

## **Returning to the Fundamentals: Sa'adeh's Call for a Literature of Life**

**By Dr Edmond Melhem**

Sa'adeh sparked the issue of fundamental philosophical thought and called upon creators of thought and art, including writers, poets, intellectuals, musicians, and students of science and philosophy, to adopt his new perspective on life, the universe, and art, and to produce their works in its light. He urged them to delve deeper into their studies through new cultural, philosophical, literary, and economic research that elucidates the matters and issues addressed by his new outlook. This research should also shift thought from superficial and ordinary perceptions, as well as conventional thinking, to the fundamentals: to the noble aims of thought and emotion, and the "major fundamental issues of life and existence, in addition to practical life matters."<sup>1</sup>

In Sa'adeh's opinion, the noble fundamental issues encompass the individual's concern - the human being and society, the purpose of human existence, the issue of the nation, and working for its interest, as well as the preservation of its safety, unity, and life. They also encompass communal human values such as freedom, duty, order, power, justice, goodness, beauty, and more.<sup>2</sup> In a guiding address that Sa'adeh sent to Dr. Charles Malik after the latter gifted him a copy of a speech in English that he delivered at the American University of Beirut titled "The Meaning of Philosophy," Sa'adeh states:

It is commendable that ordinary perception thinks of Democritus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Zeno, and Nietzsche. But when I contemplate philosophy, I do not think of these names. Instead, I think of the very same fundamental truths and ultimate psychological goals that these philosophers pondered.<sup>3</sup>

To unveil the true essence of the Syrian mentality and its depths, Sa'adeh called for the revival of the spiritual and intellectual Syrian heritage and for the revelation of the achievements of

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1 From al-Za'im to Dr. Charles Malek, *al-Nizam al-Jadid*, Beirut, vol. 1, 01/03/1948.

2 Antun Sa'adeh. *Intellectual Struggle in Syrian Literature*, op. cit., p. 67.

3 From al-Za'im to Dr. Charles Malek, *al-Nizam al-Jadid*, Beirut, vol. 1, 01/03/1948.

this cultural mentality. He urged a return to the roots of civilization and the original Syrian myths imbued with philosophical significance within human existence. He requested Syrian writers and poets to acquaint themselves with these 'precious spiritual treasures' and to explore the inherent philosophical and artistic inspirations in their nation's nature. "This understanding would enable them to create rich, beautiful, and enduring literature that uncovers the grand aspirations and noble aims of the psyche."<sup>4</sup> The literature he called for is

the literature of life; that is, the literature that comprehends our lives, accompanies us in our development and expresses our loftiest ideals and aspirations derived from the essence of our people, their temperament, history, and psychological identity, as well as the elements of their life.<sup>5</sup>

He continued,

To the realm of Syrian gods, conscious writers must make a pilgrimage and wander. They should return from their explorations, bringing with them literature that allows us to discover our psychological truth amidst the grand issues of life that had been addressed in our myths. These myths hold a place in human thought and feeling that transcends all that is known and understood of matters of thought and sentiment.<sup>6</sup>

He added,

Now, addressing all Syrian poets on my part, I say: Let's come together and raise a beacon of light for this nation that struggles in darkness. Let's shine with the light of our truth, the hope of our will, and the health of our lives. Let's come forward to build castles of love, wisdom, beauty, and hope for our nation, using the materials about the history of our Syrian nation and her talents. Let's draw from the philosophies of her mythologies and their teachings, which deal with the major issues of human life.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Antun Sa'adeh. *Intellectual Struggle in Syrian Literature*, op. cit., p. 45.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 64.

7 Ibid., pp. 64-65.