

The Book of The Universe: Its Place and Development in Bediuzzaman's Thought

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Abstract

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi is one of Modern Muslim scholar who successfully synchronized between al-Qur'an and science. In one of his writing, "Risale-i Nur" Nursi presented what called by "The Book of Universe". Writer found that Nursi's argumentation built on his representation upon this universe as reading object –Book of Universe- , then to reach the complete understanding toward this 'book' is not another than full reflective thought (*tefekkül*) as a scientific progress to achieve knowledge truth compatible with al-Qur'an. *Tefekkül* built on unity of rational intellect and Sufism way of heart purity to create this "reading" process toward universe as a spiritual-scientific point of view. Human knowledge that synergistic between the Qur'an and the universe will deliver to the purpose of human existence is that he should recognize Him. Finally, writer conclude that *Risale-i Nur* is a new methodology in al-Qur'an development based on rational, logic and reflective thought system in the metaphorical word; "Book", that is worth the idealism as a offer of modern perspective to criticize Western science and philosophy which often role negatively to Islamic Studies.

Keywords: Risale-i Nur, Reflective Thought, Universe, Unity, Knowledge

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Abstrak

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi adalah salah seorang pemikir Islam kontemporer Turki yang mampu menyinkronkan antara al-Qur'an dengan sains. Dalam magnum opusnya "*Risale-i Nur*" Nursi mengemukakan apa yang disebutnya sebagai "*The Book of Universe*". Penulis menemukan argumentasi yang dibangun Nursi atas penafsirannya terhadap alam semesta ini. Ia melihat hal tersebut sebagai sebuah objek bacaan (buku), maka untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang sempurna atas 'buku' ini tidaklah lain kecuali dengan refleksi secara penuh (*tefekkeür*) sebagai sebuah progres saintifik untuk memperoleh kebenaran pengetahuan yang sesuai dengan al-Qur'an. *Tefekkeür* dibangun dari penyatuan antara intelek yang rasional dan kesucian hati ala sufi untuk menjadikan proses 'pembacaan' atas dunia ini menjadi sebuah sudut pandang manusia yang bersifat spiritual-saintifik. Pengetahuan manusia yang sinergis antara al-Qur'an dengan alam semesta ini kemudian mengantarkan kepada tujuan eksistensi manusia terhadap pengakuan atas-Nya. Di akhir, penulis menyimpulkan bahwa *Risale-i Nur* adalah metodologi baru dalam mengembangkan al-Qur'an berdasarkan sistem yang rasional, logis, serta merupakan pemikiran reflektif dalam kalimat yang bersifat metaforis. "Buku" tersebut bernilai secara idealisme sebagai sebuah tawaran perspektif modern untuk mengkritisi sains dan filsafat Barat yang acapkali berperan negatif terhadap studi islam.

Keywords: Risale-i Nur, Refleksi, Alam Semesta, Kesatuan, Pengetahuan.

Introduction

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi uses many metaphors when discussing the universe, such as "an exhibition," "an arable field," "a guest-house," and "a palace," but the metaphor of "a book," that is, something "to be read," may be seen as particularly descriptive of the way of the *Risale-i Nur*, and even as symbolizing it. In the *Risale-i Nur*, Bediuzzaman lays considerable emphasis on the complementary nature of the relationship between the Qur'an, "the book of the attribute of Speech," and the universe, "the book of Will and Power." He continually directs the attention of his readers to the universe, shows them how to "read" it in the manner of the Qur'an and learn of the myriad meanings all beings signify, and draw the lessons the Qur'an alludes to. The concept of the book of the universe, then, and the reading of it through reflection or reflective thought

(*tefekkiür*)¹ are central to the *Risale-i Nur* and lie at the heart of "the way to reality" that Bediuzzaman opened up.

In this paper I shall examine the concept as it is employed in the *Risale-i Nur*, describe the relationship between it and the Qur'an, and shall discuss too how it may be seen as symbolizing the *Risale-i Nur*'s "contemporary approach to understanding the Qur'an." In doing this, following Bediuzzaman's own description, I shall also mention the development in his ideas concerning this question. With this in view, firstly I shall give a few details from the first period of Bediuzzaman's life, that of the Old Said, in order also to set the subject in context and to learn why he should have chosen such a way and method. Included in this section will be a brief outline of the transformation of the Old into the New Said and the development in his thought which was its corollary. Secondly, I shall describe briefly the complementary relationship of the Qur'an and the universe. This will be followed by a section entitled "The Book of the Universe and its Functions and Meanings."

Why the Book of the Universe?

It is understood from the accounts of Bediuzzaman's childhood and youth that from an early age he felt the need for fundamental and far-reaching renewal in many fields connected with Islam and the teaching of it. Firstly was his instinctive dissatisfaction with existing educational methods, which in later years led him to put forward extensive proposals for educational reform, the basis of which was the joint teaching of the traditional religious sciences and the modern sciences. Another area of concern was the reformulation of the science of *kalam*, that is, theology, which he considered to be antiquated and unable either to meet the challenges of modern

¹ Reflective thought (*tefekkiür*) is used here in a broad sense which includes "reasoning" and "thinking logically" within its meanings of "to reflect on, ponder over, consider, and cogitate." It appears that Bediuzzaman used it in this sense, for he used it in reference to such various parts of the *Risale-i Nur* as the Twenty-Ninth Flash, a *Tefekkiürname*, which includes in summary form many arguments used elsewhere in the *Risale-i Nur* [See, The Flashes Collection, 380-94]; The Supreme Sign, which he called "a reflective journey" [The Rays Collection, 135]; A Flower of Emirdað, which he described as "worship in the form of reflection," since it was about the Qur'an [Rays, 262]; and The Shining Proof, which he described as being "produced from the uniting ... of my life of reflective thought and the spiritual life of the *Risale-i Nur*." [Rays, 569]

advances in knowledge, or to answer the increasing attacks on Islam made chiefly in the name of science and progress. It was with these aims in view that in distinction to other religious scholars at that time he studied and mastered most of the physical and mathematical sciences.²

Bediuzzaman published various works setting out the chief problems facing Islam as he saw them and offering solutions. In one of his earliest works, *Muhâkemat* (1911), he stated that the chief obstacle preventing the Islamic world reversing its serious decline was the imaginary clash between some of the questions of modern science and some “externals” of Islam. By demonstrating the error of this, together with a number of other matters including the supposed conflict between reason and scientific discoveries, and certain Qur’anic verses, it was Bediuzzaman’s intention to point out “the straight path of Islam,” and to answer both “the enemies of religion,” that is, the supporters of materialist philosophies, and “the externalists,” that is, some conservative “formalist” *‘ulama*.³ At this time too he depicted the universe as “book” and pointed out its mutual relationship with the Qur’an. For because the Qur’an “discloses” the laws in force in the universe, it is the only source of true progress. However, it was as the New Said that he was successful in expounding the book of the universe. He wrote:

“... Such a Book that, because through its principles it discloses the profound, precise Divine laws in force in the book of the world’s creation, written with the pen of wisdom by the hand of Divine Determining, with its injunctions it is the absolute guarantor of mankind’s order, balance, and progress, and is its universal master.”⁴

The young Bediuzzaman’s chief concern was with the Qur’an, and the proof and elucidation of its miraculous nature in a way relevant to contemporary needs. In a letter he included in the collection *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî* (The Ratifying Stamp of the Unseen), he described his reaction to learning, around the turn of the century, of the explicit threats to the Qur’an and Muslim Community:

²See: Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, Hayatı, Mesleki, Tercüme-i Hâli (Istanbul: Sözler Yayını, 1976), 44-5.

³Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Muhâkemat*, (Istanbul: Sözler Yayını, 1977), 7-9. See also: Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Yâbâtü’l-Ûcaz*, (Istanbul: Sözler Yayını, 1978), 130-135.

⁴*Muhâkemat*, *Ibid.*, 5.

“... it overturned his ideas and changed the direction of his interest. He understood that he should make all the various sciences he had learnt steps by which to understand the Qur'an and prove its truths, and that the Qur'an alone should be his aim, the purpose of his learning, and the object of his life. Thus the Qur'an's miraculousness became his guide, teacher, and master.”

However, in the letter's continuation he confesses that regrettably he only took up the duty a while later, when he “awoke with the clash and clamour of [the First World] War.”⁵ This reawakening he refers to in another letter, where he describes how he was made to understand that he had been appointed “to reveal an aspect of the Qur'an's miraculousness.”⁶

Then, in the “Statement of Purpose” prefacing his celebrated Qur'anic commentary *Ishârât al-I'jâz* -the importance and urgency of which in his view were reflected by the fact that he continued to write it even on the front during the First War under the guns of the invading Russians- he says that due to advances in knowledge springing from the discoveries of science, “a comprehensive, true Qur'anic commentary” should be undertaken by a committee of eminent scholars, each specialists in a number of sciences.⁷ It may be understood from this that he is stating that the Qur'anic truths may be truly expounded only in the light of the knowledge of the physical world brought to light by scientific progress. In the work, which he hoped would serve as a model for future commentaries, he demonstrated that far from being in conflict, the uncovering by science of foremost the order of the universe and its beings, is in complete correspondence with the relevant Qur'anic verses.

We may say therefore by way of a summary that from an early age Bediuzzaman grasped the reality of the age of science and its implications, both for the learned institution and educational system, and practically, for the material progress of the Islamic world. His urgent concern was to dispel “the misunderstandings and false delusions” of “the clash and conflict” between science and Islam, and to reinstate the physical and mathematical sciences in their

⁵Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, (Istanbul: Sözlere Yayinevi, 1993), 80.

⁶Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Mektûbat*, (Istanbul: Sözlere Yayinevi, 1981), 343. See also: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi-Letters 1928-1932 [Eng. trans.] (Istanbul: Sözlere Publications, 1997), 433.

rightful position. For Islam was “the master and guide of the sciences, and the chief and father of all true knowledge.”⁸ As for himself, he related the advances of science and the attendant opening up of the universe to the Qur’an, and made it his mission to use his knowledge of science to understand the Qur’an’s truths and prove its miraculousness.

It should be recalled here that the currents of materialist thought, and particularly Positivism, that had come to dominate Western thought and attitudes became increasingly influential in Turkey during the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. The aggressive stance towards religion generally and Islam in particular that marked those who adhered to such ideas, who formed only a small minority up to the founding of the Republic in 1923, was then adopted officially and steps were taken to replace Islam by an official ideology based on Positivism.

Bediuzzaman described *Isyârât al-I’jâz*, only the first part of which was written, as “the ‘opening’ (*fatîha*) of the *Risale-i Nur*,”⁹ by which he presumably meant the first part of it to be written.¹⁰ For it was the bitter years following the First World War and Ottoman defeat that saw the emergence of the New Said and the writing of the Arabic pieces that were the first fruits of the profound interior change which Bediuzzaman underwent at that time.¹¹

In a number of places in those first works of the New Said, and in the *Risale-i Nur* itself, Bediuzzaman mentions his inner struggles and the factors which contributed to the emergence of the New Said and the previously “untravelling” Qur’anic way to reality which was unfolded to him. Here only a few aspects of it are alluded to.

Bediuzzaman’s path only became clear after a momentous struggle. He describes *Katre Risalesi*, the first piece he then wrote, as “a spontaneous dialogue with my soul at a terrible time. ... words

⁷Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Ûpârâtü’l-Û’caz*, 7-8.

⁸Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Muhâkemât*, 8.

⁹Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Emirdağ Lahikasý*, (Istanbul: Envar Ne’riyat, 1992), i, 42.

¹⁰Bediuzzaman’s brother Abdülmeçid translated *Ûpârâtü’l-Û’caz* from Arabic into Turkish in the 1950’s, when it was included in the *Risale-i Nur*.

¹¹In *Emirdağ Lahikasý*, Bediuzzaman listed these as “*Katre, Habbe, Pemme, Zerre, Habab, Zuhre, Bu’le, and their addenda*,” describing them as “the first inspired from ‘reality’ (*haqiqat*) in the New Said’s heart ‘at the degree of witnessing’ (*puhûd derecesinde*).” See, Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Emirdağ Lahikasý*, i, 42.

born of an awful struggle. I was as though rising to the skies and plummeting to earth and back again in an instant. For I was travelling a way in the realm between the reason and the heart that had not been travelled before.”¹²

Certain lights appeared to him in the course of this which he realized were “rays from the sun of the Qur’an.” We learn from other passages that this was the Qur’anic teaching of Divine unity,¹³ and indeed, in *Katre*, Bediuzzaman expounds “fifty-five ways in which both the universe as a whole and all its parts and particles testify to God’s existence and unity.”

Later in the same treatise, he tells us more of this “untravelled path”:

“The differences between my way and that of the theorists and philosophers is this, that wherever I am I immediately extract water by digging a well. Whereas they attempt to bring water from the far reaches of the world by laying pipes and conduits. ... [on] the way taught us by the Qur’an we have been given a tool resembling the Staff of Moses... wherever I strike it, it makes the water of life flow forth.”¹⁴

This way to reality “manifested the meaning of the phrase: *In everything is a sign indicating that He is One.*”¹⁵ As mentioned above, this way was further characterized by its being traversed through an “alliance of the intellect and the heart.” Bediuzzaman writes, however: “How my intellect and heart were fused, I don’t know. For I was on a different path to the “people of reason” from among the learned scholars [the ‘*ulama*] and to “the people of the heart” from among the righteous [that is, the Sufis].”¹⁶ While in the Addendum to the treatise *Habab*, he writes: “.. with my eyes open... in accordance with its usual practice, my intellect enveloped with its own criteria what my heart saw and weighed it up on its scales, and adhered to

¹²Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Al-Maṭnawî al-‘Arabî al-Nurî*, Taḥqîq: İhsan Qasim al-Salihi, (Istanbul: Sözlür Yayýnevi, 1994), 35.

¹³See: Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem’alar*, (Istanbul: Sözlür Yayýnevi, 1986), 229. See also: Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *The Flashes Collection*, (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, 1995), 306.

¹⁴Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Al-Maṭnawî...*, 170.

¹⁵Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye*, Translated by Abdülmecid Nursî, (Istanbul: Sözlür Yayýnevi, 1980), 7.

¹⁶Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Al-Maṭnawî...*, 318.

its proofs. In this respect all the matters contained in those treatises are reasoned proofs.”

Bediuzzaman goes on to say that it is for this reason that these treatises are particularly suited to people “who have fallen into misguidance through science and ideas.”¹⁷ “... just as, like the *Risale-i Nur*, [these treatises] heal in a short time, the wounded seeker after truth, so they silence completely and defeat in argument the people of misguidance and those who have left religion.”¹⁸

This combining of the intellect or reason and the heart led Bediuzzaman to “the way of reflective thought,” which was to be an important element of the *Risale-i Nur*, and the necessary complement of ‘the book of the universe.’ During his incarceration in Eski_ehir Prison in 1935 he wrote in his preface to the Twenty-Ninth Flash, which is in Arabic and which he called a ‘*Tefekkürname*’ or ‘piece on which to reflect:’

“Thirteen years ago, my heart combined with my mind and urged me to the way of reflective thought which the Qur’an of Miraculous Exposition commands with such verses as, *That you may consider.*¹⁹ * *Perchance they may reflect.*²⁰ * *Do they not reflect in their own minds, did God create the heavens and the earth?*²¹ * *There are signs for those who consider.*²²

The Hadith the meaning of which is “An hour’s reflective thought is better than a year’s [voluntary] worship”²³ states that on occasion an hour’s reflection may be equivalent to a year’s worship. It also offers powerful encouragement for reflective thought. ... I realized recently that the powerful source of life and brilliant lights in the various parts of the *Risale-i Nur* are flashes of those sequences of thought.”²⁴

The chief marks, then, of this new way were the combining of the intellect and heart, reflective thought on the universe in the manner enjoined by the Qur’an, and the true affirmation of Divine

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁸Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye...*, 8.

¹⁹Al-Qur’an, 2:219; 2:266.

²⁰Al-Qur’an, 7:176, etc.

²¹Al-Qur’an, 30:8.

²²Al-Qur’an, 13:3, etc.

²³Al-‘Ajluni, *Kasyf al-Khafa’*, i, 143; al-Ghazali, *Ihyâ’ ‘Ulûm al-Dîn*, iv, 409 (Kitab al-Tafakkur); al-Haythami, *Majma’u’l-Zawâ’id*, i, 78.

²⁴Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem’alar*, 272. See also: *Flashes*, 380-1.

unity (*tawhîd*), which, "through the Qur'an's miraculousness, opens up a window onto knowledge of God in everything."²⁵ At this juncture, an important difference should be pointed out between the *Risale-i Nur* and the Arabic treatises which were the first works of the New Said. Those treatises, which he later collected together and gave the title of *al-Matsawi al-'Arabi al-Nuri*, and its Turkish rendering, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye*, were for the most part the expression of an inner struggle with the soul and Satan and were "successful in opening up a way within the heart and spirit." The *Risale-i Nur*, however, "besides looking inward, looks mostly to the outer world, opening up a broad path leading to the knowledge of God." The *Mesnevi* was like the seed or nursery of the *Risale-i Nur*, while the *Risale-i Nur* was like the *Mesnevi's* garden. The *Risale-i Nur* was "like universal, extensive "*Mesnevis*", confronting in the outside world the bewildered and needy, and the people of philosophy who have taken the way of misguidance."²⁶

At the beginning of *Katre*, Bediuzzaman describes how in his forty-year lifetime and thirty years of study, he had learnt only "four words" and "four phrases." The "words," which are what concern us here, were "*Mâna-yý harfî*, *mâna-yý ismî*, intention (*niyet*), and point of view (*nazar*). Of these, it is the first that holds greatest importance, for it is directly related to the concept of the book of the universe. Briefly, Bediuzzaman defines this as follows:

"All things other than God, that is, the universe, should be looked at as signifying something other than themselves (*mâna-yý harfî*) and on His account. It is an error to look at them as signifying only themselves (*mâna-yý ismî*) and on account of causes. Yes, everything has two faces. One looks to the Creator, the other to creation. Like a lace veil or transparent glass, the face looking to creation should direct the gaze to the face looking to the Creator beneath it. Thus, when considering bounties, the Bestower of the bounties should spring to mind, ... when looking at causes, one should think of the True Causer of Causes."²⁷

There are two points here which should be made in order to be able to answer the question: Why the book of the universe? the subject of this section. One concerns the factors that led Bediuzzaman

²⁵Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye...*, 8.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 46.

to choose the way of the New Said, and the other is the place in that way, of the concept of the book of the universe.

Firstly, described above are a number of circumstances that from his childhood even drove Bediuzzaman to seek the renewal and reform of many institutions within Islam. Misunderstandings about modern science, and the imaginary conflict between reason and science and some matters of Islam and the Qur'an, lay at the root of most of these. While the chief factor necessitating renewal was the need to expound the Qur'an in the light of modern advances in knowledge. Only in this way could the assaults on Islam be replied to and halted, and the Islamic world reverse its decline. It is primarily against this background, at least in the external world, that the way of the New Said and the *Risale-i Nur* should be seen.

To come now to "the book of the universe"; in my view it brings together the various elements making up the way of the New Said and in a sense symbolizes it. As a metaphor, it is clearly expressive. For the new "untraveller" way Bediuzzaman had unfolded to him led him from the Qur'an to the universe, it enjoined him to contemplate and ponder over the universe, and directed him to look at it for the meaning, as though it was a book that was there to be read and understood. Moreover, employing both the heart and the reason, the method of "reading" which Bediuzzaman developed found a way to God in everything and a way to prove all the other main truths of belief. It healed those wounded by doubts and misguidance, and replied to philosophy and its attacks. And as we shall see, it also brought together science and religion. It is in consequence of these facts that Bediuzzaman has been acknowledged as producing a new science of *kalâm*.²⁸

A final point should be made concerning the New Said's way which distinguishes it particularly from 'the Sufi way,' and is related to "the Qur'an's miraculousness." According to Bediuzzaman, this is the elevated way of "the people of reality" (*ehl-i hakikat*), and rather than "the gnosis or intuitive knowledge and supposition (*ma'rifet ve tasavvur*)" of the Sufis, is "belief and affirmation (*iman ve tasdik*)."²⁹ Because of its importance, and Bediuzzaman also gives reasons for

²⁸ See: Muhsin 'Abd al-Hamid, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Kalam Scholar of the Modern Age," in *Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Istanbul: Sözlük Publications, 1997), ii, 429-34.

²⁹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 146.

the necessity of this way, I give the following definition in full:

"The Words that have been written [the *Risale-i Nur*] are not supposition, they are affirmation; they are not submission, they are belief; they are not intuitive knowledge, they are a testifying and witnessing; they are not imitating, they are verification; they are not taking the part of something, they are exercise of the mind; they are not Sufism, they are reality; they are not a claim, they are the proof within the claim. The wisdom in this is as follows: "Formerly, the fundamentals of belief were protected, submission was strong. Even if the intuitive knowledge of those with knowledge of God lacked proof, their expositions were acceptable and sufficient. But at this time [this is not the case, for] the misguidance of science has stretched out its hand to the fundamentals and pillars [of belief]..."³⁰

The Qur'an and the Book of the Universe

Thus, in the light of the points made above, we may say firstly that a "book" is an apt and succinct metaphor for the universe when it is considered from the Qur'anic point of view. It springs naturally from the Qur'anic view of looking at beings not for themselves, but for what they signify. In *The Supreme Sign*, Bediuzzaman wrote: "Looking through the broad and comprehensive telescope [the traveller] had taken from the Qur'an, he saw the cosmos to be so meaningful and well-ordered it took on the shape of an embodied book of the Glorious One, an incarnate dominical Qur'an..."³¹

There are other aspects of the universe which become apparent when observed through the Qur'an and make it like a book. In another place Bediuzzaman says that "the perfect order and balanced harmony" that are the result of unity have "transformed the universe into a miraculous book so full of meaning that each of its letters expresses the meanings of a hundred lines, and each of its lines the meanings of a hundred pages, and each of its pages the meanings of a hundred chapters, and each of its chapters the meanings of a hundred books. Moreover, all its chapters, pages, lines, words, and letters look to each other and allude to each other."³²

³⁰ Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Mektûbat*, 351. See also: Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Letters*, 443.

³¹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Suâlar*, (Istanbul: Sözleryayinevi, 1992), 119.

³² *Ibid.*, 25-6.

Unity, in fact, is fundamental to the concept: “It is only through the mystery of Divine unity that the universe as a whole is known to be a meaningful book of the Eternally Besought One; and all beings from the ground to the Divine Throne are a miraculous collection of Divine missives..”³³

Unity endows all the words of this book with life, causing them to respond to each other’s needs. In *Lemeât*, Bediuzzaman wrote:

“Throughout the universe the mystery of co-operation is both concealed and pervasive; intimated in every part of it are mutual assistance and the reciprocal answering of needs. Only an all-encompassing power could do this, and create the particle, situating it suitably to all its relations. Every line and word of the book of the world is living; need drives each, acquaints one with the other. Wherever they come from, they respond to the call for help; in the name of Divine unity, they meet with their surroundings. Every living word has a face and eye that looks to all the sentences.”³⁴

Divine knowledge, too, “makes the universe into a vast book containing treatises to the number of its parts...”³⁵ While Divine wisdom, “makes the whole universe into a mighty book of wisdom every letter of which contains a hundred words, and every word of which contains a hundred lines...” and so on.³⁶ In his discussion on the Greatest Name of Sapient, Bediuzzaman describes the parts of the book as follows:

“One page of this mighty book is the face of the earth. Books to the number of the plant and animal species are to be observed on this page in the spring, one within the other... a single line of the page is a garden ... written on this line are well-composed odes to the number of flowers, trees, and animals ... one word of the line is a tree which has opened its blossom and put forth its leaves in order to produce its fruit. This word consists of meaningful passages lauding and praising the All-Glorious Sapient One to the number of orderly, well-proportioned, adorned leaves, flowers, and fruits. It is as though like all trees, this tree is a well-composed ode singing the praises of its Inscriber.”³⁷

³³Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Suâlar...*, 11.

³⁴Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Sözler*, 675/ *The Words* [Eng. trans.] (Sözler Publications, new edn. 1998), 731.

³⁵Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Suâlar...*, 50.

³⁶Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Suâlar...*, *Ibid*, 67; *Lem’alar*, 295; and *Flashes*, 404.

³⁷Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem’alar*, 295. See also: *Flashes*, 404-5.

There is, then, an interdependent relationship between the Qur'an and the universe. The universe is dependent on the Qur'an for its meanings to be understood, it only gains meaning through the Qur'an. And with its verses about natural phenomena and their orderly, purposive changes, the Qur'an is the interpreter, expounder, and translator of the book of the universe.

"The Qur'an is the pre-eternal interpreter of the creational signs [or verses] which the universe recites through the tongues of its beings. And just as it is the expounder of the book of the world, so it is the discloser of the Most Beautiful Names concealed in the pages of the heavens and earth."³⁸

"... the All-Wise Qur'an... explains the meanings of the book of the universe to make known its Creator."³⁹

"Yes, the All-Wise Qur'an is a most elevated expounder, a most eloquent translator of the Mighty Qur'an of the Universe. It is the Criterion which instructs man and jinn concerning the signs of creation inscribed by the pen of power on the pages of the universe and on the leaves of time. It regards beings, each of which is a meaningful letter, as bearing the meaning of another, that is, it looks at them on account of their Maker. It says, "How beautifully they have been made! How exquisitely they point to their Maker's beauty!", thus showing the universe's true beauty."⁴⁰

"Recites the verses inscribed with the pen of power on the pages of the universe. It is as though the Qur'an is the recitation of the book of the universe and the verbal expression of its order, and reads out the Pre-Eternal Inscriber's attributes and writes His acts and deeds."⁴¹

Thus, conversely, the universe becomes "an embodied Qur'an."⁴² By this we may understand that it expresses the same truths as the Qur'an. However, whereas the Qur'an proceeds from the attribute of Speech, the universe finds existence through the manifestation of Power. The "works of art" in the universe, that is, beings, are like "embodied words" or "words assuming external shape." These "words of power" make known the Sacred Divine Essence as do the words of the Qur'an. "Presenting the cosmos from

³⁸Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye*, 210.

³⁹Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Sözler*, 237. See also: *The Words*, 251.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 124. See also: *The Words*, 145.

⁴¹Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem'alar*, 124. See also: *Flashes*, 176.

⁴²See for example: Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Sualar*, 177, 203, 532, 553.

end to end as an incarnate book of discernment [that is, Qur'an]," the attribute of power "describes and makes known a Powerful Possessor of Glory."⁴³ In this sense, the universe "expounds the All-Wise Qur'an's verses."⁴⁴ It is a proof of the Qur'an. Bediuzzaman writes:

"If you want proof of this truth of the All-Wise Qur'an, look at the pages of the book of the universe, which is written on the pattern of the Clear Book..."⁴⁵ Being "an embodied Qur'an," the purpose of the book of the universe is "to express [the Maker's] beauties and Names."⁴⁶ "The Pre-Eternal Inscraper has written the universe in such a way that all beings set forth and state His infinite perfections, Names, and attributes together with innumerable facets and aspects."⁴⁷ "...the Pre-Eternal Inscraper... through the universe and through all its pages, lines, and even letters and points... makes known and loved the beauty of His perfection and perfection of His beauty, in order to make Himself and His perfections known, and to display His beauty and make Himself loved."⁴⁸

The Book of the Universe and Its Functions and Meanings

As a concept, then, the chief function of the book of the universe is to teach those who read it about its Writer and His attributes. As Bediuzzaman interpreted the couplet *Ta'ammal sutur al-kâ'inât fa-innahâ Min mala'i'l-a'la ilayka rasâ'il*: "Look with the eye of wisdom at the lines of events written by the Pre-Eternal Inscraper on the broad page of the world... so that the never-ending missives sent down from the Sublime Assembly may raise you up to affirm Divine Unity..."⁴⁹

Similarly, the Qur'an's verses about "the creational signs [or verses]" of the book of the universe all teach these same truths. That is to say, they recount the Divine acts in the orderly changes in the universe in order to draw the attention of conscious beings to the truths they allude to: the Creator and His Names and attributes, the

⁴³Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Suâlar*, 124.

⁴⁴Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *al-Mathnawi al-'Arabi al-Nuri*, 109.

⁴⁵Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem'alar*, 132; *Flashes*, 186-7.

⁴⁶Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Suâlar*, 68.

⁴⁷Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Sözler*, 559; *The Words*, 601.

⁴⁸Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem'alar*, 296. See also: *Flashes*, 406.

⁴⁹Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye*, 225.

resurrection of the dead, and other truths of belief. The Qur'an repeatedly commands man to dwell on these "signs," and refers him to his reason encouraging him to reflect and draw lessons.⁵⁰ In numerous places in the *Risale-i Nur*, Bediuzzaman expounds verses of this kind, explaining most interestingly different levels of meanings.⁵¹

Thus, just as the purpose of the universe being in this form is in order that it should be "read," so man's "fundamental duty is ... gazing on the miracles of dominical power in beings, to contemplate on them as objects from which lessons may be drawn."⁵² As the microcosm and "miniature map" of the universe,⁵³ man is part of the book of the universe. This aspect is outside of our discussion here, but it should be recalled that as Bediuzzaman pointed out in the Introduction to *The Supreme Sign*, which we shall discuss below, the purpose of man's existence is that he should recognize the Creator of all beings and worship Him. It is "the function of his inborn nature to know God and believe in Him."⁵⁴ Bediuzzaman is here expounding the verse *I created not jinn and mankind except that they might worship Me.*⁵⁵ Thus, through practising reflective thought on the outside world (*âfâkî*) in the manner described above, which is symbolized by the concept of a book, Bediuzzaman was setting out a systematic and practical application of this Qur'anic command in order to enable the people of the present age to gain "certain, verified belief" in the face of all the currents of materialism and misguidance. My intention here, besides describing the chief functions of the book of the universe, is to support claims that this approach of the *Risale-i Nur* is "a contemporary approach to understanding the Qur'an." That is, it expounds the Qur'anic truths and teachings in a way meaningful and relevant to the people of our times.

We may now move on to *The Supreme Sign* and its manner of reading the book of the universe for its meanings. Firstly we might mention that as Bediuzzaman himself pointed out in a letter he wrote most probably towards the end of his time in Kastamonu (1936-

⁵⁰See for example: al-Qur'an, 30:8, 20-25; 59:21; 16:11, 44, 69.

⁵¹See particularly: Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Sözler*, 404-18; *The Words*, 428-43 in the Twenty-Fifth Word.

⁵²See: Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Sözler*, 317. See also: *The Words*, 334.

⁵³See: Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 146.

⁵⁴Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Suâlar*, 85.

⁵⁵Al-Qur'an, 51:65.

1943), there was a continuous development in his “way of reflective thought” throughout the years he was writing the *Risale-i Nur*. He wrote that “From the Arabic *Katre Risalesi* to *Ayetü’l-Kübra* (*The Supreme Sign*) that truth continued, changing its form, until it reached its permanent form in *Hizbü’l Ekber-i Nûriye*.”⁵⁶ The latter “emerged from *The Supreme Sign*”⁵⁷ and was written around the same time. Enumerating all the “realms” of the universe, it for the most part expresses the same truths as the *The Supreme Sign*, and is written in a concise style of Arabic, making it a suitable source for reflective thought.⁵⁸ Thus, as virtually the final form of Bediuzzaman’s exposition of the book of the universe, we shall take a brief look at *The Supreme Sign* in order to see the method he employs to prove the Divine necessary existence and unity, the chief truths it proves and demonstrates.

In form, *The Supreme Sign* is unique among the treatises of the *Risale-i Nur* in so far as it consists of “the observations of a traveller questioning the universe about his Maker.” The traveller, whose manner of enquiry should be seen as epitomizing what Bediuzzaman aimed to achieve with his way of reflective thought on the universe, makes a journey in the mind through all the realms of the universe in order to learn of their testimony to the Creator. He questions each in succession and in reply is told to look at and study them. For instance, he questions the atmosphere, and is told: “Look at me! You can discover and find through me the object of your search, the one who sent you here!” So he looks, and sees the clouds, winds, rain, and so on, all employed in various tasks. On looking at each of these “words,” he turns to his intellect and holds a dialogue with it, reasoning. He looks back at the atmosphere, reads more of its words. Reasons more in his mind and finally comes to this conclusion:

“These hundreds of thousands of wise, merciful and ingenious tasks and acts of generosity and mercy that arise from the veil and outer form of this inanimate, lifeless, unconscious, volatile, unstable, stormy, unsettled, and inconstant air, clearly establish that this diligent wind, this tireless servant, never acts of itself, but rather in accordance with the orders of a most powerful and knowing, a most

⁵⁶Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, (Istanbul: 1960), 171.

⁵⁷Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 59.

⁵⁸ There are a number of parts of the *Risale-i Nur* in this form. For example, the Twenty-Ninth Flash in Arabic and the Third Ray in Turkish.

wise and generous commander. It is as if each particle were aware of every single task, like a soldier understanding and hearkening to every order of its commander, for it hears and obeys every dominical command that passes through the air. It aids all animals to breathe and to live, all plants to pollinate and grow, and cultivates all the matter necessary for their survival. It directs and administers the clouds, makes possible the voyaging of sailing ships, and enables sounds to be conveyed, particularly by means of wireless, telephone, telegraph and radio, as well as numerous other universal functions. Now these atoms, each composed of two such simple materials as hydrogen and oxygen and each resembling the other, exist in hundreds of thousands of different fashions all over the globe; I conclude therefore that they are being employed and set to work in the utmost orderliness by a hand of wisdom ... the one who through the disposition of the winds employs them in countless dominical functions, who through the ordering of the clouds uses them in infinite tasks of mercy, and who creates the air in this fashion - such a one can only be the Possessor of Necessary Existence, the One Empowered over All Things and Knowledgeable of All Things, the Sustainer endowed with Glory and Generosity."⁵⁹

These reflections of the traveller probably do not tell us anything we do not already know about the air and its functions; what they do is to point out and demonstrate that as something inanimate and unconcious, the air could not perform all its various conscious tasks if there was not the Being with the attributes he lists who employs it in them. It is perfectly straightforward, logical, and persuasive, particularly when seen together with all the thirty-three "degrees" representing all the realms of creation visited by the traveller. Yet it is deceptively simple, for almost without realizing it, the reader has his "point of view" transformed into the Qur'anic view of "reading" beings; that is, looking at them for what they signify and the meanings they allude to. Besides taking the reader to those meanings, it thus prepares him psychologically to question such concepts as chance and causality, the basis of materialist philosophy. Moreover, the fact that Bediuzzaman utilizes his knowledge of modern science to expound the truths of both the Qur'an of the universe and the Qur'an itself, bringing them together harmoniously -as he does in the above passage- both disproves that there is any clash or contradiction between them, and provides a practical example of how they may be brought together.

⁵⁹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Suâlar*, 91-92.

It should be recalled here that the fourth of the “words,” mentioned towards the end of the first section above, which the New Said had learnt in the forty years of his life, was “point of view” (*nazar*), which he defined as follows:

“As for ‘point of view,’ it can transform the physical sciences into knowledge of God and impel them towards their true goal. This means that if the ‘view’ is on account of causes and intermediaries, it is compounded ignorance, but if on account of God, it becomes knowledge of God.”⁶⁰

The *Risale-i Nur* contains hundreds of proofs of the Divine existence and unity, and all the main truths of belief, such as prophethood, the resurrection of the dead, the angels, and Divine Determining or destiny, the Divine Names and attributes, and Divine activity in the universe. These proofs are all interrelated and indivisible. Since the proofs of Divine Determining concern also “the writing” of the book of the universe, it will be discussed in more detail, while for the others only a few brief examples directly related to the idea of the universe as a book shall be given, in order to further illustrate it. These “lessons” given by the book of the universe are all the consequence of its being “read” for its meaning.

Further Meanings of the Book of the Universe, the ‘Pillars of Belief’

As the one who brought the Qur’an, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is frequently mentioned in connection with the book of the universe. The following is a proof of his Messengership also taken from *The Supreme Sign*:

“The cosmos indicates its Maker, Inscraper, and Designer, Who creates, administers, and arranges it, and through determining its measure and form and regulating it, has disposal over it as though it was a palace, a book, an exhibition, a spectacle. And so too it indicates that it requires and necessitates an elevated herald, a truthful unveiler, a learned master, and a truthful teacher who will know and make known the Divine purposes in the universe’s creation, teach the dominical instances of wisdom in its changes and transformations, give instruction in the results of its dutiful motions, proclaim its

⁶⁰ *Al-Mathnawi al-‘Arabi al-Nuri, Op. Cit., 105.*

essential value and the perfections of the beings within it, and express the meanings of that mighty book; it indicates that he is certain to exist. Thus, the traveller knew that it testified to the truthfulness of this being, who performed these functions better than anyone, and to his being a most elevated and loyal official of the universe's Creator."⁶¹

In *The Fruits of Belief* a similar argument is given for all the prophets.⁶² The following passage describes further the indispensable role of God's Messenger (PBUH) in regard to the book of the universe, causing it to testify to him:

"Yes, through the Light Muhammad (PBUH) brought the universe's nature, value, and perfections, and the duties, results, and value of the beings within it and the fact that they are officials, all became known and were realized. From top to bottom it became Divine missives full of meaning, an embodied dominical Qur'an, and a magnificent exhibition of Divine works. If not for his Light, it becomes a mere desolate ruin, confused, a terrible place of mourning, toppling over into the darkneses of non-existence, nothingness, death, and obliteration. It is in consequence of this truth that the universe's perfections, purposeful transformations, and eternal meanings declare in powerful fashion: "We testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God!"⁶³

Bediuzzaman provides numerous proofs for the resurrection of the dead, mostly based on the manifestations of the Divine Names in the universe, for which readers may refer to the Tenth and Twenty-Ninth Words. Two proofs related to the book of the universe are as follows. The second is part of a proof of Divine power: "If there was no resurrection, all the certain meanings of the book of the universe, written with the pen of Divine Determining, would be nullified, which is completely impossible. It is as impossible as denying the universe's existence, indeed, is a delirium."⁶⁴

"As soon as every conscious creature who comes into this guest-house of the world opens his eyes, he sees that a power holds in its grasp the whole universe, and within that power are a pre-eternal, all-embracing knowledge which never confuses anything and a most

⁶¹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Suûlar*, 111.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 203.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 553-554.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

precise wisdom and favour which never act purposelessly or without balance. Just as, spinning a single particle from the army of particles like a Mevlevi dervish in ecstasy, it employs it in numerous duties; so at the same time and according to the same law, it causes the globe of the earth to travel... again like an ecstatic Mevlevi. ... At the same time and according to the same law of wisdom, that same power writes one within the other, without error or confusion, hundreds of thousands of species, which resemble books, on the page of the face of the earth, and displays thousands of samples of the supreme resurrection of the dead. .."⁶⁵

For belief in the angels, Bediuzzaman gives this proof: *"If you ask: Which verses and signs of the book of the universe indicate the existence of other beings besides man who will take lessons from those verses and in wonderment, ponder over them and glorify God?*

*"The Answer: The verses about the order in the line about balance from the page of the book's wisdom. ... Thus, in the face of all this fascinating grandeur and captivating adornment, these diverse favours and making known and loved, all these varieties of intentional bestowals and gifts, and these signs and manifestations... there is apparently no one to behold them and take instruction other than men and jinn. But heedlessness and misguidance have made most of them like deaf and dumb children and they have become blinded in the darkness of nature. ... this necessitates, therefore, that the universe should be full of spirit beings who will draw lessons from its beings and offer glorifications to God."*⁶⁶

Divine Determining and the Writing of the Book of the Universe

Bediuzzaman's proofs for Divine Determining, sometimes called "destiny" or "fate," provide numerous insights into the continuous creation of the universe, that is, the writing of the book of the universe. He writes:

"Numerous verses of the Qur'an, like, Nor anything fresh or dry [green or withered] but is [inscribed] in a Clear Book,⁶⁷ state clearly that before it comes into existence and after it passes from existence, everything is written. Through its creational signs [ayat] such as the order, balance, regularity, adornment, differentiation, and the giving of form, the verses, or signs, of the mighty Qur'an inscribed by Divine power and

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 531-2.

⁶⁶ Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Al-Maṭnawî al-'Arabî al-Nurî*, 286-7.

called the universe confirm these statements of the Qur'an. Indeed, the well-ordered missives and finely balanced verses of the book of the universe testify that everything is written.

"The indication that everything is determined and written before it comes into existence are all beginnings, seeds, measured proportions, and forms; each of these testifies to this. For seeds and grains are subtle containers appearing from the workbench of "Bel," and it is⁶⁸ in each of which is deposited a tiny index traced by Divine Determining. Divine power employs minute particles according to that plan of Divine Determining, and constructs the mighty miracles of power on the seeds. That is to say, everything that will happen to the tree is as though inscribed in its seed. For in regard to their substance seeds are simple and similar to one another; materially they are nothing. ...

" ... Now, evidence for the fact that the story of everything's life is written after its existence are all fruits, which in this world tell of the Clear Book and the Clear Record, and the faculty of memory in man, which points to the Preserved Tablet; these all hint and testify to this fact. Indeed, the appointed events of a tree's life are written in its seeds, which are like the hearts of its fruits..."⁶⁹

The Clear Record (*Imam-ý Mübin*) mentioned above "is a title for Divine knowledge and the Divine command,"⁷⁰ and is also a 'notebook' of Divine Determining,⁷¹ which in turn is itself "an aspect of Divine knowledge." As for the Clear Book (*Kitab-ý Mübin*), although in his *Mesnevi*, Bediuzzaman described it as a "book of knowledge," and in the long footnote on this subject at the beginning of his treatise about the transformations of minute particles, he mentions that both, which are mentioned in the Qur'an, have been described as "titles to describe Divine knowledge,"⁷² he concludes that the Clear Book is more "a notebook of Divine power and the creational commands."

I have described this at some length in order to show how with this schematic approach Bediuzzaman makes readily comprehensible a subject which might otherwise be obscure, and at the same time expounds numerous other truths. In *Mesnevi*, he writes:

"The universe, which is the book of Power, is written on the pattern of the Clear Book, which is the book of Knowledge. Evidence for this is

⁶⁷Al-Qur'an, 6:59.

⁶⁸Al-Qur'an, 2:117, etc.

⁶⁹Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Sözler*, 455-6.

the order and balance which encompass all the things we see... As for the Perspicuous Qur'an, which is the book of the attribute of Speech, it is the interpreter of the books of Power and Knowledge, and the index of the chapters of order and balance..."⁷³

By reason of infinite Divine knowledge, the creation, or "writing," of beings is infinitely easy:

"Divine Determining is an aspect of Divine knowledge; it determines a measure for each thing, which is like its particular and immaterial mould; the determined measure is like a plan or model for the thing's being. When Divine power creates, it does so with extreme ease in accordance with the determined measure. If the thing is not attributed to the All-Powerful One of Glory, Who possesses all-embracing, infinite and pre-eternal knowledge, as was described above, not only thousands of difficulties appear, but hundreds of impossibilities. For if it was not for the determined measure which exists in Divine knowledge, thousands of material moulds with external existences would have to be employed in the body of even a tiny animate being."⁷⁴

In this way, Bediüzzaman describes the reality of the motion of particles and of time:

"By means of the dictation of the Clear Record, that is, through the decree and instruction of Divine Determining, Divine Power is creating the chain of beings, each link of which is a sign in the creation of things. It is causing the motion of particles, it is writing on the metaphorical page of time, which is called the Tablet of Effacement and Reaffirmation. Thus, the motion of particles is the vibration and motion from that writing and transcription, which occurs while beings pass from the World of the Unseen to the Manifest World, as they pass from knowledge to power."⁷⁵

The Manifest World, or book of the universe, is in a constant state of flux and change. He continues:

"As for the Tablet of Effacement of Reaffirmation, it is a slate for writing and erasing, an ever-changing notebook of the Supreme Preserved Tablet, which is fixed and constant. It is its notebook in the sphere of

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 455, 484.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 533 h / *The Words*, 571 fn 21.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Al-Maṭnawî al-'Arabî al-Nurî*, 278.

⁷⁴ Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem'alar*, 184-5; *Flashes*, 251.

⁷⁵ Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Sözler*, 533 h; *The Words*, 572 fn 21.

contingency, where all things are unceasing manifestations of life and death, existence and ephemerality. And this is the reality of time. Indeed, what we call time, which is a mighty river flowing in creation, has a reality like everything else. Its reality is like the ink and the page of the writing of Power in the Tablet of Effacement and Reaffirmation."

While expounding these Qur'anic concepts and describing the continuous creation of beings in this lucid manner, Bediuzzaman is also replying to "the Materialists and their nonsensical philosophies." With every point he makes, he points out its ease and necessity, and the impossibility and futility of the explanations of materialist philosophy and science. Concerning the motion of particles, he writes:

"The Materialists have "taken the transformations of particles, which they regard as the results of coincidence, as the fundamental basis of all their principles and shown that the Divine works and creatures result from those transformations. Anyone with a grain of intelligence would know how contrary to reason is their attributing creatures adorned with infinite instances of wisdom to something based on purposeless, meaningless coincidence, which is totally lacking in order."⁷⁶

According to Bediuzzaman,

"...the people of neglect, misguidance and philosophy ... have perceived that 'Preserved Tablet' of creative power, and the manifestation, reflection, and demonstration in things of that perspicaciously written book of dominical wisdom and will [that is, the book of the universe], and yet, God forbid, by naming it 'nature,' they have made it completely meaningless."⁷⁷

However, what is known as "nature" is only "the sum total of all the theoretical laws in force in the creation of the universe,"⁷⁸ which is the Greater *Shari'a* of Creation. Complementary to the well-known *Shari'a*, which proceeds from the attribute of Speech and governs man's voluntary actions, "The *Shari'a* of Creation.. proceeds from the attribute of Will, and orders the circumstances and motions of the world... it is dominical will, and is also wrongly called 'nature.'"⁷⁹

⁷⁶Sözler, *Ibid.*, 535; *The Words*, *Ibid.*, 574.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 533; *Ibid.*, 572 fn 21.

⁷⁸Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye*, 227.

⁷⁹Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Sözler* 704; *The Words*, 763.

With his proofs of Divine unity and other truths such as Divine power, knowledge, and will, Bediuzzaman dealt what he claimed were fatal blows at the concepts of nature, causality, and chance and coincidence, which lie at the base of materialist science and philosophy. He said even that he had “demolished the sturdy bastion of the physical sciences and nature.”⁸⁰ To list his arguments and proofs is beyond the scope of this paper. Having seen the writing of the book above, here, to add a few more details to our depiction of the book of the universe we may just recall that the “articles and ordinances” of the code of laws known as the *Shari’a* of Creation, that is, the forces and laws in force in the universe which are wrongly called “the laws of nature,” have no external material or physical existence. They are merely the manifestation of Will, exist only as Knowledge, and are the functioning of Power.⁸¹ As Bediuzzaman said in his famous definition of “nature:”

“The imaginary and insubstantial thing that Naturalists call Nature, if it has an external reality, can at the very most be work of art; it cannot be the Artist. It is an embroidery, and cannot be the Embroiderer. It is a set of decrees; it cannot be the Issuer of the decrees. It is a body of the laws of creation, and cannot be the Lawgiver. It is but a created screen to the dignity of God, and cannot be the Creator. It is passive and created, and cannot be a Creative Maker. It is a law, not a power, and cannot possess power. It is the recipient, and cannot be the source.”⁸²

Conclusion

The concept of the book of the universe was not original to Bediuzzaman. In *Muhâkemat*, one of his earliest published works, he quotes some lines which begin “*The leaves of the world’s book are of dimensions infinite*,” and which he attributes to an earlier writer.^{83, 84} What was original to him was his creating a new methodology for

⁸⁰Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Mektûbat...*, 67; *Letters...*, 95.

⁸¹See: Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye...*, 227-8; *Lem’alar...*, 177-80; *Flashes...*, 242-6.

⁸²Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem’alar...*, 178; *Flashes...*, 244.

⁸³Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Muhâkemat...*, 120.

⁸⁴Hoja Tahsin (d. 1880), was a scholar of both the religious and modern sciences, and in 1870 was appointed the first Director of the Darü’l-Fünûn-ý Osmanî (University). Among his works were *Tarih-i Tekvin* and *Esas-ý Ýlm-i Hayat*.

expounding the Qur'an based on reasoning, and logic, and reflective thought on the universe which is symbolized by the metaphor of the book. This was in fact characteristic of Bediuzzaman, for he was not an "innovator" but a "renewer."⁸⁵ Being inspired directly by the Qur'an, this methodology of expounding the Qur'an by expounding "the Qur'an of the universe" allowed Bediuzzaman to provide literally hundreds of convincing proofs of the truths the Qur'an teaches. With it, he opened up a comprehensive, genuine Qur'anic way of worship and knowledge of God which addresses everyone whatever their 'station,' and which points out ways leading to God in everything. For in his view, in the face of the many currents of misguidance in the modern world, "certain, verified belief" in foremost Divine unity is contemporary man's greatest need.

Bediuzzaman's utilizing his own scientific knowledge when depicting the pages and words of the book of the universe demonstrated that not only is there no clash or conflict between science and true religion, but also if those pages and words are regarded in the Qur'anic manner, for their meaning, they lead to increased knowledge of God. Almost every part of the *Risale-i Nur* teaches one how to look at and "read" the physical universe.

According to what Bediuzzaman says, there must be virtually no one unaffected by the false ideas and standpoints of Western philosophy and science. He said even that "the philosophers of Europe have leagued together for a thousand years to invent objections and doubts in their hostility to faith and the Qur'an, and to attack the believers. They wish to shake the pillars of belief..."⁸⁶ It would seem, then, that that aspect of the Qur'an which is concerned with depicting the signs of Divine activity in the universe and in man so that man should ponder over them and draw lessons has a particular relevance in this modern age of science and materialism. Thus the concept of the book of the universe and the main points we have made concerning it look primarily to this question. In my view, therefore, it may be seen as a "contemporary approach to understanding the Qur'an" which elucidates an aspect of the Qur'an which looks to the modern age in particular.[]

⁸⁵Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *uâlar*, 584-5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

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