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SAID NURSI**

**THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMIC
THOUGHT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
AND BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI**

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by Şükran Vahide

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Bediuzzaman's Views on the Aspects of the Qur'an's Miraculousness

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In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Introduction

All praise be to God, Who taught knowledge with the pen, and blessings and peace on our master Muhammad, and on all his Family and Companions.

The Holy Qur'an is a vast ocean, abounding in every sort of pearl and coral. The more you study and research it, the more you come upon secrets and subtleties you did not previously know. You will not be contented with what you find, nor will you come to an end of it.

It is because of this that so many works have been written about the Qur'an, of many sorts, and from numerous points of view. One of those who have produced works on the Qur'an is Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. He truly spent much time and effort in this field. He thought long and deeply on the verses of the Holy Qur'an, which is the Word of God, pondering over their meanings. He studied the aspects of their miraculousness from many different angles, and extracted subtle meanings and important lessons from them. Pouring them onto paper, his eloquent pen expressed profoundly and subtly the treasures of the meanings he had been able to pin-point, in a style characterised by its clarity and

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Dr. Ahmad Shlukri was born in Amman in Jordan in 1960. In 1977, he completed memorizing the Qur'an and received his diploma for its correct recitation (*tajwid*). In 1983 he graduated from the Faculty of Qur'anic and Islamic Sciences in the Islamic University of Medina, and received his Master's degree in 1987 and his Doctorate in 1991, from the same university. He has published short stories and pieces for the theatre, in addition to scholarly articles for newspapers. He acted as consultant to the Society for the Preservation of the Holy Qur'an from 1993-4. In 1990, he was sent to USA by his university. He also visited Germany in 1988, and has taken part in numerous symposia and panels in Jordan.

skill. Thus, the Risale-i Nur became a light for the bewildered, and light upon light for the pious. We pray that God Almighty rewards him amply and makes this work of his a light, provision, and means to recompense for him in the hereafter.

On taking the decision to write on Bediuzzaman's ideas concerning the Qur'an's miraculousness, I found myself face to face with a great scholar who was at a peak touching the skies and had penetrated to the profundities of this branch of knowledge. I had therefore to study the subject seriously and in detail, to expend considerable effort, think deeply on his views and words, and study them again and again. Only in this way could his ideas and what he intended by them become completely clear. I am presenting what I found to this Symposium organized in Istanbul by İstanbul İlim ve Kültür Vakfı (the Istanbul Foundation For Science and Culture).

I beseech God Almighty that He accepts our good works, will grant us success in performing further such works, and that He will grant mercy to Ustad Bediuzzaman and our other masters. Success is only from God.

Aspects of the Qur'an's Miraculousness

Anyone who reads Bediuzzaman's works will find that many parts of them are about the Qur'an's miraculousness. However, this question is discussed more clearly and comprehensively in *Mu'cizat-ı Kur'aniye Risalesi* (The Miraculousness of the Qur'an—the Twenty-Fifth Word) and in *Ishārāt al-I'jāz* (Signs of Miraculousness) than in his other works. The reader will also see that Bediuzzaman described many aspects of its miraculousness with certainty; he was hesitant about only a few. On collecting together his statements about the miraculousness from various places in the works, it is possible to make out the aspects he accepted as definite. We have assigned this section of our study to this question.

On investigating the number of aspects of miraculousness that Bediuzzaman stated the Qur'an possesses, the reader will be astonished. In many places he says that they number forty, while in a few other places he says they are seven. In yet other places the number rises to two hundred, and even several hundred. So what does Bediuzzaman intend by these numbers? Is it that he is hesitant about the aspects of miraculousness? Or is it that according to him there is a way of reconciling these numbers? I have studied one by one all the passages where the aspects are mentioned in order to solve this question, and have realized that it was possible, on giving them sufficient thought, to draw clear conclusions. First of all, I considered it appropriate to note down the statements, and from them to discover what he meant by the numbers:

In *Ishārāt al-I'jāz* he says the following: "Are not the statements of the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition —whose miraculousness in seven aspects has been confirmed for thirteen centuries— about the resurrection of the dead sufficient indication that eternal happiness will come to pass?"¹

1. *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, İstanbul. Sözlük Yayınları 1978, 60.

In the first addendum to the Miraculousness of the Qur'an (the Twenty-Fifth Word), he says:

"... their avoiding producing the like of only a single Sura and its eloquence, eloquence being only one aspect of the seven major aspects of the Qur'an's miraculousness..."²

While in the second addendum, he says this:

"The Risale-i Nur, and the Twenty-Fifth Word and its addenda in particular, which prove in summary forty aspects of the Qur'an's miraculousness, and the Qur'anic commentary *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, from the Arabic Risale-i Nur, which in wondrous fashion proves the aspect of the Qur'an's miraculousness in its word-order..."³

In *Lem'alar* he says:

"The flashes of this sort of miraculousness which gives news of the Unseen, which is one sort of the Qur'an's miraculousness, are so numerous as to be incalculable. Externalist scholars restricting them to forty or fifty verses is due to their superficial view. In reality they number more than a thousand. Sometimes there are four or five aspects giving news of the Unseen in a single verse."⁴

In the Twenty-Ninth Letter, he says:

"... one sort of the two hundred sorts of the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition's miraculousness — a sort pertaining to its patterns — with the pages specified in accordance with the style of Hafiz Osman and taking the *Mudāyana* Verse as the standard..."⁵

In the same section, he says:

"It is established with proofs in the Twenty-Fifth Word, called the Miraculousness of the Qur'an, that the varieties of the Qur'an of Mighty Stature's miraculousness reach forty. Some of these are demonstrated in detail, and some briefly..."⁶

And again in the same section, he says:

"In order to facilitate this class's understanding, we had a Qur'an written which shows the aspect, one of the forty aspects of its miraculousness, which can be seen with the eyes."⁷

In the Nineteenth Letter, he says this:

"The greatest miracle of the Noble Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace), an eternal one, is the All-Wise Qur'an, which comprises hundreds of evidences of his prophethood, and forty aspects of whose own miraculousness have been proven."⁸

Again in *Mektûbat* (The Fourth Addendum of the Nineteenth Letter), he says:

"He holds in his hand a decree from the Lord of the Universe, a decree accepted

2. *Sözler*, İstanbul, Sözler Yayınevi 1993, 435 / *The Words* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Sözler Publications 1993, 463.

3. *Sözler*, 441 / *The Words*, 469.

4. *Lem'alar*, Sözler Yayınevi 1995, 36 / *The Flashes Collection* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Sözler Publications 1995, 52.

5. *Mektûbat*, Sözler Yayınevi 1994, 390 / *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Letters 1928-1932* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Sözler Publications 1994, 476.

6. *Ibid*.

7. *Mektûbat*, 391 / *Letters*, 475.

8. *Mektûbat*, 178 / *Letters*, 220-1.

and affirmed in each century by more than three hundred million people. This decree, the Qur'an of Mighty Stature, is wondrous in seven different ways. The fact that the Qur'an has forty different aspects of miraculousness and that it is the word of the Creator of all beings has been set forth in detail with strong proofs in the Twenty-Fifth Word—the Miraculousness of the Qur'an—a celebrated treatise that is like sun of the Risale-i Nur."⁹

After noting the above passages in the Risale-i Nur, and that there are innumerable flashes of miraculousness, we see that all these flashes are of a single sort, that is, they come under the category of 'giving news of the Unseen' (*ikhbār al-ghayb*).

It is understood that there are subsidiary categories included in the general aspects of miraculousness which are intended in the passage stating that there are two hundred aspects of miraculousness.

That leaves the statements that there are seven and forty aspects. On studying these passages closely, we see that he refers details of these forty aspects to the Miraculousness of the Qur'an, the Twenty-Fifth Word, and indeed, they are mentioned and described in detail in this treatise. A person who studies the treatise will see that Bediuzzaman first of all mentions one of the aspects of miraculousness briefly and then explains in detail the components that make it up. It is understood from this that what Bediuzzaman means by 'seven aspects' are the general or main aspects, while what he intends from 'forty aspects' are the subsidiary categories of the aspects, or subtle or detailed division within them.

What Bediuzzaman intends from the aspects of miraculousness becomes clear from this. In this section, I shall try to describe the seven main or general aspects of the Qur'an's miraculousness. Just as Bediuzzaman mentions these seven aspects but does not state openly what they consist of. I shall also try to remove the repetitions and overlappings between them. It is necessary to keep in mind that there are some points that Bediuzzaman mentions as aspects of miraculousness which in fact are the results or fruits of the aspects that have been proved and elucidated. At the end of this paper, a diagram is given showing the aspects of miraculousness described in the Twenty-Fifth Word.

1. The Qur'an's word-order: It was Bediuzzaman's view that the foremost and clearest of the aspects of miraculousness of the Qur'an is its word-order. He wrote his important Qur'anic commentary, entitled *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, in order to expound this aspect. He discussed the verses he expounded in this work in such a way as to demonstrate this aspect. He followed the following method: he gives an introduction before each verse and section of verses that he is to expound, though sometimes he neglects to do this. He then expounds the verses, and following this, describes the order and connections between the verse in question and the previous and subsequent verses. He then describes the relation between the sentences or clauses that make up the verse, and between its words and letters. He alludes to this method in many places in the book. For instance,

"My intention [in writing] this work, called *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, is to explain the signs and indications of miraculousness concerning the Qur'an's word-order, words, and

manner of expression. For an important aspect of its miraculousness is manifested in its word-order; its most brilliant miraculousness consists of the embroideries of the Qur'an's word-order."¹⁰

And another example:

"Know that the basis of the Qur'an's miraculousness is the eloquence of its word-order. The eloquence of the word-order is of two sorts: One is like decoration, and the other like a garment."¹¹

In the same work, Ustad says this:

"The most subtle aspect of the Qur'an's miraculousness is in the eloquence of its word-order."¹²

It is for this reason that Prof. Muhsin 'Abd al-Hamid writes the following in his introduction to the '*taḥqīqī*' Arabic edition of *Ishārāt al-I'jāz* :

"We see that Ustad Said Nursi obtained a firm grounding in the theory of word-order. He then saw that scholars like Zamakhshari, Razi, and Abu Su'ud, who had expounded it before him, had not attempted to apply this theory systematically and in order, and in comprehensive and detailed fashion to all the suras, verses and words of the Qur'an. He took these great commentators as examples, but differently to them, had wanted to write a commentary applying the theory in detailed and comprehensive fashion. And in the present commentary, he applied the theory of word-order to both the words and meanings of the sentences from the philological, universal and particular, intellectual and aesthetic points of view. He relied on this theory to discover the subtleties of the Qur'an's word-order, and he demonstrated its miraculousness with it, and set forth the fine qualities of the Qur'anic styles. It was these characteristics of the Qur'an's style that had challenged Arabic rhetoric before it and left the rhetoricians in wonderment. It had silenced the orators and in this way proved that it would challenge them till the end of time...."¹³

In truth, *Ishārāt al-I'jāz* is a most valuable work in the field of demonstrating this aspect of the Qur'an's miraculousness. It puts forward numerous verses as examples, and applying the theory proves this aspect. When it is recalled that he wrote it in the front lines under the toughest conditions in the First World War, its worth increases even more. The work is exceptional in respect of its style, method, and the conditions under which it was written.

2. Conciseness: Bediuzzaman was of the view that conciseness takes second place in the aspects of the Qur'an's miraculousness after the word-order. He mentions this in several places. Some examples are as follows:

"After its eloquence, one of the most important elements of the miraculousness of the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition is its conciseness. Instances of this miraculous conciseness of the Qur'an are so numerous and beautiful that exacting scholars are left in wonder at it."¹⁴

Ustad follows this by citing many verses as examples.¹⁵

10. *Iṣṣārāt al-I'caz*, 11.

11. *Ishārāt al-I'jāz* (Arabic), Istanbul, Sözlcr Yayinevi 1994, 141.

12. *Iṣṣārāt al-I'caz*, 226.

13. *Ishārāt al-I'jāz* (Arabic), 7.

14. *Mektûbat*, 302-3 / *Letters*, 374.

15. See, *Mektûbat*, 302-4 / *Letters*, 374-6.

3. The eloquence and comprehensiveness of the Qur'an's words: Bediuzzaman touches on the eloquence of the Qur'an's words in numerous places. In the same way, he describes the words, meanings, knowledge, and subjects of the Qur'an and the comprehensiveness of its styles in various contexts. He sometimes also adds the comprehensiveness of its words to the eloquence because of their closeness and interconnectedness, and mentions them together.

There are numerous passages in which, starting from the eloquence of the words, Bediuzzaman expounds this aspect of miraculousness. According to him, all the words, letters, and sometimes even the unvowelled consonants possess many functions and aspects.¹⁶ Ustad gives many examples of these.¹⁷

4. Original styles: Bediuzzaman indicates that he considers the extraordinary originality of its styles to be an aspect of its miraculousness. He writes:

"The Qur'an's style is both strange, and original, and wonderful, and convincing. It has imitated nothing and no one. No one has been able to imitate it. Its style has always preserved the freshness, youth, and singularity it possessed when first revealed and continues to preserve them."¹⁸

5. The excellence of its manner of expression: The Qur'an's manner of expression is the most superior of the levels of address. The Twenty-Fifth Word contains many examples of this aspect.

6. The eloquence in its meanings: Bediuzzaman does not give much detail when expounding this aspect; he suffices with pointing out briefly that it was definitely one of the aspects of miraculousness.¹⁹

7. The sciences and branches of knowledge mentioned in the Qur'an: Numerous subjects are included in this aspect. One of these is the Qur'an's containing allusions to scientific facts which are only discovered as man progresses.

Ustad Bediuzzaman points out the miracles of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an may be understood as allusions and keys encouraging man to work to attain the likes of those miracles.

"It is as though, with the stories of the prophets, the Noble Qur'an is pointing to the bases and fundamentals of progress with the stories of the prophets, and admonishing [man], saying: 'O man! These miracles that you see are sorts of samples or examples; you perform the likes of them through pooling your ideas and working!' Yes, the past is the mirror of the future; the inventions that come into existence in the future are constructed on foundations established in the past."²⁰

"For example, the verse, *To Solomon [We made] the wind [obedient]: its early morning [stride] was a month's [journey], and its evening [stride] was a month's [journey]* (34:12), which describes one of Solomon's (UPW) miracles, the subjugating of the air, says: 'Solomon traversed the distance of two months in one day by flying through the air.' Thus, it is suggesting in this way that the road is open

16. *al-Kalimât* [Arabic trans: Ihsan Qasim al-Salihî], Istanbul, Sözlür Yayınevi 1992, 451 / *Sözlür*, 380 / *The Words*, 402.

17. *al-Kalimât*, 437, 452-6 / *Sözlür*, 369, 380-4 / *The Words* 389, 402-6.

18. *Sözlür*, 346 / *The Words*, 384.

19. *al-Kalimât*, 439-457 / *Sözlür*, 370-85 / *The Words*, 391-407.

20. *İzârâtü'l-l'caz*, 238.

for man to cover such a distance in the air. In which case, O man! Since the road is open to you, reach this level and draw close to it! In meaning Almighty God is saying through the tongue of this verse: 'O man! I mounted one of my servants on the air because he gave up the desires of his soul. If you too give up the laziness induced by the soul and benefit thoroughly from certain of my laws in the cosmos, you too may mount it...'21

When reading Bediuzzaman words on this subject, the reader can clearly understand his complete conviction concerning it, which is expressed in a most agreeable and subtle manner.²² As far as I know, no one before him discussed this matter.

Another matter which is included in this aspect of miraculousness, is the Qur'an's giving news of the Unseen. Just as we see that the Qur'an has verses that tell us of things pertaining to the Unseen which it is not possible for human beings to know on their own. Some of these matters concern the past, and some—many—concern the future, while others are Divine truths, facts about the universe, and matters to do with the hereafter.²³

Bediuzzaman alludes as follows to the many instances of the Qur'an giving news of the Unseen: "Like the verses at the end of Sura al-Fath look to the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs, corroborating this, these verses look in partial and allusive manner to their future positions in a way that predicted the Unseen. The flashes of this sort of miraculousness which gives news of the Unseen, which is one sort of the Qur'an's miraculousness, are so numerous as to be incalculable. Externalist scholars restricting them to forty or fifty verses is due to their superficial view. In reality they number more than a thousand. Sometimes there are four or five aspects giving news of the Unseen in a single verse."²⁴

Bediuzzaman discussed further aspects of miraculousness that might be included among these, some of which are like their results or fruits. The diagram given below shows the aspects of miraculousness mentioned in the Twenty-Fifth Word.

* * *

21. *Sözler*, 248 / *The Words*, 262.

22. See, *İşârâtü'l-I'caz*, 301-4; *al-Kalimât*, 277-296 / *Sözler*, 246-61 / *The Words*, 260-75.

23. *al-Kalimât*, 468-471 / *Sözler*, 393-5 / *The Words*, 416-9.

24. *Lem'alar*, 36 / *The Flashes*, 52.

DIAGRAM

The Aspects of the Qur'an's Miraculousness in the Twenty-Fifth Word