

# **The Purposes of Repetition in the Qur'an According to the Risale-i Nur**

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## **Foreword**

All praise be to God, the Sustainer of the All the Worlds, and blessings and peace be upon our master Muhammad, and on all his Family and Companions

Doubtless, Imam Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, the reformer and regenerator of religion, performed exceptional services for this sublime religion. If one reads his biography, one cannot but see that he was a unique figure in his withstanding the onslaughts of this stormy age. He was a light-scattering lamp at a time the darkness was overwhelming Turkey in the attempt to extinguish its religion and all its sacred values. His matchless heroism and sincere defences in unjust courts had a powerful effect on those who saw and heard him. His example recalls many towering religious figures who strove heroically against injustice. Their words are light to the rightly-guided and scorching fire to the oppressors.

Said Nursi's mission did not come to an end with his death; it expanded and grew. The number of his followers increased rapidly both within Turkey and abroad. All resources were mobilized to disseminate his ideas. The Risale-i Nur was translated into various languages and published. It was also translated into Arabic, and the covers of its volumes are as magnificent as the knowledge contained within them. Many well-researched studies were carried out about Said Nursi himself, and his ideas, writings, method, and mission, and many books were written. He was the subject of newspaper articles, and symposia were organized about him. All these point to Said Nursi's eminent position and widespread acceptance.

I have received immense pleasure from reading both the Risale-i Nur, and many books about Said Nursi. On being invited to join the symposium "A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: the Example of the Risale-i Nur," I pondered at length over the possible subjects for a paper. Finally I decided on "The Purposes of Repetition in the Qur'an." I hope it will be acceptable. May Almighty God grant success to those works which please Him. All praise is due to Him alone.

## **Introduction**

"Since the Risale-i Nur belongs to the Qur'an and is a commentary based on proofs proceeding from it, it contains necessary, purposeful, indeed, essential and beneficial repetitions, the same as the Qur'an contains subtle, wise, and necessary repetitions which cause no boredom. Also, since the Risale-i Nur consists of proofs of the profession of Divine unity, which does not cause tedium but is repeated with pleasure and zeal, its essential repetitions are not a fault, and do not and should not cause boredom."<sup>1</sup>

Said Nursi wrote the Risale-i Nur in a distinctive form, containing many important points confirming that it is a Qur'anic commentary. Everyone who reads it will find a true commentary of the Qur'an, interwoven with his ideas and views. In most places in his works, Said Nursi begins with one or more verses from God's Book, which are like keys to what he writes. The verses are focal points for the piece, and the subject matter is derived from the verses.

The Risale-i Nur contains discussions which may be seen as summaries of all Qur'anic commentaries, indexes of the verses, and summaries of the Qur'anic sciences.<sup>2</sup> Said Nursi explained his ideas on repetition in the Qur'an in many places in his works. In the present paper I studied his interpretations of this subject, and saw that they focussed on two important points:

i) The purposes of repetition in the Qur'an.

ii) The elucidation and explanation of certain words in the Qur'an which are repeated in various places.

Before discussing these two points, we should examine the meaning of the word 'repetition' (takrar), and learn whether or not there are repetitions in the Qur'an.

## **PART ONE**

### **The Meaning of Repetition**

Repetition is one of the most widely used concepts in daily life. In its general meaning, the word 'repetition' can be used for virtually everything around us. Firstly, many of the words we use and sentences, are made up of the repetition of the letters. Then there are words and phrases which we use again and again. The things we all see are also repeated. If we refer to what the scholars have to say about repetition, we see these definitions: "Something being repeated over and over again."<sup>3</sup> "The accomplishment of something more than once."<sup>4</sup> "The return of something more than once or over and over again."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most common of these definitions is "the repetition of something due to its usefulness."<sup>6</sup>

The verbal noun of the [2nd form] of the verb karrara is takrir. The form takrar is the verbal noun sanctioned by common usage (masdar sama'i), and has a causative, intensive meaning.<sup>7</sup> However, scholars have expressed different views about these two words, some saying that they state different meanings, some saying that they express the same meaning. Tahanawi says: "Takrir means saying something more than once, and takrar has the same meaning."<sup>8</sup>

Those who study what the scholars have written will find that they either expand the meaning of 'repetition' (takrar) or restrict it. But one can say that most of them tend to expand it, including in it repetition of a word or meaning, either for some purpose or for no purpose, and repetition of words, sentences, or Qur'anic verses. Ibn Rashiq divided repetition (takrir) into three sorts:

- \* Repetition of a single word and meaning.
- \* Repetition of various words and meanings.
- \* Repetition of a meaning without its word.<sup>9</sup>

Some scholars accepted this division as it is,<sup>10</sup> while others divided repetition into six sorts:

1. Repetition of the word and the meaning, indicating a single meaning, intending two things.
2. Repetition of the word and meaning, indicating a single meaning, intending only one thing.
3. Repetition of the meaning alone without the word, indicating two different meanings.
4. Repetition of the meaning alone without the word, indicating a single meaning.
5. No repetition; inferred repetition of words and meaning.
6. No repetition; inferred repetition of the meaning only.<sup>11</sup>

One may say therefore that 'repetition' has a wide meaning or a general meaning, including synonymy, resemblance, similarity, prolixity, and emphasis. It is thus not a fault unless it serves no purpose. Scholars holding this view explained the uses of repetitions, the reasons for it, and its importance in embellishing speech and elucidating what is intended.<sup>12</sup>

Those holding another view tended to restrict the meaning of repetition, defining it as the repetition of the same word in the same form.<sup>13</sup> They looked on it as a fault and unacceptable, and did not include in it emphasis, or the resemblance and similarity of words. They said that if the [same] word is repeated in another context, it is not repetition. A small number of scholars held this view or inclined towards it. One of them was al-Tabari, who denied there was repetition in verses that were close to each other or followed on in sequence. He said:

"There are no two successive verses in God's Book in which a single word or meaning are repeated-especially if another verse intervenes and changes the meanings of the two verses. Of course there may be several identical verses in a single sura, but since they are separated by other verses, such verses bear different meanings."<sup>14</sup>

Sayyid Qutb supported the view that there are no repetitions in the Qur'an:

"People suppose that there are repetitions in the stories of the Qur'an, for various aspects of a story are repeated in more than one sura. But if they study them carefully they will see that it is not the same story or part of a story that is repeated in a single sura. Each is a different part expressing a different meaning. There is therefore no question of repetition."<sup>15</sup>

Muhammad Qutb, his brother, shares this view. He says:

"The Qur'an's true face is not one of repetition, but one of change and multiplicity. Another aspect of its miraculousness is its impelling people to think with its repetitions, and instructing them and giving them direction. So it is not a question of repetition of similar things, but a question of variety."<sup>16</sup>

Having given the above two opinions, I want to move on to Said Nursi's ideas about repetition. It appears that he preferred the first view, and when discussing repetitions in the Qur'an said that they were an aspect of its miraculousness.<sup>17</sup> According to him, the repetitions were found in verses about the tenets of belief, to encourage and restrain, and in the stories. He also mentioned the purpose of the repetitions.<sup>18</sup> After explaining them, he says:

"Nevertheless, they are apparently repetitions, but in reality every verse has numerous meanings, numerous benefits, and many aspects and levels. In each place they are mentioned with a different meaning, for different benefits and purposes."<sup>19</sup>

"Many apparent repetitions, which are thought to be boring, are admired and applauded by the science of rhetoric."<sup>20</sup>

In some places it seems Said Nursi is inclining towards the second view, but mostly he supports the first. In many places in the *Risale-i Nur*, while mentioning the repetitions he explains their purposes. Since these are discussed in Part Two, here we suffice with the above.

## **PART TWO**

### **The Purposes of Repetition in the Qur'an**

Said Nursi discusses the reasons for the repetitions in the Qur'an. Sometimes he mentions these in order, and sometimes he discusses them when they crop up during discussion of another subject. In this section we shall give his ideas about them. We shall explain all the points in the light of his ideas, in the sections that he specifies.<sup>21</sup>

• **First Point: Establishment (*Taqrir*) and Emphasis (*Ta'kid*)**

Said Nursi points out that the Qur'an is a book of remembrance, supplication, and summons; there is need to establish and confirm the truths that these express. He says:

"The Qur'an is a book of remembrance of God, a book of supplication, and a book of summons, for which reason the repetitions in its suras are completely apt according to rhetoric and eloquence, and pure wisdom. For what is hoped for from remembrance and supplication is reward and to attract Divine compassion. It is clear that frequent repetition is necessary in such matters so that the reward may increase proportionately, as well as the compassion. Moreover, repeated remembrance of God illuminates the heart. When repeated supplications are confirmed, and to whatever extent one issues a summons, its effectiveness is increased."<sup>22</sup>

"Also, the Qur'an is a founder; it is the basis of the Clear Religion, and the foundation of the world of Islam. It changed human social life, and is the answer to the repeated questions of its various classes. Repetition is necessary for a founder in order to establish things. Repetition is necessary to corroborate them. Confirmation, verification, and repetition are necessary to emphasize them."<sup>23</sup>

The above passages show that Said Nursi considered one of the purposes of the repetitions in the Qur'an to be the establishment of truths and their corroboration and emphasis. Other scholars hold the same view. Ibn 'Abidin says: "The words are repeated in order to corroborate and emphasize them; this infers that greater importance is being given to them."<sup>24</sup> "We say that repetition affords importance to a thing, establishes its meaning and emphasizes it."<sup>25</sup>

"The repetitions express verification and confirmation, for the achievement of the aims of guidance. Moreover, the repetitions do not mar it; they do not spoil it; their fragrance spreads, like musk.

"The Qur'an is strength and sustenance for hearts; it is healing for spirits. The repetition of words augments strength. The more it is repeated, the more familiar and intimate it becomes, thus increasing the pleasure."<sup>26</sup>

"And again, it is due to this mystery that the Qur'an contains repetitions, in order to establish [its truths] firmly in the people's minds."<sup>27</sup>

al-Zarkashi says:

"Part Fourteen: Repetition for the purpose of emphasis... Those who suppose repetition to be without benefit although it is one of the styles of good speech, and deny it, are in error—particularly if there is a connection between the repeated things. It is a custom of the Arabs to repeat and emphasize things when they speak, in order to show the importance of something they want to be achieved, or to indicate that it is about to be realized, or to summon something."<sup>28</sup>

The scholars have expressed many views on this matter.<sup>29</sup> Similar statements are also to be encountered in the Qur'anic commentaries. For example:

al-Qurtubi says about the verse Not the least harm will they do to God (3:177), "it is repeated for emphasis."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, when expounding the verse They are those on whom [descend] blessings from their Sustainer, and mercy (2:157), he says: "Although as a word *rahma*

(mercy) is different, it is repeated in order to emphasize and enrich the meaning."31 And in his interpretation of the verse, To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way (5:48) Abu Hayyan says: "Shi'ra (law) and minhaj (way) are two words expressing the same meaning, that is, 'road,' and have been repeated for emphasis."32

One may speak of a consensus among scholars concerning this first point. Thus, what Said Nursi writes is correct, as is testified to by the great scholars.

#### • **Second Point: To Facilitate Reading the Qur'an**

"Moreover, everyone is not capable of always reading the whole Qur'an, but is mostly able to read one sura. Therefore, since the most important purposes of the Qur'an are included in most of the longer suras, each is like a small Qur'an. That is to say, so that no one should be deprived, certain of its aims like Divine unity, the resurrection of the dead, and the story of Moses, have been repeated."33

"... since everyone does not always have the time or capability to read the whole Qur'an, it repeats those stories in the same way as it repeats the important pillars of belief, in order to make all the long and middle-length suras each like a small Qur'an. To repeat them then is not excessive, it is required by eloquence..."34

Other scholars have alluded to this instance of wisdom, among whom was Ibn Qutayba, who said:

"Groups of emissaries used to come to God's Messenger (PBUH) from the Arab tribes in order to learn about Islam. The Muslims would recite passages from the Qur'an to them. What was recited was sufficient for them, and they would convey the various suras they learnt to the tribes. If the stories and incidents of the past had not been repeated in different suras, one people would have learnt the story of Moses, another the story of Jesus, another the story of Noah, and another the story of Lut. But in His grace and mercy, Almighty God willed that all these stories should be spread all over the world, reach all ears, and find a place in all hearts."35

However, the same words are not always used in the repetitions of the verses and topics in the Qur'an; on each occasion something new, or an explanation, is added. Said Nursi's ideas about this are given below. The mass of people who read the Qur'an do not pay much attention to the fine points; what is important for them is to grasp the fundamental questions and gain an understanding without difficulty. They profit from the Qur'an's expositions to the extent of their comprehension and sufficiently to their needs, and they are not denied understanding of the general aims and main subjects of the Qur'an.

As for Said Nursi's phrase: "each like a small Qur'an," some early scholars stated that it was undesirable to call any sura "small." Abu 'Aliya told a man who called one of the suras small: "You are smaller than it is, for the Qur'an and every about it is big."36 However, other scholars did apply the attribute "small" to some of the suras. 'Amr ibn Shu'ayb related from his father, who had heard it from his father: "There is no distinction between small (short) suras and big (long) ones. However, I heard that God's Messenger (PBUH) recited these suras in the prescribed prayers when he was leading them."37

Of course, in using this expression, Said Nursi was encouraging the reader. He likened the long suras to the whole Qur'an because they contain most its chief aims. He had no intention of belittling the Qur'an in any way.

#### • **Third Point: Regard For the Repetition of Need**

"Also, like bodily needs, spiritual needs are various. Man is need of some of them every breath; like the body needs air, the spirit needs the word Hu (He). Some he is in need of every hour, like 'In the Name of God.' And so on. That means the repetition of verses arises

from the repetition of need. It makes the repetition in order to point out the need and awaken and incite it, and to arouse desire and appetite."<sup>38</sup>

In this Point Said Nursi is making a fine comparison between the variety of man's spiritual needs and the variety of his physical needs. The spirit is needy for sustenance the same as the body. This need is intense. Man advances and his spirit expands to the degree he can satisfy this need. It is because of this that the Qur'an repeatedly mentions the Divine Names.

The repetition of man's needs necessitates that they are met to the same extent. The repetition of guidance and of explanations of certain important matters arise from need. Moreover, the fact that man is forgetful of many important matters means that he has to be constantly reminded of them and to have his attention directed towards them. It is therefore not unnecessary that the end of the world and its events should be described repeatedly, and God's majesty should be constantly explained and His rule over the world, and the awesomeness of His wrath that will be visited on the unbelievers and wrongdoers.<sup>39</sup> All these repetitions and reminders are necessary because men forget the life of the hereafter and throw themselves into the life of this world. There is need then for constant reminders. We have explained in detail in this Qur'an, for the benefit of mankind, every kind of similitude.<sup>40</sup>

#### • **Fourth Point: Strengthening the Foundations**

"Also, the Qur'an is a founder; it is the basis of the Clear Religion, and the foundation of the world of Islam. It changed human social life, and is the answer to the repeated questions of its various classes. Repetition is necessary for a founder in order to establish things. Repetition is necessary to corroborate them. Confirmation, verification, and repetition are necessary to emphasize them."<sup>41</sup>

This Point may be seen as a subsidiary of the First Point, for the strengthening of the fundamentals may be included among repetitions made for establishment, corroboration and emphasis. But in order to emphasize the importance of the fundamentals, and the attention he paid them, and so that need should be felt to instil them in people's spirits, Said Nursi dealt with this question separately. In the Fourth Point he explains that the Qur'an is the foundation of Islam, so is it the basis of the world of Islam. Muslims take their beliefs and ways of life from the Qur'an. If there had been no such book, this would not have been possible. Furthermore, the Qur'an has transformed human societies ever since it was first revealed. Innumerable hearts have undergone change and come to believe after hearing the verses of God's Speech. Having been affected by the verses of this Mighty Book, many societies submerged in the darkness of unbelief and ignorance have attained to belief and the light of guidance. For the Qur'an is the basis of this religion. Within are found the answers to the questions man has asked in every age: Why were we created? Who created us? What is our function? What will happen after death? These questions and many other like them are answered clearly and in detail in the Qur'an. It cannot therefore be unnecessary to repeat these elevated meanings and the principles they comprise.

#### • **Fifth Point: Richness of Style**

"Also, it speaks of such mighty matters and minute truths that numerous repetitions are necessary in different forms in order to establish them in everyone's hearts. Nevertheless, although they are apparently repetitions, in reality every verse has numerous meanings, numerous benefits, and many aspects and levels. In each place they are mentioned with a different meaning, for different benefits and purposes."<sup>42</sup>

Scholars alluded to many matters when discussing the uses of the repetitions. We may list some of the stylistic devices that shall be mentioned in this Point as follows: exaltation and intimidation; promise and threat; inducing intent and commendation; encouragement and familiarization; rebuke and astonishment; mockery and scorning; honouring and exalting; exaggeration and provocation.<sup>43</sup> All these stylistic devices are employed to beautify a piece. Similarly, there are a great variety of styles in the Qur'an. They are mostly to be seen in the

stories and in the verses describing and proving the end of the world, which are questions the Qur'an wants to instil in people's hearts so that they should accept them. It therefore employs numerous styles so that through their variety it may have a powerful effect on people's souls.

#### • Sixth Point: Expression of the Qur'an's Aims

"You should know that all the verses have an outer meaning, an inner meaning, a limit, and an aim. And all the stories have numerous aspects, benefits, aims, and state numerous truths.<sup>44</sup> In which case, a particular verse may be mentioned everywhere for another of its aspects. Thus, even if it is apparently repetition, in reality it is not."<sup>45</sup>

These useful words of Said Nursi explain that in many places in the Qur'an the stories and subjects consist of truths close to one another. But if there are resemblances between them, these are not total. One can put forward numerous verses as examples of this. Particularly included among these are the verses describing the end of the world and the events preceding the resurrection of the dead. Although there are resemblances between the things described, the words and styles of all the verses differ. The following is a selection of verses describing what will happen to the mountains:

And the mountains will be like wool;(70:9) \* One Day the earth and the mountains will be in violent commotion. And the mountains will as a heap of sand poured out and flowing down.(73:14) \* When the mountains are scattered [to the winds] as dust;(77:10) \* They ask you concerning the mountains; say: "My Sustainer will uproot them and scatter them as dust;(20:105) \* One Day We shall remove the mountains, and you will see the earth as a level stretch...(18:47) \* And the mountains will fly hither and thither.(52:10) \* And the mountains shall be crumbled to atoms.(56:5) \* And the earth is moved, and its mountains, and they are crushed to powder at one stroke.(69:14) \* And the mountains shall vanish, as if they were a mirage.(78:20) \* When the mountains vanish [like a mirage];(81:3) \* And the mountains will be like carded wool.(101:5) \* You see the mountains and think them firmly fixed; but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away.(27:88)

The subject of all these verses is the same, but it is considered from different angles. Each verse describes a part of what will occur that day, and they form a whole when all put together. None is the repeat of another. al-Razi says about this:

"In various places in His Book, Almighty God mentions what will befall the mountains. When put together, these stages become clear: the first thing that will happen to the mountains is a gigantic quake. Their second stage is their becoming like carded wool. At the third stage, from being like carded wool, they will crumble into dust. At the fourth stage, they shall be scattered as dust, for up to this stage they were still in their places. They shall fly hither and thither at the blasts of a terrible wind. At the fifth stage, tossed up into the air by the fierce wind, the dust of the crumbled mountains will form clouds. One who sees them thus will suppose them to be motionless, but in reality they are moving: "they shall pass away as the clouds pass away," as the verse says. This will occur through the all-compelling wrath of Almighty God. The sixth stage is represented by the verse, One Day We shall remove the mountains, and you will see the earth as a level stretch, for the mountains will have turned into a mere mirage. Those who seek the mountains in their former places, will see no trace of them. Just like someone who sees a mirage; when he arrives at the place, there is nothing there."<sup>46</sup>

We should also include the verse Then which of the favours of your Sustainer will you deny?(55:13 etc.), for although it is repeated many times, on each occasion it is related to its preceding verse. God Almighty is addressing men and jinns with it. He lists the bounties He has created for man, and after mentioning each, says that it is necessary to affirm them and offer thanks for them. He states this in different ways and forms.<sup>47</sup>

Said Nursi's words, "a particular verse may be mentioned everywhere for another of its aspects" show that there is an eloquence in the repetitions of the verse arising from its conciseness.

## **PART THREE**

### ***Repetitions Said Nursi Explained the Purpose of***

Said Nursi expounded the purpose of the repetitions in the Qur'an in the Points listed above. However, because of the nature of the Risale-i Nur, he did not do this at length. The verses and subjects he expounded in order to explain the reasons for their repetition are therefore few in number; only the Bismillah, the verses Then which of the favours of your Sustainer will you deny? (55:13 etc.), Ah woe that Day to the rejecters of truth! (77:15 etc.), and And verily your Sustainer is He, the Exalted in Might, Most Merciful (26:9 etc.), and stories of the prophets. Before discussing this subject in greater detail, I want to include the following elegant passage about the repetitions in verses and stories of the Qur'an:

"Question: In the Qur'an of Mighty Stature, among the attributes of which are conciseness and miraculousness, many verses are repeated, such as: Then which of the favours of your Sustainer will you deny?, Ah woe that Day to the rejecters of truth!, and And verily your Sustainer is He, the Exalted in Might, Most Merciful. However, these repetitions are contrary to eloquence and cause boredom?

"The Answer: Friend! Everything that shines is not scorching fire. Yes, repetitions sometimes cause boredom, but not always. It does not include everywhere, all speech, and all books. Many apparent repetitions, which are thought to be boring, are appreciated and admired in [the science of] rhetoric. The food man eats is of two categories; one is basic sustenance, the other is fruit. The more the former is repeated, the greater the pleasure it affords, it gives strength, and prompts the offering of thanks. But the latter causes boredom when repeated, and gives pleasure when changed for something new.

"Similarly, there are two sorts of speech. The first is sustenance for spirits, and consists of truths which strengthen the mind, which, like the sunlight, on being repeated infuse the spirit and mind with life. Whereas repetition of the second sort, which like fruit is an appetizer, is not acceptable or recommended.

"Thus, the Qur'an as a whole is sustenance for hearts and strength, and its repetition does not cause boredom, but produces a sweetness and pleasure. Moreover, among its verses are some which are the spirit of that strength, and the more they are repeated, the more brilliantly they shine, scattering lights of truth and reality. They are musk; the more they are repeated, the more they scatter their fragrance.

"In Short: On being repeated, the source of life and luminous principles found in verses like In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, whet the appetite, and like musk, on being stirred scatter their scents. That is to say, what is supposed to be repetition, is not repetition. Only, like And they are given things in similitude (2:25), the words that are repeated indicate different points, aims, and instances of wisdom, are imagined to be repetition because the words and phrases resemble each other. The story of Moses includes numerous qualities and purposes. It is pure eloquence that an appropriate aspect of it should be mentioned in every 'station' it is mentioned. Yes, the Qur'an of Mighty Stature has taken the famous story -as silver- into its 'shining hand,' and pouring it into a mould of gold has so adorned it with eloquence that all those learned in rhetoric prostrated in wonder before its eloquence."<sup>48</sup>

We may now look in greater detail at the verses mentioned above:

#### **1. *Bismillah***

In the Third Point above, Said Nursi linked the repetition of need with the repetition of verses. In connection with the repetition of Bismillahirrahmanirrahim he said: "On being repeated, the source of life and luminous principles found in verses like In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, whet the appetite." He then elucidates this, saying:

"The Bismillah comprises numerous aspects such as auspiciousness, blessedness, and the seeking of help; and numerous 'stations' such as the affirmation of Divine unity, declaring God free of fault, praise, Divine glory and beauty, and bestowal; and alludes to the four [main] aims [of the Qur'an], the affirmation of Divine unity, prophethood, the resurrection of the dead, and justice. Thus, every time it is mentioned, it is mentioned in connection with one of these aspects or one of these 'stations.'"49

In another place, he says the following:

"...In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, which constitutes a single verse and is repeated one hundred and fourteen times in the Qur'an, is a truth which binds the Divine Throne and the earth, and illuminates the cosmos, and for which everyone is in need all the time; if it was repeated millions of times, there would still be need for it. There is need and longing for it, not only every day like bread, but every moment like air and light."50

The above shows that Said Nursi considers the Bismillah to be comprehensive both in content and meaning. Someone who makes a close study of his discussions may discover numerous levels, statements, and aims. The Bismillah is repeated frequently due to the intensity of the need. It stands at the head of all the suras, and it may be said therefore that it conveys a particular meaning to each sura and its topics. The subtle words we quoted above from Said Nursi were applied practically by al-Buqa'i and Tantawi Jawhari. For when expounding a sura, those two scholars would begin with expounding the Bismillah at the start of it, in a way suitably to the sura in question. At the beginning of his commentary on Sura al-Dukhan, al-Buqa'i wrote:

"The intention of the sura is to warn that those men will perish who do not acknowledge the good, blessings, and mercy encompassing all creatures that are found in the Word of the Most Munificent and Wise One. To start with the Bismillah: In the name of God, the Single and Most Merciful All-Compelling Sovereign, Who makes general His bounties, the Most Compassionate, Who bestows on those He loves His auspicious mercy."51

While at the start of Sura Ta.Ha, he says:

"In the name of God, the Most Merciful Supreme Sovereign Whose clemency and power are all-embracing and whose bounties encompass all creatures, the Most Compassionate, Who completes His bestowal on the beneficent and fortunate."52

Tantawi Jawhari too, expounds the Bismillah at the start of each sura suitably to the sura in question. In some places he does this at considerable length.<sup>53</sup> As will be seen, his interpretations conform closely to Said Nursi's writings; there are close parallels between the method of Qur'anic exegesis followed by Tantawi Jawhari and al-Buqa'i, and Said Nursi's ideas.

It should be said at once that the most widely held view among scholars is that outside Sura al-Fatiha, the Bismillah at the beginning of the suras is not one of the verses of the suras, but that it performs the function of separating the suras from one another. The scholars of Mecca and Kufa said that the Bismillah forms the first verse of Sura al-Fatiha. However, others have stated that this is not the case, and that like the other suras it is not part of the sura.<sup>54</sup>

## **2. The verse, *And verily your Sustainer is He, the Exalted in Might, Most***

### ***Merciful***<sup>55</sup>

The above verse, "which is repeated eight times in Sura Ta. Sin. Mim. Repeating on account of the result of the universe's creation and in the name of universal dominicality, the salvation of the prophets whose stories are told in the sura, and the punishments of their peoples, in order to teach that that dominical dignity requires the torments of those wrongdoing peoples while Divine compassion requires the prophets' salvation, is a concise, miraculous, and

elevated miraculousness, for which, if repeated thousands of times, there would still be need and longing."<sup>56</sup>

Here, it is seen that Said Nursi did not expound the previous verse, Verily in this is a sign; but most of them do not believe, which is also repeated eight times. He says only that its coming after the story of one of the prophets mentioned in Sura al-Shu'ara is important in so far as the rejection of a prophet by his people is repugnant. The sura also indicates -in the form of Almighty God informing the prophets of their rejection by their peoples- the abominable acts perpetrated by the peoples mentioned in the sura.<sup>57</sup> There is an evil greater than these peoples' denial of the prophets sent to them, and that is their denial of all the prophets.

Some of the Qur'anic commentators pointed out the important subtleties of these stories in Sura al-Shu'ara, one of which was Zamakhshari. He said:

"All these stories are like independent sections. Each contains noteworthy aspects. Each opens for its reader the doors of new meanings so that he draws conclusions according to his level. For the repetitions root the meanings in the spirit and instil constancy in the heart... For these stories enter the ears making the voice of truth heard. They induce the heart to ponder deeply over them, they give the sherbet of advice and admonition to be drunk. The repetitions and restatements may open up a closed ear, stir a mind into life, or illuminate an intellect. They may remove the rust from the understanding, cleaning and polishing it."<sup>58</sup>

While Ibn 'Ashur said:

"The verse Verily in this is a sign; but most of them do not believe coming immediately after descriptions of idolators who deny the prophets shows that the signs of Divine unity and affirmation of God's Messengers is sufficient for those seek the truth and support it. But most of the idolators do not believe it. God is Mighty and has the power to punish such deniers, He is Compassionate towards the messengers He sends and strengthens them against their enemies."<sup>59</sup>

### **3. The verse, *Then which of the favours of your Sustainer will you deny?***

### **4. The verse, *Ah woe that Day to the rejecters of truth!***

Said Nursi expounded these two verses together:

These verses "... shout out threateningly to mankind and the jinn across the centuries and the heavens and the earth, the unbelief, ingratitude, and wrongdoing of those who bring the universe and the heavens and earth to anger, spoil the results of the world's creation, and deny and respond slightingly to the majesty of Divine rule, and violate the rights of all creatures. If a general lesson thus concerned with thousands of truths and of the strength of thousands of matters is repeated thousands of times, there would still be need for it and its awe-inspiring conciseness and beautiful, miraculous eloquence."<sup>60</sup>

While in another place he says:

"While recounting [God Almighty's] bounties, signs, and evidences, the Qur'an repeats the verse Then which of the favours of your Sustainer will you deny? This implies an attitude of men and jinn which gives rise to their worst rebellion, their most severe tyranny, their greatest ingratitude, which is that they do not see the bestowal within bounties. And because they do not see the bestowal, they are heedless of the True Bestower. And driven by heedlessness of the Bestower, they ascribe those bounties to causes or to chance, and deny they come from God. Thus, on first taking a bounty, the believer should recite the Bismillah. By intentionally thinking of the bounty being from God, he should understand that he is taking it only in God's name and on God's account, and he should respond to God Almighty gratefully and with thanks."<sup>61</sup>

Sura al-Rahman is distinguished by the verse Then which of the favours of your Sustainer will you deny? following verses alternately after verse 13, related to its meaning. The verses it follows describe manifest bounties. Said Nursi explains this beautifully above. He also points out that the same verse follows verses which threaten punishment and depict it. Other commentators have explained these verses similarly, one of which was Buqa'i, who said:

"After a particular place, this verse is repeated after virtually every verse. The things an obdurate denier repeatedly denies have to be described as effectively as possible, and if despite all efforts to persuade him he persists in his obstinacy, he will be repeatedly asked: 'What are you denying?' With an address of this sort it is stating that his denial has exceeded all bounds. The address gains in importance if he continues to deny despite all the bounties offered to him. Moreover, besides verses listing the bounties bestowed on men, there are some that describe punishment and torments. The same verse follows these verses too. It is anyway another bounty if men are relieved of their torments, or if the deniers are given a respite."62

al-Qasimi says:

"If it is asked how the following verses are a bounty; that is: Soon We shall settle your affairs, O both you worlds!(55:31) \* For the sinners will be known by their marks(55:41) \* This is the Hell which the sinners deny;(55:43) \* On you will be sent [O you evil ones twain] a flame of fire [to burn] and a smoke [to choke]; no defence will you have.(55:35) \* In its midst and in the midst of boiling hot water will they wander round!(55:44) - in answer to the question of how these are a bounty: in reality these are all vast bounties, because with these verses Almighty God is threatening and frightening His servants so that they extricate themselves from the swamp of unbelief, rebellion, sin, and revolt, and being reformed reach the shore of belief, obedience, submission, and worship. If they do not heed these warnings, they will suffer the penalties described. In this way, people are encouraged to take the path of safety and salvation. This is a great bounty, just like the others, and a great favour just like the other favours."63

al-Alusi expounds all the repeated verses suitably to the preceding ones. About the verse: [He is] Lord of the two easts and Lord of the two wests; \* Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?(55:17-18), he says:

"In the first there are many meanings for man, such as the weather being moderate, the change of the seasons, and all the seasons arriving at the most suitable time." And about the verse, Soon We shall settle your affairs, O both you worlds! \* Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?, he says: "Here, men and jinn are being warned about what they will meet with on Judgement Day and are being reminded to avoid doing anything that will count against them." When the sky is rent asunder, and it becomes red like ointment; \* Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?(55:37-8) Here he says: "It is a great favour and bounty for men to be restrained from evil in this way."64

al-Kirmani says the following about the wisdom in the number of times the above-mentioned verse is repeated in the sura:

"The verse is repeated thirty-one times in the sura. Eight of these follow verses that mention the wonders of God's creatures and the beauties of His art, and the beginning and end of creation. Seven of them follow verses that describe Hell-fire and its fury, and the number of its doors. The fact that fine bounties are mentioned after verses describing the torments is so that men should avoid the torments of Hell, and because they are each bounties like the other bounties. In fact they are a greater bounty. The eight verses following these seven describe the attributes of the people of Paradise. Then the eight verses following these depict the two Paradises. The person who believes in the first eight verses and acts accordingly, and behaves as demanded by the following seven, will earn the right to acquire the other two sets of eight verses. And God knows best."65

\* \* \*

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### **FOOTNOTES**

1. Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said, The Rays Collection [Eng. trans.] (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, 1998) 90.
2. For further discussion, see, "'Ulum al-Qur'an wa'l-Tafsir fi Rasa'il al-Nur" in Badi'u'z-Zaman Sa'id al-Nursi Fikruhu wa Da'watuhu (Jordan: al-Ma'had al-'Alami li'l-Fikr al-Islami) 81-97.
3. Ibn Manzur, Lisan al-'Arab, art. karara.
4. al-Jurjani, al-Ta'rifat, 41.
5. al-Firuzabadi, al-Qamus al-Muhit, art. karara.
6. al-Tayy, Husayn ibn Muhammad, al-Tibyan fi 'Ilm al-Ma'ani wa'l-Badi' wa'l-Bayan, 360.
7. Khalaf al-Jaradat, Zahirat al-Takrir fi al-Tarakib al-Nahwiyya (Jordan: University of Mu'ta, M.A. Thesis), 21.
8. al-Tahanawi, Kashf Istilahat al-Funun, iii, 1237.
9. Ibn Rushd al-Qayrawani, al-'Umda fi Sana'at al-Shi'r, ii, 72.
10. See, Diya' al-Din ibn al-Athir, al-Mathal al-Sa'ir fi Adab al-Kitab wa'l-Sha'ir, ii, 344, 345; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, al-Fawa'id al-Mushawwiq ila 'Ulum al-Qur'an, 111-2; al-Zarkashi, al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, iii, 10; Mustafa Sadiq al-Rufa'i, I'jaz al-Qur'an wa'l-Balaghat al-Nabawiyya, 193.
11. See, Yahya ibn Hamza, al-Tiraz al-Mutadammin li'l-Balagha wa 'Ulum Haqa'iq al-I'jaz (Egypt: Matba' al-Muqtataf, 1914) ii, 177-190; ibn al-Athir, al-Mathal al-Sa'ir fi Adab al-Kitab wa'l-Sha'ir, iii, 3-40; Ibn 'Abidin, al-Taqrir fi'l-Takrir, 26-8, 36; Muhammad al-Sayyid Shaykhun, Asrar al-Takrir fi Lughat al-Qur'an (Egypt: Maktaba al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyya) 9, 10; Ahmad Matlub, "Mu'jam al-Mustalahat al-Balaghiyya wa Tatawwuruha" in al-Majma' al-'Ilmi al-'Iraqi (1986), ii, 338, 339.

12. See, al-Zarkashi, al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, iii, 11-33; Muhammad al-Sayyid Shaykhun, Asrar al-Takrir fi Lughat al-Qur'an, 21-30; 'Izz al-Din al-Sayyid, al-Takrir Bayn al-Mathir wa'l-Ta'thir ('Alam al-Kutub, 2nd. edn. 1986) 117-197.
13. Fadl Hasan 'Abbas, "Qadiyya al-Takrir fi Kitab Allah wa Silatuha bi'l-I'jaz" in Majalla Kulliyat al-Shari'a (University of Kuwait) No: 7, 1986, p. 5. See also, Khalaf al-Jaradat, Zahirat al-Takrir fi al-Tarakib al-Nahwiyya, 71.
14. al-Tabari, Muhammad ibn Jarir, Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an (Egypt: 3rd. edn. 1968) i, 64.
15. Sayyid Qutb, Fi Zilal al-Qur'an (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 7th edn. 1971) i, 64.
16. Muhammad Qutb, Dirasat Qur'aniyya (Dar al-Shuruq, 2nd edn. 1980) 261.
17. The Rays Collection, 262.
18. Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said, The Flashes Collection [Eng. trans.] (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, 1995) 112.
19. Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said, The Words [Eng. trans.] (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, new edn. 1998) 251.
20. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, Ýpârâtü'l-Ý'caz (Ýstanbul: Envar Neþriyat, 1995) 30.
21. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, Mesnevi-i Nuriye [Turk. trans. Abdülmecid Nursî] (Istanbul: Envar Neþriyat, 1994) 230-1.
22. Mesnevi-i Nûriye, 230-1.
23. The Words, 251.
24. Ibn 'Abidin, al-Taqrir fi'l-Takrir, 27-28.
25. Ibn 'Abidin, al-Taqrir fi'l-Takrir, 33.
26. Mesnevi-i Nûriye, 127.
27. Mesnevi-i Nûriye, 195.
28. al-Zarkashi, al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, iii, 7, 9.
29. For these views, see, Khalaf al-Jaradat, Zahirat al-Takrir fi al-Tarakib al-Nahwiyya, 63-88.
30. al-Qurtubi, al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an, iv, 286.
31. al-Qurtubi, al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an, ii, 177.
32. Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi, al-Bahr al-Muhit, iii, 502.
33. The Words, 250.
34. The Words, 473.

35. Ibn Qutayba, 'Abdullah ibn Muslim, Ta'wil Mushkil al-Qur'an [Tahqiq: al-Sayyid Ahmad Saqar], 181.
36. al-Qurtubi, al-Tadhkar fi Afdal al-Adhkar [Tahqiq: Tharwat Muhammad Nafi'] (Dar al-Tawhid) 121. (al-Qurtubi narrates this hadith from Makki.)
37. Abu Da'ud, Kitab al-Salat, No: 814.
38. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Letters 1928-1932 [Engl. trans.] (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, 2nd edn. 1997) 244; The Words, 250.
39. The Words, 467.
40. Qur'an, 18:54.
41. The Words, 251.
42. The Words, 251.
43. al-Zarkashi, al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, iii, 17-18.
44. This expresses one aspect of the Hadith "The Qur'an was revealed on seven letters." There is a similar Hadith in Tabarani: "Every letter has an outer face (zahir) and an inner face (batin). Every letter has a limit (hadd) and an aim (muttala')." See, Kashf al-Khafa', i, 209. Also in the al-Mu'jam al-Kabir of Tabarani, there is a Hadith: "Every verse has an outer face and an inner face;" iii, 130, No: 10108. See also, al-Mu'jam al-Awsat, i, 433, No: 777. The muhaddith Ahmad Muhammad Shakir found this Hadith 'weak', see: Tabari, Jami' al-Bayan, i, 22.
45. Mesnevi-i Nuriye, 232.
46. al-Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, al-Tafsir al-Kabir, xxxi, 11, 12.
47. al-Zarkashi, al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, iii, 18.
48. Ýpârâtü'l-Ý'caz, 30-1.
49. Ýpârâtü'l-Ý'caz, 31.
50. The Rays Collection, 265.
51. al-Buqa'i, Ibrahim ibn 'Umar, Nazm al-Durar fi Tanasub al-Ayat wa'l-Suwar (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiye) vii, 62.
52. al-Buqa'i, Nazm al-Durar, v, 4.
53. Tantawi Jawhari, al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim (Egypt: al-Maktabat al-Islami) xvii, 4-9; xviii, 144-150; xx, 3-6.
54. Abu 'Amr al-Dani, al-Bayan fi 'Add Ay al-Qur'an (Kuwait: Markaz al-Makhtutat wa'l-Watha'iq) 5-7, 139.
55. Qur'an, 26:9, 68, 104, 122, 140, 159, 175, 191.
56. The Rays Collection, 265.

57. As stated in the verse, The people of Noah.... (26:105). See also, verses 123, 141, 160, 176 in the same sura.

58. al-Zamakhshari, al-Kashshaf, iii, 126.

59. Ibn 'Ashur, al-Tahrir wa'l-Tanwir, xix, 90.

60. The Rays Collection, 265.

61. Mesnevi-i Nuriye, 95-6.

62. al-Buqa'i, Nazm al-Durar, vii, 378.

63. al-Qasimi, Muhammad Jamal al-Din, Mahasin al-Ta'wil, i, 160.

64. al-Alusi, Ruh al-Ma'ani, xxvii, 105, 112, 114.

65. al-Kirmani, Mahmud ibn Hamza, Asrar al-Takrar fi'l-Qur'an [tahqiq: 'Abd al-Qadir Ahmad 'Ata] (Dar al-I'tisam) 198.

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