

AN INTEGRATION OF SCIENCE, *TAWHID*, AND ISLAMIC
SPIRITUALITY: SAID NURSI'S *MA'NA AL-HARFI* PERSPECTIVE ON THE
UNIVERSE

(*Integrasi Sains, Tauhid dan Kerohanian Islam: Perspektif Ma'na al-Harfî Said Nursi terhadap Alam Semesta*)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the integration of science, *tawhîd* (divine unity), and Islamic spirituality through the epistemological lens of Said Nursi's concept of *Ma'nā al-Harfî* (the other indicative meaning). In an era characterised by the disconnection between scientific rationalism and spiritual consciousness, Nursi provides a Qur'anic-based framework that re-establishes the spiritual significance of the natural world. Viewing creation as a sign (*āyah*) reflecting God's names and attributes, he transforms scientific inquiry into a path to spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifah*) and love (*maḥabbah*). A qualitative textual analysis of the *Risale-i Nur* shows how Nursi's approach harmonises religion and science, offering a holistic vision of the universe grounded in *tawhîd*. The article concludes that this integration is essential for modern individuals and societies seeking to balance material progress with spiritual meaning.

Keywords: *Tawhîd*; Science; Spirituality; *Ma'nā al-Harfî*

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini meneroka integrasi sains, tauhid (keesaan ilahi), dan kerohanian Islam melalui lensa epistemologi konsep Said Nursi tentang Ma'nā al-Harfi (maksud indikatif yang lain). Dalam era yang dicirikan oleh pemutusan hubungan antara rasionalisme saintifik dan kesedaran rohani, Nursi menyediakan kerangka kerja berasaskan al-Qur'an yang menetapkan semula kepentingan rohani dunia semula jadi. Melihat penciptaan sebagai tanda (āyah) yang mencerminkan nama dan sifat Tuhan, beliau mengubah penyelidikan saintifik menjadi jalan menuju pengetahuan rohani (ma'rifah) dan cinta (mahabbah). Analisis tekstual kualitatif Risale-i Nur menunjukkan bagaimana pendekatan Nursi mengharmonikan agama dan sains, menawarkan visi holistik alam semesta yang berasaskan tauhid. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahawa integrasi ini adalah penting bagi individu dan masyarakat moden yang ingin mengimbangi kemajuan material dengan makna rohani.

Kata kunci: *Tauhid; Sains; Kerohanian; Ma'nā al-Harfi*

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, science and spirituality are often treated as two separate and disconnected fields. While scientific advancements continue to reveal remarkable truths about the functioning of the universe through a cause-and-effect perspective, this knowledge often seems to offer little in terms of life's purpose, meaning or our relationship with the Creator. As science becomes increasingly technical and specialised, its spiritual and moral dimensions tend to be pushed into the background (al-Aidrus 2018).

From the perspective of Islamic thought, this separation has long been a topic of concern and discussion, calling for a meaningful resolution. In Islam, according to Aydin (2019), knowledge (*'ilm*) is not merely a tool to understand the world; it is also a path to recognising Allah SWT (*ma'rifah*) and, as a result, developing love for Him (*mahabbah*). The al-Qur'an does not encourage us to see nature as an independent, causal or random entity, but rather as a set of signs (*āyāt*) that point to the existence and attributes of Allah SWT. This unity of the physical and the spiritual is clearly reflected in the works of Said Nursi.

As one of the most influential Muslim thinkers of the 20th century, Nursi (2018) introduces in his *Risale-i Nur* collection a key concept known as *Ma'nā al-Harfi*. The meaning of the letter *Ma'na al-Harfi* refers to viewing the universe and all beings not on their own behalf, but on behalf of their Creator. That is, to look at every creature and ask, "To whom does this belong? Whose art is this? To whom does it point?"

According to Nursi, just as a letter by itself has no independent meaning and only gains meaning by pointing to the word it belongs to, so every created being cannot take pride in its own knowledge, power, or beauty. Rather, it reflects and manifests the knowledge, power and mercy of the Divine Creator (*Sāni-i Zuljalal*). This way of seeing is called by Nursi as *Ma'na al-Harfī*. In contrast, “*Mana-i Ismī*” means viewing things as if they exist and act by themselves, saying, “*This beauty, power and knowledge belongs to it; it arises from itself*”. Such a perspective opens the door to heedlessness, polytheism and misguidance. This concept refers to perceiving things not merely for themselves but as indicators of Allah SWT’s names and attributes. According to this perspective, a tree is not simply a biological organism but a reflection of many of Allah SWT’s names, such as the Giver of Life, the Sustainer and the Source of Beauty (Nursi 2016). Likewise, the stars are not just celestial bodies but signs of divine order, beauty and wisdom.

This paper examines how Said Nursi builds a bridge between science, faith and spirituality through the lens of *Ma'nā al-Harfī*. The central argument is that when scientific knowledge is interpreted with the right perspective, it can bring a person closer to Allah SWT. Nursi (2010) demonstrates how the tools of modern science can be integrated with the spiritual depth of Islam, and how recognising creation can lead to a deeper recognition of the Creator. This study aims to show that the integration of science and spirituality is not only possible but also urgently needed in our time both for individuals in search of meaning and for societies striving to balance material advancement with moral integrity.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative and conceptual textual analysis to explore how Said Nursi, through his concept of *Ma'nā al-Harfī*, builds a connection between science, *tawhīd* and Islamic spirituality. Rather than relying on empirical data, the research is based on an interpretative reading of key texts within Nursi’s *Risale-i Nur* corpus. It focuses particularly on selected parts of the *Risale-i Nur* collection’s main volumes: The Words, the Flashes, the Letters, *al-Mathnawi Nuriya* and the Rays, where themes such as nature, the Divine Names and scientific observation are most clearly articulated. These texts are analysed within the framework of Islamic epistemology and Quranic hermeneutics, using thematic and interpretative (hermeneutical) approaches. Additionally, comparative reflections are made with other Muslim thinkers who have addressed the relationship between science and spirituality. The aim of this study is not to offer a comprehensive account of Nursi’s entire philosophy of science, but rather to examine how the concept of *Ma'nā al-Harfī* functions as a bridge between scientific knowledge and spiritual consciousness. The findings are therefore conceptual and reflective in nature, without the use of empirical or experimental methods.

FINDINGS

The Disconnection Between *Tawhid*, Science and Spirituality in the Modern Era

In the modern era, science has increasingly been detached from any form of religious or spiritual context and has instead been confined to a purely empirical and materialistic framework. Rooted in Western philosophical paradigms, modern science tends to prioritise observation, experimentation and quantifiable evidence while disregarding metaphysical and theological dimensions (Said 2018). As a result, the universe and all forms of existence are often interpreted solely through material realities, with little to no reference to the concept of divine unity (*tawhid*) or spiritual significance.

This disconnection has led to the perception that scientific knowledge and religious belief are incompatible domains. Particularly in secular educational systems, science is presented as a neutral and objective discipline, while religious teachings are relegated to personal belief systems with no direct relation to empirical inquiry. This has contributed to a widespread view that spirituality and divine purpose are irrelevant to the understanding of natural phenomena (Tatli 1992).

Said Nursi challenges this dichotomy by emphasising that all sciences, when correctly understood, inherently point toward the Creator. Said Nursi challenges this duality by emphasising that, when properly understood, all sciences essentially point to a Creator. In this regard, he recounts a striking incident he encountered when a group of high school students visited him during the second of his exiles in Kastamonu, a small province in northern Anatolia. The students are saying, “*Tell us about our Creator; our teachers do not speak of Allah*”. Nursi (2015) responded, “*All the sciences you study continuously speak of Allah SWT and make known the Creator, each with its own particular tongue. Do not listen to your teachers; listen to them [i.e., the sciences]*”. This statement highlights the failure of contemporary education to integrate faith with knowledge and reflects the broader modern trend of separating scientific inquiry from spiritual meaning.

This situation reveals that the modern understanding of science has weakened its connection with *tawhid* and spirituality, treating religion and science as two separate realms. Said Nursi's approach, however, challenges this separation and demonstrates that scientific knowledge, when interpreted correctly, can serve as a means to recognise and know Allah SWT.

Said Nursi’s *Ma ‘nā al-Ḥarfī* Concept: Reconnecting *Tawḥīd* with Modern Knowledge through al-Quran

In today’s world, science and spirituality are often seen as separate domains. Said Nursi challenges this divide through his concept of *Ma’na al-Ḥarfī*, which views all created beings not as independent objects but as signs pointing to Allah SWT names and attributes (Basar 2010). This Quranic perspective reorients scientific observation toward a theocentric understanding of the universe. By contrasting it with *Ma ‘nā al-Isīmī*, which sees things as self-contained, Nursi calls for a way of reading nature that leads to deeper faith. Through this lens, modern knowledge becomes a bridge to *tawḥīd*, not a barrier showing how faith and reason can be harmoniously integrated. In this context, scientific disciplines such as biology, physics and botany are no longer viewed as mere secular descriptions of material processes, but as systematic ways of uncovering the divine wisdom and order inherent in creation (Sorularla Islamiyet 2010).

These two perspectives *Ma ‘nā al-Isīmī* (the nominal/literal meaning) and *Ma ‘nā al-Ḥarfī* (the indicative/relational meaning) deeply influence how we interpret existence and the universe. To better understand the difference, we can consider the example of a mirror. According to Nursi (2017), a mirror exists to reflect what is in front of it, but how we interpret it depends on our perspective. From the *Ma ‘nā al-Isīmī* point of view, the focus is on the mirror itself its physical properties, what materials it is made from, or its decorative function. The mirror is seen as a material object with value limited to its own form and function. In contrast, the *Ma ‘nā al-Ḥarfī* perspective sees the mirror not for itself, but for what it reflects. The true meaning lies not in the object itself but in what it points to. The emphasis is on the source of the reflection the reality beyond the surface. Philosophically, the *Ma ‘nā al-Isīmī* view leads to a secular or naturalistic interpretation of reality, while the *Ma ‘nā al-Ḥarfī* view directs us toward a theocentric understanding, where all things point to Allah SWT (Sorularla Islamiyet 2022). Thus, just as the purpose of a mirror is not in its material form but in what it reveals, the universe too should be understood not only as physical matter, but as a mirror reflecting the divine names and attributes of Allah SWT. Only through this lens can we uncover the true meaning and purpose behind creation. If we show it with a Table 1:

TABLE 1 Comparison between *Ma ‘nā al-Isīmī* and *Ma ‘nā al-Ḥarfī* perspectives

Subject	<i>Ma ‘nā al-Isīmī</i> (Literal Meaning)	<i>Ma ‘nā al-Ḥarfī</i> (Indicative Meaning)
Way of Looking	Looks at things for their own sake, as independent beings	Looks at things for the sake of their Creator, as mirrors reflecting divine names

continue ...

... cont.

Cause– Effect Relation	Relies on secondary causes and apparent means	Sees <i>musebbibu'l-ʿasbāb</i> the Real Causer of Causes behind everything
Spiritual State	Brings heedlessness, egocentrism and hidden association (<i>shirk</i>)	Brings faith, recognition of God (<i>ma'rifah</i>) and contemplation (<i>tafakkur</i>)
Final Result	Leads to decay, vanity and darkness	Leads to eternity, light and spiritual illumination

Similarly, consider how rain is formed. Scientifically, it follows the water cycle: evaporation, condensation, precipitation and collection. A *Ma'nā al-Ismī* view sees this only as natural processes and physical laws. But through the lens of *Ma'nā al-Harfī*, each step reveals divine wisdom, Allah SWT:

- turns salty seawater into fresh vapor,
- guides clouds with purposeful winds,
- holds tons of water in the sky,
- sends down rain to revive the earth,
- and nourishes every living being.

Is this due to chance, nature, or blind causes? Or is it a sign of Allah's power and mercy? Through *Ma'nā al-Harfī*, such events point beyond themselves to the Creator, who designed every detail with purpose and wisdom (Sabaz 2022).

As Nursi (2016) emphasises in the *Risale-i Nur*, creation should be seen as a mirror reflecting divine beauty and wisdom, not as an end in itself. He urges us to love beings not for their own sake, but for the One who created them, saying, “How beautifully they have been made”, rather than “How beautiful they are”. To view creation through *Ma'nā al-Harfī* is to read the universe as signs pointing to Allah SWT, whereas seeing it through *Ma'nā al-Ismī*- as if it belongs to causes or nature - is a grave misreading of existence. This Quranic lens reorients the human heart from the material to the spiritual, restoring the lost connection between knowledge, *tawhīd* and divine purpose.

Scientific Realities as Manifestations of the Divine Names

According to Said Nursi, true scientific understanding must be rooted in a spiritual and Quranic worldview. In his *Risale-i Nur* Collection, Nursi (2016) emphasises that the inner realities of all beings and phenomena are grounded in the divine names of Allah SWT. Every entity in the universe, from the smallest particle to the grandest galaxy, reflects one or more of these names. While physical forms are fleeting and external, their true essence lies in what they point toward: divine attributes such as *al-Hakīm* (The All-Wise), *al-'Alīm* (The All-Knowing), or *al-Rahmān* (The Most Merciful).

Nursi (2016) states, “The realities of all beings and of the universe are based on the divine names, while the essences of things are only shadows of that reality”.

To illustrate this relationship between scientific reality and spiritual meaning, the following examples show how various fields of modern science reflect the *al-Asmā' al-Husnā* (Beautiful Names of Allah) when viewed through the lens of *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* or indicative meaning:

Divine names reflected in the sciences: A *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* perspective:

<u>Name (Asmā' al-Husnā)</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Corresponding Sciences</u>
al-Ḥakīm (الْحَكِيم)	The All-Wise	Physics, astronomy
al-Khāliq (الْخَالِق)	The Creator	Biology, embryology
al-Muqaddir (الْمُقَدِّر)	The Determiner	Mathematics, geometry
ar-Razzāq (الرَّزَّاق)	The Provider	Agriculture, ecology
al-Baṣīr (الْبَصِير)	The All-Seeing	Optics, visual sciences
al-Shāfi (الشَّافِي)	The Healer	Medicine, health sciences

Each of these disciplines, when understood as reflecting Allah's Names, becomes a means of recognising the Creator's wisdom, order and mercy within the universe (Nursi 2016).

He further asserts that knowledge acquired without acknowledging its Divine source is not true knowledge but a form of veiled ignorance. If one contemplates the universe “on behalf of Allah”, then everything becomes a means of gaining sacred knowledge. Conversely, viewing creation independently of the Creator - attributing it to causes, chance or nature - strips science of its true light and purpose (Mermer 2004). As Nursi (2014) affirms, “Science, philosophy, and art have no lasting value on the path to eternity without the light of the al-Qur'an. Their light reaches only as far as the door of the grave”. In this way, Said Nursi repositions science not as a secular domain opposed to faith, but as a means of witnessing and reflecting the Divine, when illuminated by *tawḥīd* and Quran guidance.

From Knowledge (*ʿIlm*) to Gnosis (*Ma'rifah*) and Love (*Maḥabbah*)

Said Nursi's spiritual epistemology is grounded in a holistic understanding of knowledge one that encompasses the intellect, heart and soul. According to him, the highest aim of creation and the most valuable outcome of existence is belief in Allah SWT (Thomas 2019). Within this belief, the most exalted rank a human can attain is

the knowledge of Allah (*ma'rifah*). As Nursi (2020) states: "Be certain of this, that the highest aim of creation and its most important result is belief in Allah. The most exalted rank in humanity and its highest degree is the knowledge of Allah (*ma'rifah*) contained within belief in Allah". This knowledge, when deepened, gives rise to love for Allah (*mahabbah*) a love that brings about inner peace and eternal happiness.

This progression - from *'ilm* (knowledge) to *ma'rifah* (gnosis) and finally to *mahabbah* (divine love) - represents a spiritual journey rather than a purely intellectual process. Just as a person cannot truly form a strong opinion about someone at the first meeting, but gradually develops admiration or aversion as they get to know them, similarly, the more a person comes to know Allah through His names, attributes and acts, the more love and awe they feel toward Him. This is not a superficial or abstract knowledge, but one that is internalized, lived and felt within the depths of the heart and soul (Keskin 2010).

Nursi's framework highlights that in Islamic thought, knowledge is not an end in itself, but a means to draw nearer to the divine. In this framework, knowledge transforms into recognition (*ma'rifah*) and recognition gives birth to love (*mahabbah*), forming an unbroken chain that leads the human being to their highest spiritual fulfillment. This emphasis on *ma'rifah* as a life guide and a tool for social reform is also observed in contemporary Malay-Muslim exegetical works, such as the *Tafsir al-Ma'rifah*, which utilises a social-reformist methodology (*al-Islahi al-Ijtimāci*) to address modern societal and moral challenges (Saiin et al. 2021).

Spiritual Tranquillity: Uniting Sciences Through *Ma'nā al-Harfi*

Said Nursi proposed a profound vision of educational harmony by advocating for the integration of religious and modern sciences. He stated: "The light of the conscience is religious sciences. The light of the mind is modern sciences. Combining both manifests the truth. The student's skills develop further with these two. When they are separated, the former breeds superstition, and the latter breeds corruption and scepticism" (Nursi 2010).

In this view, religious sciences cultivate the heart and conscience by nurturing moral insight and spiritual awareness, while modern sciences sharpen the intellect and provide tools for understanding the physical world. When these two sources of knowledge are harmoniously integrated - guided by the principle of *Ma'nā al-Harfi* (viewing things as signs pointing beyond themselves) - they produce a balanced and enlightened individual (Kahveci 2019). According to Horkuc (2021), benefit of integration:

Benefits of integration:

- Leads to a clearer and deeper understanding of truth, both material and metaphysical.
- Achieves a balance between faith and reason, preventing conflict between religion and science.
- Enables holistic development of the student intellectually, morally and spiritually.
- Ensures science is guided by ethical and spiritual values.
- Promotes harmony within society by preventing fragmentation between religious and secular worldviews.

Harms of separation:

- Isolating religious sciences may lead to dogmatism or superstition.
- Isolating modern sciences may result in spiritual emptiness, skepticism or nihilism.
- Encourages moral decay when science is detached from conscience.
- Produces individuals who are imbalanced, contributing to wider societal dysfunction.

In essence, Said Nursi's educational philosophy offers a remedy for the crises of both modern secularism and rigid traditionalism. He envisions a unified epistemology, where all forms of knowledge - religious or scientific - are directed toward understanding divine wisdom and fulfilling human purpose (Keskin 2010). By embracing this approach, education becomes a path not only to intellectual advancement, but also to spiritual tranquility and social harmony.

In conclusion, Said Nursi's spiritual epistemology, rooted in the Quran concept of *Ma'nā al-Harfī*, presents a profound framework for perceiving all knowledge religious and scientific as signs pointing to Allah SWT. By interpreting the universe not as an autonomous system, but as a mirror reflecting the Divine Names such as *al-Hakīm*, *al-'Alīm*, and *Al-Razzāq*, he transforms modern sciences into a path of *tawhīd* rather than materialism. Through this lens, natural phenomena become not mere facts but revelations of wisdom, mercy, and purpose. Knowledge (*ilm*) thus evolves into *ma'rifah* (knowing Allah), culminating in *maḥabbah* (loving Allah), nurturing the heart alongside the intellect. Nursi's vision integrates the light of the conscience with the light of the mind, dispelling both superstition and scepticism. When religious and

modern sciences are united under this spiritual perspective, they cultivate holistic individuals who pursue truth with both faith and reason. In a world fragmented by ideological extremes, this balanced model offers a compelling path toward inner peace, intellectual clarity and spiritual harmony.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Said Nursi offers a spiritually enriched epistemological model rooted in *Ma'nā al-Harfī*, wherein both religious and natural sciences are seen as complementary means to reach *ma'rifah* and *maḥabbah*. This challenges the fragmented knowledge systems of modern secular education and provides an integrative framework that unites faith, reason and moral purpose. In the following discussion, we explore the theological, educational and spiritual implications of this approach, highlighting its relevance for contemporary Muslim societies and its potential for reviving a holistic understanding of knowledge.

Theological and Epistemological Implications

Said Nursi's approach to *Ma'nā al-Harfī* offers an alternative epistemological foundation in understanding knowledge and existence. According to this view, the world is not a collection of purposeless or merely material entities, but rather, everything in existence is a meaningful sign (*al-āyah*) that reflects the names and attributes of Allah SWT. For Nursi, true knowledge lies in perceiving things not as ends in themselves, but as signs that point toward the divine (Turner 2013). This stands in contrast to the dominant paradigm of modern secular science, which primarily evaluates reality through *Ma'nā al-Ismī* (the nominal or literal meaning) and focuses only on the outward, observable aspects of things.

At this point, Nursi redefines science not as a tool concerned solely with physical data, but as a spiritual journey of discovery. Reflecting on the created world becomes, for him, a means to recognise Allah SWT's existence, oneness (*tawḥīd*) and divine attributes such as knowledge, power and wisdom. Hence, knowledge is not merely a cognitive exercise, but also a form of spiritual recognition and connection that nourishes the heart and soul (Ozalp 2016).

This understanding is not just theoretical; it is exemplified in real-life incidents from Nursi's experience. For instance, when a group of high school students in Kastamonu expressed their concern that their teachers did not speak about Allah SWT, Nursi (2015) advised them not to focus on the teachers but to listen to the sciences themselves, each of which "speaks of God in its own language". He further illustrated this point with the example of a pharmacy: just as a living remedy composed of various precisely

measured substances cannot form by accident through the random spilling of bottles, it is likewise impossible for the intricately balanced and purposeful design of living beings to emerge from blind, unconscious causes. This example powerfully reinforces the *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* approach of interpreting creation as a coherent, meaningful sign system pointing to the Divine (Sahinoz 2013).

This epistemological framework contributes significantly to contemporary Islamic thought. In a time when modern materialist knowledge systems often lack meaning and moral direction and tend to alienate individuals from their metaphysical roots, Nursi's approach offers a *tawḥīd*-centred model that reconciles reason with revelation, science with spirituality and observation with contemplation (al-Amin 2014). As such, it provides both a personal path to spiritual wholeness and a theoretical foundation for the renewal of Islamic civilisation.

Relevance in the Modern Educational Context

Said Nursi's integration of religious and modern sciences presents a transformative educational paradigm that challenges the sharp dichotomy between the "sacred" and the "secular" often found in contemporary systems of education. In modern contexts, religious sciences are frequently confined to personal piety and ritual, while modern sciences are treated as value-neutral, focused solely on material success and empirical facts. This split produces two significant risks: when religious sciences are divorced from reason and reality, they may devolve into superstition; when modern sciences are isolated from spirituality, they can foster materialism, nihilism and atheism (Akhmetowa 2021).

Nursi's approach establishes a balance that nourishes both the intellect and the heart. In his view, religious sciences cultivate the soul and moral consciousness, while modern sciences when read through the lens of *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* become tools for discovering divine wisdom, power and mercy embedded in the universe (Horkuc 2021). Education, in this sense, is not merely about information accumulation, but about holistic human development, forming individuals who seek both truth and meaning.

This model holds deep relevance for modern Muslim education systems. Its application can be seen in several dimensions: curriculum development that integrates spiritual insight with scientific inquiry; teacher training programs that emphasise both epistemological balance and moral integrity; and classroom practices that aim to form well-rounded students grounded in both reason and revelation. Far from being a nostalgic return to tradition, Nursi's educational vision offers a solution to the modern identity and purpose crisis within Muslim societies (Yusoff, Yilmaz & Ebrahimi

2013). By uniting knowledge and wisdom, intellect and faith, as well as success and meaning, this model lays the foundation for a renewed Islamic educational philosophy that speaks to the needs of both the individual and society.

Science as a Path to Spirituality

Through the lens of *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī*, Said Nursi redefines science as a spiritual journey that leads the human mind and heart toward *ma'rifah* (experiential knowledge of God), *maḥabbah* (love of God) and ultimately *ḥaqīqah* (spiritual truth) (Turner 2013). In this view, natural phenomena are not mute objects but meaningful signs (*al-āyāt*) pointing to the Creator.

For example, rain is not just a meteorological event – it is a sign of divine mercy and provision. A mirror does not merely reflect light – it symbolises the heart's capacity to reflect divine attributes (Nursi 2015). The stages of embryonic development are not only biological facts but also a manifestation of divine knowledge and will at work in the most hidden realms (Guenon 2019).

Thus, science, when interpreted spiritually, transforms into a form of *dhikr* (remembrance) and *tafakkur* (reflection). It deepens awareness of divine presence in the universe and invites the soul to love and submit to the One behind all order, harmony, and life.

Responding to Modern Crises of Meaning

In an age marked by spiritual emptiness, moral confusion and rising nihilism, Said Nursi's epistemological and educational vision offers a deeply meaningful alternative to materialist interpretations of reality. His approach reintegrates moral and metaphysical depth into both science and education, anchoring knowledge in divine meaning and ethical purpose (Vahide 2005). By reading the universe through *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* that is, seeing all beings as signs pointing to divine names Nursi helps re-establish a link between knowledge and values, intellect and heart, as well as science and spirituality.

This framework is not only philosophical but also profoundly practical. In *A Guide for Youth*, Nursi (2013) directly addresses the moral dangers faced by young people in modern society. He warns that if youth is spent in vice, it brings pain rather than pleasure not only in the hereafter but in this world as well: *“Just as a minute's anger may cause a person to suffer years of imprisonment, the fleeting pleasures of illicit youth often lead to lasting regret, disease, imprisonment and spiritual emptiness”*. Nursi's emphasis on protecting the spiritual integrity of youth aligns with contemporary

research suggesting that strengthening the *aqidah* (faith) of adolescents through balanced Qur'anic methods like *targhīb* (encouragement) and *tarhīb* (deterrence) is essential to counter the negative impacts of secularism and liberalism (Sham, Mustapha & Mokhtar 2022).

Through this poignant example, Nursi shows how the modern age's crisis of meaning and morality is not merely intellectual, but existential. His solution is a spiritually integrated model of education one that develops both the mind and the soul, encouraging a life aligned with purpose, virtue and the reality of divine accountability (Ahamed 2014).

This approach resonates with contemporary Muslim efforts to reform education: integrating sacred and secular sciences, grounding curricula in metaphysical awareness and fostering ethical responsibility in learners. In doing so, Nursi's thought offers a path beyond the sterile neutrality of modern education towards a paradigm in which science itself becomes a reminder of meaning, responsibility and transcendence (Machouche, Bensaid & Ahmed 2019).

Comparative Insight: Said Nursi and Other Thinkers

Said Nursi's integration of scientific knowledge with spiritual meaning finds strong resonance with earlier Islamic scholars such as al-Ghazālī, who emphasised the harmony between reason and revelation. Like al-Ghazālī, Nursi viewed knowledge as a means of drawing closer to God, rather than an end in itself. Both thinkers opposed purely rationalist or materialist approaches that sever knowledge from ethical and metaphysical foundations (Poya & Rizapoor 2023).

From an epistemological perspective, Nursi's emphasis on *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* echoes certain concerns raised by Ibn Sīnā, particularly regarding the metaphysical structure and gradation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), in that both thinkers sought to explain how reality points beyond itself to a higher source. Yet Nursi significantly diverges from Ibn Sīnā's philosophical method: whereas Avicenna's metaphysics rests on abstract reasoning and conceptual analysis, Nursi grounds his epistemology in direct contemplation of the cosmos as a living text of divine signs (*āyāt*). In other words, while both affirm that all beings manifest degrees of a single reality that refers to the divine, Nursi insists that true knowledge does not arise from logical deduction but from perceiving the universe through *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* seeing every existent as a mirror reflecting the names and attributes of God (Goz 2018).

His critique of secular scientism also aligns with modern critiques by thinkers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Charles Taylor, both of whom warn against the

disenchantment of the world and the reduction of reality to empirical facts. Like them, Nursi calls for a re-sacralisation of knowledge, in which science serves not to obscure metaphysical meaning but to illuminate it (Hulawa & Yasin 2023).

By situating Nursi's ideas within these broader intellectual currents Islamic and Western, we can appreciate how his vision offers a unique synthesis: neither anti-science nor anti-modern, but deeply spiritual, ethical and intellectually robust.

Limitations and Further Research

While this analysis highlights Said Nursi's epistemological and spiritual contributions to reconciling science and religion, it does not explore in depth the practical implementation of his ideas within formal educational settings. Questions remain regarding how his integrative model could be systematically embedded into curricula, teacher training and pedagogical strategies in contemporary Muslim societies. Likewise, the specific challenges of integrating *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī*-based approaches within secular educational systems are areas that warrant further exploration.

Moreover, this study is largely conceptual and theological in nature. Future research could adopt a more empirical orientation, such as examining the impact of Nursi-inspired educational institutions, especially *madrasas* or faith-based schools in Turkey, Southeast Asia and beyond. Comparative studies involving other revivalist thinkers like Muhammad Iqbal, Hasan al-Banna, or contemporary Islamic educators could further enrich the discourse by highlighting convergences and divergences in addressing the modern crisis of meaning.

Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches drawing from philosophy of education, religious studies, and educational psychology may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Nursi's vision can be actualised in 21st century learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore Said Nursi's epistemological framework particularly his *Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* (indicative meaning) approach and its implications for the integration of religious and modern sciences in contemporary educational thought. By employing a qualitative textual analysis of Nursi's key works, especially the *Risale-i Nur*, the research examined how Nursi reconceptualises the nature of knowledge, science and existence within a theocentric worldview.

The findings demonstrate that Nursi's thought offers a robust alternative to the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, challenging both the reductionism of

modern scientism and the isolation of religious knowledge from empirical inquiry. His emphasis on interpreting the natural world as signs pointing to divine attributes transforms science into a spiritual pathleading not only to cognitive understanding (*'ilm*) but also to experiential knowledge of Allah SWT (*ma'rifah*), love of Allah SWT (*maḥabbah*) and ultimately, spiritual truth (*ḥaqīqah*). Furthermore, his model offers a compelling response to modern crises of meaning, moral disorientation, and nihilism by reuniting metaphysical depth with rational inquiry.

The discussion also highlighted Nursi's relevance within broader intellectual traditions, showing parallels with thinkers like al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīnā and modern critiques of secular epistemology, thus situating his contribution within a global framework of spiritual pedagogy.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges its limitations. It remains primarily conceptual and does not delve into empirical applications or specific curricular models in Muslim educational institutions. Future research might investigate how Nursi's ideas are being applied (or could be) in actual school settings, explore teacher formation programmes inspired by his thought, or compare his educational philosophy with other revivalist or reformist thinkers in the Muslim world. Such studies could further test the transformative potential of his vision in modern pedagogical contexts.

In conclusion, Said Nursi's integration of science and spirituality not only enriches Islamic epistemology but also offers a much-needed corrective to the fragmented paradigms of modern education. His legacy holds valuable insights for constructing a more holistic, ethical, and spiritually grounded model of learning for the contemporary Muslim world.

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