

Discernment and Understanding: Why Does the Reader Not Understand?

In a literary sense, every field has its own unique language, conceptual world, and terminology. Every work that becomes the subject of a writing also receives its share from this uniqueness. If the reader is not familiar with the vocabulary, conceptual depth of the field they are reading, and the background from which the text is nourished, it is not easy for them to discern what they read in a true sense. Therefore, in such a situation, nothing is as natural as their having difficulty in understanding the text.

Particularly if the reader's depth of thought and world of meaning are not sufficiently developed, it becomes even more difficult for them to comprehend texts written with a literary or philosophical approach.

In texts written with the literary subtleties of Syriac, this truth is much more prominent. Because to comprehend the depth of the classical language is not merely a grammatical skill; it requires a sensitivity woven into the soul. For this reason, the number of those who can read Syriac with the subtleties of the language and comprehend its essence is, unfortunately, very few.

The habit of "not reading," which is common in Eastern societies, is another reflection of this negativity. For reading is a love; the one who does not love cannot read, the one who does not read cannot understand, and the one who does not understand has in truth never read at all.

True reading is a silent journey that the human being makes towards their own inside. Every word is a station on this journey, and every meaning is a door. For the one who can enter through that door, the word is no longer merely knowledge, but the echo of light.

Syriac wisdom says: ***"Understanding is a gift; but this gift is given to the heart that is ready."***

For this reason, reading is an action performed not merely with the eye, but with the heart. Because words are solved by the intellect, but meaning is felt by the heart.

While reading or interpreting a writing, our intention, our accumulation, our prejudice, our values, our principles, our habits, our morality, our upbringing, our level of knowledge, our vocabulary, our capacity of perception, our system of evaluation, our anxieties, and our expectations—even the spectacles we wear while looking at life—are highly decisive.

Even if it be a gold-plated, perfect writing, the one who reads it through the spectacles of an ideology or a negative belief will see not the meaning but their own delusion. Because every pair of spectacles carries a colour; that colour either refracts or distorts the light of truth.

To understand a text is not to solve words. Because every word is a world within itself. Meaning is hidden not on the surface of letters, but in the depth of the soul. For this reason, the reader more often than not reads not a text, but the boundaries of their own narrow view. The mind that contents itself with the visible cannot hear the voice of meaning.

Reading is an act of consciousness; but if discernment does not accompany it, this act is merely the echo of sound. The warning of Mor Jacob of Serugh (451–521) coming from beyond centuries carries wisdom at this point: ***"The ability to discern along with reading is very important. If the capacity to comprehend is absent, the human being ought not to read. For reading performed without comprehension is a door opening to darkness."***

For animals also hear the sound of the word; but only the human being hears the breath of meaning.

Reading is actually the human being reading themselves. Every text is a mirror; what we see in that mirror is related to the clarity of our inside. If the mirror is dirty, that which is reflected is blurred as well. No matter how brilliant the text may be, if the reader's spectacles are dirty, light transforms into shadow.

Failure to comprehend meaning stems most of the time not from the complexity of the author, but from the inner closedness of the reader. Unless the doors of the soul are opened, words cannot enter inside.

To read is an awakening beyond acquiring knowledge; but this awakening is possible only through discernment. The intellect initiates seeing the meaning; discernment, on the other hand, internalizes it.

The journey of reading is the journey of maturity, not of knowledge. Unless the soul matures, meaning does not unfold. Because every text wears clothes according to the consciousness of the reader: it becomes a rule for some, a path for some, a secret for some. While the same word finds no echo in one, it opens a divine door in another.

The reader does not understand every text; because they are not ready to read themselves. If the mind is crowded, discernment cannot speak. To understand, one must first empty oneself: of prejudice, of intellectual arrogance, of haste, of habit. When the mind falls silent, words breathe.

Saint Mor Ephrem (306–373) says: ***"The word is the mirror of the soul; the one who purifies the mirror sees the light."***

Most readers search for meaning without looking at their mirror. They pass words rapidly, consume sentences, but cannot hear the breath in the heart of the word. Because meaning is born not with haste, but with serenity.

Every text is a space where the souls of the reader and the author meet. When that meeting takes place, words no longer carry meaning; they transform into meaning itself.

And the human being realizes at that moment that: the text or the meaning was always there, but the eye to see has now opened.

As Goethe said: ***"One does not learn to understand anything unless one loves it."***

Conscious reading performed with love is the key that opens the door of discernment. For the person who looks with love and intends to understand first cleanses their own mirror. At that moment, the word ceases to be knowledge; it transforms into an inner enlightenment.

Every word is a call. And every call whispers secretly thus: ***"Come, look inside. For what you read on the outside is the echo of what is inside you."***

Yusuf Beğtaş