

## DEALING WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES THROUGH READING RELIGIOUS TEXTS: BROADENING THE SCOPE OF BIBLIOTHERAPY

Mehmet ATALAY (\*)

### Abstract

*Compared to science and philosophy, religion constitutes the most consistent and integrative explanations about such issues and questions as the meaning of life, the purpose of life, where we are coming from, and where we are headed.*

*The old yet scarcely obsolete wisdom embedded in basic religious texts might prove effective in dealing with psychological traumas. Empirical evidence suggests that religious texts can provide people with high self-esteem, strong sense of responsibility, and courage to face and deal with calamity.*

*Thus, the whole range of experts in clinical practice should not choose to be oblivious to the wisdom inherent or immanent in religious texts, insofar as they are beneficial and insightful concerning psychological treatment. In this context, it has been proposed that there should be interaction between the experts of clinical practice and the scholars of religion. The outcome, nonetheless, would only be beneficial to all if nothing more.*

**Key Words:** Psychological Challenges, Bibliotherapy, Religious Texts, Islamic Texts.

### **Dinsel Metin Okuyarak Psikolojik Zorluklarla Başa Çıkmak: Bibliyoterapinin Kapsamını Genişletmek** Özet

*Bilim ve felsefe alanlarına kıyasla din; hayatın anlamı, hayatın amacı, 'nereden geliyoruz?' ve 'nereye gidiyoruz?' gibi konu ve sorular üzerinde en tutarlı ve kapsamlı açıklamalar sağlar.*

*Dinsel metinlerde için olan eski fakat asla eskimez hikmetler (bilgelik), psikolojik zorluklarla başa çıkmada etkili olabilmektedir. Deneysel kanıtlar dinsel metinlerin, insanlara; yüksek özgüven, kuvvetli sorumluluk duygusu ve 'musibet' durumlarıyla yüzleşme ve onlarla başa çıkma cesareti sağladığını göstermektedir.*

*Dolayısıyla, klinik uygulama alanının uzmanları, dinsel metinlerde için veya onların özünde mevcut olan hikmetlere, bu hikmetlerin psikolojik tedavi bağlamında doğrudan doğruya faydalı veya öngörü sağlayıcı olması hasebiyle, duyarsız kalmayı seçmemesi gerekir. Bu bağlamda, klinik uygulama uzmanları ile din bilginleri arasında etkileşim olması gerektiği öngörülmektedir. Her şeye rağmen sonuç ise, şayet daha fazlası değilse, en azından herkesin yararına olacaktır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Psikolojik Zorluklar, Bibliyoterapi, Dinsel Metinler, İslami Metinler.

\*) Dr. Mehmet Atalay is an assistant professor teaching psychology of religion in the Faculty of Theology at Istanbul University. (E-mail: atatalay@yahoo.com). An early version of this paper was orally and extemporaneously presented at *The International Conference on Mental Health in a Socio-Cultural Perspective* (October 5-7, 2010) held in Al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia (KSA), which was organized by Saudi Psychiatric Association. This work was supported by the Scientific Projects Coordination Unit (BAP) of Istanbul University and the author would like to offer his thanks to the Coordination Unit of Istanbul University for its support.

## Introduction

Psychology is simply defined as the study of both mind and behavior. The definition in itself points out the two major aspects of the discipline of psychology: on the one hand, psychology is related and close to scientific research; on the other hand, it is related and close to philosophical investigation and religion for that matter. Psychology was never completely inimical to religion.

One can wholeheartedly contend that psychology along with sociology were the two major products of positivism, a new philosophical orientation that came into existence in the 19th century and, with its stark approach to epistemology, heavily shaped the modern mind. In a way, it was psychology –and perhaps together with the discipline of sociology– that was supposed to meet or deal with the religious needs of modern people. So, if nothing else, it was in the nature of psychology to deal with and further harvest the wisdom embedded in the fundamental religious texts of the world literature.

The perception that psychology and religion are essentially two different realms of investigation hostile to one another and they cannot be integrated at all became widespread was mainly the effect of Sigmund Freud's book *The Future of an Illusion* (1964), which laid out the focal point of divergence between modern science and religion. However, to reintegrate psychology and religion and to reestablish the fact that they are not intrinsically inimical to each other, one might go back to the same book of Freud. Because he "believed that he had disproved the reality of God, but his appreciation of religious values may be surprising to some who have misunderstood him" (Biddle, 1955: 17). In *The Future of an Illusion*, a manifesto concerning religion, Freud says the following:

"What... is the psychological significance of religions ideas and under what heading are we to classify them? The question is not at all easy to answer immediately: After rejecting a number of formulations, we will take our stand on the following one. Religious ideas are teachings and assertions about facts and conditions of external (or internal) reality which tell one something one has not discovered for oneself and which lay claim to one's belief. Since they give us information about what is most important and interesting to us in life, they are particularly highly prized. Anyone who knows nothing of them is very ignorant; and anyone who has added them to his knowledge may consider himself much the richer" (1964: 37).

It is interesting and rewarding to realize that Freud's major quarrel was not with religion itself, it was with religious dogma. In this regard, Freud himself brings forth two arguments with respect to the value of religious dogma(s) and dismisses them easily. The first argument is the position of '*credo quia absurdum*' maintaining that when/if religious dogmas are outside the realm of reason, they are above the reason. The second argument is that since religious dogmas do not appeal to reason, people have to act 'as if' they still believe in them considering them all as products of fiction. Freud dismisses both of the

arguments by rendering the former being “only of interest as a self-confession” and the latter as “not being eligible at all to meet the needs of reason” (1964: 43-45). However, it is apparent that Freud does not rule out the practical value and usefulness of religion and thus the wisdom inherent in religious texts.

Although there is not a clear-cut agreement among the scholars of psychologically-oriented scientific investigation on the place of religion in clinical practice and particularly psychotherapy, many of them readily came to grasp its functionality concerning effective therapy (Biddle, 1955: 19-20). Moreover, Gordon Allport, for instance, “finds no conflict between science and religion and comes to the astonishing conclusion that religion is superior to prayer therapy in dealing with emotional problems” (Biddle, 1955: 19). At the very least, according to Allport, “insofar as the clergy is the better able to deal with issues of basic belief, values, and orientation toward life, he has an inescapable role to play in the conversation and advancement of mental health” (1960: 96). The need to make use of religion and thus religious wisdom in clinical practices around the time Gordon Allport voiced his ideas was not really called into account among the professionals of clinical expertise. However, in our age, which might perfectly be called as a post-modern era where the borders between science, philosophy and religion are blurred, the idea of full integration between religion and clinical practices seems to be more reasonable and convenient than before. People of clinical profession can employ religion or at least make use of it in almost every branch of clinical practice.

That, of course, might include bibliotherapy that does not only add up to the active involvement of the client in the process of psychotherapy but also calls into account insights about the very phenomenon of ‘reading’. The involvement or the active engagement of the client in the process bibliotherapy mostly means the attempts of the client with the help and professional guidance of the therapist to increase this/her our level of education and sophistication. All helpful and further promising as a genius idea and application in the process of psychotherapy, the scope of bibliotherapy can be broadened to also include fundamental religious texts and/or the written works inspired by them.

Before going further, two points should be made. The first point is that one is reminded of the fact that the very idea of bibliotherapy aimed at helping the client is in perfect accordance with the whole psychological theory of Erik Erikson, the architect of modern psychohistory. Basically, according to Erikson, personality development does not get determined and certainly does not stop a specific point at the life cycle of the individual; on the contrary, it goes on through the life span of the individual and thus it is rather an ongoing process (Erikson, 1980). It might be contented that bibliotherapy as an idea has its precedent-like substance in the psychology of crisis introduced by Erikson. Moreover, inasmuch as the fact that bibliotherapy is mostly about the client educating himself/herself only with the help of the therapist, it is likely to increase up the success promise of the whole enterprise. People who are in need of psychological help do not have to get something fixed on their bodies and minds all the time. At least sometimes, they too might fix it themselves. In other words, self-education can be more effective than any

other, and in some cases it can be the only effective way than any other as the following maxim brought forth by Oscar Wilde implied: “Education is an admirable thing. But it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught” (1994: 1203).

The second point with respect to the very idea of bibliotherapy centers on the Turkish word ‘*okumak*’. Along with the simple meaning of reading, the Turkish word *okumak* also means *to learn* and *to have education* (Sâmi, 1985). If nothing else, the Turkish word *okumak* emphasizes the connection between reading and education.<sup>1</sup> It might be seen as pointing out the substance of bibliotherapy as it is being not just about the client reading some assigned texts helping him/her find out that there are other people who have similar problems. Bibliotherapy is also about the client simply educating himself/herself. Reading is perhaps the best way of the individual’s educating himself/herself. One can find out that the great figures in human history were almost always the ones who were into reading or some type of heavily reading-related education. In short, the Turkish word *okumak* gives away the essence of bibliotherapy as it is mostly about self-education.<sup>2</sup>

Reading conducive to self-education is the very essence of bibliotherapy. Of course, it is not just casual reading that is promoted in the context of bibliotherapy. The simple value of the phenomenon of reading aside, what is crucial in bibliotherapy is how to read and perhaps in what order to read. That is why bibliotherapy involves the help of the therapist and assigned readings. Consequently, the scope of bibliotherapy can be broadened as to also include religious texts and written works inspired by religious texts.

### **Bibliotherapy: Nature and Scope**

As a relatively new realm of cognitive therapy, bibliotherapy might simply be seen as suggesting the client to read a written material about a topic as opposed to directly adopting a teacher-like role (Nietzel, Bernstein, Milich, 1998: 239). And the major benefit of bibliotherapy is described as getting the client informed about the people who have similar problems and how they received professional help and perhaps how they changed in time (Drake, 1970: 145).

Therefore, one can contend that there are three major aspect of bibliotherapy: 1) It is about the client reading written materials (books, articles, etc.). 2) In the process of bibliotherapy, the role of the therapist would be minimized, provided that there in a therapist involved. 3) The benefit that the client in expected to derive from bibliotherapy is to harvest information, knowledge, and insights from the reading materials concerning his/her psychological problems.

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1) In Turkish culture, it is almost customary to call educated people ‘*okumuş*’, meaning ‘the ones who have read’. As an example of this usage of the word that appeared in a short story, see: (Baykurt, 1975: 16).

2) One should note that a Turkish author and columnist, Oktay Akbal, seemingly out of his respect toward reading books, suggests that people read books instead of newspapers (1979).

There is ample evidence indicating the positive effects of bibliotherapy on people seeking professional help. For example, “Dr. Forest Scogin and his colleagues at the University of Alabama studied the effects of simply reading a good self-help book like *Feeling Good* – without any other therapy. The name of this new type of treatment is ‘bibliotherapy’ (reading therapy). They discovered that *Feeling Good* bibliotherapy may be as effective as a full course of psychotherapy or treatment with the best antidepressant drugs” (Burns, 2009: xxiii).

One can see that bibliotherapy is as old as the first clinical treatment in human history and therefore what scholars of relevant disciplines have been trying to do is just put it out there in the best tangible way possible. In other words, “every form of therapy we use today has its ancestry in the past. ‘There is nothing new under the sun’” (Biddle, 1955: 29-30). For example, “hydrotherapy is probably the most ancient treatment” because of the simple fact that water was always universally available and its use in clinical treatment was recorded in some ancient documents (Biddle, 1954; 30).<sup>3</sup>

It seems that when tracing back bibliotherapy in history its relevance to religions becomes easily conceived following the rationale embedded in the following aphorism: ‘There is nothing new under the sun’. Although bibliotherapy today is still widely used and referred to in clinical treatment of children with mood disorders, it seems perfectly reasonable to think that its antecedent in history must be related to religious texts because of their availability even in ancient societies.

As a type of therapy that goes back to ancient times, there is also music therapy, the use of music in clinical treatments of the individuals (Yiğitbaş, 1972). One can find out that there are studies pointing out the effectiveness of music therapy. For instance, an empirical study showed that there is positive correlation between music therapy and the health of unborn babies (Yiğitbaş, 1968: 4). But more interestingly, music therapy was also linked to religious texts, and this puts forth at the very least the importance of them when trying to find the antecedents of the modern methods in clinical treatment (Yiğitbaş, 1968: 29).

### **Bibliotherapy and Literary Works**

Generally, the descriptions concerning the scope of bibliotherapy center on the role of therapist and the written materials involved in that process. Prochaska and Norcross give the following account about bibliotherapy:

“Bibliotherapy involves the client’s learning about herself and her environment through reading. Reading books and articles relevant to therapeutic issues educates the client and reduces the knowledge differential between the therapist and the client. Popular examples are books related to assertion, sexual abuse, women’s health, codependency, work place discrimination, relationship conflicts, and family-of-origin concerns” (2010: 384).

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3) For some information in a nutshell on music therapy and praying therapy, see: (Safa, 1978: 73).

Although bibliotherapy appears to be in its infancy stage, there are two crucial aspects that might also determine its future: the role of the therapist or the individual providing professional help and written materials involved in the process of bibliotherapy. The above-mentioned excerpt might be seen as reducing the role of the therapist to a minimum level. The following account on bibliotherapy extends the scope of the written materials to be read in the process of bibliotherapy. According Sperry and Giblin:

“It is important to assess the impact of literature, movies, and videos on clients and the therapeutic process as well. In cases where readings chosen by clients may serve to maintain their rigid defensiveness, readings prescribed by therapists may economically expand perspectives, correct misinformation, challenge misperceptions, and contribute to a sense of belonging and understanding. Clinicians need to have read whatever they assign, must follow up on their assignments, and must process client understanding or interpretation of the material” (2005: 528).

As can be seen, the scope of the written materials involved in the process of bibliotherapy, the use of books within therapeutic contexts, is expanded from the books related to therapeutic issues to general works of literature. To include the use of literary works such as novels and poetry is important and one major step ahead in terms of the developmental process of bibliotherapy because “literature is an insurmountable realm of information or education” (Yücel, 2001: 210). Of course, “literature might be seen as a realm of knowledge but the kind of knowledge it provides is not scientific knowledge” (Yücel, 2001: 218). However, the works of literature can be more enriching than any other; for instance, the characters (protagonists) and the incidents of a novel that we like might seem to us more vivid than the real people” (Yücel, 2001: 129). At this point, following the wisdom immanent in the Turkish work ‘*okumak*’ that has both the meanings of reading and getting educated, it is worthy of mention that the notable Turkish literary theorist and novelist Tahsin Yücel equates an educated man with the one who simply reads novels: “If you ask me, an educated man (*‘okumuş adam’*) is not the one who acquired diplomas, he is rather the man who reads novels” (2001: 129).

Inasmuch as literary works should be included in the process of bibliotherapy, novels are especially important in that they turned out to be a branch of literature that outpaced theatrical plays and became rightly competing with poetry through the end of the eighteenth century (Forster, 2001: 9). Novels, as well as other types of literary work, are not just about the stories of human beings; they are definitely more than that. The insights that the readers might have into novels can be as deep and far-reaching as either need or momentum of their interest, understanding, and search for meaning of life.<sup>4</sup> To give an example, Turkish

4) It would be worth mentioning here that according to a Turkish literary historian and critic, Mehmet Kaplan, “the age we live in is an age of science and novel” (1978: 294) and, therefore, novels deserve to be in the same line with sciences because “both psychological and sociological investigations today have shown us that there are fundamental facts and truths concealed in the old tales and

intellectual and literary critic and theorist Rasim Özdenören, who believes for himself that every novel is ‘a separate universe’, states the following: “I do read novels because I want to attain a consciousness of my human existence” (1997: 111).

Novels and other types of literary work(s) are not merely about telling stories and experiences about human beings. That is one thing. However, even if we resort back to the very analytic idea that they are about telling stories and relating experiences about human beings, then the whole idea of reading novels in the process of bibliotherapy as a therapeutic endeavor comes down to the following statement made by Danish author and novelist Isak (Karen) Dinesen: “All sorrows can be borne; if you put them into a story or tell a story about them” (as cited in Arendt, 1958: 175). Of course, one might ask: how is this statement going to be applied to the reader, since he/she is not the one who puts the sorrows into a story or tells a story about them? The answer to this question has everything to do with the general tendency of the reader in the face of a novel: identification. No wonder there was such an expression written on the top of the door at the entrance of a library as the following: ‘The place where the soul of man is healed’ (Öner, 2007: 135).<sup>5</sup>

Readers generally identify with the characters of the novels they read and particularly with the characters of the novels they like. Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina, a master of reading to the extent that he might even be described as a mystical reader, alludes to the tendency of the readers to identify with the character of the novel when describing a Mr. Villari, the main character of his short story called *The Wait (Bekleyiş)*: “Unlike people reading novels, Mr. Villari did not see himself as one of the characters of an artistic work” (Borges, 2001: 123).

Identifying with the characters of the novels lead into the therapeutic effect embedded in them. However, before going further on identification issue, one quick way of establishing the therapeutic effect of the novels on the readers would be looking into the testimonies of the story writers with respect the therapeutic effect of writing upon them. In this regard, I should like to include two important figures of storytelling, Sait Faik Abasıyanık of Turkey and Graham Greene of England.

To begin with the latter, according to Graham Greene, the whole enterprise of writing is a form of therapy. He says:

“Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation” (1999: 9).

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myths” (1978: 281). Likewise, according to Stefan Zweig, “those who were able to look to the contemporary man’s soul are neither the philosophers nor the psychologists; on the contrary, they are the poets who surpassed the limitations of any kind” (2000: 209-10).

- 5) An account concerning the Italian adventurer and author Giacomo Casanova given by Stefan Zweig would be very interesting to note here. According to Zweig, Casanova had to write in order not to go crazy or die: “His writing his memoirs was the only remedy in order not to go crazy or not to die simply because of his... sorrow” (1993: 104).

The testimony of this sort regarding the therapeutic effect of writing that was given by Sait Faik Abasıyanık may be more dramatic than that of Greene. It actually constitutes the last paragraph of a short story written by Abasıyanık in the first person. And the paragraph is regarded as indicative of this genuinely psychological state in regard to writing (Naci, 2003: 52, 98). Abasıyanık says the following:

“I had promised to myself: that I would not even write. Writing was nothing but a powerful desire for me. I was going to nicely wait here just like decent people for my death; what did I need ambition and rage for? But I was not able to do it. Suddenly, I ran to a tobacco shop and got a pen and a clean paper. I simply sat down. Then, I took out the jackknife I had on me in my pocket to chisel little sticks in case I would get bored. I sharpened the pencil with it. Afterwards, I looked at it for a short while and simply kissed it. I would have gone crazy had I not written something then” (2010: 61).

One can find many testimonies on the therapeutic effect of writing on people who write as hobby or both hobby and profession. In this context, the idea of bibliotherapy would be claim that the same therapeutic effect that can be harvested out of writing can also be conveyed to the realm of reading. Writing and reading are close to one another in value and nature considering that they are the two main components along with mathematics (arithmetic) of the most basic analytic education shortly called as 3R (reading, writing, and arithmetic [arithmetic]). In other words, if we repeat the question we asked before: how is the reader supposed to get a therapeutic effect since he is not the one who ‘puts the sorrows into a story or tells a story about them?’ In the context of answering this question, the wisdom stemming from bibliotherapy points out the concept and the phenomenon of identification. Moreover, the reader not only gets to be identified with the characters of the literary works he/she might also get to be identified with the authors. The reader might inevitably feel that he/she is the one who is telling the story. The point is perhaps best expressed by the French philosopher and novelist Jean-Paul Sartre. According to him, “reading seems, in fact, to be the synthesis of perception and creation” (2001: 31) and “to read a book is to rewrite it” (2001: 248).

Reading might be and perhaps is more important than writing and even writing professionally since it absolutely paves the way for being a good writer. At this point, one is reminded of Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina, probably the most important contemporary figure who dramatically stressed the importance of reading even in the context of the profession of writing. He simply said the following: “Good readers are fewer than good writers” (2001: 11). Borges was so into reading as a writer that one can even describe him as a mystical reader, that one can assert that he seemingly promoted and exemplified some type of mysticism or meditation through reading. He preferred to describe himself as a good reader rather than a good writer, though he was a great one:

“I once said, others brag of the books they’ve managed to write; I brag of the books I’ve managed to read. I don’t know if I am a good writer, but I

think I am an excellent reader, or in any case, a sensitive and grateful one”  
(2001: 513).

In short, Borges’ suggestion that one should brag of reading rather than writing seems to contain at least a grain of truth that bibliotherapy is and has always been out there and to promote it is just to realize it in a lot of different ways.<sup>6</sup> Bibliotherapy can be a major way of providing help in clinical treatment and the possibility of its being recognized as one of the mainstream methods of treatment is beyond a wishful prediction. It involves full engagement of the client in the process of treatment and it is most probably apt to make way for a complete self-therapy.

As reading feeds both mind and heart, making use of both fiction and non-fiction is included in the process of bibliotherapy. In other words, bibliotherapy is not only aimed at getting help from literature of non-fiction and implementing it in the therapeutic process, it also involves making use of literature of fiction, which brings forth an idea about the scope of bibliotherapy insofar as it is related to written works as extensive as the highest category of literature (written words) pertaining to science, literature, philosophy and even religion. Regarding the use of both fiction and non-fiction in the context of bibliotherapy, one of the pioneers of bibliotherapy contends the following: “Didactic literature [non-fiction] may contribute to the reader’s understanding of this motivations and behavior... [and it is] more apt to contribute to man’s intellectual awareness whereas imaginative literature [fiction] is more likely to afford the reader an emotional experience without which effective therapy is impossible” (Shrodes, 1950: 33).<sup>7</sup>

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- 6) It might bring about a sad feeling to point out that people in our age generally are ‘prone’ to be under the influence of ‘visual culture’ instead of becoming good and avid readers. On the contrary, one should realize the fact that great minds and hearts throughout history were categorically familiar with the written word, i.e., with the written materials. In other words, reading was an essential part of their life. Take the case of Carl Gustav Jung, as an example. While he was an associate professor on his way to be promoted with full professorship he readily made the puzzling decision to leave his university post. And it was all because he wanted to be able to read more and more (Jung, 1961). However, one is obliged to still keep the hope that people might come back to the old habit of reading, given that “mankind does not like quick pleasures” (Kaplan, 1978: 211).
- 7) When we look into the influence that the classical writers had on both the nations they were born into and the others we can easily appreciate the importance and the value of fictional literature in the department of bibliotherapeutic help. For an example, take the work of Shakespeare. A Turkish novelist and essayist, Tarık Buğra, made the following remarks about the importance of Shakespeare: “A famous English politician in the House of Commons once said: ‘The greatness of Britain does not come from the Honorable Queen; it comes from Shakespeare.’ Shakespeare was just a writer. If England, which is left sitting high and dry, is still a great country or at least can claim to be one, it is through Shakespeare or through the fact that she managed to preserve her great writers including of course Shakespeare” (1995: 402). Buğra goes on to also say the following: “In the history of nations’ civilization, about half of the books are their literary works” (1995: 402).

### **Bibliotherapy and Philosophy**

It can be asserted that bibliotherapy's inclusion of non-fictional works of literature along with books, or in a large sense written materials, related to clinical issues may constitute its connection to philosophical and religious texts for that matter. On the one hand, both philosophy and religion have their own merits as integrative realms of explanation(s) or disciplines. They might provide help to people who already have some familiarity and acceptance with philosophical and religious explanations. On the other hand, one should note that the line between what is merely literary, philosophical and religious is not always all clear; often times it is actually blurred. Thus, just as a book of Sufism, for instance, may also be categorized as a book of literature, it may as well be included in the process of bibliotherapy. Furthermore, even the classification of fictional and non-fictional literatures, insofar as they meet different needs of people, may apply to Sufi books. For example, Michaela Mihriban Özsel testifies that in her 40 day-experience of day-time fasting and isolation from people, which is called in Sufism as *khalvet* (isolation or loneliness), she greatly benefited from Rumi's and Ibn Arabi's books: "I am happy with the books I was advised to read during *khalvet* [seclusion]. The Honorable Rumi's sharp analogies and love words and Ibn Arabi's calm and academic approach are just complementary for each other" (2003: 66).<sup>8</sup>

So, when talking about stories effecting human emotions, we are not only talking about literary works we are also talking about philosophical and religious texts. First of all, religious texts and particularly fundamental religious texts contain stories of ancient times. Sometimes a novel is not just a book telling a story etc., it is also a philosophical book; the story functions as a vehicle to make it easy for the reader to 'swallow' the philosophical accounts that were laid down in that book. In other words, the story in the book of story functions as the outer layer of a pill. One should also keep in mind that the great works of philosophy and the fundamental texts of world religions are all great pieces of literature. This point in the case of the fundamental Christian texts was nicely put forward novelist and essayist Iris Murdoch as the following: "The great artist, like the great saint, calms us by a kind of unassuming simple lucidity, he speaks with the voice that we hear in Homer and in Shakespeare and in the Gospels" (1999: 242).

Stories in the works of literature, philosophy, and in the fundamental texts of world religions have a similar function: they help or even provide people (the readers) with their emotional release through identification. Aristotle actually coined the term 'catharsis'

8) It should also be noted here that reading must not be an end rather than the means to reach an end. The idea becomes apparent when looking into the case of Rumi, the great Turkish scholar and sufi who was absolutely an avid reader and, to use the words of Turkish philosopher Nermi Uygur, "was an endless ocean of books" (2001: 103): "Rumi was a man who read books constantly. On one occasion, his spiritual teacher, Shams, took the book that Rumi was reading and threw it into a pool full of water" (Kaplan, 1978: 7). Perhaps Shams was trying to convey to Rumi the same idea that reading should not be utilized as an end. In order to expand on the point, one should like to take into consideration that, according to the French novelist Marcel Proust, "reading is on the threshold of the spiritual life; it can introduce us to it; it does not constitute it" (as in De Botton, 1997: 180).

(purgation) as the effect of dramas on audiences. Aristotle's account in this respect is the following:

“Tragedy, then, is a representation (*mimêsis*) of an action (*praxis*) that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language of pleasurable and variously embellished suitably to the different parts of the play; in the form of actions directly presented, not narrated, with incidents arousing pity and fear in such a way as to accomplish a purgation (*katharsis*) of such emotions” (1951: 296).

Aristotle's account can easily be seen as valid for the phenomenon of reading books (texts) containing stories. Because when people read they actually create a stage in their minds and make the stories they read into action in that stage.

Reading stories have a real effect on the readers in calming them down as Shakespeare had Titus Andronicus say these words: “Come, and take choice of all my library / And so beguile thy sorrow....” (1994a: 154). Just like the therapeutic effect of writing on the writers, reading has a therapeutic effect on the readers and it is in fact crucial and irreplaceable, as Turkish novelist Kemal Tahir had one of the characters (Teğmen Faruk) in his novel *Yorgun Savaşçı* (1973) give the following testimony: “I used to read in the military school constantly... I used to read whatever I would get to have... like junk food... irrespective of an order... I thought I would die if I didn't get to read” (1973: 34).

The very much esteemed Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, another writer who can be described as being into mysticism through *reading*, very dramatically alludes to the therapeutic effect of both writing and reading. On the one hand, he states that “a melancholic projection of life for the poet is more attractive for the poet than life itself” (2003: 104); on the other, he defines the whole endeavor of writing as “the ability of making the reader say ‘I was just going to say the same thing but I could not have become that childish’” (1999: 18). It should also be noted that his whole corpus which was made available to this date provides very sharp and illuminating accounts concerning the soothing and thus the therapeutic effect of reading (1999: 13). Pamuk, who puts forward such a notion in his novel *Kar (Snow)* as “an understanding relative to reasonable people who read the same books in their adulthood years” (2002a: 333), says the following of the phenomenon of reading: “What was reading someone's work, after all, but gradually acquiring the writer's memory?” (2002a: 333).<sup>9</sup>

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9) It is worth mentioning here that the Italian writer Italo Calvino nicely promotes the idea that the books that people have read somehow add up to their consciousness. Calvino says the following: “I have come to the end of this apologia for the novel as a vast net. Someone might object that the more the work tends toward the multiplication of possibilities, the further it departs from that unicum which is the self of the writer, his inner sincerity and the discovery of his own truth. But I would answer: Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books

In the light of the last quotation, it should be noted that bibliotherapy and bibliotherapeutic applications in our age of computers can be perceived as more crucial and more difficult than relatively before since more and more people gradually abstain from reading. In our age people generally became oblivious to the pleasures and other gains from reading mainly because of computers. As Alberto Manguel, a Canadian Argentine-born writer and translator who can also be introduced as an important ‘scholar of reading’ nicely put it: “Thanks to my computer, I can memorize—but I can’t remember” (2000: 260).

Based on the various accounts we laid down so far, one can conclude that books, or simply speaking, written materials to be used in the process of bibliotherapy can be inclusive not only of literary works but also of those philosophy and religion for the simple reason that many works of philosophy and religion are also great pieces of literature.

Simply speaking, reading is fundamental as the first and foremost vehicle of education leading up to peoples’ being conscious of themselves and the others. It is so important for people to obtain a sense of who they are that one can change the famous dictum that ‘we are what we eat’ into the following: ‘we are what we read’.<sup>10</sup> As important as it is, it can be contended that, like reading literary works, reading philosophical and religious texts can be included in the process of bibliotherapy. In the context of bibliotherapy, which is nowadays more promising than ever before, major works or texts pertaining to literary, philosophy, and religion are –and should be taken– to be compatible rather than antagonistic and to be capable of being combined in mutually beneficial ways.

At this point, with respect to using literary and philosophical texts in a process similar to that of bibliotherapy, it would be very worthy of mention that in 1999 The University of Notre Dame (Indiana, USA) held a weekly seminar “for homeless men and women whose personal stories often have the weight of classic tragedy” (Bronner, 1999: 22). This eight-week seminar included works of Plato, Shakespeare, Montaigne and Herman Melville and “was inspired by Earl Shorris, a New York author who created a humanities course for the poor, although not necessarily homeless, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan” in 1995 (Bronner, 1999: 1). The seminar was conducted by two professors, developmental psychologist F. Clark Power and literary critic Stephen M. Fallon, who both admit that the whole enterprise was definitely enriching for them. Whereas Professor Power stated that he felt grateful to look at the texts involved in the seminar through the students’ eyes, Professor Fallon says of the homeless students the following: “They have insights into the texts I had not heard” (Bronner, 1999: 22).

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we have read, things imagined? Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable” (1992: 124).

- 10) An unusually different yet very interesting and likewise promising dictum of the same kind might be derived from the famous formulation of René Descartes that ‘I think, therefore I am (cogito ergo sum)’. As the Turkish poet, literary theorist and columnist Hilmi Yavuz suggested: “It is all possible and beneficial to turn the dictum of Descartes into the following: I read, therefore I am” (1999: 71).

The testimonies of the participants of this course are amazing and seem to be open proof of the rehabilitative and thus the therapeutic effect of bibliotherapy. Three testimonies out of the 10 participants are as follows:

---Michael A. Newton (Age: 50): “Those of us in the grip of addiction use this process to rethink our lives. Socrates makes clear that you have to have the courage to examine yourself and to stand up for something. A lot of us have justified our weaknesses for too a long time” (Bronner, 1999: 1).

---Ted West (Age: 39): “When you come out of the fog of addiction, you thirst for knowledge. You feel there is so much you missed. For 20 years, I never had a goal beyond where my next glass of vodka was coming from. When Socrates talks about the pleasure of knowledge, I know exactly what he means. My health was miserable, my life was failing. I was vomiting blood, I weighed 139 pounds. I was hanging around with crazy people. I couldn’t even light a cigarette, I was so shaky. It took me a couple pints of vodka to go to sleep at night. Now I need structure in my life and reading these books [the books that were involved in the seminar] has become an important form of structure” (Bronner, 1999: 22).

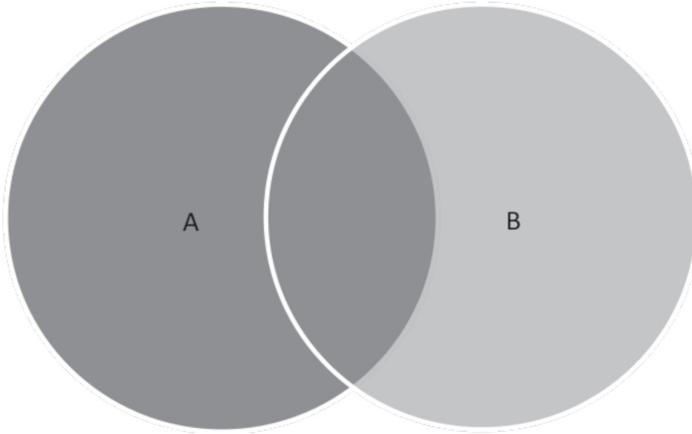
---Denis Kazmierczak (Age: 54): “It is hard to find beauty when you are in the situation we are in. But I have come to realize through the reading that, in some ways, everybody is homeless. You can be sitting in your fancy penthouse apartment looking out at the world but your life can be hollow. Now my mind is active, I have picked up a lost thread. Who knows? Maybe one day I’ll write the great American novel” (Bronner, 1999: 22).

### **Bibliotherapy and Religion**

As for the fundamental texts of world religions or simply religious texts being put into use in the process of bibliotherapy, the whole scene is not and should not be so much different than the one related to philosophic texts deemed eligible to be used in the context of bibliotherapy.

In relation to bibliotherapy and religious texts, there are two important issues to be addressed. The first one is that reading religious texts as bibliotherapeutic application often seems to overlap with praying therapy.

The exact conceptual relation between religious bibliotherapy and praying therapy can be shown as in the following figure:



**A: Religious Bibliotherapy. B: Praying Therapy.**  
**(The bold space between contains the members of both A and B)**

In other words, not every member of set A is a member of set B and vice versa; and yet some members of set A are also members of set B. This is the case as to the interconnectedness and the actual relationship between religious bibliotherapy and praying therapy. This is also what I have found in the interviews that I have conducted with seemingly religious people in the context of this paper, that there is almost always a ‘thin line’ between praying therapy and religious bibliotherapy.

One of the best examples that indicate the interconnectedness and the relation between the two is illustrated by Dale Carnegie who cites the story of a former lawyer, a man with the name of John R. Anthony, who closed his law office and went into selling law books to lawyers. Although he thinks that he is specifically fit for the job he somehow becomes unsuccessful in getting the proper amount of orders. He grows discouraged and particularly worries about the future of his family with three children since his sales manager threatens to give a red sign for him if he does not send in more orders. This former lawyer becomes even ostensibly suicidal at some point in this psychological impediment as he says the following: “I understood that night why desperate men raise a hotel window and jump. I might have done it myself if I had had the courage” (in Carnegie, 1974: 1980). Yet, as he goes back to his hotel room, a very fundamental development that involves both praying and reading religious texts takes place with respect to his psychological state:

“Since there was no one else to turn to, I turned to God. I began to pray. I implored the Almighty to give me light and understanding and guidance through the dark, dense wilderness of despair that had closed in about me. I asked God to help me get orders for my books [that I sell] and to give me money to feed my wife and children. After that prayer, I opened my eyes

and saw a Gideon Bible that lay on the dresser in that lonely hotel room. I opened it and read those beautiful, immortal promises of Jesus that must have inspired –countless generations of lonely, worried, and beaten men throughout the ages –a talk that Jesus gave to His disciples about how to keep from worrying:

Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are you not much better than they?.. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

As I prayed and as I read those words, a miracle happened: my nervous tension fell away. My anxieties, fears, and worries were transformed into heart-warming courage and hope and triumphant faith.

I was happy, even though I didn't have enough money to pay my hotel bill. I went to bed and slept soundly –free from care– as I had not done for many years” (in Carnegie, 1974: 180-81).

Mr. Anthony then goes to relate how he got up next morning feeling rejuvenated and how he got back on the track and became successful in his business.

Now, one might see that the above-mentioned example can be used for both praying therapy and religiously-oriented bibliotherapy, for the simple reason that it involves both praying and reading religious text. In terms of the above-mentioned chart, namely, the relation between praying therapy and religiously-oriented bibliotherapy, the following analysis can be done: if a person is coming up with a prayer of his/her own then the process is peculiar to praying therapy. On the other hand, if the subject is simply reading a text that does not specifically contain prayer words, whether he reads the text by looking at it or by his heart, then the process is peculiar to bibliotherapy. Additionally, if the subject is reading a piece of religious text that fully or partly consists of prayer words along with the subject's intension to pray then the process will fall in the common area of bibliotherapy and praying therapy.

At this point, it is worth bringing about the fact that there are two types of reading that might blur the thin line between praying therapy and bibliotherapeutic reading. The first one is to read the text, particularly a text that partly or fully contains praying words by heart. This type of reading does necessarily make the whole event of reading fall only in the scope of praying therapy; it might as well be an example of bibliotherapeutic application. Moreover, sometimes it might even be considered a bibliotherapeutic application exclusively. Since, our reading any text by heart is actually reading it through the eyes of our minds, which is very similar to reading through the eyes of our heads. In other words, reading through mind's eyes is the simulation of reading through head's eyes. Thus, reading a text by heart involves double animation compared to reading the

text by looking at it, considering that “reading is to animate what the text tells us in the movie theatre of our minds” (Pamuk, 2010: 211).

The second type of reading is to read a text repeatedly, which normally seems to be an aspect of praying therapy rather than a bibliotherapeutic application. However, this type of reading might as well be included in the scope of bibliotherapy because normally “a book constitutes a direct relationship with the reader” (Yücel, 2001: 207); moreover, “reading is to produce a new text whose writer is the reader” (Manguel, 2001: 84). In other words, since reading a book is somewhat to rewrite it, reading a book again and again is to rewrite it again and again. Consequently, in terms of bibliotherapy, it is very consistent to espouse the idea that every time we read a book there is something new that happens to that book and that something new gets involved in the process of reading (Borges as cited in Burgin, 1994: 35) and thus “no reading can amount to the final one” (Manguel, 2001: 108).

Regarding the phenomenon of reading, “which is something like love” (Alkan as cited in Dağlı, 2000: 60), to read a book over and over again can be called into account as an effective way to get the most out of it. As Jorge Louis Borges stated: “I believe that my re-reading a book that I am familiar with will make me gain more than my reading a new book” (as cited in Burgin, 1994: 106).

After having clarified the relationship and the general confusion points between praying therapy and religiously-oriented bibliotherapy, it seems appropriate to look into why it is plausible to convey bibliotherapeutic applications to fundamental texts of world religions and to the general works inspired mainly by them.

Two main components of the scope of bibliotherapy in of written works readily expected to be used in it are psychological wellbeing books written generally by clinical psychologists and the works of literature such as novels and poetry books for that matter. Thus, it should be stated first of that the benefits that are likely to be derived from religiously-oriented bibliotherapy are akin to the ones being derived from literary works. Since, fundamental religious texts also constitute great pieces of literature, if nothing else. And generally the religious works can be seen likewise on the grounds that they are inspired by the fundamental religious texts and thus are to this or that degree projections on them.

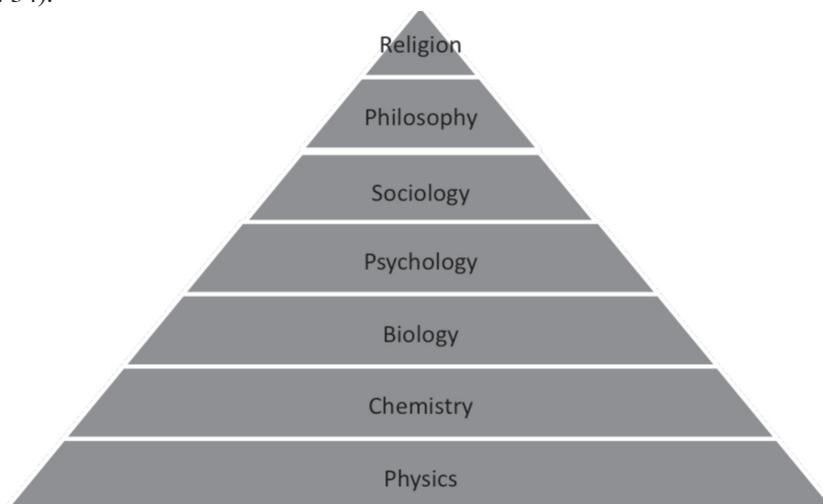
As for the wellbeing books, that is, scientifically-oriented clinical works, one should pay attention to the fact that religion along with philosophy is a more integrative realm than science. In fact, religion is even more integrative than philosophy.

As we have pointed out before, philosophical texts have already made their way into bibliotherapeutic applications for the simple reason that sometimes novels are not just literary works; they are also about rigorously-arranged philosophical accounts. Moreover, one should also recall the fact that in the seminars conducted at the University of Notre Dame for the homeless people philosophic literature proved to be effective in their orientation and rehabilitation. Nevertheless, to show how religion is more integrative than even philosophy might help bolster the idea that religious texts can –and perhaps should– be used in the context of bibliotherapeutic applications.

Philosophy is in a way “the science of all sciences” (Safa, 1978: 17). According to Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno “philosophy is superior to science” (2008: 48). In fact, the idea that philosophy is greater than science is perfectly plausible in because unlike science philosophy deals with universals rather than particulars and that the methods of investigation used in science essentially stem from philosophy.

However, it should also be noted that religion is greater than philosophy for the simple reason that the scope of religion seems to be greater than that of philosophy. Religion constitutes a more integrative discipline or explanation than philosophy (Myers, 1983: 6-8). In other words, both religion and philosophy deal with universals rather than particulars and they both study complex systems rather than nature’s building blocks. But religion is greater than philosophy for the simple reason that unlike philosophy it also deals with ‘before birth’ and ‘after death’ (Atalay, 2010).

It might be asserted that philosophy actually struggle to extend its scope so to include before birth and after death. In fact, such an endeavor was actually made by Bertrand Russell. According to him, philosophy deals with three fundamental problems: “Where do we come from? Where do we go to? What shall we do meanwhile?” (cited in Mead, 1946: 54).



**A partial hierarchy of disciplines putting religion on the top.  
(For the consecutive order, see: Myers, 1983: 6; Arslantürk, 2001: 27).**

The fact that religion is greater or constitutes a more integrative discipline and thus explanation than philosophy and science draws attention on the fundamental religious texts and the ones inspired by them towards using them in bibliotherapeutic applications.

Besides, it should be noted that in both philosophic and religious texts there are indispensable insights beneficial to both the hearts and minds of people who are seeking

professional help. That is, since both philosophic and religious texts address both the hearts and minds of people, they are apt in some ways to meet both emotional and analytic needs of people.

Of course, involving religious texts in bibliotherapeutic applications might require an aptitude and perhaps a background of religious education because not everybody has the same level of intelligence and especially of the hermeneutic rigor necessary to convey the insights derived from basic religious texts to their own realities.

There might arise numerous problems of understanding when reading religious texts: the reader, for instance, might take the metaphorical bits of the texts as having literal meanings. On the other hand, sometimes the problem of understanding might come from the text itself, i.e., its translation, interpretation, etc. By reading a religious text, a person might lean towards an unhealthy mysticism not holding himself/herself accountable for anything he/she does and leaving aside the fundamental human impetus to properly continue the journey of life. A very dramatic and worthy-of-mention example of this case was given by Dale Carnegie. He gave the following account:

“Many men have rejected those words of Jesus: ‘Take no thought for the morrow.’ They have rejected those words as a counsel of perfection, as a bit of Oriental mysticism. ‘I *must* take thought for the morrow,’ they say. ‘I *must* take out insurance to protect my family. I *must* lay aside money for my old age. I *must* plan and prepare to get ahead.’

Right! Of course you must. The truth is that those words of Jesus, translated over three hundred years ago, don’t mean today what they meant during the reign of King James. Three hundred years ago the word *thought* frequently meant anxiety. Modern versions of the Bible quote Jesus more accurately as saying: ‘Have no anxiety for tomorrow’” (1974: 3-4).

In the face of such problems as the difficulty to grasp the real meanings of the words in their historical context and conveying them to our time, differentiating what is literal and what is metaphorical etc., it becomes apparent that when involving religious texts in the bibliotherapeutic applications the role of the therapist as to advice the client to read the religious texts suitable for his/her situation and provide help with their interpretation(s) becomes crucial. One suggestion in this context would be a two-way reading: from the fundamental religious texts to the ones inspired by them and vice versa.

At this point, it should also be kept in mind that metaphors are not radically alienated from literal meanings. On the contrary, metaphors are absolutely conducive to literal knowledge and helpful to get the whole picture of an issue on focus provided that they are not misinterpreted and abused. As the Turkish poet and literary theorist Özdemir İnce points out: “The highest level of knowledge is the degree in which it becomes a metaphor. Metaphor is the point at which knowledge becomes ripe and saturated. It also constitutes a bridge making connection with other types of knowledge. It is ‘attribution’

and it is ‘association’” (2003: 316).<sup>11</sup> After all, using religious texts in bibliotherapeutic applications would be particularly or primarily beneficial to religious people.

Religious texts should not be ruled out in bibliotherapeutic applications since they constitute the most integrative explanation and, especially for religious people, they might provide the most indispensable insights with respect to psychological resilience. Moreover, considering that “reading seems... to be the synthesis of perception and creation” (Sartre, 2001: 31), one can even contend that religious texts might provide help to even non-religious people faced with challenging situations. In any case, it should just be kept in mind that “reading is a free dream” (Sartre, 2001: 37).

Before going further, it would be worth covering one last case of making use of religious texts in dealing with stressful situations and thereby gaining extra strength not to give up on the ideals and the life course chosen by the individual. The example was laid out by a former prime minister of Turkey, Bülent Ecevit.

At the age of 14, Ecevit got acquainted with Indian literature through Rabindranath Tagore’s works. Later, in his twenties in the year of 1946, he decided to learn Bengali and Sanskrit and as he got more and more acquainted with the modern Indian literature. He also became immersed in some of the religious literature of Hinduism such as *Bhagavad-Gita*, which he later called as “the secret of his 43-year political career” (Hakkı, 2000: 15).

But the most tragic moment for Ecevit came about when he decided to go against İsmet İnönü, the closest friend of Atatürk, to get over the leadership of People’s Republic Party, the oldest political organization, which was founded by Atatürk himself. Ecevit’s tragedy stemmed from the following: on the one hand, he believed that İnönü was too old to lead the party and therefore had to be defeated in order for the party to come into power. On the other hand, he felt that he had to stay away from fighting against İnönü because he was the very man who paved the way for Ecevit’s political career in the first place. Ecevit overcame this tragic struggle through reading the following passages from *Bhagavad-Gita*, in which Krihsna (Sri) tries to help his student Arjuna who has a similar tragic situation in the face of a battle:

“But if you refuse to fight this righteous war, you will be turning aside from your duty. You will be a sinner, and disgraced. People will speak ill of you throughout the ages. To a man who values his honor, that is surely worse than death. The warrior-chiefs will believe it was fear that drove you from the battle; you will be despised by those who have admired you so long. Your enemies, also, will slander your courage. They will use the

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11) In the same context, concerning the co-existence and compatibility of science (in the place of literal knowledge) and poetry (in the place of metaphors or metaphorical ‘knowledge’) see a very interesting and concise account (“science reaches sensation and sensitivity at the farthest end of its development, that is, it becomes a sort of poetry”, etc.) given by Dr. Erkkä Maula of Finland: (Ince, 2003: 45).

words which should never be spoken. What could be harder to bear than that?

Die, and you win heaven. Conquer, and you enjoy the earth. Stand up now, son of Kunti, and resolve to fight. Realize that pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, are all one and the same: then go into battle. Do this and you cannot commit any sin” (1995: 11).

In other words, when Ecevit decided to go against İnönü he felt lonely and even desperate. Then he took refuge in *Bhagavad-Gita*. After reading it once again “he came to realize that just like the case of Arjuna as told in the Indian epic story he could not escape from this mission, that he had to push this personality and that he could not give up on the mission he believed in and started to take. Sometimes the events get developed in such a way that the individual would find herself in the middle of a grave battle against someone to whom he feels grateful and upon whom almost his whole existence is dependent. Indian mysticism greatly empowered Ecevit” (Tanju, 1977: 5).<sup>12</sup>

A person might lean towards religious texts simply because he/she has a religiously-oriented background or he/she is highly cultivated. In other words, the idea of making use of religious texts in bibliotherapeutic process is not only dependent on the fact that the client might be religiously oriented, it is also dependent on the fact that the client might be highly cultured and cultivated so that he/she can both harvest and create new insight from any religious text. It should just be borne in mind that “the more knowledge and experience the reader has the more power and acuity of perception he/she has in comprehending the written materials” (Özdenören, 2002: 75).

Finally, the case of Bülent Ecevit is especially important in terms of the subject matter of our paper because he made use of a book of Hindu religion despite the fact that he was a Muslim. This only suggests that bibliotherapy expanding its borders to cover religious texts will be on the primary agenda of bibliotherapeutic application as it seems to be readily available to give rise to new horizons in the whole endeavor of therapy such as employing all the major religious texts perhaps almost irrespective of the client’s religious orientation.

According to Jean-Paul Sartre, “reading seems to be the synthesis of perception and creation” (2001: 31). Because, on the one hand, “reading is a free dream” (2001: 37); on the other, “reading is [a] directed creation” (2001: 33). Essential religious texts and the ones inspired by them cannot be ruled out in the context of bibliotherapeutic applications because they present a rich source from which people can harvest and by which people

12) In the same context, to take into account another testimony proclaiming that Ecevit harvested from both the corpus of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore and from *Bhagavad-Gita*, Latif Mutlu, the president of İstanbul Bilgi University, says the following: “Bülent Ecevit mentioned that he translated 9 books of Tagore from the author’s mother tongue, the Bengali, and that he felt Tagore’s influence in every stage of his life since he became familiar with his books. Ecevit said that ‘he was inspired by Krishna, the Indian epic hero’. Ecevit also mentioned that Krishna said the following: ‘You must fight the war that you believe is just and you must fight it till the end’” (Mutlu, 2010: 247).

can get inspired. As the Turkish poet and literary theorist Özdemir İnce says: “In order for people to become good poets first they have to be very good readers” (2001: 133). Likewise, one can contend that in order for people to become psychologically well their being very good readers might help tremendously.

### **‘I get my senses back’: 9 Interviews**

Searching for the real possibility of bibliotherapeutic applications, I have conducted some interviews with 9 people, the majority of whom being seemingly religious and practicing Muslim. Five participants are university graduates. And, among the respondents, only two people wanted their names to appear in this article with the initials. All the respondents were randomly selected in the course of two months except that they were spotted as being somehow into religion or sympathetic to religion and there was no mention of bibliotherapy or reading therapy neither before nor during the interviews. They are all of middle age years and agreed to get involved in my project. The respondents were asked two main questions as in the following:

- I. Did you or do you ever get any psychological help from your reading either basic or secondary religious texts and, if you did or if you do, how?
- II. Do you consider yourself religious?

The abridged versions of the responses are as follows:

---*Hakan Talha Alp (independent scholar; elementary school and informal education; age: 37)*: “When I am faced with a difficult and stressful situation of which I can’t find a way out, I open the cover of the Quran and read randomly a page. I actually keep on reading a couple of pages and I get some kind of relief. I do this usually. Sometimes I run across some verses advising me about patience and endurance. Sometimes I read the surah of *Inshrah* (Quran, 94), because according to a commentary of the surah belonging to Ibn Abbas, an early scholar of Islam and both the companion and the cousin of the Prophet of Islam, painful situations and reliefs are intermingled. I get tangible help from the Quran, feeling relieved. I also read the surah of *Dhuha* (Quran, 93) when I am really down. I contemplate on the pain and sorrow the Prophet went through all his life and say to myself: ‘Who are you to complain about anything?’ And I get my senses back. As for whether I am religious or not, I do not consider myself religious. I feel more like a student that is in the process of becoming religious.”

---*Ahmet Kurtuluş (silversmith; elementary school and informal education; age: 45)*: “When I am in a difficult situation in the psychological sense, I turn to the corpus of Said-i Nursi [an eminent scholar of Islam]. I read several pages. Afterwards, I try to reflect upon what I read. This usually works in my dealing with the situation. In 2001, there was an economic crisis, a major crisis that was sparked by a quarrel between the president (Ahmet Necdet Sezer) and the prime minister (Bülent Ecevit) at the time (the president threw the constitution towards the prime minister), and I had to sell my apartment. The devaluation ratio on silver was almost %100. I actually read the whole corpus of Said-

i Nursi a couple of times before and, depending on my reading the corpus, I quickly came over the fact that I had to sell my apartment. The world is a testing place and we are constantly being tested. Whether we keep patient in the face of difficulties and get spiritual reward in return from Allah is up to us. Whether I am religious or not? Given what is going on around us, I do consider myself religious.”

---*Erdem Şentürk (accountant; university graduate; age: 34):* “I read the Quran, and when I read it I just feel calm and peaceful. The verses that strike me most are the ones encouraging people to practice the remembrance of Allah (*zikr*). Two years ago I really wanted to get married and I made a proposal to a lady. But she turned me down. I was both surprised and bewildered. Then I fortunately got past that terrible feeling of loss reading the Quran and thinking that the real love is actually toward God. I can even say that I came back from depression. I consider myself partly religious. But I do try to act in accordance with the Islamic injunctions and sensitivities.”

---*Ömer Eroğlu (industrial machine manufacturer; elementary school; age: 42):* “A long time ago, I was faced with legal action for debt. The guy I did business with was religious and he sued me though I was innocent and determined to pay my debt. Interestingly, another guy who was not religious helped me out at that time. In the early 1990s, I went to Turkmenistan for business purposes. My initial purpose was to establish a dairy farm. But somehow I got involved in night club business. (I brought with myself to Turkmenistan a number of jeeps and I sold them out quickly but people did not pay the money that they owed to me. The people who bought them were running a night club. After some time, they told me to get involved in their business as a sharer and this is how I got into night club business). I remember that I was driving home one night and I ran over a brick, a very large brick. I stopped the car and removed the brick from the road. Then I started to drive on my way again Then I saw a truck from the opposite direction that blocked our way. There was a huge accident right in front of us. My estimation is that I could have died if I hadn't spent some time removing that brick. However, a couple of months later, on the same road and in the same place I crushed into three camels, literally, camels. It was a terrible accident. I stayed in coma for 20 days... However, the accident turned out to be a sign of mercy from Allah. Then I left the night club business, wrapped up all my errands and came back to Turkey. In all the healing process from accident, the prayer of the prophet Jonah as stated in the Quran (‘There is no deity save Thee! Limitless are Thee in Thy glory! Verily, I have done wrong’ [Quran, 21: 879]) helped me a lot to recover. And eventually I made a promise to Allah that I would not get involved in an illegitimate way of living; religiously speaking, of course. Am I religious or not? It depends. I don't think that I practice my religion in every aspect of life. In terms of living my religion, I can't say I am religious.”

---*Süleyman Muradoğlu (food packaging business; elementary school; age: 44):* “Whenever I get to feel down I turn to Allah trying to feel His presence and say ‘*ya Hayyu, ya Qayyum*’ (O, The Living, Sustainer). I believe it's the greatest name of Allah (*ism-e azam*). Because one night, I read some passages from the Quran, prayed and went to sleep. In my dream, I saw that I was reciting ‘*ya Hayyu, ya Qayyum*’. And I believe, every time I pray with that name I get abundant help afterwards. I am religious or not?”

No one can tell. It's all in the heart. Did I clean my heart with soap? No. But it's all in the heart."

---*Yusuf Ertuğrul (machine operator; elementary school; age: 43)*: "About ten years ago, I ran a chicken farm in Kayseri, addressing the whole central Anatolia. And I went bankrupt together with my fellow partner of course. We couldn't keep our momentum on a normal level. We were sort of determined to make tons of money in the shortest way possible. The whole central Anatolia was in our hands. But we couldn't avoid the bankruptcy. It's a long story with all the details... Then, after bankruptcy, I came to Istanbul and left that adventure behind. It was both shame and disgrace that I had to deal with in the wake of that disaster. The healing process from the bankruptcy took me some considerable time. But during that process, two verses from the Holy Quran helped me a lot recover and carry on my life like nothing happened. The verses read like this: "No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a Book before We bring it into existence. That is truly easy for Allah. In order that ye may not despair over matters that pass you by, nor exult over favors bestowed upon you. For Allah loveth not any vainglorious boaster" (Quran, 57: 22, 23).<sup>13</sup> I reflected upon what happened to me and my fellow partner and I simply came to the conclusion that 'Allah gave us all that wealth and means and Allah simply took them back. Believe me, not only were we ambitious we were very greedy then. The most important lesson is that the calamity a person is exposed to shouldn't stay in; on the contrary, it should fade out. It's been a long time, say, ten years, and you are still 'there'. It's not reasonable and wise to be that person... No, I am not a religious Muslim. However, I have been trying to practice my religion."

---*Musa Alak (university lecturer; PhD; age: 40)*: "When I feel disordered or distressed I read the surah of *Inshirah* (Quran, 94) as well as the prayer of the prophet Moses as stated in the Quran ('O My Lord, I ask you to expand my breast, make my task easy, undo the knot in my tongue so that my speech will become comprehensible' [Quran, 20: 25-28]). When I really feel that I have to get successful in something I usually read the verse 'And for those who fear Allah, He (ever) prepares a way out' (Quran, 65: 2). In the process of my scientific studies, when I get weary or jaded I get to turn to the books of *Zahidü'l-Kevserî* and *Abdü'l-Fettah Ebû Ğudde*, the ones that are mostly biographical encouraging people to go into academic studies. These books help me carry on... And they did all the time. Am I religious? Well... Let's just say that I am working on it. But I like religious people. They are very productive and beneficial to other people."

---*Ö. F. T. (translator; university graduate; age: 39)*: "I have been using antidepressant drugs for about ten years now... more like antipsychotic drugs (MERESA & LUSTRAL). I have to take some doses from each one of them every day. A Ramadan night, I forgot to take my drugs and thus I went into severe depression the following day. I was terribly constricted. A strong feeling of qualm just laid on me. I couldn't or simply didn't take the drugs because I was fasting, right? I took up the Holy Quran, I opened it to a random page and started reading. Because I believe reading the Quran is also a healing process, among

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13) All the translations in this article were taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali. See: [http://www.kuranikerim.com/english/m\\_indexe.htm](http://www.kuranikerim.com/english/m_indexe.htm) (last visited in May 2011).

many other things. I read about ten pages and as I read them I felt that I was relieved. I read those pages and at the same time I contemplated on their meanings, of course. I sort of went with the ‘flow’. Henceforward, I do the same whenever I feel stressful or down. Yes, I define myself as religious.”

---A. C. Z. (*community organizer; university graduate; age: 39*): “Generally, when I turn upside down, when I drop like a rock, meaning that when I am unsuccessful with my relationship with Allah not having done my duties, I take refuge in a secluded place and I read the first surah of the Holy Quran reexamining myself. Everything is in the hands of Allah and when I pray to Him I would feel His presence. It’s almost like a feeling that people have towards their families. I read the first verse: ‘Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds’. And I read this verse thinking about the endless capacity of Allah to put norms and educate people. In the second verse, those attributes (‘Most Gracious, Most Merciful’) are important as well to reflect upon. And I would try to find a place ‘there’. I would get something from those attributes, a gift, a feeling of mercy around me, or something like that. Then: ‘Master of the Day of Judgment’. You see that Allah is all omnipotent and would take you into account. I also do feel the same thing when I do the Islamic ritualistic prayer. Afterwards: ‘Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek’. That means to me that we are all in Allah’s hands. Everything comes from Him. You would remember His grace on you. He is the one who provides you with the capital and He again is the one who turns out to be the purchaser for what you make out of that capital. Then: ‘Show us the straight way’. You would take refuge with all your existence in Allah. If people can manage to do just that, it’s a sign of Allah’s mercy for them. Then: ‘The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray’. Not this way, not that way... the straight way... I do read this whenever I feel down. And I do this in Arabic but I do follow and contemplate on the meaning of these verses. I believe that people should read books constantly. And they should read both rejuvenating and didactic books. And you should read the kinds of books that might provide you with good foundations about the topic in which you are interested. Books are true guides for all of us. Am I religious? ‘Religious’ is a relative concept. That’s all I can say.”

---Muhlis Turan (*independent scholar and community organizer; university graduate; age: 41*): “I was involved in the Gazza flotilla in the expedition of humanitarian aid to Gazza in the summer of 2010, you know, the famous flotilla. I was on the Turkish boat called Mavi Marmara. In the whole expedition, there are two verses that struck me most. The first one is this: ‘That is the Command of Allah, which He has sent down to you: and if any one fears Allah, He will remove his evil deeds, from him, and will enlarge his reward’ (Quran, 65: 5). And the second one is the following: ‘...So fear Allah. For it is Allah that teaches you. And Allah is well acquainted with all things’ (Quran, 2: 282). There is also a prophetic tradition of Islam, a saying of the Prophet of Islam (*hadith*), that ‘whoever is killed over his property and belongings is a martyr’. That *hadith* helped me stay cool and strong all that time and even after the attack. When we were attacked from the air... Israeli commandoes were coming down from the helicopters on the main deck of our boat with

their machine guns... If I were alone I would absolutely get scared to death... You would be scared to death... We lived that attack together with five or six hundred people... Of course, as a whole body of a big group of people, everything gets to be easy... Modern man worships power. But, believe me, for some time there was no power on the deck of Mavi Marmara other than that of Allah... I was inside the boat but we lived all that... After having come back to Istanbul, I watched the attack that we were exposed to while on the deck. And surprisingly I got really, really scared. I think the reason why is that we lived that attack as a community but I watched the same attack as one single person. When we first sailed I prayed, read a number of verses from the Holy Quran, and did some remembrance of Allah (*zikr*). All those things helped me tremendously in dealing with the horror of that night. During the expedition, an English man became Muslim and took the name Fatih (the conqueror). Am I religious? Well, describing oneself as religious would be some type of unnecessary audacity. I am not religious but I can say that I would like to be a religious person and am trying to be one.”

The interviews above show that bibliotherapeutic applications find a real possibility especially among people who are religious or sympathetic to religion. Another crucial finding is that people mostly take bibliotherapy as praying therapy and this tendency goes up at a degree parallel to the lack of education. In other words, the more the individual is educated the more likely is the bibliotherapeutic applications taken into account. And this goes right with respect to people who have informal education (see the case of H. T. Alp and A. Kurtuluş). People who are interviewed either turn to a text to read and get help or remember a text that they read before prior to their being faced with psychological challenges. And it is clear that they make use or tend to make use of the texts they have read. As an overall assessment, one can come to the conclusion that although through praying therapy-like applications, bibliotherapeutic applications seem to be readily taken into account by people who are either religious or sympathetic to religion.

### **Conclusion**

As a relatively new discipline and clinic-related endeavor, bibliotherapy seems to have a promising future although it is still at its infancy age. Bibliotherapy is aimed at making use of written materials in providing professional help for individuals.

Considering its current situation, it seems that there are a number of limitations as well as possibilities related to bibliotherapy: Who are the target people? What kinds of materials should be used? And should the application of bibliotherapy be therapist-focused or client-focused?

Considering the current application(s) of bibliotherapy, it seems that it is more therapist-focused application than otherwise. In other words, as normally one can argue about its necessity, the role of the therapist is crucial and bibliotherapy is often times more likely to be applied on children than adults. As for the written materials used in the context of bibliotherapy, they are usually well-being books generally written by clinical psychologists and some literary works such as novels.

As we are more interested in the possibilities than the limitations of bibliotherapy, it can be argued that the written materials used in bibliotherapeutic application can (and

should) be extended to include both philosophic and religious texts. On the one hand, the line between literary works and philosophic works is often times blurred. On the other hand, religious texts can function as literary works since they also include narratives. Besides, there is no doubt that both major philosophic and religious texts are great pieces of literature if nothing more. Moreover, both philosophy and religion are supposed to be more integrative than science; that is, both philosophic and religious texts are expected to be more integrative than scientific texts. After all, the inclusion of such literary works as novels and poems in the whole enterprise of therapy does nothing but cry out in the first place for the inclusion of philosophy and religion for the sake of the same endeavor.

Evidence that was presented in this paper indicates that the inclusion of religious texts, both the essential ones and the ones inspired by them, in bibliotherapeutic applications is a real possibility.

The case of Ecevit brings about insights into the possibility of inclusion of religious texts for non-religious people and into the possibility of inclusion of religious texts outside the individual's own religious tradition. Of course, one can argue that whether religious texts can be employed in bibliotherapeutic process regardless of the client's own religious tradition and whether the role of therapist can be minimized during the process or even be ruled out leading to a systemic way of bibliotherapeutic self-help needs to be further investigated. However, the inclusion of religious texts for people, whether simply religious or highly cultivated, is evident. On the whole, it can be said that bibliotherapy, as a new endeavor of therapeutic enterprise, can successfully meet the challenge of espousing new written materials to even include religious texts.

Bibliotherapy eventually comes down to the concept and phenomenon of reading. The whole endeavor to explore into the phenomenon of reading, as the Turkish word *okumak* aptly implies, is nothing but promising. Putting aside the fact that reading itself is a source of great pleasure and a source of happiness (Ayvazoğlu, 1997: 187), people's familiarity with the written word throughout ages only reminds us of the famous dictum that 'there is nothing new under the sun'. Bibliotherapy has actually been in use throughout history and to promote the idea of the inclusion of religious texts in its applications is just an act of exploring and renaming it otherwise.<sup>14</sup>

The ageless Shakespeare has Hamlet say to this friend Horatio the following:

“There are more things in heaven and earth,  
Horatio,  
Than are dreamt in your philosophy” (1994b: 679).

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14) While trying to reach some sources to be used in the process of writing this article I made an interview with Emeritus Professor Aykut Kazancıgil of Istanbul University. Thanks to him, I managed to glance at the vast possibility of bibliotherapy in any setting in which written materials are involved. During the interview, he made the following remark: “Those who build and keep a library in their homes are actually into bibliotherapy. How can you explain the habit of bookkeeping otherwise?” Kazancıgil also gave some information about Professor Süheyl Ünver, an eminent Turkish expert on the history of medicine and science, that “he went through his books and simply browsed their pages for almost three full days per week” (personal communication, August 2010).

*Mutatis mutandis*: Perhaps there are more things to be explored regarding the very familiarity of people with the written words than are dreamt of in the department of getting therapeutic help from them.

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