

**Qur'anic Exegesis in the Contemporary Islamic World  
Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Muhakemat**

*Çağdaş İslam Dünyasında Tefsir ve Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin  
Muhakemat'ı*

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## **Qur'anic Exegesis in the Contemporary Islamic World** **Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's *Muhakemat***

**Niyazi BEKI**

### **Abstract**

Parallel to the famous Renaissance/enlightenment movement that emerged in Europe, the nineteenth century also saw movements of innovation in different fields in the Islamic world. On the axis of scientific-religious debates, studies were carried out in the field of tafsir in the light of a new understanding that would present Islam to the realization of the century. In particular, the concepts of liberty, freedom, and justice, the main slogans of the French Revolution, were handled by reinterpreting Islamic literature. Islam tried accelerating this new exegetical world's social, political, and economic standards.

In this article, particular emphasis is placed on a new methodology of exegesis of the Qur'an, which emerged as parallel to new developments in the Muslim world. This new methodology of exegesis is called the *Muhakamat*, which is the work of the theologian Bediuzzaman Said Nursi who, in the face of aggressive western secularism - sought innovative solutions to Muslim problems without sacrificing Islamic traditions. The anatomy of his *Muhakamat* is composed of three parts, each of which will be discussed in this paper. "Hakikat unsuru" (Elements of Reality) consists of 12 introductory sections and includes information related to the formality of exegesis. Then there is the "Belagat Unsuru" (Elements of Rhetoric) which is composed of twelve subjects, and, finally, "Akide Unsuru" (Elements of Creed), which consists of twenty-four different units. In addition, in this work, the weaknesses and limitations of the classical commentaries (exegesis) are considered and highlighted in contrast to Said Nursi's exegesis in his new modern context. Comparison has been made between this new and classical method of commentaries, and these issues have been supported with some examples. It is a fundamental issue that the Divine Book, Qur'an, has new messages that appeal to every century. Therefore, there is a great need in our age for an interpretation that will teach the truths of faith in the verses of the Qur'an. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi is one of the first intellectuals to interpret the Qur'an and the Islamic sciences harmoniously with modern science. He emphasized that there cannot be any conflict between modern sciences that explain the working principles of the universe, which is a work of Allah's Power (*Qudrah*), and the revelation of the Qur'an, which comes from His attribute of Word (*Kalām*). This study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of this important figure in modern Islamic intellectual history. Said Nursi, before writing the *tafsir* called *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, wrote a work about the methodology of interpreting the Qur'an under the name of *Muhakamat* (Rational Arguments), which aimed at appealing to the understanding of the modern age. This study will examine the general content of this work, especially the rhetoric aspect.

From this point of view, under the title "Problems of Tafsir and Solution Suggestions," the problems that exist and are discussed in the field of tafsir are mentioned, and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's approach to these problems is

discussed, and his method of tafsir is demonstrated. I shall also try to connect this to traditional tafsir methods to show its effectiveness.

Under the title "A contemporary approach to understanding the Qur'an," the characteristics of Bediuzzaman's tafsir work are expressed, and such studies are necessary. This article uses the example of the *Muhakemat* to draw attention to the need for a new methodology of exegesis of the Qur'an that has emerged in parallel with the new developments in the Islamic world. The weaknesses of classical exegesis are also pointed out, and Bediuzzaman's understanding of tafsir takes into account the knowledge of the age and the perception of the century is emphasized. At this point, a comparison is made between new and classical exegesis methods, and this point is supported with some examples.

It is indisputable that the Divine Book, the Holy Qur'an, has new messages for every century. Therefore, there is a great need in our age for a commentary that will teach the truths of faith in the Qur'anic verses. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was one of the first intellectuals to interpret the Qur'an and Islamic sciences harmoniously with modern science. He emphasized that there cannot be any conflict between modern sciences that explain the principles of the universe, which is a work of God's power, and the Qur'anic revelation that comes from His attribute of kalâm. This study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of this important figure in the history of modern Islamic thought.

**Keywords:** Exegesis procedure, Commentary methodology, Nazm-i ma'ani, *Muḥākamât*, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.

## Çağdaş İslam Dünyasında Tefsir ve Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin *Muhakemat*'ı

### Öz

Avrupa'da ortaya çıkan meşhur Rönesans/aydınlanma hareketine paralel olarak on dokuzuncu asırda İslam âleminde de farklı sahalarda yenilik hareketleri görülmektedir. İlmi-dinî tartışmalar ekseninde tefsir sahasında da İslam'ı asrın idrakine sunacak yeni bir anlayış ışığında çalışmalar yapılmış, bilhassa Fransız İhtilalinin ana sloganları olan hürriyet-müsavat-adalet kavramları İslamî Literatürü yeniden yorumlamak suretiyle ele alınmış ve İslam bu yeni tefsir âleminin sosyal, siyasal ve ekonomik hayat standartlarına ivme kazandırılmaya çalışılmıştır.

İslam âleminin Batı'nın ilerlemesi karşısında çaresiz kalışı, her alan baş gösteren geri kalmışlığa çare üretememesi şüphesiz bu tür çalışmaların ana motivasyonunu oluşturmaktadır. Bu aşamada bazı Kur'anî yorumların tamamen pozitif fen bilimlerinin etkisinde kalınarak yapılması farklı tartışmaları da beraberinden getirmiş, Kuran'ın asli anlayışına uygun yeni çalışmalara ihtiyaç duyulduğu gözlenmiş ve bu husus dile getirilmiştir. Aslında bu yeni tefsir

metodolojisi, müellifin yazmasını tasavvur ettiği bir tefsir mukaddimesi olarak tasarlanmıştır. Bu mukaddime, İslamî kimliğinden taviz vermeden, Batının baş döndürücü teknolojisi karşısında -çaresiz kalan- İslam âlemi için bir çare arayan ilk âlimlerinden biri olan Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin "Saykalu'l-İslam" olarak da isimlendirdiği *Muhakemat* adlı eseridir. Çalışmamızda üç bölümden ibaret olan *Muhakemat* adlı eserin anatomisine kısaca yer verilmiş, özellikle 12 mukaddimeden ibaret olan ve tefsir usulü ile ilgili bilgiler ihtiva eden "Hakikat Unsuru" detaylı sayılacak düzeyde bu çalışmamızın asıl konusunu teşkil etmiştir.

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin *Muhakemat* adlı eseri bu bağlamda incelenmeye değer niteliktedir. Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin "Saykalu'l-İslam/İslam'ı cilalama-parlatma" olarak da adlandırdığı *Muhakemat* adlı eseri, İsrailiyat, ifrat ve tefrit, cehalet vb. unsurlarla adeta üzeri tozlanan, çeşitli unsurlarla üzeri örtülen İslamiyet'i tekrar parlatmayı, İslam toplumlarını Sırat-ı Müstakim çizgisine çekmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu yönüyle *Muhakemat*, 19. Asrın İslamiyet üzerindeki temel tartışmalarına cevap vermekle birlikte, sunduğu tefsir metodoloji açısından da Kur'an hakikatlerinin anlaşılması adına önemli bir kapı aralamaktadır.

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin Eski Said Dönemi eserlerinden olan *Muhakemat* 1911-1912 yıllarında telif edilmiştir. Eser; Unsuru'l Hakikat, Unsuru'l Belagat ve Unsuru'l Akide olmak üzere üç ana makaleden oluşmakta olup bu çalışmada özellikle tefsir usulü ile ilgili bilgiler ihtiva eden birinci bölüm ele alınmaktadır. Eserin birinci makalesi olan Unsur-ul Hakikat'ta başta İsrailiyat olmak üzere tefsir ilminin ilgilendiği birçok mesele incelenmekte, İslam âlimlerinin, Kelam ulemasının ve müfessirlerin ihtilaf ettikleri konulara açıklık getirilmektedir. Bununla beraber, ihtiyaç duyduğumuzda 12 meseleden ibaret olan "Belagat Unsuru" ile 24 değişik ünitelerden oluşan "Akide Unsuru" bölümlerinden de istifade edilmiştir.

Buradan yola çıkarak bu çalışmanın öncelikli amacı *Muhakemat*'ın bir tefsir metodolojisi olarak tanıtılmasıdır. Bu amaçla çalışmamızda öncelikle asrın idrakine uygun olarak Kuran'ı yorumlamanın önemi vurgulanarak çağdaş dönemde İslam âleminde yapılan Tefsir çalışmalarına değinilmiş ve Bediüzzaman'ın "İşaratü'l-İcaz" ile birlikte diğer eserlerinde ortaya koyduğu tefsir anlayışının özellikleri ortaya konulmuştur.

Çalışmamızın temel hedefleri açısından Tefsir metodoloji ile birlikte bu alandaki problemler göz önüne alındığında, *Muhakemat* incelemesinin modern çağın Müslüman entelektüellerin tarihini, içinde buldukları şartları, yorumlarındaki düşünce sistematliğini ve öne çıkan fikirlerinin arka planını öğrenmeye yardımcı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

Bu bağlamda Kur'anî hakikatleri, asrın gelişmelerine uygun olarak sağlam mantık ölçüleri çerçevesinde değerlendirerek gözler önüne seren Bediüzzaman Said Nursî'nin tefsir metodolojisi *Muhakemat* örneği ile ele alınmış ve incelenmiştir. Buradan hareketle akıl-nakil, madde-mana, din ve terakki kavramları içinde bocalayan, dinin İslam toplumlarını geri bıraktığı düşüncesi ile sarsılan, İslam dinine ve dolayısıyla Kur'an'a ifrat veya tefrit ile yaklaşan kimi ulemanın ve aydınların yanlışları karşısında İslam'ı hak etmediği hücumlardan kurtarmayı amaçlamıştır. Buna ilaveten ulemaya "sırat-ı müstakim"i göstermeyi hedefleyen *Muhakemat*'ın klasik tefsir usul ve yaklaşımlarından farklı olarak hangi metotlarla Kur'anî prensipleri aktardığının incelenmesi son derece önemlidir. Çalışmamız bu hassasiyetle ele alınarak belirtilen hususları ayrıntılı olarak gözler önüne serilemeye amaçlamaktadır.

Yine buradan hareketle çalışmamızda "Tefsir Problemleri ve Çözüm Önerileri" başlığı altında tefsir sahasında var olan ve tartışılan problemlere değinilmiş ve Bediüzzaman Said Nursî'nin bu problemler karşısındaki yaklaşımı ele alınarak onun tefsir metodu gözler önüne serilmiştir.

"Kur'an'ı anlamada çağdaş bir yaklaşım" başlığı altında Bediüzzaman'ın tasarladığı tefsir çalışmasının hususiyetleri dile getirilerek bu tür çalışmaların gerekliliği ortaya konmuştur. Bu makale, İslam âleminde yaşanan yeni gelişmelere paralel olarak ortaya çıkan Kur'an'ın yeni bir tefsir metodolojisi ihtiyacına dikkat çekmek üzere *Muhakemat* örneğini öne almaktadır. Klasik tefsirlerin zaafına da işaret edilen çalışmamızda Bediüzzaman'ın çağın bilgilerini, asrın idrakini göz önünde bulunduran tefsir anlayışına dikkat çekilmiştir. Bu noktada yeni ve klasik tefsir metotları arasında mukayese yapılmış ve bu husus bazı örneklerle desteklenmiştir.

İlahi Kitap Kur'an-ı Kerim'in her asra hitap eden yeni mesajlara sahip olduğu tartışılmaz bir konudur. Dolayısıyla Kur'an ayetlerindeki iman hakikatlerini öğretecek bir tefsirin varlığına çağımızda büyük bir ihtiyaç vardır. Bediüzzaman

Said Nursi, Kur'an'ı ve İslami ilimleri modern bilimle uyum içinde yorumlayan ilk aydınlardan biridir. O, Allah'ın kudretinin bir eseri olan kâinatın çalışma prensiplerini açıklayan modern bilimler ile O'nun kelâm sıfatından gelen Kur'an vahyi arasında herhangi bir çatışma olamayacağını vurgulamıştır. Bu çalışmanın, modern İslam düşünce tarihinin bu önemli şahsiyetinin daha iyi anlaşılmasına katkı sağlaması beklenmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tefsir, Tefsir usulü, Nazm-ı maanî, Muhakemat, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.

### Introduction

At the outset, it would be helpful to give brief biographical information about Said Nursi, who states that there is never any contradiction or conflict between the correctly perceived data of modern science and the truths revealed and correctly understood by the Qur'an.

Said Nursi was born in 1877 in the village of Nurs, in Bitlis, an Eastern Province of the Ottoman Empire, which is a part of Turkey today. At an early age, Nursi displayed keen intelligence and remarkable learning ability. He started his traditional madrasah education at nine, finishing the more significant part of the curriculum in three months and receiving his ijaza by 14. Nursi completed his madrasa education with unusual rapidity, and his unbeaten record in defeating all scholars who questioned him earned him the title Bediuzzaman, or "Wonder of the Age."<sup>1</sup>

Nursi's ability to succeed without traditionally completing his madrasah studies proved the need for the madrasah to be reformed. The urgent need for such a modernized madrasah grew stronger in Nursi's mind as he continued to study independently, especially after 1895, when he was invited to Van by its governor, Hasan Pasha, on account of his reputation as a scholar. As a result of Nursi's interaction with the officials surrounding him, he became aware of the developments in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, Hasan Pasha's library was full

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<sup>1</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı* (İstanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 2019), 31-32; Abdulkadir Badıllı, *Mufassal Tarihçe-i hayat*, 3 vols (İstanbul: n.p. 1990), 1/75-76; Alparslan Açıkgöç, "Said Nursi", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*. (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2018), 35/565.

of books reflecting Western thought's increasing influence, particularly positivism and materialism, and modern sciences, on the secularized Tanzimat elite. As Nursi read these works and learned about modern science, he realized that the madrasah curriculum was not responding to the needs of the late nineteenth century and that *'ilm al-kalam* was unable to answer the doubts and questions raised by modern science and he concluded that the madrasah and its curriculum needed to be reformed.

Nursi desired to vindicate the Qur'an as a source of knowledge and progress and to interpret and explain its teachings in a way that incorporated the Islamic sciences and modern scientific knowledge while refuting materialist philosophy. According to Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', "Nursi preached a sort of synthesis of science and religion, or between the traditional madrasah system and the modern one. Nursi says, ' Religious sciences are the light of the heart, whereas modern sciences are the light of reason.' He became convinced that a new interpretation of Islam was necessary if the Muslim world were to survive the momentous changes of the modern era. According to him, the Muslim world needed to produce a new type of intelligentsia with brilliant insight into both the Islamic theological disciplines and the Western sciences. However, despite his passionate quest to build a "university" or madrasah that would take into account both Islamic and Western sciences, Nursi failed to fulfill his dream."<sup>2</sup> Despite that, according to Abdulkadir Badilli, one of his companions, Nursi's thoughts were recorded in 196 writings called the collection of *Risale-i Nur*; and they became significant during his lifetime, earning him millions of followers.<sup>3</sup> A complete study of Nursi's life is beyond the scope of this study as Nursi's continuing support of the Islamic sciences in the wake of the establishment of the modern secular Turkish nation-state to repeated episodes of exile and imprisonment on unsubstantiated charges brought against him by the government. Nursi departed this life on March 23, 1960, and was buried in Urfa; the Turkish military and its whereabouts later exhumed his body remain unknown until this day.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', "How to Read Said Nursi's *Risala-i Nur*", *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State U of New York P, 2003), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Badilli, *Mufasssal Tarihçe-i Hayat*, 2/702.

Besides being a significant scholar and thinker, Nursi was a man of action and reflection. According to one author, "modern Islamic intellectual history boasts of some important figures, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, and Muhammad Iqbal. However, no one reflected on his career and thought the enormous changes in the Ottoman Empire's last phase and at the Turkish Republic's beginning better than Said Nursi."<sup>4</sup>

Said Nursi, one of the intellectuals who favored teaching modern sciences and religious studies together in the madrasah in such a way to support each other harmoniously and who felt the need for a significant change in madrasa education, wrote this work called *Muhakemat*, to respond to this need. Now we will try to analyze this work.

### 1. Muhakemat

*Muhakemat (Rational Arguments)* was written after Nursi's experience traveling in Eastern Turkey around 1910. It is one of his first works that was written due to his concern to reform the educational system of the madrasahs and addressed to the *ulema* (the learned). It was also his first work to treat Qur'anic exegesis in detail; its purpose, as indicated by the work's second name, *Sayqal al-Islam* (Polisher of Islam), is to clarify the chief principles of the Qur'anic exegesis. It was written in Arabic, and a Turkish translation was published in 1911 as *Muhakemat*.<sup>5</sup> However, it is not a part of the *Risale-i Nur* collection. This work consists of three parts: Hakikat Unsuru (The Element of Reality), Belagat Unsuru (The Element of Rhetoric and Eloquence), and Akide Unsuru (The Element of Doctrine).

Some of the main issues Nursi deals with in the first section are the introduction into Islam of both *Isra'iliyyat* (knowledge taken from non-Islamic sources, especially from Jewish origin) and ancient Greek philosophy in the guise of religion and the confusion these caused to *Ahl Al-zahir* (externalist scholars), i.e., the scholars of the law in particular; the literalist interpretation of metaphors

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<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', "Editor's Introduction," *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State U of New York P, 2003) ix.

<sup>5</sup> Şükran Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi", *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State U of New York P, 2003), 76.



and figures of speech and the claim of the so-called inconsistency between Islam and reason (and modern science).<sup>6</sup> Nursi believes that an imaginary clash between science and the laws of Islam resulted in the despair and suffering of the particular Islamic community. Thus he sought to overcome this.

In the second section, he explains several matters related to the essence of eloquence. Nursi demonstrates his extensive knowledge of the Arabic language and the various branches of the science of rhetoric.

The third section, which was not completed until a later date, offers proof for the four main aims of the Qur'an, namely, the Single Maker, prophethood, bodily resurrection, and justice."<sup>7</sup>

Nursi considers the importance of polishing the truths of Islam and its essential mission: "The service which I wish to do with this work is twofold: On the one hand, it is to put forward the mistakes of anti-Islamic views; on the other, it is to show some incorrect opinions held by some people who deserved the title of *sadīq-i akhmak*, or idiotic friend, and to present Islamic truths to humankind in the correct form called *sirat-i mustaqim*, (the straightway), and finally to help Muslim scholars who are always busy with scientific investigation."<sup>8</sup> Nursi writes: "Since my youth, I had wanted to polish up the truths of Islam and to dispel the doubts of the enemies of religion (*ehl-i tefrit*) and to repulse the ungrounded fears of the externalist scholars and those who go to excess (*ehl-i ifrat*)."<sup>9</sup>

The importance of *Muhakemat* lies in its first section, *Hakikat Unsure* (the Element of Truth). Nursi advocates that the Qur'anic interpretation addressed to the contemporary mind should be prepared by a high board of ulama specializing in science. Nursi believes that the public opinion of our age needs a new interpretation following a new approach to understanding the Qur'an. Thus, its exegesis and interpretation should be carried out at this time by a committee of specialist scholars, and they should collect authentic knowledge and different beautiful interpretations from traditional commentaries. Then they should

<sup>6</sup> Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi", 8.

<sup>7</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Muhakemat* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Ebuzziya, 1911), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 44-45.

address the contemporary mind.<sup>10</sup> Nursi said, "there is a rule for each period, and the time itself is a commentary. Each period is pregnant with some new knowledge waiting to be discovered. When its time comes, the Qur'anic interpretation has to accord these new explorations."<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Problems of Traditional Qur'anic Exegesis

The Qur'an itself is the foremost source for interpretation. The Qur'an is a revelation from Allah, and to understand any particular verse, it must be examined within the context of the entire revelation. The Qur'an says, "Do they not ponder the Qur'an? If it had been from other than Allah surely, they would have found in it much inconsistency" (4:82). It also says, "Allah has revealed (from time to time) the most beautiful message in the form of a Book, consistent with itself" (39:23). The Qur'an, then, is an infallible source of interpretation because its verses cannot contradict one another. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyyah explains, "what is generally stated in one place is explained in another. Moreover, what is abbreviated in one place may be elaborated at another."<sup>12</sup> No one knows the meaning of the Qur'an better than Allah.

Equally important as a source of exegesis is the *sunnah*, the actions, and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), preserved in the *ahadith* books. The Qur'an declares that it was Prophet's duty to explain the meaning of the Qur'an to humankind: "And We have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought." (16:44). Consequently, a person wishing to understand the meaning of any verse of the Qur'an, and also wishing to know how the teachings of the Qur'an are to be practiced appropriately, must look to both the Qur'an and the *sunnah* simultaneously. Neither can contradict itself or the other, and no other source of interpretation may supersede these sources.

According to Nursi, however, in the era of the Successors, Muslim exegetes became increasingly negligent in rigorously applying the methodological principles of Qur'anic exegesis. For example, they began to use uncritically

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<sup>10</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Jamaal al-Din M. Zarabozo, *How to Approach and Understand the Qur'an* (Boulder: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 1999), 205.

secondary sources of interpretation, such as the *Isra'iliyat*, or Judeo-Christian narratives concerning the lives of the persons, particularly the prophets in the Old and New Testaments, and, later, ancient Greek philosophy. The deterioration of the quality of the methodology of Qur'anic exegesis was a reflection of the deterioration of Muslims in general. Metin Karabaşođlu explains Nursi's understanding of this history as follows:

At the center of his appraisal is the Age of Happiness, in which Islam was born. The Age of Happiness can be comprehended by putting the Qur'an and the Prophet into the center of consideration. Unfortunately, the legacy inherited from the Prophet has, over time, been subject to disintegration. The first step in this disintegration was the transformation of the caliphate into a sultanate. The second step in the process was the Umayyad dynasty's use of ethnicity and religion as the central point of reference. The Umayyad dynasty introduced the sultanate into Islam, subsequently becoming a tradition. Thus, the principle of pure justice (*adalet-i mahza*), enjoined by the Qur'an and preached by the life of the Prophet, was eroded.<sup>13</sup>

Epistemologically, this disintegration in the fourth Islamic century resulted in the creation of distinctions between the religious and temporal sciences. "The great disintegration became clear-cut at the end of the fifth Islamic century on the planes of science, life, and reflection."<sup>14</sup> The disappearance of the holistic study of the Islamic tradition and the differentiation of reason (*'aql*) from the heart (*qalb*) created a chasm between intellectual activity and Qur'anic injunctions, which profoundly affected Qur'anic exegesis and thus peoples' understanding of the Qur'an. Central to *Muḥākamāt* is a criticism of these faults of the traditional approach to Qur'anic exegesis.

According to Nursi, the door of *Isra'iliyat* was opened to the studies of the Qur'anic interpretations by some People of the Book who became Muslims, like Wahb Ibn al- Munabbih and Ka'b al-Akhbar. Nursi continues to state that Muslim scholars accepted this incorrect information because it did not concern the main issues of Islamic sciences. Then, over time, those ignorant of the correct sources

<sup>13</sup> Metin Karabaşođlu, "Text and Community: An Analysis of the Risala-i Nur Movement", *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State U of New York P, 2003), 267.

<sup>14</sup> Karabaşođlu, "An Analysis of the Risala-i Nur Movement", 268.

accepted this erroneous information and misinterpreted some Qur'anic verses. "And you should seek the Qur'an's meanings in its shells, not in your pocket, which is all mixed up. For you will not find them there."<sup>15</sup> He supports that idea with this statement: "The source of commentary is the Qur'an and authentic hadith, not *Israi'iliyat*."<sup>16</sup> Whereas, if the information of *Israi'iliyat* was hypothetically correct, it must only have been used as a loyal follower (*māsadaq*) of the Qur'anic verses, not their meaning."<sup>17</sup>

According to Nursi, the ancient Greek philosophy confused the mind of externalist scholars (Ahl Al-zahir – people for whom just the outlook is essential). As it is known, the Qur'anic information includes intellectual ('aqli) and narrated (naqli) knowledge. When Muslim scholars paid special attention to the study of the interpretation of the Qur'an, somebody started to use the *Israi'iliyat* for narrated knowledge of the Qur'an and tried to apply the reasonable statement of the Qur'an with information of the ancient Greek philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Regarding this subject matter, Nursi has given the example of a limited number of the main elements of the universe. Hence, he states that the information that some Islamic sources have indicated as "there are four main elements of the universe" had been transferred from Greek philosophy. In addition, he explained his feeling about modern science and Greek philosophy, "well done to the efforts of the liberal wisdom of modern science, which has pulled downed the structure of the despotic Greek Philosophy."<sup>19</sup>

It is evident, based on the authority of the words of an expert in a specific field of science, cannot be claimed to be authoritative in another field of science where he is not an expert. Hence, even the greatest expert of the commentary of the Qur'an carries the risk of mistakes if his knowledge is just within his scientific area. When Nursi indicated this, he gave one example about "the barrier of *Dhul Qarneyn*" in the verses, "Bring me blocks of iron. At length, when he had filled up the space between the two steep mountainsides, he said, 'blow (with your

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<sup>15</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 16-17.

<sup>17</sup> See Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 17. 'maasadaq' is a thing that can be a suitable example for statement of the Qur'anic verses. It is not directly meaning of verses. There are many differences between "meaning' and 'maasadaq'.

<sup>18</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 83-84.

bellows)." (18:96). Qadi al-Baydawi, one of the most famous interpreters, limited the location of that barrier and said, it is between mountains which link Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nursi very clearly said that "This explanation is not true. Because it belongs to the geography of the time, it is not a kind of information that belongs to the field of commentary. It is outside the expertise of Al-Baydawi."<sup>20</sup> Nursi also indicated the incorrect explanation regarding the sphericity of the earth. During his era, he challenged some scholars who had claimed that the earth is not spherical but is flat, and he firmly rejected these points as he asserts, "It awakened me to the fact that an ignorant friend can cause as much harm as an enemy."<sup>21</sup> According to Nursi, the ruling from the people of the past period (*ebna-yi mazi*) is based on emotional reflections.

Nursi gives two examples of the effects of exaggeration, which are as follows: the miracle of the splitting of the moon is a very famous one in Islamic literature. Most serious traditional *hadith* sources state that this miraculous event happened during the lifetime of the Prophet.<sup>22</sup> For example, Bukhari narrated from Anas b. Malik, one of the famous companions of the Prophet, "Narrated Anas bin Malik: The people of Mecca asked Allah's Messenger (pbuh) to show them a miracle. So he showed them the moon's split in two halves between which they saw the Hira' mountain."<sup>23</sup> According to *Sahih-i Muslim* Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud narrated: "The moon was cleft asunder while we were in the company of the Prophet (pbuh), and it became two parts. The Prophet said: Witness, witness (this miracle)"<sup>24</sup> In accord with the majority of Islamic scholars, the verse "The Hour (of Judgment) is nigh, and the moon was cleft asunder"<sup>25</sup> indicates the miracle of the splitting of the moon.<sup>26</sup> However, Nursi asserts in "On the Miracles of Muhammad," the nineteenth chapter of his book entitled *Letters*,

<sup>20</sup> Nursi, *Muhakamat*, 26, 27. Nursi, Also see Niyazi Beki, *Kur'an İlimleri ve Tefsir Açısından Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin Eserleri* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 1999), 194.

<sup>21</sup> Nursi, *Muhakamat*, 44-45.

<sup>22</sup> Siddiq Hasan Khan, *Fatah al-Bayan fi Makasid al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Abd al-Muhyi Ali Mahfuz, n.d.), 191.

<sup>23</sup> Muhammed ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Manaqib, bab inshiqaq al-qamar" (Cairo, 1393/1973), 186.

<sup>24</sup> Muslim, ibn Hajjaj al-Qushayri, "*Sahih u Muslim, kitab at-Tefsir*" (Istanbul: Np, 1981.), Q. 54:1

<sup>25</sup> Q. 54:1. And narrated Ibn Abbas: "The moon was cleft asunder during the lifetime of Prophet (pbuh)", in the same place of Bukhari and Muslim.

<sup>26</sup> Khan, *Fatah al-Bayan*, 190-192.

“in some books it is written that after the moon split into two halves, it fell to earth, but veracious scholars have rejected such additions,<sup>27</sup> saying that dissemblers perhaps added them intending to belittle this evident miracle, and making it valueless.” In *Muhakemat*, he writes, “Yes, it is true that some preachers have obscured some of the shining truths of religion.”<sup>28</sup> For example, some people, with the same exaggeration, have dropped the worth of evidence pertaining to the miracle of the splitting of the moon. That is unfortunate because this miracle shines like the sun and proves the prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh). They made it valueless, deflated it like the star named Suha (the small star in the constellation Ursa Major), and they were the cause of the door's opening, for the pretext of non-believers.”<sup>29</sup>

Nursi's other example is about the unbalanced comparison between some Islamic rules. In order to awaken the feelings of humankind in happiness and fear, exaggeration was made, which has broken the right to truth. “For example, so to show backbiting to be equal to murder or passing water while standing to be equal to adultery due to enjoining the good and deterring from evil in exaggerated terms — although the truth never needs this, or to hold giving one dirhem as charity equal to making the Hajj, is to take murder and adultery lightly and to devalue the Hajj.”<sup>30</sup> When Nursi addresses these exaggerators, he uses a brusque style: “You scoundrel, you are opposing the Shari'a with these words of yours! Supposing you were faithful to it even, you would still be foolishly faithful. You are more harmful than the worst enemy.”<sup>31</sup>

In the Arabic language, metaphorical statements have very significant implications. However, their use in place of reality will cause many mistakes. Thus, there is a rule showing the path to recognize the case of metaphorical expressions and identify their entailments. As Nursi indicates: “Also, it is an established principle in the art of rhetoric that when using metonymies and

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<sup>27</sup> For example, Yusuf al-Nabhani quoted from Abu Ishaq Al-Zajaj that the information that the moon entered into the pocket of the Prophet and came out from his sleeve, is wrong. It is not leaning on any authentic source. See al-Nabhani, *Hujjat Allah 'ala al-'Alamin fi Mujizat Sayyid al-Mursulin*, vol. 1 (Cairo: n.p., n.d.), 443.

<sup>28</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Letters 1928-32*, Trans. Şükran Vahide. New rev. ed. Risala-i Nur Collection vol. 3 (Istanbul: Sözlük, 2001), 249.

<sup>29</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 27-28.

<sup>30</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 27-28.

<sup>31</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 29.

making allusions, the literal meanings, known as primary meanings, are not deemed true or false. Such figures refer to the secondary meaning, which is what is intended."<sup>32</sup>

Based on this subject, Nursi gives two famous examples<sup>33</sup> from classical sources. The first example of this expression is as follows: "The blade of the sword of such-and-such man is long."<sup>34</sup> That explanation aimed that; the man addressed by the speech is tall. However, if this man indeed has an extended height, that statement is true for him, even though he has not a sword in his life. The second example is: "The ash of such a man is more."<sup>35</sup> This statement indicates the man's hospitality by speech, so this explanation is proper about a hospitable man, even if he never had a furnace or stove with much ash.

According to Nursi, ignorance is the main reason for the confusion in this subject. He explains: "If figures of speech, *mecaz* fall into the hand of the ignorance from that of learning, they are taken literally and open the door to superstition."<sup>36</sup> Nursi explains this statement with an experience he had in his childhood:

What made me aware of this was an eclipse of the moon when I was young. I asked my mother about it, and she replied: "A snake has swallowed the moon." So I asked: "Why can you still see it?" So, she said: "The snakes in the sky are semi-transparent." See how a simile (*teşbih*) had become reality and, with its interposition, obscured the reality. For employing a simile, astronomers called the intersections of the two arcs of the two imaginary circles formed by the moon's orbit and the zodiac the head and tail of the great serpent. Then when the moon passes either the head or the tail, and the sun passes the other, the interposition of the earth will eclipse the moon.<sup>37</sup>

According to Nursi, neither *ifrat* (exaggeration) nor *tefrit* (understatement) is acceptable in the Qur'anic interpretation, "both their entry and exit are proscribed, just as it is proscribed to either add to the Qur'an or miss

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<sup>32</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 13, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 39

<sup>36</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 26.

something out from it. To add to it is more harmful since it spoils the order and opens the door to baseless ideas. To miss any part out arises from ignorance and may be forgiven to an extent. However, adding to it needs knowledge, and a knowledgeable person is not to be excused. Similarly, it is not permissible to eliminate anything from religion or to join something alien to it.”<sup>38</sup>

By Nursi's point, as some people could not consider that style of the Qur'an, they deviated from the middle way and turned to the wrong path, and they got away from the Qur'an, either as externalist, went to excessive (*ehl-i ifrat*) or enemy of the religion of Islam (*ehl-i tefrit*). Those who are called *ehl-i tefrit* and those looking at the appearance of everything (*zahir*) cause the appearance of externalist doctrine, which is very advantageous for Islamic understanding. However, those who are *ehl-i ifrat* as they cause the appearance of *Batini* doctrine gave more harm than them. After Nursi pointed to this explanation, he stated, “It is only the philosophy of the Shari'a and rhetoric, and logic and science (*hikmet*) that will show the middle way and confute the two extremes.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, he explains:

I say science (*hikmet*) because it is suitable for the more significant part. It contains evil, but this is minor. It is an incontestable principle that to abandon a matter which is mostly good because of some minor evil is to perpetrate a greater evil. It is essential to choose the lesser of two evils. Yes, ancient philosophy contained little good; its superstitions were many, [it led to] minds losing their capacity, to the limiting of ideas due to blind imitation, and ignorance ruling the mass of people. For these reasons, later generations prohibited it to an extent. However, relative to ancient philosophy, philosophy now [modern science] contains much good from the material point of view; its lies are few; thought is free, and learning predominates. In any event, every age has its ethos.<sup>40</sup>

It seems that Nursi's intention of wisdom here is the system of contemporary thinking, which has appeared under the influence of modern science and philosophy. However, he sees the wisdom (*hikmet*) mentioned in the following verse as an appropriation (*maasadaq*) or suitable action for an

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<sup>38</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 46

<sup>39</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 27.



example of contemporary wisdom and modern sciences. “He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and he to whom wisdom is granted has received indeed a benefit overflowing, but none will receive admonition but men of understanding.”<sup>41</sup> This point is crucial because it shows Nursi’s positive attitude towards modern science and philosophy. Nursi’s following points clarify his position vis-à-vis the modern sciences. “It is not necessary that all knowledge found in the commentaries be a direct argument of them because scientific knowledge supports each other.”<sup>42</sup> However, the interpreters of the Qur’an must have profound knowledge of different scientific fields.

### 3. The Style of the Qur’an

Experts have accepted three styles based on Islamic literature, and they are as follows: the abstract style (*uslub-u mujarrad*) which is used in discussing actual speaking and daily dealings; the ornamental or decorative style (*uslub-u muzayyan*), which is used to convince the addressed, especially in delivering either a warning or good news and the high style (*uslub-u ali*) which includes power and majesty that is used primarily in the divine subjects.<sup>43</sup>

According to Nursi, “Certainly the Guiding Qur’an, which is inimitable and whose eloquence is of the very highest degree, will choose the most appropriate styles of Arabic and the most direct, the clearest, and the shortest method of deductive reasoning.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, the All-Wise Qur’an guides people with a style that does not insult their feelings, mainly while it uses the rules or the order in the universe as a witness, it shall consider the level of their reasoning and their knowledge about the universe. “That is an important reason for using metaphoric style in Qur’an.” To Nursi’s point, some people could not realize the style of the Qur’an. They deviated from the middle way and turned to the wrong path; they approached the Qur’an either as externalists, who went to excessive (*ehl-i ifrat*) or as enemies of the religion of Islam (*ehl-i tefrit*).<sup>45</sup> Some examples given for this subject are the following:

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<sup>41</sup> Qur’an, 2:269.

<sup>42</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 28.

<sup>43</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 109.

<sup>44</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 12.

"Your Guardian Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and earth in six days, then He settled Himself on the Throne."<sup>46</sup> "Until, when he (*Dhu'l-Qarnayn*), reached the setting of the sun, he found it set in a spring of murky water;" "And the Sun runs unto a resting place, for him: that is the decree of (Him), the Exalted in Might, the All-Knowing."<sup>47</sup>

The answers to questions such as "What is meant by Allah's settling Himself on the throne' and 'the setting of the Sun in a spring of murky water'" are lengthy, so indicating them briefly, we say this: since the verses of the Qur'an express matters following the styles of Arabic, in conformity with outward appearance, in a way everyone will understand, they frequently explain things in the form of metaphors, allegories, and comparisons. Thus, to consider the verse, *set in a spring of murky water*: Dhu'l-Qarnayn saw the Sun setting on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, which appeared like a boiling, muddy spring or in the fiery, smoking crater of a volcano. That is, in the outward view, the Atlantic appeared to Dhu'l-Qarnayn from a distance as a large pool of a spring surrounded by a swamp which, in the intense heat of summer, was steaming and vaporizing; he saw the Sun's apparent setting in a part of it, or he saw the Sun, the eye of the skies, being hidden in a new, fiery crater at the summit of a volcano, which was spewing out rocks, earth and lava.

Yes, the All-Wise Qur'an's miraculously eloquent expression teaches many matters with this sentence. Firstly, by explaining that Dhu'l-Qarnayn's journey to the west coincided with the intense heat of the summer, the area of a swamp, the time of the setting of the Sun, and the time of a volcanic eruption, it alludes to many instructive matters, like the complete conquest of Africa. It is well-known that the Sun's motion is in appearance, indicating the earth's hidden movement and giving news of it. What it intended is not the actual setting of the Sun, while the spring is also considered a metaphor. From a distance, a giant sea appears like a small pool. The likening of a sea appearing beyond swamps, mists, and vapors rising from it due to the heat to a muddy spring together with the word *'ayn*, which in Arabic means spring, and the Sun and eye, while the last is the most meaningful and apt according to the mysteries of eloquence.<sup>48</sup> It

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<sup>46</sup> Qur'an, 7:54.

<sup>47</sup> Qur'an, 18: 90.

<sup>48</sup> Qur'an, 18:86.

appears like that to Dhu'l-Qarnayn because of the distance. Based on the Sublime Throne and commanding the heavenly bodies, the heavenly address of the Qur'an states that the subjugated Sun, which performs the duty of a lamp in this guest-house of the Most Merciful One, is hidden in a dominical spring like the Atlantic Ocean, and this is fitting for the elevatedness and greatness of the heavenly address; through its miraculous style it shows the sea to be a hot spring and a steaming eye, and that is how it appears to heavenly eyes.

"I n S h o r t: Terming the Atlantic Ocean *a muddy spring* indicates that Dhu'l-Qarnayn saw that huge ocean as a spring due to the distance. However, because the Qur'an sees everything at a close distance, it did not see what Dhu'l-Qarnayn saw, a sort of illusion. Indeed, since the Qur'an comes from the Heavens and looks to them, it sees the Earth sometimes as an arena, sometimes as a palace, sometimes as a cradle, and sometimes as a page. Thus, it calls the vast, misty, vaporous Atlantic Ocean a spring, showing its great elevatedness."<sup>49</sup>

"And the Sun runs its course to a place appointed."<sup>50</sup>

The *Lam*, translated here as 'to,' also expresses the meaning of 'in.' Thus, ordinary believers see it as meaning 'to' and understand that the Sun, a portable lamp providing light and heat for them, will undoubtedly conclude its journey and reach its place of rest, then take on a form that will no longer be beneficial. Moreover, pondering over the great bounties that the All-Glorious Creator has attached to the Sun, they declare: "Glory be to God! All praise and thanks be to God!"<sup>51</sup>

A learned scholar would also show the *Lam* as meaning 'to,' but he would think of it not only as a lamp but also as a shuttle weaving the tapestries of the Sustainer on the loom of spring and summer, as an ink-pot whose ink is light for the letters of the Eternally Besought One wrote on the pages of night and day. Moreover, thinking of the order and regularity of the world, of which the apparent movement of the Sun is a sign and to which it points, the learned scholar would exclaim before His wisdom: "What wonders God has willed!" and declare before

<sup>49</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, Trans. Şükran Vahide, New rev. ed. *Risala-i Nur Collection*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: Sozler, 2002), 147-148.

<sup>50</sup> Qur'an, 36-38.

<sup>51</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words*. Trans. Şükran Vahide. New rev. ed. *Risala-i Nur Collection*. vol. 3. (Istanbul: Sözlür, 2002), 393.

the All-Wise Maker's art: "How great are His blessings!" and he would bow in prostration.

A geographer and philosopher would explain the *Lam* as meaning 'in,' like this: through the Divine command and with a spring-like motion on its axis, the Sun orders and propels the solar system. Exclaiming in wonder and amazement before the All-Glorious Maker Who thus creates and sets in order this mighty clock: "All mightiness is God's, and all power!" he would cast away philosophy and embrace the wisdom of the Qur'an.

A mindful scholar would consider this *Lam* as both causal and adverbial and would explain it like this: "Since the All-Wise Maker has made apparent causes a veil to His works, through a Divine law, which is called gravity, He has tied the planets to the Sun like stones in a sling, and causes them to revolve with different but regular motions within the sphere of His wisdom; and He has made the sun's spinning on its axis an apparent cause giving rise to the gravity. That is, the meaning of *(to) a place appointed* is 'it is in motion in its appointed place for the stability of the solar system.' For it is a Divine rule, a dominical law like motion giving rise to heat, heat to force, and force to gravity?" Thus, on understanding this from a single letter of the Qur'an, the philosopher would declare: "All praise and thanks be to God! It is in the Qur'an that true wisdom is to be found. I consider philosophy to be worth virtually nothing!"

Moreover, the following idea would occur to a thinker of poetic bent from this *Lam* and the stability mentioned above: "The sun is a luminous tree, and the planets are its mobile fruits. Nevertheless, contrary to trees, the sun shakes itself, so the fruits do not fall. If it did not shake itself, they would fall and be scattered. Then he would think to himself: 'The sun is an ecstatic leader of a group reciting God's Names. He recites in ecstasy in the center of the circle and causes others to recite.' In another treatise, the meaning is described as follows: Yes, the sun is a fruit-bearing tree; it shakes itself so that the planets fall, not its fruits. If it rested in silence, the attraction would cease, and they would sweep through space, its ecstatic."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 394.

According to Nursi, these and such verses reflect this excellent style.<sup>53</sup> This also includes the mountains [its] pegs (78:7):

“a phrase which says, “I made the mountains as stakes and masts for that earth of yours.” An ordinary person’s share from this phrase would be this: he sees the mountains, which appear like stakes driven into the ground, thinks of the benefits and bounties in them, and offers thanks to his Creator. A poet shares from this phrase: he imagines the Earth as the ground, on which is pitched in a sweeping arc the dome of the heavens like a mighty green tent adorned with electric lamps, and he sees the mountains skirting the base of the heavens to be the pegs of the tent. He worships the All-Glorious Maker in wondering amazement.

A tent-dwelling literary man’s share of this phrase: he imagines the face of the Earth to be a barren desert and the mountain chains as the various tents of nomads as if the soil layer had been cast over high posts and the pointed tips of the posts had raised the cloth of the soil, which he sees as the habitation of numerous different creatures looking one to the other. He prostrates in wonder before the Glorious Creator, Who placed and pitched so quickly these august and mighty beings like tents on the face of the earth.

The share of a geographer with a literary bent from this phrase: he thinks of the globe of the earth as a ship sailing the oceans of either the air or the other and the mountains as masts and posts driven into the ship to balance and stabilize it. He declares: “Glory be unto You! How sublime is Your glory!” before the All-Powerful One of Perfection, Who makes the mighty globe as an orderly ship, places us on it, and makes its voyage through the far reaches of the world.

A sociologist and philosopher of human society share this phrase; his thoughts would go like this: the earth is a house, and the supporting post of the life of that house is animal life, while the supporting post of animal life is water, air, and earth, the conditions of life while the supporting post of water, air, and earth are the mountains. The mountains are the reservoirs for water, the combs for the air: they precipitate the noxious gases and purify them; they are the earth’s preserver: they preserve it from being transformed into a swamp and from the encroachment of the sea. They are also the treasuries for other

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<sup>53</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 40.

necessities of human life. In utter reverence, he offers praise and thanks to the Maker of Glory and Kindness, Who made these great mountains as posts for the earth -the house of our life- in this way and appointed them as the keepers of the treasuries of our livelihood. The share of a scholar of natural science from this phrase would be this: he would think of the earthquakes and tremors which occur as the result of upheavals and fusions in the heart of the earth being calmed with the upthrust of mountains, that the emergence of mountains is the cause of the earth's stable rotation on its axis and in its orbit and it is not deviating in its annual rotation as a result of the convulsions of earthquakes; the anger and wrath of the earth are quieted through it breathing through the vents in the mountains. He would come to believe entirely and exclaim: "All wisdom is God's!"<sup>54</sup>

#### 4. The Inclination of People to Dignity and Superstitions

Whenever people want to dignify something, they try to associate it with famous people. Nursi explained this truth with this short formulation: "The entrance or doorway of superstitions is the inclination of people to dignity."<sup>55</sup> However, he continued, some historically famous men, like Rustam, the son of Zal (who was a Persian famous for his power and heroism) and Mullah Nasruddin (a Turkish man famous for witty phrases and funny statements), if they are given even two and a half percent of the words as an alms, are attributed to them, it would suffice.<sup>56</sup> According to Nursi, the main reason for the use of powerless narrations in the Islamic sources and the attribution of the majority of them to Ibn 'Abbas (one of the companions of the Prophet and one of the most famous interpreters of the Qur'an) is that inclination to dignity and reputation.<sup>57</sup> However, "the favor more than the favor of God is not favor," while "To be consent with the favor of God is an obligation."<sup>58</sup> "Yes, it is only the stars of the Qur'an that ... are so bright that they both disperse the darkness of ignorance and the dimness of superficiality; and with their perspicuousness, they rend the veils of

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<sup>54</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 413-414.

<sup>55</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 20-21.

<sup>57</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 20.

<sup>58</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 21.

familiarity and superficiality and rip up the masks of the literalists, and direct them towards the truths of the world and the self and offer them guidance.”<sup>59</sup>

In accordance with Nursi’s view, it is understood that the main reason for exaggeration is “to be more royalist than the king.” Everyone who loves religion and is enamored of the truth should content himself with the worth of things [as they are] and not exaggerate and go to excess. For to do so is to decry divine power. It is to be dissatisfied with the perfection and beauty in creation, which caused al-Ghazali<sup>60</sup> to declare: "There could be nothing better in the sphere of contingency than what exists, and to belittle them.”<sup>61</sup> However, “the authentic narrations of traditions are adequate sources for Qur’anic interpretations, and we have to be contented with the authentic historical information, which was strained with the filter of reason.”<sup>62</sup>

### 5. Nursi’s Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur’an

Referring to his view concerning the formative period of Islamic history, Nursi said, “As for the Muslim peoples (millet-i Islam), for the first three hundred years they were eminent and superior, and reached the highest point of development in five hundred years. I call the period from the fifth to the twelfth centuries the past and the subsequent centuries the future.”<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, Nursi divided the ages while evaluating people according to their psychology and scientific value into ‘the people of the past’ and ‘the people of the future.’ He did not forget the non-Muslim people, for whom he says, “what I mean by the people of the past are the non-Muslims of the Middle Ages from before the tenth century (AD sixteenth century), and in ancient times.”<sup>64</sup> According to Nursi, evaluating people according to the period’s concept may not be accurate. Thus, he says, “Even though some people live physically in our century, spiritually, it is as if they

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<sup>59</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 43-44.

<sup>60</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Cairo: 1356/1937), iv, 2509.

<sup>61</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 30. Nursi’s this idea is suitable to the narration of tradition: “The best of ages, is my time, then the age which follows it, then the one which follows it” See, al-Bukhari, *Fadail al-Sahabe*, 1; In another narration it is accounted the fourth century. See, Ibn Hajar Ahmad bin ‘Ali al-Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari: Sharh al-Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 7 (Riyadh: n.p., n.d.) 3-7. [fix entry]

<sup>64</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 30-31.

are souvenirs of the middle ages. Thus, many clear truths are groundless according to their opinions.”<sup>65</sup>

In Nursi's opinion, eight obstacles hindered the understanding of the Qur'anic truths in the past. Four of them belonged to non-Muslims. They were imitation, ignorance, bigotry, and the absolute authority of the Christian Clergy members. Three obstacles that belonged to Muslims were different kinds of Despotism, Immoral movements, and hopelessness, which were the main reasons for confusion and laziness in Muslim society. The eighth and most significant obstacle, common to both parties, was imagining a struggle between Religion and modern science. However, Nursi wrote, “three realities which come forth in the present time will overcome these obstacles. One is the tendency to learn the reality, which arose from modern scientific education; the second is the love of humanity and finally, the tendency of fairness.”<sup>66</sup> The fair and authentic interpretation of Qur'anic truths can be realized only with objective efforts. Nursi stressed the eighth obstacle explicitly, and he considered as ignorant the owners of the claim that there is a clash between modern sciences and the truths of the Qur'an. According to Nursi, the claimers were either the enemies of religion (*ehl-i tefrit*) or the externalists and those who go to excess (*ehl-i ifrat*). He continues, “Islam is the master and guide of sciences and the chief of all true knowledge.”<sup>67</sup>

Nursi, who pondered the real needs of his time, saw that the current basic needs of people agreed with the Qur'an's main aims.<sup>68</sup> As mentioned above, the third section of *Muhakemat* offers proof of the main aims of the Qur'an, the Single Maker, Prophethood, the Resurrection of the dead, and Justice. It is fascinating as many of the arguments and matters he had put forward in *Muhakemat* are also reiterated in his commentary *Isharat al-I'jaz*, and subsequently in the Collection of *Risale-i Nur*, to which he merely added the worship together with justice.

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<sup>65</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 8.

<sup>67</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 8. And see about this subject Vahide Sukran, *The Author of the Risale: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: 1992) 44; Kelton Cobb, “Revelation, the Disciplines of Reason and Truth in the Works of Said Nursi and Paul Tillich,” *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany: State U of New York P, 2003), 134-139.

<sup>68</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 10-11.



Nursi concerned himself with the faults of the traditional approach to the Qur'anic exegesis that might have possibly tarnished some Islamic truths. Ever since childhood, he sought to separate the incorrect teachings of Islam that shaded its truths by using a logical filter.<sup>69</sup> To put forward the method of a contemporary commentary, on the one hand, he pays attention to the weakness of the traditional approach to the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an; on the other hand, he tries to determine the necessary elements for a new approach to understanding the Divine Book. Nursi saw in his time that most of the attacks on the truths of the Qur'an came from people who studied modern science and philosophy. Thus, he considered the essential elements of faith the most needed for contemporary humankind and worked on an appropriate new approach to understanding the Qur'an. Thus, he clarified those elements under the light of both the revelation and the modern sciences. As a result, he tried to decipher the messages of the Qur'an, despite the texts by the traditional interpreters. This is the original method used in the *Risale-i Nur*. Although Nursi did not consider all scientific theories in the *Risale-i Nur*, he challenged some of them.<sup>70</sup> He considers Israi'iliyat and ancient Greek philosophy to be of little epistemological value and thinks that modern science and modern thought (reason) should be emphasized despite them:

Similarly, we see that thanks to science, at present, for the most part, truth governs in place of force, proof instead of sophistry, reason instead of instinct, guidance instead of caprice, steadfastness in place of bigotry, zeal instead of malice, the propensities of the intellect rather than the desires of the soul and thought rather than emotion. In the future, this will be the case completely, God willing, as it was in Islam's first, second, and third centuries and was mostly so until the fifth. From the fifth century down to the present, force overcame right.<sup>71</sup>

Some of the essential elements of the contemporary thinking style can be explained as follows: One should assume a positive attitude. In other words, one should assert the ideas and thoughts that one certainly believes in their truth,

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<sup>69</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 44-45.

<sup>70</sup> See, as an example, Beki, *Kur'an İlimleri*, 285-292.

<sup>71</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 32-33.

and one must not occupy oneself with the incorrectness of others. Thus, in the *Isharat al-I'jaz*, Nursi's first Qur'anic commentary, and in the Twenty-fifth Word of the *Risale-i Nur*, all of the positive arguments/elements used in the classical commentary sources. However, we can also see in some places references to modern science. This topic is extensively examined in the researcher's doctoral thesis.<sup>72</sup>

In order to support one's ideas while considering the messages of the Qur'an, authentic traditions should be benefited alongside authentic historical information and proven scientific knowledge, but not *Isra'iliyat*. However, most people prefer the consideration of reality to bigotry and filings of partiality.<sup>73</sup> According to Nursi, there is a seal or signet for every truthful meaning, which is the reality of the beauty revealed in the truths of the Qur'an and Islam. However, he wrote, "(the *Rasa'il*) breaks the excess of the externalist (*zahiriiyun*) approach, which looks at the appearance as reality, and of those who look at everything as a metaphor (*batiniyyun*). Adopting a middle way, the epistles guide a way which is nothing except the philosophy of the Shari'a and rhetorical science, and the style of logical thought and the wisdom."<sup>74</sup>

However, in the preface of his commentary, *Isharat al-I'jaz* was planned to be a source and a guide for the prospective commentary in the future, the collection of *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi asserts:

"If obstacles had not arisen such as the First War, and other fascicles and letters had included other exegetical truths similar to the miraculousness of the Qur'an's composition – one aspect of its miraculousness – which is expounded in this first volume, a good comprehensive commentary would have been produced on the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition. Perhaps in the future, a fortunate committee will take this partial commentary and the sixty-six, rather, one hundred and thirty parts of The Words (*Sözler*) and Letters (*Mektûbat*) as its source to write such a commentary, God willing."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Beki, *Kur'an İlimleri*, 177-261.

<sup>73</sup> Beki, *Kur'an İlimleri*, 17, 32, 39.

<sup>74</sup> Beki, *Kur'an İlimleri*, 23.

<sup>75</sup> Nursi, *Isharat al-I'jaz*, 18.

Comparing *Isharat al I'jaz* and the Collection of *Risale-i Nur*, two imagined sources for the probable commentary, Muhsin Abd al-Hamid stated that in the *Isharat al-I'jaz*, Nursi tries to prove the miraculousness of the Qur'an. Thus, within the framework of the theory of the regularity of meanings, he used the logical, literary, and dictionary style.<sup>76</sup> However, in the Collection of *Risale-i Nur*, he pays attention to clear statements, trustworthy science, the enjoyed explanations, and the proofs given logically. It is appropriate to remember that until today such a commentary as planned by Nursi in the *Muhakemat* has not been written.

In fact, for Nursi, as Kelton Cobb writes, "every conceivable discipline and kind of knowledge is discernible in the Qur'an, if only in the form of a "seed," or to use a less organic metaphor, in a code that a perceptive interpreter may crack."<sup>77</sup> Nursi believes deep in his heart that the truths of the Qur'an will dominate the future. "The truth and reality will grow and overcome groundless fancies. Moreover, I believe that the absolute ruler of the future is only the truth of Islam."<sup>78</sup>

It is worth considering Nursi's breadth of thought with the most recognizable characters in his *Muhakemat*. For instance, the work of a Qur'anic interpreter typically addresses the Muslim people, but Nursi addresses Muslims and non-Muslims as well. It is not only the people of the straight way but also the Excessive people (*ehl-i ifrat* and *ehl-i tefrit*), like idiotic friends and clever enemies, are also addressed. In addition, broader titles like 'Element of the Truth,' 'Element of the Literature,' and 'Element of the Faith' were used to describe titles in the traditional commentary system. Likewise, the methodology of commentary usually uses the Qur'anic subjects. However, Nursi, in his work, has referred to the concept of Islam as the word of 'Qur'an'<sup>79</sup> Probably, Nursi, with this

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<sup>76</sup> Muhsin Abd al-Hamid, "Preface" *Isharat al-Ijaz* by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, ed. İhsan Qasim (İstanbul: n.p. 1994), 8.

<sup>77</sup> Cobb, *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, 134.

<sup>78</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Forexemple in that centence the Word İslam used in plecte of Word Qur'an: "And with su'-i fehm and su'-i adab, we could not fulfill the right of Islam and the respect that it deserves. He too, hating us, embraced us with clouds of delusions and dreams, and veiled him.

He also has the right. Because we could not appreciate its value by mixing the method of Israel, the story with its doctrine, and the metaphor with its truth. As a punishment, he

work, has intended not only to write a methodology of the Qur'anic commentary in specific meaning but also to write a comprehensive interpretation of severe Islamic disciplines like 'Kalam,' 'Fiqh,' 'Literature,' even the social events, etc. Eventually, Nursi's approach uses the 'Hermeneutical Method' through the name of *Muhakemat* as the 'Saikal al Islam (Polishing Islam) in place of 'Saikal al-Tafsir (Polishing the Commentary) must be considered as the indication of a vast capacity.

Nursi stated three main issues in the interpretation: first, interpreting the text of the Qur'an as unquestionably the words of God; second, presuming what God aimed with His words is correct and proper; finally, explaining the aim of a verse, for example, maybe such and such. Of course, he said, "there is not any doubt about the first two rules, in accord with the opinion of believers, and there is no place for different interpretations. However, the existence of different commentaries in the place of the third rule is normal, and it is necessary for the emergence of reality "In consequence, all houses should be entered by their doors since each has its door and each lock has its key."<sup>80</sup>

That implies there are many sciences in the Qur'an, which addresses all people in all historical periods, and understanding those different sorts of knowledge needs expert scholars, as the field of interpretation should be open to every owner of freedom, conscience, and thought. In Nursi's statement: "the future, due to the domination of common sense and free thought, will be a very suitable place for the shining of the sun of Islam." Unlike "some Christians who deviate from the middle way by never using the sense and reasonable proofs, and imitating their religious men," "what constantly makes Islam manifest and discloses its truths, is it is being founded on reality, girded with proof, consulting with reason, being seated on the throne of truth, and its conformity with the principles of wisdom."<sup>81</sup>

## 6. The Element of the Time

Nursi stated the importance of the time for interpreting the Qur'an with that statement: "for every time there is a rule," we have to consider it. "Time is a

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left us in humiliation and misery for ta'dib in the world. It is his mercy that will save us again" (Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 9).

<sup>80</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 42.

<sup>81</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 33-34.

big interpreter,” so it should have been considered when it shows its actual rule. “As time grows older, the Qur’an grows younger.”<sup>82</sup> That indicates that the truths will be understood by time, and time will become the witness of the truths of the Qur’an.

Nursi has put forward this statement, “The old status is impossible, so either a new status, or non-existence status,” as a sociological rule, and he compared the scientific manners of the people of the past and people of the future concerning the element of time, and evaluated the new approach of interpretation in that frame.

In the Qur’anic commentary, Nursi has aimed to go down to the sources of the problems to find solutions for them. Thus, he tried to prove the psychological source of the problems instead of historical and social sources. On account of that, he compared the people of the past and the people of the future to prove the different emotional manners concerning different times. We can follow this in the statement:

“Now, it is well-known that it is either the reason or the eye that governs human beings. Alternatively, to put it another way, it is either thought or emotions; truth or force; wisdom or imperatives; either the inclinations of the heart or the leanings of the intellect; or either whims or guidance.”<sup>83</sup>

After this classification, Nursi tries to determine the factors that dominate people in the past and the future.

“In consequence, we see that with the people of the past, their mostly uncorrupted morals and pure emotions predominated, and their unenlightened minds caused personalities and conflicts to gain the upper hand. However, since the somewhat enlightened minds of the people of the future have conquered their emotions, which are clouded by lust and appetites, and have subjugated them to its command, certainly, the rights of people generally shall rule.”<sup>84</sup>

Following Nursi’s formalization, the educational system at the thoughtful schools, even in the same sciences, has to be different from the one at the

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<sup>82</sup> Nursi, *Letters*, 1928-32, 590.

<sup>83</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 31.

<sup>84</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 31.

emotional schools. Thus, because of the domination of the power and the inclinations which produced malice, hostility, and a strong desire to be over at the past time, merely the ornamented imagination of the statement and people readily admitted the magician style of rhetoric, without proof. However, to compare us now to them means confining us to the corner of those times. "We want proof; embroidered words do not deceive us."<sup>85</sup> "We are the people of the present and are destined for the future. Embellishing what is claimed does not satisfy our minds; we want proof."<sup>86</sup>

### 7. The Modern Islamic Perspective

Dating from the twentieth century, the civilization of Europe become the ruler in the Islamic world, displaying new approaches and different interpretations in the field of the Qur'an and the other scientific disciplines. However, some were like positivist approaches, and contemporary scientific theories were accepted as unchanging truths. As a result of these modern approaches, many incorrect commentaries have been made. On the other side, some people rejected everything concerning modern sciences in the name of religion. Now! As explained above, Nursi's work was like a light showing that the middle way was far from those two extreme ways. He called both sides of those fanatics to agree to investigate merely the truths objectively. His perspective was reasonable, flexible, and without fanaticism, and he considered only finding the truth. With this perspective, Nursi became the hope for the hopeless manners during his lifetime and after his death. This approach demonstrated that "The idiotic friends are as harmful as the clever enemies"<sup>87</sup> and that "The matters known as the virtues of civilization are each ordinance of the Shari'a put in another form."<sup>88</sup>

Nursi stressed the importance of forwarding those Islamic truths with the following argument: The powerful reasons for Islam's material progress show that Islam will also be materially dominant in the future. In the heart of the

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<sup>85</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 31.

<sup>86</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 32.

<sup>87</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 29.

<sup>88</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 39.

Islamic world's collective personality are five compelling, unbreakable 'strengths,' which have joined hands and cooperated.

**First Strength:** This reality of Islam, the master of all perfection, can turn three hundred and seventy million people (now more than 1.5 billion) into a single soul.

**Second Strength:** An intense need, which is the absolute master of civilization and industry and is the source and means of development, together with complete, back-breaking poverty.

**Third Strength:** This Strength consists of freedom which is following the Shari'a. It teaches men exalted aims in the form of competition for exalted things and causes them to strive that way, shatter despotism, excite exalted emotions, and destroy jealousy, envy, malice, and rivalry. It is furnished with a true awakening, an eagerness for competition, a tendency towards renewal, and a predisposition for civilization,

**Fourth Strength:** Fearlessness arising from belief, which is decorated with compassion. That is, neither to demean oneself nor to be servile to oppressors and despots nor to oppress and be arrogant towards the unfortunate; these form the foundations of freedom under the Shari'a.

**Fifth Strength:** This is the dignity of Islam, which proclaims and upholds the Word of Allah. In this age, proclaiming the Word of Allah is contingent on material progress; it may be proclaimed only through achieving true civilization. It cannot be doubted that the world of Islam's collective personality will carry out to the letter that categorical command issued by the dignity of Islam through belief.<sup>89</sup>

## 8. The Objective Point of View

The researcher considers that the contemporary man needs an objective point of view that will show the truth as it is, a freedom that will save his mind and opinion from scientific ignorance, and substantial evidence that will satisfy his conscience. Because, as in the past, ideological obsessions can change the

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<sup>89</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Reyhan, 1996), 36-37; Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 37. But the third strength and fourth strength in *Muhakemat* is a little different in the wording.

appearance of the truth many times in this century and cause prejudiced approaches about any subject. Nursi calls on those who approach the Qur'an and Islam with prejudices to act wisely and justly and briefly warns:

“O, you unfair people who try to criticize Islam from outside and from afar! Do not be deceived! Think and reason! Do not make do with looking superficially, for those who are the cause of these pretexts of yours are called "reprehensible religious scholars" (lit. scholars of evil, wickedness — ulema-i sū') in the language of the Shari'a. Look beyond the veil caused by their imbalance and externalist literalness. You will see that each truth of Islam is a light-scattering proof, like a luminous star.”<sup>90</sup>

### 9. The Book of Universe

The book of the universe is a common and essential subject between the Qur'anic verses and modern sciences. Thus, the proof of an agreement between reality or authentic scientific knowledge and the truths of the Qur'an depends on understanding the book of the universe. In this way, it will be understood that the claim of a disagreement between them is just an imaginative and unrealistic idea. Nursi's statement is as follows: The All-Wise Qur'an, as a book of guidance, teaches humankind the wisdom of the natural laws, the scientific principles of the universe, and the justice measure, which accounts for the existence of the universe. As a book explaining these natural laws of creation, the Qur'an has revealed a just, sound, and balanced life model with the principles it has preached for the human community and has been a guarantor for their happiness in this world and the hereafter.<sup>91</sup> The universe book, the science subject, is also on the agenda of the Qur'an because the belief in tawhid is at the forefront of the four primary purposes of the Qur'an. One of the best ways to prove this is the method of *istidlâ*, which can be expressed as "transfer from art to the artist" That means the created indicates the Creator. This method is prevalent in the Qur'anic verses; the argument for this method is the universe itself.<sup>92</sup>

### 10. The Function of Beings Mentioned in the Qur'an

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<sup>90</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 29.

<sup>91</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 6.



According to Nursi, the Qur'an mentions that the universe is to draw attention to its witness to the intention, will, knowledge and wisdom of the Supreme Creator with the language of wisdom, order, and regularity. In other words, Nursi explains that there are four duties of the beings of the universe that are mentioned in the Qur'an:

First: To announce the sovereignty of the Eternal Maker with the language of order and agreement.

Second: Each being is the subject of a branch of science to reveal that Islam is a summary or essence of actual sciences.

Third: Each being is a sample of a species to prove the conformity of Islam with the Divine laws and principles prevailing in the creation.

Finally: Each example of truth attracts the attention of ideas and minds and encourages them to search for truths. "For instance, the heavenly bodies, both lofty and lowly, are distinguished by being the subject of oaths in the Qur'an and constantly exhort the heedless to ponder over themselves. Yes, the Qur'anic oaths are a rap over the knuckles for those drifting in slumbers of heedlessness."

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### **11. The Proofs of the Existence and the Uniqueness of the Maker of the Universe**

According to Nursi, there are four ways to reach the recognition and knowledge of the Lofty Maker. First: The way of the investigative Sufis is founded on purification and illumination. Second: The method of Islamic theology (*Kalam*) is founded on possibility and creation (*imkân ve hudus*). These two methods were taken from the Qur'an, but human thought got mixed into them. Thus they became unclear. Third: the method of philosophy. All three ways are not saved from the attack of doubts. Finally: The method of the Qur'an, which shows the high degree of the rhetoric of the Qur'an, is much shorter than the other right ways, and it is the most comprehensive in accordance with its clear explanation to the people in general. "Here! We, too, chose this."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 11-12.

<sup>94</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 107-109.

Nursi explained the Qur'anic method as follows: "That method includes two kinds of proofs to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Lofty Maker:

**First:** is the proof of assistance (*dalil-i inayah*). This proof can be summarized as follows: We observe that there is a perfect order in the universe full of wisdom. That state proves the intention and wisdom of God and puts the groundless possibility of chance in that order out of sight. **Second:** is the evidence of God's invention. It means that everything in existence is given a special form. Everything is temporal, which means that existence is not necessary."<sup>95</sup>

### 12. The Philosophy of Figurative Speech (Felsefe-i Beyan)

Nursi also brings up the subject of the philosophy of figurative speech or poetry's purpose (*hikmet*). He wrote: "If the science of figurative speech is disregarded, rhetoric yields no benefits other than arousing wonder in the listener."<sup>96</sup> He continued, "The manifest wisdom in these rules of grammar and syntax has great value, even if it is less than that of the science of figurative speech. In short: the rules transform the transmitted sciences (*ulûm-u nakliye*), established through induction, into rational sciences (*ulûm-u aklıye*)."<sup>97</sup> Some examples were given by Nursi about this subject as follows:

"Two different subjects cannot govern a verb. Two agents are not able to be governing the same action." For instance, you cannot say: I you will go, but you have to say: you and I will go.

The interrogative particle '*hal*' will not wait patiently to see the verb but desires to join.

Also, the doer (*fâ'il*) is mighty; it seizes for itself the nominative vowel point 'u' (*damma*), which is substantial. Each is a reflection and similitude of the laws in force in the universe and external world.<sup>98</sup>

"It is no secret that the most penetrating of instruments that points to external truths and fastens a mental proposition to the external law, and if one

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<sup>95</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 107-109.

<sup>96</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 91.

<sup>97</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 92.

<sup>98</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 92.

may say so, rend the veil and discloses the truth behind it, is the intensive particle *inna*. Due to this characteristic of *inna* that it is used frequently in the Qur'an."<sup>99</sup>

Nursi also draws attention to the meanings of other particles like '*ba*,' '*ala*,' '*ila*,' '*hatta*,' '*fi*,' '*lam*."<sup>100</sup> He also attracts attention to the importance of the oaths in the Qur'an: "the Qur'anic oaths are a rap over the knuckles for those drifting in slumbers of heedlessness."<sup>101</sup>

**The word *mubarazah* and war:** According to Nursi, an essential rule of rhetorical statement is "each thing if is realized, it is realized with its all necessities." For instance, "the word *mubarazah* is like a window showing the battlefield." For example, he wrote, "Zamakhshari, the famous Qur'anic interpreter, just like an expert of war and like a contemporary diplomat, can understand from this verse: 'Who will give life to decayed bones?'"<sup>102</sup> a challenge which he explained as: 'who can come forth, to struggle with me?'"<sup>103</sup>

**The nominal and indicative meaning:** At the same time, Nursi used technical linguistic terms in scientific and philosophical areas. He made a clear distinction between natural scientific philosophy and Qur'anic philosophy, as the former examines the universe by its nominal meaning (*mana-i ismi*), while the latter does so through its indicative meaning (*mana-i harfi*). He wrote: "All things other than Allah, that is, the universe, should be looked at as signifying something other than themselves (*mana-yi harfi*) and on account of Allah. It is an error to look at them as signifying only themselves (*mana-i ismi*) and on account of causes... when looking at causes, one should think of the true Causer of Causes."<sup>104</sup>

**Cinematography:** Unlike the Islamic scholars existing at Nursi's young age, he used some foreign vocabulary to stress an imaginative meaning in his works. For example, he pays attention to the rhetorical style in an Arabic poem, which can be translated as "the breaking of a promise addresses me from beneath the

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<sup>99</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 101.

<sup>100</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 92-93.

<sup>101</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 12.

<sup>102</sup> Qur'an, 36:78.

<sup>103</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 83.

<sup>104</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, trc. Abdulmecid Nursi (Istanbul: n.p., 1994), 51.

delayed restitution of my right. It tells me not to be deceived, for which reason hope and despair have begun to struggle in my heart; they are destroying the heaving house that is my breast." Moreover, he added, "As in a dream, these lines appear to one's mind like cinematography (film). Yes, such rhetorical magic is hypnotic in a way."<sup>105</sup>

### 13. The Order of Meaning (nazm-i ma'ani)

According to Nursi, "the natural channel for ideas and emotions is the ordering of the meanings expressed. The arrangement of the meanings is constructed firmly through the rules of logic. Logic progresses step by step towards truths. Moreover, thought reaches truths when it penetrates the subtleties of the natures of things (*mâhiyat*). The subtleties of the essences of things are derived from and reinforce the world's perfect order. Within the perfect order resides sheer beauty, the source of all beauty.

Moreover, sheer beauty is the garden of the elegant and refined sayings that are the flowers of eloquence. This flower-filled garden is where the nightingales wander, who is known as the poets and lovers of blooms. Moreover, the meanings' arrangement imparts to the sweet, soft songs of those nightingales their spiritual harmony."<sup>106</sup> Because the thing that shows the power of a statement is the different relationship between its words; in the spiritual register, the words listen to each other, help each other, and serve the same aim in the verses.<sup>107</sup> For example, consider the following sentence:

"But if a breath of your Sustainer's punishment touches them."<sup>108</sup>

In this sentence, the significant amount of the punishment is pointed out by showing the severity of the least amount. That is to say, the sentence expresses littleness or fewness, and all the parts of the sentence also look to this littleness or fewness and reinforce it. Thus, the words, *but* signify doubt, and doubt looks to littleness or fewness. The word *touches* means to touch lightly and expresses a small amount. Moreover, just as the word *a breath* is merely a whiff, so is it in the singular form. Grammatically it is a *masdar marra* and signifies once. Also,

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<sup>105</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 80.

<sup>106</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 77-78.

<sup>107</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 83-84.

<sup>108</sup> The Qur'an, 21: 46.

the *tanwin* indicating indefiniteness in a breath expresses littleness or fewness and means it is so insignificant that it can scarcely be known. The word *of* signifies division or a part; it means a bit and indicates scarcity. The word *punishment* points to a light punishment about chastisement (*nakal*) or penalty (*i'qab*) and suggests a small amount.

Furthermore, by alluding to compassion and being used in place of Subduer, All-Compelling, or Avenger, the word *Sustainer* indicates littleness or fewness. It says if the small amount of punishment suggested in all this paucity has such an effect, you can compare how dreadful Divine chastisement would be. How much, then, do the small parts of this sentence look to and assist one another? How each reinforces the aim of the whole! This example shows the strong connection and solidarity among the words of the Qur'an.<sup>109</sup>

### Conclusion

This study differs from other studies as the researcher relates to the work of *Muhakemat*, the first work published by Nursi dealing in detail with the questions related to the exegesis of the Qur'an. It aimed to clarify several matters confusing the minds of scholars in his time. It is also his scientific reflection on a new style of commentary consisting of three main sections, "The Element of Reality" (In Arabic version: *Unsur al-Haqiqah*, in Turkish version: *Unsur u Hakikat*)," "The Element of Rhetoric (in Arabic version: *Unsur al-Balaghah*, in Turkish version: *Unsur-u Balağat*)," and "The Element of Doctrine (in Arabic version: *Unsur al-Aqidah*, in Turkish version: *Unsur-u Akide*)." In the first section, Nursi concentrates explicitly on two different manners. On one side, he tried to correct the mistakes of the Externalist scholars (*Zāhirīs*) and those who were excessive (*ehl-i ifrat*) and strived to save the beauty in the image of Islam, which was damaged by their unbalanced claims. On the other side, he called to pay attention to the external reflections of the enemies of religion (*ahli tefrit*) and to understand the truths of the Qur'an and Islam in depth. He also warned not to consider the opinions of those externalist scholars as Sharia calls them "*ulema us-su'*" (the scholars setting bad examples). In addition, with *Muhakemat*, he wished to present the Islamic truths to humankind in the correct form, which is traditionally named 'sirat-i mustaqim (the straight path).

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<sup>109</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 84.

Besides that, Nursi also struggled to study the interpretation by involving a wide use of logic, argumentation based on reason and proof, and "pointing out the conformity of the physical sciences with the Qur'an."<sup>110</sup> instead of an emotional approach and the imitation of the tradition. Thus, according to his perspective, using modern sciences in place of Ancient Greek Philosophy and using the authentic *hadith* and corrected historical information in place of *Isra'iliyat* is the right way of understanding and writing the commentary of the Qur'an.

In the second section, Nursi explained several matters related to the spirit of eloquence or rhetoric. He also mentioned some poetry from the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods as examples of the science of rhetoric. It demonstrates Nursi's extensive knowledge of the Arabic language and the various branches of the science of rhetoric.

The third section, which was not completed in the first print, offers proof for the Qur'an's four main aims: the Single Maker, the prophethood, the resurrection of the dead, and Justice. Nursi's work was essentially aimed to be written in three steps with logical relationships among each other. In the first section, Nursi wrote some basic rules about learning the corrected knowledge to polish the Qur'anic truths and to put forward mistakes of anti-Islamic views and externalist Islamic scholars. It is the first way to understand the Qur'an. In the second section, he explained the rules of rhetoric, particularly the order of meaning (*nazm-i ma'ani*) which, according to Nursi, is the central miracle of the all-wise Qur'an. Finally, in the third section, he stressed the four main aims of the Qur'an, which are mentioned in the earlier section of this paper. Although the final section was not completed, it sounds like a result of this study, as Nursi explained in a poem, "Our statements are different, but your beauty is just one. However, every one of them pointed out that beauty."<sup>111</sup> In conclusion, Nursi preferred to solve the issues concerning the interpretation of the Qur'an in a psychological frame in his work, specifically in his time and in the modern world, as the matter of the Quranic interpretation increases in the contemporary setting. In addition, in the work, the problems of traditional *tafsir* – instead of

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<sup>110</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Isharat al-I'jaz*, 264. Also see Vahide, *Islam at the Crossroads*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 83.

external reasons such as social, economic, and ideological, which are mentioned in classical exegesis methods – are evaluated within the framework of human psychology, which has real historical traces of his period.

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