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Said Nursi is a Muslim scholar who wrote a 6000-page work of Qur’anic exegesis called *The Epistles of Light* (Risale-i Nur). He was born in Nurs, a village in the modern day Bitlis province in the eastern Turkey. He discusses a wide range of topics in his exegetical work, from the articles of faith to ethics, from metaphysics to political philosophy, from spirituality to theological interpretations of modern scientific findings. The emphasis, however, is on the rational justification and theoretical-practical implications of the articles of faith such as divine unity (tawhid), predestination (qadar), and prophethood (nubūwwa). The accentuation of the content of the articles of faith, the frequent use of the legacies of both Islamic speculative theology (kalam) and Sufism, and the tendency toward addressing the challenges of modern philosophies, from scientific materialism to secular humanism, render *The Epistles of Light* a highly original work that can be located where traditional scholarship meets contemporary issues and a serious engagement occurs between the two.

The article aims to investigate the exegetical significance of the inclusion of the Divine Names in the text of Qur’anic verses as it is articulated in Nursi’s writings. Nursi argues that the Divine Names recited in a given verse do not appear randomly. They corroborate, add more nuances to, and, hence, exegetically enrich the message of the verse. The Divine Names mentioned in the Qur’anic verses dealing with natural phenomena reveals the divine qualities manifested in cosmic processes. The Divine Names mentioned in verses considering ethical principles and behavioral injunctions add efficiency to the incentive or preventive message. When inconsistencies occur between the Divine Names and the content of the verse, Nursi holds, new exegetical possibilities emerge. Two conclusions can be drawn from Nursi's analysis: First, an interpretation of a given verse needs to be proposed with an eye to the Divine Names mentioned in that verse. Second, if the Divine Names are not only linguistic appellations or epithets applied descriptively to God, but also theological categories designating the cosmological relationship (nisab) between God and the world, as suggested by Nursi's metaphysics, then the Qur'anic emphasis on the Divine Names opens up new exegetical possibilities in terms of relating the text of the Quran to the larger cosmic context.

In my critical examination, I first briefly touch on the classical interpretations of the Divine Names in order to contextualize the discussion. To this end, I will summarize the spiritual, ethical, theological, and cosmological implications attributed to the Divine Names by Muslim theologians, mystics and philosophers. Then I will examine how Nursi inherits and appropriates this tradition and to what extent he departs from the classical interpretations. Finally, I discuss Nursi’s readings of several Qur'anic verses to show the exegetical significance of the frequent inclusion the Divine Names in these verses.

1. Classical Interpretations of the Divine Names

The Qur'anic emphasis on the Divine Names has inspired Islamic theology, philosophy, and spirituality to speculate on the nature of the world, the relationships between God and the cosmos, ethics, and spiritual advancement by extrapolating from the divine qualities. The Divine
Names recited in the Qur'an (and in the hadith literature) has been perceived as having spiritual, ethical, theological, and cosmological implications.

The Divine Names are mentioned and described in the Qur'an and Sunnah. There are certain prophetic traditions (hadith) enumerating a special group of 99 names that can be attributed to God. Although it became a custom among Muslims to list groups of 99 names with differing variations, there is no agreement on the exact number. In the Qur'anic text the names occur in the forms of adjectives, nouns, and word constructs and exceeds a total of 99 names. There are also prophetic traditions indicating that there are names of God that cannot be know and are hidden from mankind.

From a spiritual and pietistic perspective, it is believed that the recitation of the Divine Names brings blessing and grace (baraka). The use of the Divine Names in the construction of supplications is common in Muslim liturgy that is, to a great extent, inspired by a famous prophetic tradition that lists 99 names of God. According to this hadith, “whoever memorizes (and recites) these names enters the garden (jannah).” There are early books listing and explaining the meanings of the Divine Names in the hadith literature written by Ibn Jerîr at-Tabari (d. 310/923), Abu Zayd al-Balhî (d. 322/934), and al-Bayhaqî (458/1066). This literature deals mostly with the explication of the meanings of the Divine Names and the pietistic implications of the formulaic recitations of them.2

Later we see the emergence of speculations on the ethical significance of the Divine Names. The first thinker who systematically studied the ethical implications of the Divine Names seems to be famous al-Ghazâlî. In Al-Maqsad al-Asnâ fi Sharh al-Ma'âni Asmâ' Allâh al-Ḥusnâ, al-Ghazâlî elaborates on the meanings of the Divine Names as his predecessors did. He then turns to argue that most of these divine qualities could be emulated as much as this is humanly possible. In addition to their pietistic benefits, the Divine Names designate the divine character. Thus, the Divine Names provide an ethical guideline to assimilate the divine character traits.3 In the following centuries, we see the development this line of thinking in Fahrudîn ar-Râzî’s (606/1210) Lawâmiu' al-Bayyinât Sharh al-Asmâ Allâh Taâla wa al-Sfâit and Abd al-Karîm al-Jîlî’s (d. 1424) al-Insân al-Kâmîl. Jîlî’s book, which has exerted a great influence on the subsequent generations of Muslim theologians, mystics, and philosophers, argues that the human perfection is possible through being a comprehensive and "polished mirror" for the reflection of the Divine Names.

What more closely concern us here, however, are the cosmological implications of the Divine Names. The use of the Divine Names in the construction of metaphysical cosmology appears relatively early as well. In the Invocation of Kumayl, for example, which is attributed to the fourth caliph Ali ibn Abu Tâlib, we read that “the beautiful names of God are the pillars which hold up all things.”4

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1 These are recorded in the canonical hadith books with minor differences: Buhari, Tawhîd, 12; Müslim, Dhikr, 5-6; Tirmidhī Daavât, 82; Ibn Mace, Du'a, 10. Please see the appendix for Tirmidhî’s list of the Divine Names.
2 The Divine Names are used in popular liturgy books. Jawshan al-Kabîr, traced back to the Prophet through Zayn al-Abidin, and ‘Abbas Qummi’s Mafatîth al Jinân are important examples.
Relatedly, the issue of the divine qualities comes to the fore in theological discussions, as it is evident in the disputes over the nature of the Qur’an. The Qur’an, as almost all Muslims hold, is the verbatim word of God. The words of God cannot be a part of the created world that is subject to generation and corruption. Yet the Qur’an, God’s uncreated words, is expressed in a “language” that is created. How can the “uncreated” become part of the “created”? This difficulty calls for some uneasy meditations on the nature of the Qur’an and, thus, on the divine attribute which is the source of the Qur’an: Divine Speech (*kalām*). Historically, the tension leads to radical disputes between Mu’tazilites and Ash’arites. The Mu’tazilites conclude that the Qur’an is created (*makhluq*), for there cannot be eternal beings beside God (*ta’addud al-qudmā*). The Asharites hold that the Qur’an is created from one perspective and uncreated from another. Divine Speech, as it is in itself (*al-kalām al-nafsī*), is uncreated, but Divine Speech as it is expressed in sensory language (*al-kalām al-lafzī*) is created.5

For Muslim theologians, mystics, and philosophers, however, this discussion on the nature of the Qur’an suggests further and more comprehensive conclusions on the nature of the relationship between the Divine and the world.6 If the Qur’an is neither created nor uncreated, then it follows that the divine attributes are neither identical nor separate from the divine essence (*dhat*). According to this theology, the divine qualities are located in an intermediate realm between God and the world without belonging to one side.

Perhaps the most important thinker who speculated on the topic of the Divine Names and their cosmological significance is the famous philosopher and mystic ibn ‘Arabi, who explains the multiplicity, gradation, and vicissitudes of the created order by employing the Divine Names. As Toshiko Izutsu aptly summarizes, for ibn ‘Arabi “the world is nothing but whole sum of the Divine Names as concretely actualized.”7

The Divine Names, for ibn ‘Arabi, stand for the relations (*nisab*) or connections (*ta’ alluq*) that God bears to the world. Since the number of possible relations between God and the cosmos is infinite, the Divine Names must be infinitely varied: “The possible things are

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6 A long list of scholars contributed to this discussion on the cosmological implications of the divine names, including such luminaries as Wâsit ibn ‘Atâ (d. 748), Abû’l-Hudhayl al-Âttâf (d. 841 or 849), al-Nazzâm (d. 845), Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), Abû al-Hasan al-Ash’arî (d. 936), ibn Sinâ (d. 1037), al-Juwaynî (d. 1085), and al-Ghazâlî (d. 1111).

infinite, so the names are infinite.”8 The plethora of the Divine Names coincides with the subtlety of God’s interactions with phenomena in the world. Things are traces of the Divine Names, and phenomena are the sum total of their relationships to God. The world consists of loci for continuous manifestations of the divine qualities.

2. Nursi and the Divine Names

Nursi, as with his predecessors in Islamic theology, philosophy, and philosophical mysticism, develops his ideas within a deeply interconnected set of ideas that covers a wide domain from ontology to epistemology and cosmology. The basic observation Nursi makes is quite common in Sufi metaphysics. The reality of everything is based on the Divine Names, and the world is a locus where the Divine Names and attributes are unceasingly and ever-changingly reflected. Both history and the cosmos are manifestations of the Divine Names. In all levels of existence, various combinations of the Divine Names are reflected. The process of manifestation of the Divine Names is consummated in human existence, which is the most profound nexus of the Divine Names. Where we see beauty, mercy, and life, we see the reflection of the Names of Beauty (Jamāl) such as All-Merciful, the Gentle, the Generous, and Life. Where we see the ferocity of nature (galaxies, thunders, disasters, a storming sea), we perceive the reflections of the Names of Majesty (Jalāl) such as the Just, the Majestic, the Reckoner, the Giver of Death, the Victorious, and the All-Powerful. The world, as would a mirror, reflects the Divine Qualities. It oscillates between majesty and beauty, hence the complexity of human experience in the world. However, God’s Names of Beauty take precedence over the Names of Majesty, hence the optimism of Nursi’s world view.9

In Nursi’s metaphysical cosmology, the Divine Names have ontological, epistemological, theosophical, and ethical functions. From an ontological perspective, the Divine Names stand for the relationships between the source of manifestation and the manifestation itself. Nursi writes, “The Divine Names constitute the true reality of things, while the essences of things are only shadows of that reality.”10 He says in another context, “The reality (haqīqa) of the universe and all beings is based on the Divine Names. The reality of every being is based on one Name or on many.”11

From an epistemological point of view, the Divine Names are theological categories for understanding and interpreting the God-cosmos relationship. One can attain a knowledge of God in and through His creation by employing these epistemological vessels. The Divine Names

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8 Ibn ‘Arabi, Futūḥāt, vol. 4, 288.1. Elsewhere Ibn ‘Arabi adds that it is not courteous to attribute a name to God if it is not specifically designated in the revelation, more specifically in the Qur’an and Sunna. Courtesy (adāh) must be observed toward God: “He is not named except he has named himself. Even if it be known that a name designates Him, since conditionality (tawqīf), in ascribing is to be preferred..., so that the creatures would learn the courtesy (adāh) towards God. Futūḥāt, vol. 2, 232.28. See also Futūḥāt, vol. 3, 373.1 and vol. 2, 69.32. Cf. Chittick, Sufi Path, 41.
9 The verses are, “My mercy has encompassed everything” (Qur’an, 7:156) and “God has written mercy upon Himself” (Qur’an 6:12, 54)
reflect on the mirror of existence and represent His face turning towards the world.\textsuperscript{12} God loves—in a way appropriate His perfection—to manifest His perfection and beauty in the mirror of creation.\textsuperscript{13} God knows His beauty and perfection but He also loves to know himself in a consciousness other than Himself. Nursi allocates a substantial part of his writings to teaching how to read these signs. He writes, "A piece of art points to a well-ordered act (fi‘il). And a well-ordered act points to a skillful agent and his/her attributes (sifat). The Divine Attributes indicate the existence of an innate ability (isti’dād). And an innate ability indicates the existence of an ‘exalted spirit and elevated essence (dhāt).”\textsuperscript{14}

From an ethical point of view, the Divine Names provide a guideline for assimilating the divine character traits. To be moral is to be in tune with the manifestations of the Divine Names, or to be a polished mirror for the reflection of the divine qualities. Here Nursi also introduces his understanding of Sunna—i.e., acts, deeds, and silences of the Prophet Muhammad. For him, the prophetic example is guidance that teaches how to reflect the Divine Names in the mirror of our own being. If we truly understand and follow Sunna, we would be in comportment with the requirements of the divine character traits. As he puts it, “the ethical dimension of Sunna is about taking the most appropriate stance before the manifestation of divine names.”\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, for Nursi, Sunna and Sharī’ah unfold and concretize the meanings of the divine names in the corporeal realm. This defines the real purpose of following the detailed instructions taught by Sharī’ah. To follow Sharī’ah is the same as being a mirror for the reflections of the Divine Names.\textsuperscript{16}

From a theosophical point of view, the Divine Names refer to the infinite possibilities concealed in the Divine Essence (al-Dhāt). The Divine Names, because they are possibilities (imkān), demand to be manifested. In creating, God eases the “sadness” (qurba) of the Divine Names. Nursi also relates the multiplicity of the world to the plethora and hierarchy of the Divine Names, an idea which can be traced back to ibn ‘Arabi.\textsuperscript{17} The multiplicity of the Names “demands” the multiplicity of mirrors. “Avenger demands the occurrence of vengeance in its

\textsuperscript{12} To use Toshihiko Izutsu’s metaphor, similar to the traffic signs on the road, they reflect our gaze to their creator more than they attract it to themselves (Toshihiko Izutsu, Kur’ān da Allah ve İnsan, trans. Süleyman Ateş, [İstanbul: Yeni Ufuklar Neşriyat, 1991], 23).

\textsuperscript{13} Nursi, Sözler, 44. This alludes to a famous sacred prophetic tradition: “I was a hidden treasure. I loved to be known and created the creation” (Ali b. Sultan Muhammad al-Harawi al-Qari, al-Masnu’ fi Ma’rifat al-hadith al-Mawdu’, [İ-Riyad: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1404 AH], 1:141). As ibn Taymiyya and others stated, no chain of transmission is known for this hadith, whether weak or strong, but the same meaning can be inferred from a verse, which says, “I created Jins and humans only that they may worship me” (Qur’an 51:56), meaning that “they may know (ma’rifah) me,” as ibn Abbas explains.

\textsuperscript{14} Nursi, Sözler, 275 and 567; Mesnevi, 20. See also Şuālar (The Rays), trans. Şükran Vahide (İstanbul: Sözler Publications, 1998), 70.

\textsuperscript{15} Nursi, Lem’alar (The Flashes), from the Risale-i Nur Kulliyati, trans. Şükran Vahide (İstanbul: Sözler Publications, 2000), 106.

\textsuperscript{16} Nursi, Sözler, 326

\textsuperscript{17} Ibn A’rabi writes “The reality (haqq) of names demands that every name become manifest, ad infinitum.” See also “The divine names that are attributed to the Real (al-Haqq) have various level in attribution. Some of them depend upon others, some of them supervise (muhaymin) others, and some have a more inclusive connection to the cosmos and more effects within it than others. The whole cosmos is the loci of manifestation for these divine names,” al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya, vol. 2, 34.1. Hereafter Futūhāt.
objects, while Compassionate demands the removal of vengeance, so the multiplicity and demands of the Names have never ending reverberations in our ontological domain.

3. Nursi, the Qur’an, and the Divine Names

Nursi develops his exegetical strategy within this comprehensive metaphysical framework. For Nursi, the Qur’an’s purpose is to teach to perceive the Divine Names manifested in the "mirror" of natural phenomena. The Qur’an talks about material and immaterial worlds to encourage its readers to seek out the roots of phenomena which are the Divine Names.

The Qur’an is the revealer of the treasuries of the Divine Names hidden in the heavens and on the earth; the key to the truths concealed beneath the lines of events; ... It is the expounding word, lucid exposition, decisive proof, and clear interpreter of the Divine Essence, attributes, Names, and functions.

The Qur’an of Miraculous Exposition mostly mentions summaries at the conclusion of its verses which either contain the Divine Names or their meanings; or refer the verse to the reason in order to urge it ponder over it.

Nursi wants to draw the reader's attention to the Divine Names recited in a given verse in order to understand their expository significance. To this end, he uses exegetical tools the insights provided by the above mentioned historical discussions on the Divine Names. Nursi’s argument is that the Qur’an encourages its readers to extract the Divine Names manifested in cosmic events. With such extraction the Qur’an, reveals the Divine Names hidden beneath the “veils” of events.

For example, the following verse provides a typical example where the Qur’an lays out the acts and works of the Divine: “A sign for them is night. We withdraw wherefrom the day, and behold, they are in darkness. And the sun runs on its course for a term (appointed). That is the decree of the Almighty (al-Azīz), the All-Knowing (al-‘Ālim).” This verse deals with the celestial order and harmony. The regularity, consistency, and majesty of the cosmic events (the day-night cycle, the fixed course of the sun) display the underlying knowledge and power. Creation, sustenance, and beauty of the cosmic order manifest the Divine Names of the Almighty

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18 Ibid., vol. 2, 93.19.
19 Similarly, Nursi writes, “There are thousands of sorts of beauties and each sort differs according to its own different kind of being. For example, beauty perceived by the eye is not the same as something beautiful heard with the ears, and an abstract beauty comprehended by the mind is not the same as the beauty of food relished by the tongue; so too, the beauties appreciated and perceived as beautiful by the external and inner senses and the spirit are all different. As examples, there are: beauty of belief; the beauty of reality; the beauty of light; the beauty of a flower; the beauty of spirit; and the beauties of form, compassion, justice, kindness, and wisdom. Similarly, since the utter and infinite beauties of the Most Beautiful Names of the All-Beauteous One of Glory are all different, the beauties in beings also differ (Nursi, Şûlûr, 94).
20 Nursi, Sözlerr, 221.
21 Nursi, Sözlerr, 377-378; emphasis is mine.
22 Ibid., 428; emphasis is mine.
23 Ibid., 377.
24 Qur’an 36:37-38. Translations are excerpted with slight modifications from the Sahih International Translation.
(al-Azīz) and the All-Knowing (al-‘Ālim). The Qur’an extracts those names from the cosmic events. For Nursi, al-Azīz and al-‘Ālim show the sources of these vast displays.25

Similarly, the Qur’an asserts, "Who is it that sustains (al-Razzāq) you from the sky and from the earth? Or who is it that has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living? And who is it that rules and regulates all affairs? They will say, ‘God.’ Say: Will you not then show piety [to Him]? This is God, your Sustainer (al-Rabb), The Truth (al-Ḥaqq).”26 This verse, for Nursi, mentions God’s dispensations to human individuals. The primary aim of the verse is to point to the creation of the senses, the sustenance of the world, the regulation and lawfulness of the natural world that make life possible. The verse concludes with the recitation of the names of al-Rabb, al-Ḥaqq, al-Razzāq and Allah. For Nursi, this is clearly an invitation for the reader to extract those names from the cosmic events mentioned in the text of the verse. The creation of the body and the regulation of body-nature relationships allude to those names. Moreover, these names are “seeds” that are “unfolded” within the fabric of these events.27

Another interesting example is the following: "God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and carries her complaint to God; and God [always] hears the arguments between both sides among you; for God is All-Hearing (al-Samī’), All-Seeing (al-Baṣīr)."28 Nursi draws our attention to the context in which the verse revealed. In this verse, the Qur’an condemns zihar, a customary vow prevalent at the time of Muhammad that was used as a form of divorce for a specified period. A woman named Khoulah bint Thalabah is divorced by zihar, which makes it impossible for her to remarry her husband. She carries her complaint to God. The verse mentions that God hears and sees her complaint, and the following verses states that zihar is no longer a divorce. God is immanent; God “shows interest in” and “feels affection for” the quiet invocation of the woman. The concluding names, al-Samī’ and al-Baṣīr, remind the reader that God even relates to the details of daily life. The names All-Hearing and All-Seeing are all-pervasive and are manifested in each and every physical and non-physical event.

Nursi also holds that each individual being conducts his life by the guidance or dominance of a specific name or names. He reads the following verse as referring to this: "Thus will your Sustainer choose you (Joseph) and teach you the interpretation of events and perfect His favour to you and to the posterity of Jacob—even as He perfected it to your fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime; indeed, your Sustainer is All-Knowing (al-‘Alim), All-Wise (al-Hakîm).”29 As Nursi notes, this verse reminds us of the bounties given to the Prophet Joseph and his forefathers.30 Joseph’s life, as a harmonious oscillation between extremes, is a clear sign of

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25 Nursi, Sözler, 470.
26 Qur’an 10:31-2.
27 The same discursive strategy is observable in similar verses, such as “He it is Who has created for you all things that are on the earth, then He turned His will to the heavens and ordered them as the seven heavens, for He has knowledge of all things (al-‘Ālim)” (Qur’an 2:29); “He created the sun, the moon, and the stars, [all] subject to His command. Is it not His to create and to command? Blessed by God, the Sustainer of All the Worlds (Rabb al-‘Alamîn)” (Qur’an, 7:54); “Man We did create from quintessence of clay. Then We placed him as [a drop of] sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed; then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a [foetus] lump; then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature. So blessed be God, the Best of Creators (Ahsan al-Khâliq)” (Qur’an 23:12-14).
28 Qur’an 58:1.
30 Nursi, Sözler, 470.
divine wisdom. On the one hand he was separated from his family, thrown into a well, taken into slavery, subjected to a wealthy woman’s attempted seduction, and imprisoned. On the other hand, he was granted the ability to interpret events and dreams, given Egypt’s treasury to look after, reunited with his family, and awarded the gift of prophecy like his forefathers. As such, his life clearly and preponderantly reflects the names of al-ʿAlīm and al-Ḥakīm. It is as if Joseph’s life was a locus of manifestation of these two names, the divine knowledge and wisdom.\footnote{This interpretation may be inspired by Ibn ‘Arabī’s, who holds that the career of each prophet manifests some of the Divine Names more specifically. In Fusūs al-Ḥikam, Ibn ‘Arabī reads the individual journey of each prophet in light of these specific Divine Names. This verse may then be indicating the Divine Names that can be extracted from the parable of Joseph. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s reading of each prophet’s journey in light of the Divine Names, please see Ibn ‘Arabī, Fusūs al-Ḥikam (The Bezels of Wisdom), trans. R. W. J. Austin (New Jersey: Paulin Press, 1981). See also other verses of the Qur’an narrating the stories of the prophets. For example, the concluding names in the following verses, and in similar verses, appear to be the axes around which the prophets’ careers revolve: “That was the reasoning about Us, which We gave to Abraham (to use) against his people: We raise whom We will, degree after degree: for thy Lord (ar-Rabb) is full of wisdom (al-Ḥakīm) and knowledge (al-ʿAlīm)” (Qur’an 6:82); “The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: ‘Be.’ And he was… This is the true account (of Jesus): There is no god but God; and God (Allah) is indeed the Exalted in Power (al-ʿAzīz), the Wise (al-Ḥakīm)” (Qur’an 3:59-62); “And He taught Adam the Names, all of them, then placed them before the angels, and said: ‘Tell me the Names of these if you are right.’ They said: ‘Glory be unto You! We have no knowledge save that which You have taught us; indeed You are All-Knowing (al-ʿAlīm), All-Wise (al-Ḥakīm)” (Qur’an 2:31-2).}

Sometimes the relation between the content of the verse and the Divine Names recited in that verse is more difficult to identify. See for example, "O ye who believe! Enter into Islam whole-heartedly; and follow not the footsteps of the evil one; for he is to you an avowed enemy. If ye backslide after the clear (Signs) have come to you, then know that Allah is the All-Mighty (Al-ʿAzīz), the All-Wise (al-Ḥakīm).”\footnote{Qur’an 2:31-2.} For Nursi, the verse points to the seductive influence of the evil one (shaytān) on humankind. He is an “avowed enemy” who tirelessly tries to seduce, whispers into ears, and shows the way to transgression. If we follow his “footsteps,” we will be walking on slippery ground and, most likely, will fall or “backslide.” But as the verse proceeds, a question arises. Why does God allow Satan to have such a deleterious effect on human beings? For Nursi, the concluding names al-ʿAzīz and al-Ḥakīm appear to respond to that question. God is al-ʿAzīz (Mighty, Transcendent), beyond all foibles that apparent evil in the world would imply. God is also al-Ḥakīm, so even the creation of and permission for evil points to the all-encompassing divine wisdom behind events that we can only partly comprehend.\footnote{Nursi, Sözler, 471.}

Similarly, the following verse indicates a more subtle relation between the Divine Names and the content of the verse: \footnote{Nursi, Sözler, 468.} “The seven heavens and the earth, and all beings therein declare His glory; there is not a thing but celebrates His praise; and yet you understand not how they declare His glory! Indeed, He is Oft-Forbearing (al-Tawwāb), Most Forgiving (ar-Rahīm).”\footnote{Qur’an 17:42-4.} For Nursi, the verse starts with an allusion to the all-pervasiveness of the divine consciousness in “seven heavens and on the earth.” It is natural that a religiously oriented reader would read these verses with a sense of “awe” in the face of this all-pervasive presence of the Divine. By concluding the verse with names pointing towards divine mercy, the Qur’an appears to assert divine closeness in order to offer a sense of joy in the midst of this overwhelming awe and not to
cast the reader into despair and hopelessness. In short, the Qur'an in these verses keeps an eye on the spiritual experience of the believer.\(^{36}\)

For some verses, the concluding names open up new exegetical possibilities: "And so, when the sacred months are over, slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God wherever you may come upon them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place! Yet if they repent, and take to prayer, and render the purifying dues, let them go their way: for, behold, God is All-Forgiving \((\text{al-Ghafūr})\), All-Merciful \((\text{al-Raḥīm})\).\(^{37}\) This verse, often called “the verse of the sword,” is a good example. The verse relates to a context in which the Arab pagans choose to wage war after three sacred months of truce, and Muslims are allowed to fight back. Clearly, the verse carries a harsh tone against the Arab pagans, but the Divine Names mentioned in the verse—All-Forgiving \((\text{al-Ghafūr})\) and All-Merciful \((\text{al-Raḥīm})\)—do not reflect the fierce atmosphere of the verse. Nursi argues that this Qur'anic preference may be viewed as an exhortation to Muslims to minimize hostilities, to grant asylum to anyone, and to act tenderly even in the context of war. This apparent contrast between the names and the content implies that mercy is to be the guiding principle, even in the fiercest situations. The concluding names of \(\text{al-Ghafūr}\) and \(\text{al-Raḥīm}\) soften the generally harsh tone of the verse.

**Conclusion**

Nursi argues that the Divine Names included in a verse corroborate, add more nuances to, and, thus, enrich the message of the verse. With the inclusion of the Divine Names in verses dealing with natural phenomena, the Qur'an reveals the divine qualities manifested in the harmony, beauty, and ferocity of nature. This interpretation is offered within a larger metaphysical context, in that the world is a multiplicity of loci for ever-changing and unceasing manifestations of the divine qualities. Nursi perceives the Divine Names as theological categories describing the relations between God and the world and, thus, as the cardinal principles of his metaphysical cosmology. In accordance with this conviction, he interprets the Qur'anic emphasis on the Divine Names as exegetical support for this world view.

As far as religious convictions are concerned, the Divine Names mentioned in a verse dealing with instructions and prohibitions add more efficiency to the incentive or preventive message. Sometimes discrepancies appear between the Divine Names and the content of the verse, but even in these cases, as Nursi attempts to show, they open up surprising new exegetical possibilities. Divine Names such as \(\text{al-Ghafūr}\) and \(\text{al-Raḥīm}\) change the general critical tone of a verse. Sometimes they accentuate the transcendence and/or the immanence of God in situations where these dimension of divinity might be ignored. Sometimes they serve as helpful hints for understanding the character and mission of a prophet appearing in the Qur'anic narrative.

Two conclusions, I believe, follow from Nursi's analysis as it pertains to the methodology of Qur'anic exegesis. First, the interpretation of a given Qur'anic verse must pay close attention on the Divine Name/s mentioned in that verse. Second, if the Divine Names are not only epithets appearing in the Qur'an designating the divine character but, as Nursi's metaphysics suggests, are

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\(^{36}\) A similar discursive strategy can be seen in the following verse as well: “He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed: and He is the Exalted in Might \((\text{al-Atīr})\), Oft-Forgiving \((\text{al-Ghafūr})\) (Qur'an, 67:2).

\(^{37}\) Qur'an, 9:5
also theological categories standing for the cosmological relationships between God and the world, then the Divine Names, with their linguistic and cosmological significance, can establish a further link between the text of the Qur'an and the cosmic context.

Appendix

In Tirmidhi’s version, the Divine Names are the following:

Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful, the King, the Holy, the Source of Peace, the Preserver of Security, the Protector, the Mighty, the Overpowering, the Great in Majesty, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner, the FORGIVER, the Dominant, the Bestower, the Provider, the Decider, the Knower, the Withholder, the Plentiful Giver, the Abaser, the Exalter, the Honorer, the Humiliator, the Hearer, the Seer, the Judge, the Just, the Gracious, the Informed, the Clement, the Incomparably Great, the Forgiving, the Rewarder, the Most High, the Most Great, the Preserver, the Sustainer, the Reckoner, the Majestic, the Generous, the Watcher, the Answerer, the Liberal, the Wise, the Loving, the Glorious, the Raiser, the Witness, the Real, the Trustee, the Strong, the Firm, the Patron, the Praiseworthy, the All-Knowing, the Originator, the Restorer to Life, the Giver of Life, the Giver of Death, the Living, the Eternal, the Self-sufficient, the Grand, the One, the Single, He to Whom men repair, the Powerful, the Prevailing, the Advancer, the Dlayer, the First, the Last, the Outward, the Inward, the Governor, the Sublime, the Amply Beneficient, the Accepter of Repentance, the Avenger, the Pardoner, the Kindly, the Ruler of the Kingdom, the Lord of Majesty and Splendor, the Equitable, the Gatherer, the Independent, the Enricher, the Depriver, the Harmer, the Benefactor, the Light, the Guide, the First Cause, the Enduring, the Inheritor, the Director, the Patient.\(^{38}\)

Bibliography


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