prays for the protection of children from teachers who are incapable of explaining themselves.

Themes

Receptiveness Muallim Naci aims to define the mind, love, stupidity, women, and many other things. For this purpose, he gives references to people from different sects without excluding any scholars: a Mu'tazila theologian, Thumama, the founder of the Thawri sect, Sufyan, and a Sunni theologian, Abu Hanifa. He also uses the stories of people from different nationalities to illustrate better what he wants to tell. In this way, he uses every channel to access the accumulated knowledge that helps him make sense of life.

Anonymized Experience Muallim Naci typifies certain human behaviors by conveying specific experiences of certain people under a few titles. For example, concerning what happened to Ferdowsi in Ghazni, he points out that people who stand out with their achievements will surely fall victim to the envy of others. By referring to Said ibn Jubayr, he asserts that the oppressors are ignorant and will never find peace in the end. By David Teniers's story, he argues that people value artists and intellectuals only after their death. With the anecdote regarding the correspondence of two poets, he claims that when a father is unfair to his child, he will experience a similar injustice from his child. Thus, all these subjective experiences become objectified by being transformed into typified

experiences. The meaning of envy, cruelty, ignorance, and injustice becomes something that can be understood and experienced by everyone who reads these anecdotes.

Misogyny All of what Muallim Naci tells about women consists of statements that contain serious prejudices and negative judgments about women. While it is implied that evil is inherent in femininity, the good qualities of a woman who can be a mother respected by her children are described as a character trait belonging to the person.

Mastery His comments on rubai, his criticism of the poet who wants to edit his couplet, his evaluations of form and content, and his response to criticisms of his translations imply that his mastery cannot be questioned.

Bibliography

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