

**SAID NURSI'S THOUGHTS ON
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN
*RISALE-I NUR***

Muhammad Widus Sempo*, Norullisza Khosim**

*Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies. Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. 71800. Nilai. Negeri Sembilan. Malaysia.

**Centre for Islamic Development Management Studies (ISDEV). Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). 11700. Pulau Pinang. Malaysia.

Email: *widus81@usim.edu.my

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.sp2020no2.4>

Abstract

This study addresses the standpoint of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi about the importance of holistic Islamic view towards living sustainably. Nowadays, human beings are less aware of the environmental destruction that increasingly causing harm to all. The problem arises from people's abandonment in manifesting the infinite meaning of Allah's attributes (*al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*) in daily practice. In fact, Allah the Most Merciful has fulfilled all the needs of His creatures to the very least. However, we do not take into account the importance of implementing the meaning of *al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* to make any progress in all aspects of life. Therefore, Said Nursi was a leading Muslim scholar of the 20th century who strived to give greater understanding and explanation to the importance of manifestation of the God's Divine Name for the people towards creating awareness of environmental sustainability. This article focuses on the values and ethics related to environmental sustainability from the Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's perspective in *Risale-i Nur*. Therefore, the researchers have read the *Risale-i Nur* inductively to capture Said Nursi's thought on environmental sustainability. In conclusion, the results of the study found that a good understanding towards (i) the

purpose of Allah's creation, (ii) the meaning of *al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* and its manifestation, (iii) and the importance of ethics or behaviour towards creatures, can help maintain environmental sustainability and survival of biodiversity.

Keywords: Sustainability; environmental; Said Nursi; *Risale-I Nur*, *al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*.

Khulasah

Kajian ini memaparkan pandangan Said Nursi tentang kepentingan pandangan Islam yang holistik tentang cara hidup yang lestari. Dewasa ini, manusia kurang sedar tentang kerosakan alam sekitar yang semakin memberi mudarat kepada semua. Masalah ini berpunca daripada kurangnya kesedaran untuk mengambil refleksi makna-makna mulia *al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* ke dalam kehidupan harian. Hakikatnya, Allah Yang Maha Pengasih telah memenuhi semua keperluan makhluk ciptaan-Nya sehinggakan kepada keperluan yang teramat kecil. Walaupun demikian, manusia tidak mengambil berat kepentingan mengimplementasi makna *al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* dalam kehidupan harian untuk menjana kemajuan dalam semua aspek kehidupan. Oleh sebab itu, Said Nursi yang merupakan ulama Islam terkemuka pada abad ke-20 telah bertungkus lumus memberi kefahaman dengan menghurai kepentingan manifestasi *al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* bagi umat dalam menjaga kelestarian alam. Artikel ini menumpukan perhatian kepada nilai dan etika berkaitan dengan kelestarian alam dalam karya agung Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, iaitu *Risale-I Nur*. Oleh itu, para pengkaji membaca *Risale-I Nur* secara induktif untuk mengetahui pemikiran Said Nursi berkaitan kelestarian alam sekitar. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa kefahaman dan penghayatan yang sebenar terhadap (i) konsep penciptaan setiap makhluk Allah SWT, (ii) *al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*, dan (iii) etika, mampu membantu mengekal kelestarian alam sekitar dan kelangsungan hidup makhluk biodiversiti.

Kata kunci: Lestari; persekitaran; Said Nursi;
Risale-I Nur, al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā.

Introduction

Said Nursi is very close and esteemed to nature. His views on the environment are at a higher spiritual level. It is a natural effect of spending more time in nature. Nursi spends times, days, weeks or even months, contemplating in the woods, forests, caves and treetops looking at the stars and observing the process in nature and the effect of time. Nursi was "always investigating, questioning and seeking answers."¹ Accordingly, he is a camera live of living-being through constant awareness of the spiritual dimensions towards every single entity of creatures in this life.

This connectedness started early in his life and was supported by the surrounding nature. He was born² and raised in the small village of Nurs where he lived intimately close to the natural world. As a young man, he would travel long distances by foot or sometimes by horse. Nursi would reflect on the universe or macrocosm through observing the natural world from the ants to the stars. When he was sent into exile in 1925 by the secularist government in Ankara, Nursi found himself alone in the distant village of Barla.

Despite the loneliness, Nursi credits this time of his life as being precious by devoting his time to reflect and

¹ Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 12.

² Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was born in the Rumi year of 1293 (1877/1878) in the village of Nurs, nestled in the subdivision of Hizan in the Bitlis Province. See: Said Nursi, *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Authorised Biography; His Works; Method and Approach*, translated by Risale Press Translation Committee (Turkey: Risale Press, 2016), 33.

contemplate in the nearby woods and mountains.³ It is a key era for the inspiration and development of his views on the natural world as reflecting the attributes of the Most Gracious. His connection and esteem to the natural beings grew significantly, as can be seen in his works.⁴

Before highlighting Nursi's thought on environmental sustainability, the clarification, technical meanings of some concepts regarding this issue would be very helpful.

A Definition of Environmental Sustainability

The word 'environmental' is almost always used in reference to human interaction with the ecosystem.⁵ Meanwhile, the term 'sustainable' has been used to describe the awareness of every sector towards environmental conservation. In the same vein of environmental awareness, the term 'sustainable' has been used in other sectors such as management, agriculture and forestry.⁶

In this context, Morelli defines environmental sustainability "as meeting the resource and services needs of current and future generations without compromising the health of the ecosystems that provide them, ...and more specifically, as a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the

³ Said Nursi, *The Authorised Biography*, 33-37. See also: Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 260.

⁴ Salih Yucel, "An Islamic Perspective of the Natural Environment and Animals: Said Nursi and His Renewalist," *International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies* 5(1) (2018): 56.

⁵ John Morelli, "Environmental Sustainability: A Definition for Environmental Professionals," *Journal of Environmental Sustainability* 1(1) (2011), 5.

⁶ Mohd Zuhdi Marsuki, "Religious Agendas towards Sustainable Development: An Islamic Perspective," *Malaysian Journal of Science and Technology Studies* 7 (2009), 30.

services necessary to meet those needs nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity."⁷ In short, environmental sustainability according to Sutton 'is the ability to maintain the qualities that are valued in the physical environment.'⁸

Based on these two definitions, sustainable development is highly reliant on environmental sustainability. Therefore, it is very vital to take care of the health of the ecosystem in granting the needs of the future generations. This article takes seriously the same issue into account from the holistic view of Said Nursi. According to Ibrahim Ozdemir, Said Nursi has an Islamic approach to the environment.⁹ He affirmed his conclusion on Nursi stand on the environment based on the following Nursi's statement¹⁰:

"Glory be to the One who made the garden of the earth an exhibition of His art, a gathering of His creatures, a place of manifestation of His power, the means of His wisdom, the flower-bed of His mercy, the tillage of Paradise, a place of passage of creatures, for the flood of beings, a funnel for His artefacts. The adorned animals, decorative birds, fruit-bearing trees, and flowering plants are miracles of His knowledge, wonders of His art, gifts of His munificence, propitious signs of His grace. The blossoms smiling at the embellished fruits,

⁷ John Morelli, "Environmental Sustainability," 6.

⁸ Philip Sutton, "A Perspective on Environmental Sustainability," accessed on 22/09/2020, <http://www.green-innovations.asn.au/A-Perspective-on-Environmental-Sustainability.pdf>.

⁹ Ibrahim Ozdemir, "An Islamic Approach to the Environment," Environment and Ecology, accessed on 22/09/2020, <http://environment-ecology.com/religion-and-ecology/489-an-islamic-approach-to-the-environment.html>.

¹⁰ Said Nursi, *al-Lama'āt*, translated into Arabic by Ihsān Qāsim al-Ṣalihī (Cairo: Sözlcr publication, 2011), 3/476.

the birds twittering in the breezes of the early morn, the pattering of the rain on the petals of the flowers, the tender affection of mothers for their infants and young all show to jinn and men, and spirits and living creatures, and angels and spirit beings a Loving One making Himself known, a Merciful One making Himself loved, a Tenderly Kind One bestowing His mercy, a Gracious Bestower manifesting His kindness.”

What is *Risale-I Nur*?

Risale-i Nur is a collection of Said Nursi's work written in a grievous situation in his life.¹¹ He wrote the collection of

¹¹ A collection of *Risale-i Nur* consists four major volumes and other pieces of *Risālah* as follows:

- i. The Words, consists of thirty-three pieces of word, which explains and proves aspects of the fundamental matters of belief such as God's existence, the manifestation of the Divine Names and attributes in creation, the resurrection of the dead and hereafter, prophethood, the miraculousness of the Quran, the angels, together with questions about the nature of man and universe.
- ii. The Letters answers to many questions of belief, Islam and mysteries of the Holy Quran. This book also sheds light on Bediuzzaman's own life in those years of exile and the conditions during the early years of the Turkish Republic.
- iii. The Flashes comprises thirty-three pieces of Flash, which expound the fundamental truths of the Quran and belief, and the practices (Sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Also included in this collection are the celebrated treatise on Nature and discussion on Divine Self-Subsistence, which lay open the unsound basis of Naturalist and Materialist philosophies, and demonstrate in a reasonable and logical manner the necessity of Divine existence and unity. Other sections answer criticisms made by atheists of certain Quranic verses and Hadiths.
- iv. The Rays includes The Supreme Sign with their matchless proofs of the Divine existence and Unity and collections of Bediuzzaman's letters to his students while in the prisons of Denizli and Afyon, together with parts of his defence speeches during his trial in Afyon court.

Risale-i Nur to put an end to the negative influence of Western civilization on Muslims and to restore Muslim's devotion to the Quran and Sunnah and to revive religious life.¹² Said Nursi describes how the name '*Risale-i Nur*' was given to his work¹³:

"I have buried the *Old Said* which is a time period of my life in my terminology. I have retired from worldly pursuits, being a *New Said* focusing totally on the Afterlife. I drew back to the *Yûşâ* (Yusha) Hill in Istanbul in complete seclusion from society. Later, I went to *Bitlis*, which is my birthplace, and Van, and secluded myself in the caves. I have stayed alone with my spiritual and heart pleasures. I have been absorbed in my spiritual realm according to the principle of "*A'ūdhu billāhi min al-Shaytān wa al-Siyāsah*", that is, "I seek

Other than the 4 books above, Said Nursi also has another piece of *Risālah* such as the *Signs of Miraculousness* which is a commentary of the Holy Quran, starting from al-Fatihah chapter until the first half of al-Baqarah chapter. It was written on the front in the first year of the Great War when no books or sources were available. Another one is *al-Mathnawī al-'Arabī al-Nūrī* that summarizes all the topics in the *Risale-i Nur*. Besides that, the book also explains Divine Unity through the universe and its beings. It is an account of his spiritual journey in which he describes how he battled with two idols, ego in man and nature in the outer world. Additionally, *Staff of Moses*, which is a collection of Nursi's writings, concerns worship, youth, life after death, belief in the Hereafter and their relation with happiness in this world and the next.

See: Ihsān Qāsim Al-Şalihī, *Dunia Membaca Risalah Nur* (Cairo: Sözlcr Publication, n.d), 26-34; *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by Oliver Leaman and Contributors (Lexington: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

¹² Idris Tüzün, "The Great Islamic Scholar: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," The Pen, accessed on 22/09/2020, <http://www.thepenmagazine.net/the-great-islamic-scholar/>. Accessed on 22/09/2020.

¹³ Said Nursi, *The Rays* (Turkey: Sözlcr Publication, 2013), 4/493.

refuge in Allah from Satan and politics" and I have begun to live as *New Said* by busying myself with study and research of the Quran. However, the manifestations of destiny have made me travel to several places as an exile. During these times, I have made people around me write the inspirations from the Quran born into my heart and in that way *the Risale-i Nur Collection* was formed. I have given the name '*Risale-i Nur*' to all of these treatises as a whole. Truly, since it was dependent on the light (*nūr*) of the Quran, that name was born out of my conscience and I am sure with all my conviction that this is a Divine inspiration. And I have said "*Bārakallāh!*" to those who have reproduced these treatises, because it is impossible to begrudge the light of faith to anybody. These treatises of mine were shared among some of the people of faith and they were reproduced by hand. My conviction is that it is a Divine prompt to strengthen the weakened faith of the Muslims. A man of faith cannot be thought to prevent this divine prompt, and I personally felt to be obliged to encourage it. These treatises, whose number has exceeded one hundred and thirty, pertain to themes such as the afterlife and faith, and they purposely avoid politics and worldly matters."

It is hard to define and categorize *Risale-i Nur*; it is a kind of *tafsīr* (Quranic exegesis) or a book of *irshād* (preach). To avoid misunderstanding towards *Risale-i Nur*, Said Nursi himself defined it as follows¹⁴:

"*Risale-i Nur* is a very strong proof of the Holy Quran, and a real *tafsīr* (interpretation) of it. It

¹⁴ Said Nursi, *al-Malāḥiq* (Cairo: Sözlür Publication, 1995), 7/220.

was a glamorous glow from the shine of its miracle."

Nursi also says, "The *Risale-i Nur* is not a *Şūfi Tarīqah*, but a *Ḥaqīqah*. It is a light emanating from the Quranic verses and is not derived from the science of the Orient or the art of the Occident." So, what kind of *tafsīr* that Said Nursi meant to *Risale-i Nur*?

The *Risale-i Nur* is known as a *mânevî tefsir* (in Turkish, *al-Tafsīr al-Ma'nawī* in Arabic), or commentary which expounds the truths of Quran teaches. The verses mostly expounded in the *Risale-i Nur* are those concerned with the truths of belief, such as the Divine Names and attributes and the Divine activity in the universe, the Divine existence and Unity, resurrection, prophethood, Divine Determining or destiny, and man's duties of worship. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi explains how the Quran addresses all men in every age in accordance with the degree of their understanding and development; it has a face that looks to each age. The *Risale-i Nur* then explains that face of the Quran which looks to this age.¹⁵

The Environment in the Viewpoint of Said Nursi

In regards to the environmental issue, Said Nursi has no definite writing addressing directly to the issue. But then, this issue is almost discussed through the meaning of Allah's attributes and their manifestations over beings and the daily life of men mentioned in many parts of *Risale-i Nur*. So, to quote the statement of Nursi towards this issue will require reading the whole collection of *Risale-i Nur*.

Based on the spiritual view of Said Nursi towards nature, his definitions of the environment were perhaps from a spiritual perspective. Therefore, he viewed all entities in the universe as a part of the 'Book of the

¹⁵ Said Nursi, *The Letters*, translated by ŞükranVahide et.al (Turkey: Sözlür Publication, 2014), 2/580.

Universe'.¹⁶ This term means everything in the universe holds wisdom in its creation and needs to be read and understood. Each fulfils its given duty. They glorify God in their own form of worship.¹⁷

At the same level of spiritual view, Said Nursi describes the whole part of the macrocosm which is the universe as the vast book as follows; the earth is the one volume of this vast book, seasonal changes shown as page transitions, verse described as events and phenomena, a row is the sequence of events, words looked at similar with trees, letters are fruit and a dot is the substance of the seed.¹⁸ In further expounding the universe which is in the form of comparison, Nursi says¹⁹:

“Just the same is the mighty book of the universe; we see with our eyes a pen at work which writes on the face of the earth, which is a single of its pages, and on the spring, which is a single folio, the three hundred thousand plant and animal species, which are like three hundred thousand different books, all together, one within the other, without fault or error, without mixing them up or confusing them, perfectly and with complete order, and sometimes writes an ode in a word like a tree, and the complete index of a book in a point-like seed.”

The lesson learned pointed out implicitly from the above statement is the importance of taking care of the surrounding environment. Therefore, we should grant the

¹⁶ Said Nursi, *The Words* (Turkey: Sözlür Publication, 2013), 1/118.

¹⁷ Many statements were similar to this one found in *Risale-i Nur*. For instance, see: Said Nursi, *The Letters*, 2/36.

¹⁸ Said Nursi, *al-Lama'āt*, 3/433.

¹⁹ Said Nursi, *The Staff of Moses*, translated into English by Students of *Risale-i Nur*. (Turkey: Sözlür Publication, 2011), 7/27.

universe, which is the mighty book, sustainability of health as much as we can.

Turning back to the wisdom behind the creation, Said Nursi practically draws many examples. Below is the republicanism system as the sacred wisdom behind the cooperation is shown by a community of ants:

"They asked me there: "What do you think about the Republic?" I replied: "My biography, which you have in your possession, proves that I was a religious republican before any of you, with the exception perhaps of the Chairman of Eskisehir Court, was born. A summary of it is this: like now, at that time I was living in seclusion in an uninhabited tomb. Someone would bring me soup and I used to give breadcrumbs to the ants. I used to eat my bread with the soup. Some people heard of this and asked me about it, and I told them: "The ant and bee nations are republicans; I give the ants the breadcrumbs out of respect for their republicanism."²⁰

Consequently, recognising the divine wisdom of every creation in the universe could play a greater part in granting our surrounding environment preservation and protection as well.

Interconnectedness of Universe and Environmental Behaviours

Environmental behaviours include all activities of human regardless of the fact, how insignificant their impact on the environment is. For example, a walk, any human movement, even breathing have a certain influence on the

²⁰ Said Nursi, *The Rays*, translated into English by Şükran Vahide (Turkey: Sözlük Publication, 2013), 4/304.

environment, greater or smaller, positive or negative.²¹ Said Nursi encourages people to be pro-environmental behaviour because he realises that human attitudes and behaviour will determine the good conditions of an environment.²² Pro-environmental behaviour is behaviour that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one's actions on the natural and built world.²³

Hence, Said Nursi viewed all beings, from the stars to the ants, as interrelated and connected like the links of a chain, so when one link is harmed, the whole system is harmed. All creatures act as mirrors that reflect God's Divine Names to show humankind the path to understanding the Glorified Maker.²⁴ In his magnificent book *Risale-i Nur*, Said Nursi strengthened the above standpoint in several occasions as follows²⁵:

"The earth and the heavens are connected like two countries under a single government. There are important relations and transactions between them. Things necessary for the earth like light, heat, blessings, and mercy in the form of rain come from the sky, that is, they are sent."

In the same vein, Said Nursi says²⁶:

"Indeed, whatever there is in the world, there are samples of it in my being. I am connected to everything."

²¹ Jan Krajhanzl, "Environmental and Pro-Environmental Behavior," in *School and Health 21* (Czech: Masarykova Univerzita, MSD. Brno, 2010), 251.

²² Tyas Palupi & Dian R Sawitri, "The Importance of Pro-Environmental Behavior in Adolescent," (E3S Web of Conferences 31, 09031 (2018), 1-4.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ IGI Global Dictionary. accessed on 22/09/2020, <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/pro-environmental-behaviour/56188,55>.

²⁵ Said Nursi, *The Words*, 1/192.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1/226.

One more example goes in the same way as above, Said Nursi says²⁷:

"Study closely the meaning of the verse; "*And neither heaven nor earth shed a tear over them*,"²⁸ and heed it. Look, what does it say? With its explicit meaning it says: "When the people of misguidance die, the heavens and earth, which are connected with man, do not weep over them, that is, they are pleased at their deaths." While with its implied meaning, it says: "The heavens and earth weep over the bodies of the people of guidance when they die; they do not want them to depart." For all the universe is connected with the people of belief and its being are happy with them. For by virtue of their belief they know the Creator of the Universe. So, appreciate the universe's value, and respect and love it, they do not nurture implicit enmity and have contempt for it like the people of misguidance."

Said Nursi proclaimed that everything in the universe is connected to one another. As human beings, we are part of the whole universe and being connected to them with the divine relationship created by the All-Wise Creator, the Single One of Unity. In that sense, causing damage or whatever activities that may harm a single entity of creation means not respecting the All-Glorious Maker who created them from nothing and uncertainty.

This awareness is the key point to encourage people to sustain the health of this universe and do not act negatively against the welfare of the community. So, it is necessary for people who work in the environmental

²⁷ Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 3/123.

²⁸ Quran, al-Dukhan 44:29.

services, both NGO and the government, to have awareness and consciousness like this in which they set up a friendly policy for the environment.

Ethics and Positive Thinking towards Creatures

Positive thinking is a major approach of Said Nursi in promoting the Islamic values of Allah's names by reflecting Allah's attributes manifested over His creatures. This kind of thinking can create a good attitude towards the creatures and the environment and change our entire life to be better. Positive thinking also sometimes associated with *husnu al-zan* that encourages us to have a hope and optimism. So, whatever thing happens to us, we always try to find out a pearl of wisdom behind and thinking positively. For example, in the context of Said Nursi's point of view in facing abuses and pressures of the Kemal Ataturk Rules that dictating secularism, Said Nursi never blamed Mustafa Kemal Ataturk even though he was put in jail and banished from his followers. He looked positively this torture and said, "May Allah makes this torture and solitary imprisonment an expiation to us for leaving the Sunnah of keeping a beard"²⁹.³⁰

Another example in the context of environmental sustainability, Said Nursi takes a hand of his student away from harming any creatures. In some occasions, he found one of his students drying his clothes and finding at that time on the clothesline a lot of flies lined up. Seeing that, his student drove the fly away. Looking at this situation, Said Nursi reprimanded his student and forbade him to expel the flies. This kind of situation led him to write the book of insects (*Risālat al-Ḥasharāt*). According to Nursi,

²⁹ Said Nursi told us the reason behind of having not beard, "I grew up having not bearded, and I was surrounding people, 90 percent of them have no beard." See, Said Nursi, *Mulḥaq Emirdagh*, translated into Arabic by Iḥsān Qāsim al-Ṣalihī (Turkey: Sözlür Publication, 1995), 250.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

all creatures worship Allah. Therefore, they have the same right to live.³¹

In the same context, Said Nursi admonished his student who wanted to take the apple that grew naturally in the forest. According to him, the apples that grow wild in the forest are bird food. As for human, food is the apple that grows in the garden. If the food of wild animals in the forest is taken, then they start looking for food in the farmers' gardens.³²

Based on this stand, Said Nursi defends the survival of wild animals and realises the importance of the balance of natural ecosystems and the food chain. Therefore, it is necessary for the life-long sustainable ecosystem management. According to Mohd Yusof Othman, there are four main components in controlling ecosystem balance to produce a more harmonious and balanced natural life, namely forest management, water management, energy management and waste management.³³

Accordingly, Said Nursi viewed all creatures as God's officers, displaying His artwork. As God's officers and artwork, they have value as a result of their connection to God. So, humans must respect that connection and treat them accordingly. When applied, this ideally would prevent abuse of creatures including animals, plants and others through honouring them as manifestations of God's Divine Names. Nursi would not discriminate between small creatures and the large ones. Regarding their displaying the art of God, he considered all created equal. This is Nursi's key difference and indicates a unique factor in his concept. For him, the

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Said Nursi, *Sīrah al-Dhātīyah*, translated into Arabic by Iḥsān Qāsim al-Ṣalihī (Turkey: Sözleryayınları, 1995), 9.

³³ Mohd Yusof Othman, "Media dan Isu Alam Sekitar," *Jurnal Hadhari* 2(2) (2010): 9-13.

flower and stars are equally significant in all their aspects and importance.³⁴

Said Nursi proclaimed this added value to the creatures in their connection to God as follows³⁵:

"Indeed, from the point of view of the wonders of art and marvels of creativeness, particulars are not behind universals; neither are flowers lower than the stars, nor seeds inferior to trees."

Through asserting the great role of creatures as God's officer and artwork, Said Nursi says³⁶:

"Indeed, the All-Powerful One of Glory has two ways of creating:

The First is through origination and invention. That is, He brings a being into existence out of nothing, out of non-existence, and creates everything necessary for it, also out of nothing, and places those necessities in its hand.

The Second is through composition, through art. That is, He forms certain beings out of the elements of the universe in order to demonstrate subtle instances of wisdom, such as displaying the perfections of His wisdom and the manifestations of many of His Names. Through the law of providing, He sends particles and matter, which are dependent on His command, to these beings and employs the particles in them."

This ethic led Nursi to respect all creatures and avoid using degrading names for them. Accordingly, Said Nursi would not refer to the donkey by its name of *eşek* in Turkish, because it is used as an insult between people.

³⁴ Yucel, *An Islamic Perspective of the Natural Environment*, 61.

³⁵ Said Nursi, *The Letters*, 2/294.

³⁶ Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 3/172.

Instead, he called the donkey *işlek*, which means 'hard worker' as a way to honour the donkey for carrying goods. He even considered ill-speaking towards dogs as gossip.³⁷

Therefore, ethics is among the key factors determining people's attitude towards environmental sustainability. Accordingly, Said Nursi did great work when emphasizing the importance of constant awareness towards creatures through positive thinking. He believed that if people practice this ethic in daily activities, there is no abuse of creatures anymore. Both NGO and government employees who work in environmental services are supposed to have this kind of ethics which leads them to treat creatures and the surrounding environment with the best form of treatment. So, no abuse of power that may cause damage to the health of the environment such as destroying the forest which is the home of various animals and plants without legal reason that is permitted by Islamic law.

Compassion towards Creatures

United Nations reported that humans cause damage to the environment faster than it can recover. Therefore, radical action is needed to combat the increasing environmental damage to water sources, land, biodiversity and marine life.³⁸

Yes, actions are needed, but before that, the compassion towards each being and each living being is compulsory to be embraced as a constant awareness. However, destruction and damage are inevitable. Accordingly, Said Nursi showed extraordinary compassion towards the natural world as a constant awareness of God's presence and it is *ihsān*, the highest

³⁷ Yucel, *An Islamic Perspective of the Natural Environment*, 56.

³⁸ Fiona Harvey, "Sustainable Development," *The Guardian*, accessed on 22/0/2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/may/19/humans-damaging-the-environment-faster-than-it-can-recover-report-finds>.

level of spirituality, in which a person acts knowing that God is always observing as mentioned in the hadith.³⁹

In one instance, Molla Hamid recalled a time when they were staying at Mount Ereğ in early winter. Nursi asked the student to build a hut or room made out of wood to protect against the cold. When excavating the necessary areas, Molla Hamid and some other students who were there came across an ants' nest. When Nursi saw this, he told them to cease working in that area. When the students asked for a reason, he said, "Would it make sense to destroy a home in order to make a home?"⁴⁰

He also felt great sorrow at the speedy destruction of spring flowers and even pitied those delicate creatures. He says⁴¹:

"I was staying on the top floor of the famous Fiehir Hotel. The subtle and graceful dancing of the leaves, branches, and trunks of the many poplar trees in the fine gardens opposite me at the touching of the breeze, each with a rapturous and ecstatic motion like a circle of dervishes, pained my heart, sorrowful and melancholy at being parted from my brothers and remaining alone. Suddenly the seasons of autumn and winter came to mind and a heedlessness feeling overcame me. I so pitied those graceful poplars and living creatures swaying with perfect joyousness that my eyes filled with tears."

If compassion has been given a proper portion in mind, it will create a constant awareness of mercy and

³⁹ Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah, Number of Hadith: 50. See, Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr bin Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Egypt: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 1422 H).

⁴⁰ Said Nursi, *Sīrah al-Dhātīyah*, 9/587.

⁴¹ Said Nursi, *The Words*. 1/475.

compassionate towards creatures in the universe. According to Nursi, "The Creator manifests twenty Divine Names in every creation."⁴² Nursi expounds the connection between the Names and their manifestation in creation as follows.

First, God gives the creation a form, shape and proportion, manifesting the Divine Names of Giver of Form, Determiner and Orderer. God knows how to adorn the created because of His complete knowledge and understanding of the created, reflecting His Names of All-Knowing and All-Wise. Following these, the created is adorned and beautified according to its necessities and the will of God, reflecting His Names of the Maker and Designer. The beauty and adornment given to the created embodies God's favour towards His subjects, displaying His names of the Gracious One and Munificent One, for He could not have created his subjects without beauty and harmony.

More than favouring His creation, God loves it, granting it beautiful flowers or lovable children, reflecting God's names of Loving One, Compassionate One and Bestower of Bounties. Throughout this process, God demonstrates four other Names: The Merciful, Gentle, Beautiful and Perfect. His creation is a mirror of those names as He creates with those Names. He concludes this process with granting life and the provisions for life, displaying His Names of Giver of Life, Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One. With so many Names in the Creation, God is the Known One.⁴³

These twenty divine names may be seen on a single living creature. For example, the rose, with the miraculous hand of art the Almighty Allah gives the rose a form, shape, colours of beauty and adornment, reflecting His

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1/655.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1/656-657. See also: Yucel, *An Islamic Perspective of the Natural Environment*, 61-62.

Names of the Giver of form, Determiner and Orderer. He determines the general shapes of the rose by ordering and adjusting them. It is clear that this ordering and measuring is carried out with knowledge and wisdom or purpose. It is manifesting and reflecting His Names of All-Knowing (*al-'Alīm*) and All-Wise (*al-Ḥakīm*).

Following these, the rose embodied favour and beauty artistically, reflecting His names of the Maker and Designer. The beauty and adornment gave to the rose to display His names of the Gracious One and Munificent One. More than that, God loves it and makes people loving it and willing to protect it through granting it beautiful flowers, reflecting God's names of Loving One, Compassionate One and Bestower of Bounties.

Throughout this process, God demonstrates four other Names: The Merciful, Gentle, Beautiful and Perfect. Next, through the manifestation of the Giver of life of the Living Being, He concludes this process with granting life to the rose, reflecting at the same time His names of the Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One. Following this, with His compassionateness and bestowal that require the qualities of making known and loved, the names of Loving and Known One manifested.⁴⁴

This method practiced by Nursi recommended strongly in manifesting the Divine Names of Allah in this universe. This approach creates awareness about the importance of taking care of the environment that reflects the attributes of Allah. Indeed, this kind of thinking is the articulation of Allah's command in the Qur'an to ponder the sovereignty of Allah through the uniqueness His creatures. Allah says in the chapter al-Ghāshiyah verses 17-20:

“Then do they not look at the camels - how they are created? And at the sky - how it is

⁴⁴ Said Nursi, *The Words*, 1/121, 655, 657.

raised? And at the mountains - how they are erected? and at the earth - how it is spread out?"

Allah also says in the chapter al-Dhāriyāt verse 21:

"And on the earth are signs for the certain [in faith]."

Those verses call humankind to maintain tolerance and kindness as an environmental guideline towards creating environmental sustainability, especially in this contemporary time, in which the environmental damage being a global issue rated higher recently.

Virtue of Frugality

Living modestly is one pillar of Said Nursi's life. In his work, there are many examples of this pillar. He says⁴⁵:

"Wastefulness is contrary to thanks and slights the bounty and causes loss, while frugality shows respect for the bounty and is profitable. Yes, frugality is both a sort of thanks and shows respect towards the divine mercy manifested in the bounties and most definitely is the cause of plenty. So too, like abstinence, it is health-giving for the body, and since it saves a person from the degradation of what is in fact begging, is a cause of self-respect. It is also a powerful means of experiencing the pleasure to be found in bounties and tasting that pleasure in bounties which apparently afford no pleasure. As for wastefulness, since it is opposed to these instances of wisdom, it has grave consequences."

Of similar kind, Nursi asserts⁴⁶:

"Consumers increase and producers decrease as a result of wastefulness and lack of

⁴⁵ Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 3/189.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3/196.

economy. Everyone fixes his eye on the government's door. Then industry, trade, and agriculture, on which social life depend, decrease. And the nation declines and is impoverished."

According to Khadījah al-Nabrāwī, Nursi has laid the basis of inflation issue; its causes and negative effects on economic growth.⁴⁷ This kind of life practised by Nursi followed the way of Prophet Muhammad's life as Nursi declared⁴⁸:

"In all his Practices, daily conduct, and injunctions of his Shari'a, he chose the way of moderation, and avoided excess and deficiency, and wastefulness and prodigality, which are wrongdoing and darkness. He avoided wastefulness absolutely and took frugality as his guide in his speech even, and in eating and drinking."

Relatedly, Nursi told the story of unfortunate people due to excess and wastefulness as follows⁴⁹:

"I observed the fearsome harm of wastefulness and excess on a broad scale. It was as follows: nine years ago, I visited a fortunate town. Since it was winter, I could not see its sources of wealth. Several times the town's Mufti, may God have mercy on him, said to me, "Our people are poor." These words touched me. The next five or six years, I felt continual pity for the people of the town. Eight years later I again visited it in the summer, I looked at the gardens and recalled the words of the late

⁴⁷ Khadījah al-Nabrāwī, *Dawr Kulliyāt Rasā'il al-Nūr fī Yaqaḏah al-Ummah* (Cairo: Sözlür Publication, 1998), 349.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3/94.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3/198.

Mufti. "Glory be to God!", I said, "These gardens' crops are far greater than the needs of the town. Its people should be very rich." I was amazed. Then I understood through remembering a fact which has never deceived me and is my guide in understanding other truths that the abundance and plenty had disappeared due to wastefulness and excess, so that although the town possessed such sources of wealth, the late Mufti used to say: "Our people are poor."

Inspired by frugality to live towards a friendly usage of natural resources of life, such as water, atmosphere, sunlight, land and others as suggested strongly by Nursi, it is time for human beings to apply the concept of frugality in consuming the natural resources. Otherwise, the grave consequences of wastefulness will destroy everything when the time is passing by.

Conclusion

The spiritual dimension of Nursi's worldview towards the connection between human beings, nature and God establishes ethics that could grant sustainability to the environmental health. His attitude towards the whole universe is encouraged strongly to be implemented in benefiting natural resources. Nursi not promoting the abuse of creature through reflecting the manifestation of *al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* in our daily life. It is prohibited by Islamic law due to grave consequences that nurture default and ungratefulness towards God's bounties.

Considering ethics covered by the spiritual aspect of thought demonstrated by Nursi, it is time to implement those ethics through the friendly policy towards natural resources such as water, atmosphere, sunlight, land (including all minerals) along with all vegetables, crops and animal life to grant the better future life for the current and the future generation.

The concept of frugality offered by Nursi is not a mere philosophy concept, but a spiritual concept based on the Islamic view that grants the abundance and plenty of God's mercy and bounty if applied really in the best performance. Nursi's spiritual beliefs are sometimes inspired by nature and real-life faced by people at that time, such as the poor people due to the style of life that showed wastefulness.

References

- Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr bin Nāṣir Al-Nāṣir. Egypt: Dār Taṭwq al-Najāh, 1422H.
- Harvey, Fiona, "Sustainable Development," The Guardian, accessed on 22/09/2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/may/19/humans-damaging-the-environment-faster-than-it-can-recover-report-finds>.
- IGI Global Dictionary. accessed on 22/09/2020, <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/pro-environmental-behaviour/56188,55>.
- Krajhanzl, Jan. "Environmental and Pro-environmental Behavior." In *School and Health 21*. Czech: Masarykova Univerzita, MSD. Brno, 2010.
- Mohd Yusof Othman, "Media dan Isu Alam Sekitar", *Jurnal Hadhari* 2(2) (2010): 1-17.
- Mohd Zuhdi Marsuki, "Religious Agendas towards Sustainable Development: An Islamic Perspective," *Malaysian Journal of Science and Technology Studies* 7 (2009): 22-38.
- Morelli, John, "Environmental Sustainability: A Definition for Environmental Professionals," *Journal of Environmental Sustainability* 1(1) (2011): 1-9.
- Al-Nabrāwī, Khadījah. *Dawr Kulliyāt Rasāil al-Nūr fī Yaqaḏah al-Ummah*. Cairo: Sözler Publication, 1998.
- Nursi, Said. *Al-Lama'āt*, translated into Arabic by Iḥsān Qāsim al-Ṣalihī. Cairo: Sözler Publication, n.d.

- Nursi, Said. *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Authorised Biography, His Works, Method and Approach*, translated by Risale Press Translation Committee. Turkey: Risale Press, 2016.
- Nursi, Said. *Mulḥaq Emirdagh*, translated into Arabic by Iḥsān Qāsim al-Ṣalihī. Turkey: Sözlere Publication, 1995.
- Nursi, Said. *Sīrah al-Dhātīyah*, translated into Arabic by Iḥsān Qāsim al-Ṣalihī. Turkey: Sözlere Publication, 2013.
- Nursi, Said. *The Letters*, translated by Vahide, Şükran et. al. Turkey: Sözlere Publication, 2014.
- Nursi, Said. *The Rays*, translated into English by Vahide, Şükran. Turkey: Sözlere Publication, 2013.
- Nursi, Said. *The Staff of Moses*, translated into English by Students of Risale-i Nur. Turkey: Sözlere Publication, 2011.
- Nursi, Said. *The Words*. Turkey: Sözlere Publication, 2013.
- Oliver Leaman et. al. *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy*. Lexington: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.
- Ozdemir, Ibrahim, "An Islamic Approach to The Environment," *Environment and Ecology*, accessed on 22/09/2020, <http://environment-ecology.com/religion-and-ecology/489-an-islamic-approach-to-the-environment.html>.
- Palupi, Tyas & Sawitri, Dian R. "The Importance of Pro-Environmental Behavior in Adolescent" (E3S Web of Conferences 31, 09031, 2018).
- Al-Ṣalihī, Iḥsān Qāsim. *Dunia Membaca Risalah Nur*. Cairo: Sözlere Publication, n.d.
- Sutton, Philip, "A Perspective on Environmental Sustainability," accessed on 22/09/2020, <http://www.green-innovations.asn.au/A-Perspective-on-Environmental-Sustainability.pdf>.

Muhammad Widus & Norullisza, "Said Nursi's Thoughts on Environmental Sustainability," *Afkār* Special Issue 2 (2020): 107-132

Tüzün, Idris, "The Great Islamic Scholar: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," *The Pen*, accessed on 22/09/2020, <http://www.thepenmagazine.net/the-great-islamic-scholar/>.

Vahide, Şükran. *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2005.

Yucel, Salih, "An Islamic Perspective of the Natural Environment and Animals: Said Nursi and His Renewalist Philosophy," *International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies* 5(1) (2018): 55-69.