

**THE *SĪRAH* GENRE: AN EVALUATION OF FETHULLAH  
GÜLEN'S APPROACH**

Submitted by

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## **STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES**

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by means of which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No parts of this thesis have been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

Süleyman Sertkaya

December 2016



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## ABSTRACT

In the Islamic tradition, Prophet Muhammad is an important and central figure. The Prophet's role is critical as the receiver of revelation, and Qur'anic verses describe him as an exemplary role model. Among the Islamic disciplines, the genre of *sīrah* deals independently with the life of Prophet Muhammad, his biography within the framework of incidents in his life, generally in a chronological format. This study examines Turkish Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen's approach to the *sīrah* genre, how he reads it and what original insights he brings to the study of *sīrah*, especially in terms of his approach and methodology. It questions through comparison whether Gülen's approach differs radically from other prominent Muslim scholars, such as Mawlana Shiblī (d.1914) and Muhammad Hamīdullah (d.2002), and analyses whether Gülen adds any new perspective to *sīrah*.

One of the main findings of this research is that Gülen reads *sīrah* from a base of the *kalām* discipline, which I call 'the *kalāmisation* of *sīrah*'. This is discussed in the context of the discipline of *kalām*, with special reference to the new *ilm al-kalām* period, which emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. How Gülen links these two disciplines is addressed, together with the motivation and reasons for such an approach. In this regard, once Gülen's approach to the notion of prophethood has been examined, his main work on *sīrah*, entitled *Sonsuz Nur*, is thoroughly analysed from various perspectives. This includes his particular brand of, and approach to, religious oratory, which is examined and evaluated. Of particular interest is its unique methodology which is based on the attributes of the prophets and, in particular, the attribute of *fatānah* (prophetic intellect).

In addition, Gülen's unique approach to "*sīrah* philosophy," in attempting to link the lessons learnt through historical events and incidents that took place in the Prophet's lifetime to the problems of the current day and age, is examined and analysed with various examples. Special attention is given to the incident of Hudaibiya, which is regarded as one of the most important cornerstones in the life of the Prophet. These dynamic evaluations of *sīrah*, as practised by Gülen, demonstrating his distinctive approach, with its novel systematic and unique methodology, are likely to provide an alternative perspective for future inquiries into the *sīrah* discipline of the modern period.



## INTRODUCTION

### Area of Research

Islam has two fundamental sources: the Qur'an (the revelation) and the Prophet Muhammad, to whom this revelation was addressed. In Islam, God sent the Qur'an to the Prophet via the angel Gabriel. The Prophet memorised the revelation, incorporated it into his daily life, taught it to his companions, and had it written down to ensure its survival for future generations. The second source comprises of the words, actions, representations and tacit approvals of the Prophet. These were recorded by his companions from the initial period<sup>1</sup> and later developed and studied as a branch of learning under the title of *hadith*. The study of *sīrah* developed alongside that of the *hadith*, the leading area of Islamic learning in the first century of the *hijra*. However, from the second century of *hijra* onwards, *sīrah* started to follow its own specific route.<sup>2</sup>

#### a. Differences Between *Hadith* and *Sīrah*

Even though *hadith* and *sīrah* share common content, dealing as they do with the life of the Prophet, nevertheless there exist certain differences between them. Books relating to *hadith* are generally classified in accordance with Islamic law and sometimes under the names of the narrators, while books on *sīrah*, in general, present the life of the Prophet in chronological format, depicting incidents in his life. The *hadith* tradition attaches much greater importance than the *sīrah* to the chain of transmitters, the reliability of the narrator and strength of the *hadith*. Even in cases where the narrator of *sīrah* and the scholar of *hadith* are one and the same person, there is not equal importance attached to the *sīrah* in terms of the chain of transmitters or the narrator's reliability. In some particular instances, especially in secondary matters such as *fadā'il* (virtues), scholars' sensitivity has been overlooked in *sīrah*.

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<sup>1</sup> For information on the fundamental written materials reported from the period of the Prophet which enter the area of *hadith*, and in particular *sīrah* (the agreement with the Jews of Madīna, the constitution of Madīna, the letters sent to tribal leaders and kings, the complaints to tax officers, etc.), see Muhammad Hamīdullah, *Majmūāt al-Wathāiq al-Siyasiyya li al-Ahd al-Nabawī wa al-Khilāfat al-Rashīda* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafāis, 1987); M. J. Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 352-353; Uri Rubin, *The Formation of Classical Islamic World IV, The Life of Muhammad* (USA: Ashgate, 2007), XXI-XXII.

<sup>2</sup> For the relationship between *hadith* and *sīrah*, and discussions whether *sīrah* separated from *hadith*, see Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," 352; Şaban Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları ve Müellifleri*, PhD Thesis, University of Ankara: 2006), 41-48; Andreas Görke, "The Relationship Between *Maghāzī* and *Hadith* in Early Islamic Scholarship," *Bulletin of SOAS* 74(2) (2011): 171-185; Öz and Görke do not agree that *sīrah* separated from *hadith*. Instead, they are of the opinion that initially *hadith* and *sīrah* developed simultaneously and interacted with each other.

Nevertheless, the study of *sīrah* presents both a full and, in general, chronological account of the life of the Prophet together with his experiences.<sup>3</sup>

## **b. Fethullah Gülen**

The charismatic Turkish Islamic scholar, Fethullah Gülen, heads an influential global movement that stresses the central importance of inter-religious dialogue and education. He emphasises the need for harmony and understanding between Islam and other religious traditions and works hard to dispel the ignorance and fear that exists in the Western world about the Prophet Muhammad and Islam. Highlighting the fact that our world has become a global village in which common sense, tolerance, mutual understanding, respect and dialogue are indispensable for the resolution of inter-religious conflict and the promotion of peace, Gülen calls people to a more profound understanding of the meaning and message of Islam. He reiterates that the Qur'an points to the Prophet as the model human being<sup>4</sup> and that obedience to the Prophet is tantamount to obedience to God.<sup>5</sup> Gülen therefore discusses the dynamics of the ideal society,<sup>6</sup> with particular reference to the 23-year prophetic career of the Prophet Muhammad, his words, deeds, lifestyle and philosophy.

### **Aims and Purposes of the Thesis**

The central aim of this thesis is to examine Gülen's approach to the Islamic literary genre known as *sīrah*, the traditional biographical accounts of the life of the Prophet Muhammad. To date, a large number of studies and conferences have focused on Gülen's teaching and activities in the fields of inter-religious dialogue and education, but few studies have considered his competence in the field of Islamic learning. Even the few investigations that have spotlighted Gülen's profound Islamic knowledge, have limited themselves to his ideas about *fiqh*, *tafsīr* and *hadith*. To the best of my knowledge, no scholar has yet examined his reading of *sīrah* or, using Gülen's own words, his '*sīrah* philosophy'. This thesis therefore breaks new ground.

There is an abundance of material for investigating Gülen's approach to *sīrah*. Information on the topic can be found in more than 72 of his publications. For example:

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<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Mohar Ali, *Sīrat al-Nabi and the Orientalists* (Medinah: King Fahd Complex, 1997), I A, 25; Rubin, *The Life of Muhammad*, XXV-XXVII.

<sup>4</sup> Qur'an 33:21.

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an 3:31-32.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Fethullah Gülen, "İdeal Nesiller," in *Ruhumuzun Heykelini Dikerken* (İzmir: Nil Pub., 2002), 108-113; Fethullah Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru* (İstanbul: Nil Pub., 2008), 106-113.

- i) *Sonsuz Nur* [The Infinite Light], a compilation of Gülen's 1989-1990 Friday sermons at Üsküdar/Istanbul Valide Sultan Mosque over 53 weeks, does not deal with the life of the Prophet in the classical sense—chronologically—but instead examines the attributes of the prophets as the basis for Gülen's own distinctive approach.
- ii) Works such as *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru* [Towards our own World], *İnancın Gölgesinde* [In the Shadow of Faith] and *Asrın Getirdiği Tereddütler* [Question and Answers] also clearly portray the qualities of the Prophet Muhammad. This is especially apparent in his discussions on the notion of prophethood, as well as the status of the Prophet (and all prophets) in relation to God, the universe, humanity and prophecy.
- iii) Gülen often refers to *sīrah* in the process of explaining topics and answering questions.

One of the reasons for investigating the genre of *sīrah* is that much scholarly writing on the subject reflects conflicting tendencies. While some authors call the Prophet Muhammad a historical figure and ignore his status as a prophet, others attribute to him certain baseless characteristics in an attempt to portray the 'perfect Prophet'. Both these tendencies are especially apparent in Orientalist studies after the nineteenth century, and in Islamic studies influenced by the West in the last two centuries. Some Muslim intellectuals now go so far as to claim that *hadith* and *sīrah* materials are suspect, containing a large number of weak or fabricated reports. They therefore propose to reconstruct the life of the Prophet based on the Qur'an alone. At the same time, other researchers go to the opposite extreme, completely ignoring all studies and criticisms emanating from the West. This study sets out to discover where Gülen stands in relation to *sīrah* literature. The quest becomes even more essential because Gülen regards the Prophet Muhammad as the exemplar of ideal Muslim behaviour. The thesis therefore attempts to comprehend Gülen's portrait of the Prophet, as well as explore his application of the era of the Prophet and his companions as an important argument in motivating people to achieve their highest goals. Inevitably, the study will lead to a better understanding of the life of the Prophet. It will also lead to a deeper understanding of Gülen's life and the underlying reasons for his extraordinary global achievements. An important consideration of the thesis will be whether Gülen's notion of *sīrah* differs radically from that of other prominent contemporary Muslim intellectuals, and whether he adds new perspectives to *sīrah* literature.

## Research Questions

1. How does Gülen link the *sīrah* and *kalām* (theology) disciplines? What is his motive in reading *sīrah* on a foundation of *kalām*?
2. How is prophethood and the attributes of prophets viewed in Gülen's theology?
3. How does Gülen understand *sīrah* and what does he mean by the 'philosophy of *sīrah*'?
4. What original insights does Gülen bring to the study of *sīrah*, especially in terms of his approach and methodology?

## Methodology

Historical research methods will underpin this study of *sīrah*. Although *historiography*, a type of qualitative research that relies heavily on narrative description, will be employed in this research, Hamilton Gibb articulates that Islam "is an autonomous expression of religious thought and experience, which must be viewed in and through itself and its own principles and standards."<sup>7</sup> In this respect, the sources and narratives or reports used in this research will be analysed according to *sīrah* discipline, *matn* (the text of the report) and *sanad* (the chain of the report) critiques of *hadith* methodology. More importantly, the transmitters' reliability will be analysed in the light of *hadith* methodology and *sīrah* discipline. From the standpoint of modern history, some methodological criteria will also be used for more detailed examination within this thesis, especially those critical approaches to the notion of *isnad* and *hadith* criticism.

The starting point for this study is the definition of the *sīrah* genre and analysis of the scope of the *sīrah* concept. Consequently, the main tendencies and approaches to the Prophet's life throughout the centuries will be introduced. Having clarified Gülen's approach to the genre through an examination of his collection and particularly his major book *Sonsuz Nur*, the main similarities and differences with other scholars will be discussed. Consulting literature from both the Islamic World and the West, spanning the 14 centuries of Islam, the life of the Prophet Muhammad will be analysed. However, as Gülen underlines, significant changes have occurred in historical and sociological conditions in comparison to previous studies – philosophical agreements have been laid aside, gone out of fashion or have been abolished, with new ideologies, rules and regulations substituted. Therefore, previous studies may be beneficial for a more thorough investigation, but likewise, new studies and outlooks are

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<sup>7</sup> H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism, An Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), vi.



necessary to shed light on contemporary problems. In short, *sīrah* should be reinterpreted in the light of current developments.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the way in which Gülen has attracted people's attention will also be analysed, and this will be compared to other scholars. To do so, comparative reading and evaluation methods will be applied, comparing Gülen's approach to *sīrah* with classical and modern contemporary scholars in the Islamic world as well as the medieval and modern approaches of Western academics. It should be borne in mind that Gülen's works not only deal with *sīrah*, but also with a variety of Islamic disciplines from exegesis of the Qur'an to Islamic theology (*kalām*) and mysticism. Thus, first and foremost, content analysis of these books will be undertaken to clarify *sīrah* related passages, and contextual analysis will be used to evaluate and examine Gülen's understanding and explanation of certain issues in this genre.

Further, to ascertain Gülen's approach to the life of Prophet Muhammad, it is vital to clearly identify how he understands and interprets the notion of prophethood and the Prophet's attributes in general. As the nature of the research is highly theologically based, this study will approach the notion of prophethood and prophets' attributes through classical *kalām*. The definition, conceptualisation and theorising of prophethood will be explained, followed by comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between the arguments applied by Gülen and other scholars.

As *sīrah* is a matter of history, the credibility and accuracy of sources plays a significant role. According to some scholars, such as Fuat Sezgin and Montgomery Watt, the Islamic transmission, despite certain defects, has at least a genuine core, which can be recognised by using the appropriate source critical method.<sup>9</sup> From a more sceptical viewpoint, M.J. Kister's numerous studies have made it clear that, unless the broadest possible range of sources is examined, no real idea about the status of a certain theme in Islamic tradition can be gained.<sup>10</sup> For that reason, the reliability of sources introduced in the literature review is important for this study from external and internal criticism perspectives. Oral and written traditions, which are major *sīrah* sources, will have their reliability discussed within this study, as well as traditions utilised by Gülen. Sources that are used by Gülen in depicting the Prophet will also be scrutinised. Within this, the criteria considered or omitted by Gülen will be questioned in light of the methods mentioned above, with the aid of *sīrah* and *hadith* methodology. Within the methodology of these two disciplines exist concepts similar to literary criticism, namely,

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<sup>8</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi* (Istanbul: Nil Pub., 2012), 132-133.

<sup>9</sup> Hebert Berg, *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997), 3.

*sanad* criticism and *matn* criticism. These will thoroughly critique both the sources and the information to be gathered from them, and will provide sufficient information in identifying the credibility of these historic sources and equally a strong analysis of the *sīrah*. In brief, methodologically speaking, by taking both Islamicly developed methodologies and modern Western historical criticism into account I aim to achieve a balanced outcome.

### **Organisation of Thesis**

Besides the introduction and conclusion, this thesis comprises five chapters. In Chapter 1, I review *sīrah* literature since the beginning, including those of Islamic and non-Islamic scholarship. In Chapter 2 I deal with, and succinctly review, the development of *kalām* as a discipline, since Gülen's approach to *sīrah* is heavily rooted in *kalām*, particularly the discussion of the prophethood in Islamic theology, Then, narrowing my focus specifically to prophethood in Islamic thought, I analyse *kalām-sīrah* relations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period known in Islamic theology as the new *ilm al-kalām* period. Having highlighted the general attitude of Islamic schools towards prophethood, I investigate and contextualise where and how Gülen stands as compared to classical and new *ilm al-kalām* approaches to *nubuwwa*. Since Gülen's understanding of *sīrah* is heavily based on his perception of prophethood, I clarify his main arguments and approach towards prophethood in Chapter 3, where I find significant correlation between his *nubuwwa* reading and *sīrah* understanding.

After these theoretical investigations into Gülen's approach to *sīrah*, which is deeply rooted in theology, in Chapter 4 I focus on Gülen's magnum opus on *sīrah* of the Prophet. I analyse the work from different angles, including from the Islamic *khitābah* (oratory) tradition, from its unique systematic approach, as well as through comparison with pioneering scholars of the modern period, such as Mawlana Shiblī and Muhammad Hamīdullah. Finally, in Chapter 5, I take the incident of Hudaibiya, regarded as one of the turning points in the Prophet's life, as a case study. Through detailed analysis, I aim to demonstrate how Gülen textually uses *sīrah* narrations and what he means by *sīrah* philosophy in the frequent rhetoric he uses.

## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 Introduction to *Sīrah*

The Islamic science that deals independently with the life of the Prophet is known as the “*sīrah*” genre. The word *sīrah* (plural *siyar*) derives from the letters *s-y-r*, meaning “route, approach, behaviour, lifestyle, state, conduct, tradition, and the morals, character and life story of a person.”<sup>11</sup> The Qur’an (20:22) also mentions the term. It is the definition given to the branch of discipline with its own specific characteristics, which examines, relates and consists of works concerning the life of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>12</sup> Some scholars claim that the term *sīrah* was first used by Ibn Hishām (d.833),<sup>13</sup> and until the end of the first half of the second century of *hijra*, it contained stories of battles (*maghāzī*). Other scholars claim it was Zuhri (d.721) who, at an earlier date, had applied this meaning to the word.<sup>14</sup> In this field, the word “*maghāzī*” (plural of “*maghza*”) is sometimes used as a synonym for *sīrah*.<sup>15</sup> *Maghāzī* refers to fields of battle, battles, and stories or epics about battles.<sup>16</sup> As a general notion, *maghāzī* is the history of the armed forces (*ghazwah* and *sariyya*<sup>17</sup>) of the Prophet Muhammad and the books written on this topic.<sup>18</sup>

There have been certain factors that have motivated scholars in the Islamic world and the West to investigate the subject of *sīrah*.<sup>19</sup> Among the fundamental incentives for this interest is the Prophet Muhammad’s key position within Islam. The Qur’an, through many of its *ayahs* (verses), exhorts obedience to God and the Prophet, as well as the duty of conveying his message (*tabligh*), character and personality, thus placing the Prophet at the forefront of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Sadr, 1990), IV, 389-390; Muhammad ibn Abī Bakr Rāzi, *Mukhtār al-Sihāh* (Beirut: Maktabah Lubnan, 1995), I, 136; W. Raven, “*Sīra*,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), IX, 660.

<sup>12</sup> The term *sīrah* has also been the name given to areas concerning state legislation and books written on this matter, including, in particular, war, hostages and spoils (e.g. *al-Siyar al-Kabīr* by Muhammad b. Hasan el-Shaybānī). Even though it comprises parts of books on Islamic law, it is outside the area of my subject. For the meaning of the word and areas where it is used, see Mustafa Fayda, “*Siyer ve Megāzī*,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2009), XXXVII, 320; Martin Hinds, “‘*Maghāzī*’ and ‘*Sīra*’ in Early Islamic Scholarship,” in *The Life of Muhammad*, ed. Uri Rubin, 5-6; Raven, “*Sīra*,” 660; M. Hinds, “*al-Maghāzī*,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 1162-1163. From here on *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* will be referenced “DIA” as per commonly used in Turkish academia.

<sup>13</sup> Hinds, “‘*Maghāzī*’ and ‘*Sīra*,’” 1-10; Hinds states that Wāqidi and Ibn Sa’d have narrowed the meaning of *maghāzī*, where it relates just to the Madīna period. As an example, he even shows that previous *maghāzī* works have dealt with the Khulafa al-Rashidīn period (p. 8-9); Hinds, “*al-Maghāzī*,” 1161-1162.

<sup>14</sup> For counter argument and discussions, see Rubin, *The Life of Muhammad*, XXIX, footnote 84; Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 11-12.

<sup>15</sup> Hinds, “‘*Maghāzī*’ and ‘*Sīra*,’” 1-2; Öz, 23-24; Hinds, “*al-Maghāzī*,” 1162.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*, XV, 124.

<sup>17</sup> *Sariyya* is the word given to forces where the Prophet appoints one of his own companions as leader; *ghazwah* is the word given where he is part of and leads the forces.

<sup>18</sup> Fayda, “*Siyer ve Megāzī*,” 320; Hinds, “*al-Maghāzī*,” 1161.

<sup>19</sup> See Raven, “*Sīra*,” 661 for reasons causing research on *sīrah*.

the religion. Certain sections draw up a kind of *sīrah* blueprint<sup>20</sup> by mentioning elements of, and important incidents in the Prophet’s life. Others – by referring directly and sometimes indirectly (40 of the 114 *surahs* do this) to events concerning the Prophet and his companions – make frequent reference to the Prophet, demonstrating to Muslims the importance of learning and knowing about his life. As a result of these incentives, Muslims have made great efforts to know the Prophet and introduce him to others. These matters, concerning *sīrah* and *maghāzī*, have been widely mentioned in books on exegesis of the Qur’an and *hadith*.<sup>21</sup> Answers to questions addressed by the companions to the Prophet concerning his life are the first materials of *sīrah*.<sup>22</sup> Abdullah Ibn Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet, states he tried to learn the verses of the Qur’an relating to *sīrah* and *maghāzī* from his childhood days, by visiting the Prophet’s companions. He emphasised that the foremost factor leading to the birth and development of this discipline was the Qur’an.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, the interest shown in the life of the Prophet derives from the Qur’an, rendering the opinions of those who consider<sup>24</sup> his life to be the continuation, in a more developed form, of the *ayyām al-Arab*<sup>25</sup> unreliable.<sup>26</sup>

Another area that contains *sīrah* materials are the works on *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). The fact that the Qur’an and the life of the Prophet are strongly connected to one another has led Qur’anic scholars to the conclusion that the life of the Prophet is not self-contained. The requirement to ascertain when and how each verse has been sent down has also resulted in the need to carry out in-depth research into the life of the Prophet, and those who have studied *sīrah* and *maghāzī* have similarly mentioned this. Thus, while the development of *sīrah* has paralleled the development of the *hadith*, it has at the same time also paralleled the science of exegesis.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This factor has resulted in certain researchers in the last period, which I will deal with later, proposing and attempting to only write *sīrah* concerning the Qur’an.

<sup>21</sup> It is reported that around 50 companions, who hold an important place in the reporting and determination of *hadith*, which are the second most important source of *sīrah* and *maghāzī* after the Qur’an, wrote *hadith* on pages (for their names see M.M. Azami, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature* (USA: American Trust Pub., 2001), 34-60) and some, such as Abd Allah Ibn Abbās, gave lessons on *sīrah* and *maghāzī* in mosques and also had articles on these matters (Azami, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature*, 41).

<sup>22</sup> Bukhārī, *bad’-al-wahy*, IV, 80; Bukhārī, *yawm al-uhud*, IV, 83; Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrah*, 28; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, I/661.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tārīkh*, VIII, 298.

<sup>24</sup> Vida, G. Levi Della, “Sīre,” in *Islamic Encyclopedia* (Istanbul: Millî Eğitim Basimevi, 1997), X, 700; Rubin, XXII reports is as the opinion of Horovitz; Raven, “Sīra,” 661.

<sup>25</sup> *Ayyām al-Arab* is the term used during the age of ignorance and in the early periods of Islam for the wars between Arab tribes. For detailed information see Mehmet Ali Kapar, “Eyyāmu’l-Arab,” in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfi Pub., 2009), XII, 14-16.

<sup>26</sup> Fayda, “Siyer ve Megāzī,” 320.

<sup>27</sup> Kister, “The *Sīrah* Literature,” 353-354.

Furthermore, the *sīrah* and *maghāzī*, beginning with the *tābi'ūn* (followers of the companions), were embellished and converted into epic poetry<sup>28</sup> by individuals known as *qussās*,<sup>29</sup> and were added to the *sīrah* works during the earlier periods. So, the personality of the Prophet, his battles, those who took part in them, his victories, and other similar matters, were related in the verses of the Qur'an, the *hadith* and the words of the companions.

Another important area within the discipline of *sīrah* is *ansāb* (genealogy). Books written on this subject contain special sections to describe the ancestry and genealogy of the Prophet. Emphasis is placed on his noble lineage, especially the fact that his roots could be traced back to the Prophet Abraham through his son Ishmael, as well as belonging to the meritorious Quraysh tribe, and the famous Hashimī family.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, interest in *sīrah* increased due to the resolution of legal and political problems, acceptance of the *hijra* (migration) as the starting date of the Islamic calendar, and the need to obtain information concerning the lives of the companions for the establishment of *dīwān* (council of state). Political and religious disagreements during and after the era of the third Caliph, Uthman, relationships with non-Muslims as a result of victories and conquests, and various debates on religion, only added pace to *sīrah* studies.

In short, the agreements reached with the Jews and polytheists living in Medīna (Medīnan Constitution) during the life of the Prophet, the letters sent to other Arab and Christian tribal leaders or kings in surrounding countries, the complaints to tax officers, the relationships with the companions who embraced the life of the Prophet as a model, the mutual relationship between the Prophet and other factions within the community who claimed to be believers, or others who did not believe, and the activities he attempted to undertake, were collected together as a whole in the greatest possible detail, and recorded as *sīrah*.<sup>31</sup> While the framework of *sīrah* encompasses wide and varied fields, this study will focus on Gülen's approach to *sīrah*, how he understands this material and the philosophy of *sīrah* and how he relates the behaviour of the Prophet to the modern day, in an attempt to determine how Gülen has modelled his life on these materials.

## 1.2 *Sīrah* Literature

As stated above, as a result of factors that have motivated research into the life of the Prophet, studies on *sīrah* and *maghāzī* began with the companions, and gained pace through the works

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<sup>28</sup> Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 54-58; Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," 357-361; Rubin, *The Formation*, XXII-XXIII.

<sup>29</sup> Hasan Cirit, "Kussas," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2001), XXVI; Fayda, "Siyer ve Megāzī," 320.

<sup>30</sup> Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," 361; Rubin, *The Formation*, XXIII.

<sup>31</sup> Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," 352-353.

of their children and followers. Zayn al-Abidīn, the great-grandson of the Prophet (son of Husayn), stated, “We learnt of the *maghāzī* of the Prophet in the same way we learnt the *surahs* of the Qur’an”<sup>32</sup>, clearly showing the importance attached to this discipline. Three individuals – Ka’b al-Ahbār (d.652), Abd Allah ibn Salām (d.663) and Wahb ibn Munabbih (d.732) – realised the need for Muslims to research the life of the Prophet. These scholars considered this to be part of creation in general and a part of world and Islamic history in particular. As they came from the culture of *ahl al-kitāb* (people of the Book), who used pre-Islamic beliefs as a contributory source to *sīrah*, they did so in terms of understanding, comprehension and content. At the early stage of *sīrah* studies, their work played an undeniable role in the integration of areas such as creation, previous knowledge and previous prophets. These were usually contained in the introduction sections of works on Islamic history so the life of the Prophet could be evaluated as a part of the whole.<sup>33</sup>

There is an organic link among Islamic disciplines, and in particular the shared roots of *hadith* and *sīrah*. As these Islamic disciplines developed, it was the writers and recorders of *hadith* who were laying the foundations of *sīrah* and *maghāzī*. From a chronological perspective, the first individual encountered in the *tābi’ūn* is Urwah ibn Zubayr (d.713), the nephew of Aisha, and a scholar who obtained *hadith* from many companions, and in particular his aunt, who was one of the seven greatest jurists during his time in Madīna. He was the initiator of the disciplines of *sīrah* and *maghāzī*, recording knowledge about *sīrah*, preventing material being lost and/or mislaid, laying the foundations of *sīrah* methodology, and writing the first epistles and books on *sīrah*.<sup>34</sup> Urwah is the first serious authority on *sīrah* and a turning point in this field, due to his concentrated research on *sīrah*. His epistles were used as sources by later scholars who benefited from the specialised influence of his content, style and methods. Thanks to his most famous student, Zuhri, and his son, Hishām, he co-founded the methodology of *sīrah* writing, which was then passed down to the next generation, and continued to develop thereafter.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, III, 242. (All Arabic and Turkish sources are translated by the author unless otherwise stated.)

<sup>33</sup> Kister, “The *Sīrah* Literature,” 354; Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 119.

<sup>34</sup> The work of M. Mustafa Azami, which is a narration by Abū al-Asad of the first written *sīrah* by Urwah, collects together *maghāzī* narratives (Urwah ibn Zubayr, Abū Abd Allah al-Asadī al-Qurashī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. M. Mustafa Azami (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Tarbiyyah al-Arabī, 1981)), but is more a narrative comprising certain topics on this matter, rather than being an independent work on *maghāzī*. In these narratives on Islamic history, which have reached today through various sources, the tone is clear, strong, unexaggerated and plain. Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 153-154; Fayda, “Siyer ve Megāzī,” 321.

<sup>35</sup> Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 168.

After Urwah, comes Shurahbīl ibn Sa'd (d.740), who met many of the Prophet's companions and composed various works on *sīrah*. He is well known for certain narratives that cannot be found elsewhere.

Another important *sīrah* and *maghāzī* scholar of the *tābi'ūn* is Āsim ibn Umar ibn Qatādah (d.737). He taught *sīrah*, *maghāzī* and the life stories of the companions at the Damascus mosque during the caliphate of Umar ibn Abd al-Azīz. A large number of the narratives in his *sahīfah* (script) were transmitted through Wāqidī, Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabarī, and in particular Ibn Ishāq, who was one of his students.<sup>36</sup>

Another well-known individual of the *tābi'ūn* is Abd Allah ibn Abū Bakr ibn Hazm (d.752), who recorded many topics that he received from his great-grandfather, Amr ibn Hazm. The most important contribution of Abd Allah to *sīrah* literature is his narration of events from the life of the Prophet Muhammad, which he obtained from a collection kept by his grandfather.<sup>37</sup>

After these individuals, writers produced independent and more in-depth works on *sīrah* and *maghāzī*, using existing works and other sources. At the forefront of these is Zuhri (d.721), whom Umar ibn Abd al-Azīz employed to collect *hadith*. Zuhri officially began encoding the *hadith*, which, up until then, had only existed unofficially. He thus ushered in a new era in *sīrah* and *maghāzī* writing.<sup>38</sup> Zuhri collected narratives transmitted by Urwah from Aisha, by Āsim ibn Umar from Mahmūd ibn Labīd, and by Abd Allah ibn Abū Bakr from his father, Abū Bakr; and he was successful in creating a written text that was accessible to his students, Musa ibn Uqbah<sup>39</sup> (d.758), Ibn Ishāq and Ma'mar ibn Rashīd<sup>40</sup> (d.770). These three students went on to write important works on *sīrah* and *maghāzī*. In this way, Zuhri prevented material from being lost and enabled later scholars to produce compiled and classified works. Even though none of the works attributed to Zuhri are extant, a large part of the literature on the life of the Prophet is based on his narratives.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, Zuhri's narratives and works enabled later scholars to document changes in *sīrah* writing over time.

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<sup>36</sup> Mustafa Zeki Terzi, 'Asim b. Ömer b. Katade', in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 1991), III, 479.

<sup>37</sup> Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 193.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 220-221; M. Lecker, "al-Zuhri," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), XI, 565.

<sup>39</sup> His work has been reconstructed by Muhammad Bakhshish, under the title *al-Maghāzī li Musa b. Uqbah*, by collecting the narratives contained in the sources. For detailed information, see Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 246-256.

<sup>40</sup> Suhayl Zakkār has collected the narratives of Ma'mar in accordance with the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of *al-Musannaf* by Abd al-Razzāq al-San'ānī, and published them under the title of *al-Maghāzī al-Nabawiyya*. (Damascus: Publisher, 1981). For detailed information, see Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 347.

<sup>41</sup> Fayda, "Siyer ve Megāzī," 321.

Following Zuhri we enter the period most frequently associated with *sīrah* writing in Islamic history, namely, the first half of the H. 2<sup>nd</sup> century, when Zuhri's students, the last representatives of the *tābi'ūn*, left a permanent mark on *sīrah* writing. The writers in this period collected narratives made accessible in articles and books, on matters considered important by Zuhri, and classified them chronologically by subject. They thus established the general and final shape of *sīrah* and *maghāzī* writing. This is the period when *sīrah* writing became enriched in terms of its sources and content, and when a methodology of *sīrah* took shape. Works undertaken in later periods are generally based on the works carried out within this period, and consist of the evaluation and narration of these various reports. Foremost among the writers in this period was Ibn Ishāq (d.768), whose work left a lasting impact on the field of *sīrah*.

Ibn Ishāq holds an important position on *maghāzī* and *sīrah* matters. As a result of being a student of Zuhri, he was well versed in these matters but, in addition, he obtained and classified reports on *sīrah* and *maghāzī* from around 100 narrators, among whom were many children of the companions of the Prophet. He perceived the history of the world as a history of the prophets, and *sīrah* as its last hoop<sup>42</sup>, and wrote his famous work consisting of two parts, *Kitāb-Mubtada' wa al-Mabath wa al-Maghāzī (Sīrah ibn Ishāq)*.<sup>43</sup> In contrast to tradition, Ibn Ishāq included in his *Sīrah* narratives of individuals relevant to *ahl al-kitāb* and accounts from the books of the Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, as well as information based on *isrā'īliyyāt*.<sup>44</sup> He also included stories concerning many correct and incorrect reports regarding *ayyām al-arab* and poems.<sup>45</sup> Many historians, especially those who have written books on *sīrah* and *maghāzī*, have quoted Ibn Ishāq. His achievements in narrating *sīrah* reports chronologically and as a whole, led to later writers adopting this method as normative for describing *sīrah*. Even though the original entire work of Ibn Ishāq no longer exists, two copies still exist.<sup>46</sup> It is necessary also to state that there are certain criticisms of earlier

<sup>42</sup> Mehmet Özdemir, "Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine," in *Milel ve Nihal* 4(3) (2007), 133; Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 297.

<sup>43</sup> For information concerning the title of the book, see Mustafa Fayda, "Ibn Ishak," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 1999), XX, 95; Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 299-300; Hinds, "'Maghāzī' and 'Sīra,'" 3-4.

<sup>44</sup> "As a technical term, *isrā'īliyyāt*, in the broadest sense, which is contained in the interpretations and sayings of the Prophet, is the name of the legendary and religious literature belonging to the Jewish, Christian, old Persian and Near East cultural basin. In the strictest sense, it is the collection of narratives and reports coming from predominantly Jewish (and Christian) cultures." İsmail Albayrak, "Reading the Bible in the Light of Muslim Sources: From *Isrā'īliyyāt* to *İslāmiyyāt*," *Journal of Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations* 23/2 (2012): 113.

<sup>45</sup> Özdemir, "Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine," 133.

<sup>46</sup> The first, together with various additions, is an incomplete copy, which Ibn Ishāq had written by Yūnus ibn Bukayr (d.814), who is accepted as a *sīrah* writer. This copy has been published separately by Muhammad Hamīdullah and Suhayl Zakkār, under the title *Sīrah Ibn Ishāq*. Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 426; Raven, "Sīra," 661. The second is the book known as *al-Sīra al-Nabawīyya*, narrated by Ziyād ibn Abd Allah al-Bakkāī, and written by Ibn Hishām (d.833), who shortened the famous copy known as Kūfī Baghdādī. Ibn Hishām made this shortened version on taking into account the criticisms made of Ibn Ishāq, and left out some reports on the



scholars, and in particular of Ibn Ishāq, by *jarh* and *ta'dil* scholars (traditionists) who either rebut or criticise his work.<sup>47</sup>

After Ibn Ishāq, the final important writer in the field of *sīrah* and *maghāzī* in the H. 2<sup>nd</sup> century was Wāqidī (d.823). Wāqidī compiled his work, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, which only deals with the activities of the Prophet in Medīna, and in particular the *ghazwah* and *sariyya* during this period. His style is similar to that of *hadith* writers. Wāqidī uses narratives of earlier scholars, but his failure to cite Ibn Ishāq has led to accusations of plagiarism. However, these accusations are debatable and cannot be proved.<sup>48</sup> Wāqidī has made painstaking efforts to denote correctly what was written previously: official documentation, the chronological dates of the *ghazwah* and *sariyya*, and those who took part in them. He personally visited the locations where the events took place and attempted to obtain topographical information.<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting that Della Vida presents Wāqidī as the founder of the science of *rijāl*<sup>50</sup> (evaluating of the qualities of narrators) and *al-Tabaqāt* by Ibn Sa'd is largely based on Wāqidī.

Wāqidī's student and clerk, Ibn Sa'd (d.845), also known as *Kātib al-Wāqidī*, took narratives from the books of his tutors, and also benefited from Wāqidī's library. He added the attributes of the Prophet as foreseen in the Old and New Testaments, *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* (proofs of prophethood), and the narratives concerning the physical and moral characteristics of the Prophet (*shamā'il*) to the outline of the *sīrah* created by Ibn Ishāq and previous scholars.<sup>51</sup> Further, he wrote the work entitled, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, which also included the biographies of the companions, their followers and successors. As a result, he is responsible for carrying out the most important and lasting changes in this field. The first two volumes of his work were assigned to *sīrah* and *maghāzī*, and these constitute the oldest existing text since the time of Ibn Ishāq, which has survived until today through Ibn Hishām and Wāqidī. In short, Ibn

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*isrā'iliyyāt*, matters that were not contained within the Qur'an nor connected to the Prophet, and the poems that contained obscenities or were written by unknown poets, and made some albeit, few additions, in order to create this work which is attributed to him. This work is a source for later works within the Islamic world, and has become famous as the *Sīrah Ibn Hishām*. Fayda, "Siyer ve Megāzī," 322; Fayda, "Ibn Hişam," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2001), XX, 72; Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 299-303, 430-434; Raven, "Sīra," 661; W. Montgomery Watt, "Ibn Hishām," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1986), III, 800.

<sup>47</sup> For criticisms brought, see Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 291-293; J. M. B. Jones, "Ibn Ishāk," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1986), III, 811.

<sup>48</sup> Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 377-386; Leder, "al-Wāqidī," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), XI, 102-103. Arguments concerning plagiarism are contained in articles of J. M. B. Jones "Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī: The Dream of Atika and the Raid to Nakhla in Relation to the Charge of Plagiarism" and M. Lecker, "Wāqidī's Account on the Status of the Jews of Medina: A Study of Combined Report" in *The Life of Muhammad*, ed. U. Rubin, in Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>49</sup> Fayda, "Siyer ve Megāzī," 322; Leder, "al-Wāqidī," 102.

<sup>50</sup> Vida, "Sire," 702.

<sup>51</sup> Fayda, "Siyer ve Megāzī," 322; Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 450

Sa'd set the format of the sections and topics to be included in a work on *sīrah*. Works written after this date followed almost the same format.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, together with Ibn Sa'd, the genre changed from relaying the narratives of just one writer to comparing the narratives of several.<sup>53</sup> Other individuals who followed Ibn Sa'd, such as al-Tabarī, Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Kathīr, followed a similar format. Ibn Sa'd's work, *al-Tabaqāt*, the oldest available source of the discipline of *rijal*, has also affected later developments, in terms of content and methodology.

Since the 9th century, works on *sīrah* and *maghāzī* have continued along these lines. That is to say, while writings on *sīrah* found their ultimate form with Ibn Sa'd, the material used for *sīrah* continued to increase and included *sīrah*-related information in the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *ansāb* affiliated books, general history books and mystical works.<sup>54</sup> The most important works that exist today are: Ibn Hibbān's (d.965) *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*; Ibn Fāris's (d.1004) *Awjaz al-Sīra li Khayr al-Bashar*; Ibn Hazm's (d.1064) *Javāmi' al-Sīra*; Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī's (d.1201) *al-Wafā bi Ahwāl al-Mustafā*; Kalā'ī's (d.1237) *al-Iqtifā fi Maghāzī Rasul Allah*; Ibn al-Athīr (d.1210), Nawawī (d.1277) and Abd al-Mu'min al-Dimyātī's (d.1306) *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*; Ibn Sayyid al-Nās's (d.1334) *Uyūn al-Athar fi Funūn al-Maghāzī wa al-Shamā'il wa al-Siyar*; Mogultay ibn Kilich's (d.1361) *al-Ishāra ila Sīra al-Mustafā*; Izz al-Dīn ibn Jamaa's (d.1366) *al-Mukhtasar al-Kabīr fi Sīra al-Rasūl*; Ibn Kathīr's (d.1373) *al-Fusūl fi Sīrat al-Rasūl*; Ibn Habīb al-Halabī's *al-Muktafa min Sīrat al-Mustafa*; and Nūr al-Dīn al-Halabī's (d.1635) *Insan al-Uyūn fi Sīra al-Amīn al-Ma'mūn (al-Sīra al-Halabiyya)*.

Apart from works that deal independently with *sīrah* and *maghāzī*, historical accounts and books about certain aspects of the life of the Prophet also deal with topics relating to *sīrah*. The first two volumes of Ibn Sa'd's work, as mentioned above, were assigned to *sīrah* and *maghāzī* and constitute the first important *tafaqāt* works (a genre of Islamic biographical literature). In this respect, the *Futūhat* historian Balādhūrī (d.892) was the second author to begin work on *sīrah* in his *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*. Balādhūrī relates the genealogy of the Prophet in a similar way to Wāqidī and Ibn Sa'd, and from the time of Noah onwards, and includes much subject matter common to *sīrah*, such as the attributes of the Prophet, and facts about his personal and family life.

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<sup>52</sup> Fayda, "Siyer ve Megāzī," 322; Mustafa Fayda, "İbn Sa'd," in *DIA* (İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2001), XX, 294-297; Özdemir, "Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine," 134.

<sup>53</sup> Öz, *İlk Siyer Kaynakları*, 444.

<sup>54</sup> Özdemir, "Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine," 134.

There are also works on *tabaqāt* that do not give special precedence to *sīrah*, but nonetheless contain a wide range of *sīrah* and *maghāzī* materials because they focus on the lives of the companions. Notable among these are: Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt's (d.854-55) *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt*; Ibn Abd al-Barr's (d.1071) *al-Isṭī'āb fī Ma'rifat al-Ashāb*; Ibn al-Athīr's *Usd al-Ghāba fī Ma'rifa al-Sahāba*; and al-Dhahabī's (d.748) *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubālah*.<sup>55</sup> Gülen, who believes it is necessary to understand the companions in order to understand *sīrah* correctly, has allocated much space to the companions in his works. Gülen's use of cited sources during his private lessons has been adopted as a style of teaching.<sup>56</sup> Gülen emphasises the characteristics of the companions and states that he learned about their lives from a young age.<sup>57</sup> To determine Gülen's approach to *sīrah*, I will deal with the lives of the companions within this thesis.

A close examination of the works written in the next period reveals that the work *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk* of al-Tabarī (d.922), the acknowledged forefather of Islamic historians, is of central importance. Here al-Tabarī has attempted to write a chronological history of the world and the prophets, starting from Adam, and gives prominence to the Meccan and Medīnan periods of the Prophet's life. In this work, al-Tabarī gathered information on *sīrah* from narratives of scholars that no longer exist, but that he possessed, on *sīrah* and *maghāzī*. He classified these in his own way, and his work later became one of the most important resources for subsequent *sīrah* scholars.<sup>58</sup>

Other significant works that give space to *sīrah* are: 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr's *el-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*; Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*; al-Dhahabī's *Tārīkh al-Islam*; Ibn Khaldun's *Kitāb al-'Ibar*; and Diyarbakrī's *Tārīkh al-Khamīs fī Ahwāl al-Anfas an-Nafīs*. It is also useful to remember that a large amount of information about the life of the Prophet and his activities in Mecca and Madīna exist in works about the history of these two cities, which also provide geographic details. Azraqī's *Akhbāru Makkah* and Ibn Shabba's *Tārīkh al-Madīna al-Munawwara* are at the forefront of historical works containing *sīrah* and *maghāzī* material.

The branches of science that are based directly on the Prophet and deal with his attributes are *hadith*, *sīrah* and *maghāzī*, *shamā'il* and *dalā'il*. *Shamā'il* is the branch of science that deals with the humanity of the Prophet, and describes his lifestyle. The *hadith* scholar al-Tirmidhī

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<sup>55</sup> Fayda, "Siyer ve Megāzī," 323.

<sup>56</sup> Ergün Çapan, "Gülen's Teaching Methodology in his Private Circle," in *Mastering Knowledge*, ed. İsmail Albayrak (New York: Blue Dome, 2011), 149-150.

<sup>57</sup> Latif Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam* (Istanbul: AD Yayıncılık, 1995), 25.

<sup>58</sup> Fayda, "Siyer ve Megāzī," 323; F. Buhl-A. T. Welch, "Muhammad," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), VII, 361.

(d.892) was the first person to use this term, entitling his work *Kitāb al-Shamā'il*. As a result, a number of scholars wrote commentaries on his book, and a wide range of literature is now available in the field. Gülen also takes advantage of this literature.<sup>59</sup>

As a result of encountering new cultures through conquest, Muslim scholars produced books under the title of *dalāil al-nubuwwa* and other names.<sup>60</sup> This resulted in the creation of a vast body of literature. The works were especially written to convince Jewish and Christian religious leaders of the proof and status of the Prophet in the Qur'an, and report on various miracles. The miracles were compared to those performed by previous prophets.<sup>61</sup> This matter was first dealt with in a work by Ibn Ishāq<sup>62</sup>, and it is also discussed in books on the *hadith* and *kalām* (systematic theology). Abū Nuaym al-Isfahānī (d.1038?) and Abū Bakr al-Bayhāqī have written specialised work on the matter entitled *Dalāil al-Nubuwwa*. Qādī 'Iyad, has discussed the holy character of the Prophet in his work *al-Shifa bi Ta'rīf Huqūq al-Mustafa*, and many commentaries have been written on this work.

There have also been specific works devoted to particular aspects of the life and personality of the Prophet (ranging from discussions on his birth to his names and ascension, etc.).<sup>63</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *Zād al-Maād* is an important source of information about the religious, moral and legal implications of the *sīrah* of the Prophet. In addition, three other books on *sīrah* which use *hadith*, *sīrah*, *shamā'il* and *dalāil* sources, require examination: Maqrīdhī's *Imtāu'l-Asma' bimā li al-Rasūl min al-Abnā wa al-Ahwal wa al-Hafadah wa al-Matā'*; Shams al-Dīn al-Shāmī's *Subul al-Hudā wa al-Rashād fī Sīrat Khayr al-'Ibād*; and the commentary on the book of el-Qastallānī by al-Zurqānī, *Sharh alā al-Mawāhīb al-Ladunniyya*.<sup>64</sup>

Studies on *sīrah* continued in this way until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when changes occurred under the influence of Orientalist studies. In the West, *sīrah* entered the field of studies relating to the Qur'an, *hadith*, Islamic law and Islamic theology. A large number of studies began to consider the life of the Prophet, his status, *sīrah* materials and their reliability. As a result, Western studies found echoes in the Islamic world. Before discussing the types of studies that

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<sup>59</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Zamanın Altın Dilimi* (Istanbul: Nil Pub., 2011), 184-185; Fethullah Gülen, *Ölümsüzlük İksiri* (Istanbul: Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı Pub., 2007), 229-236.

<sup>60</sup> Like *A'lām al-Nubuwwa*, *Bashāir al-Nubuwwa*, *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa*, *Tathbit Dalāil al-Nubuwwa*.

<sup>61</sup> Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," 355.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat*, 257.

<sup>63</sup> For these types of books and articles, see Salah al-Dīn al-Munajjid, *Mu'jam ma Ullifa 'an Rasul Allah* (Cairo: Dār Qādī 'Iyad, n.d.).

<sup>64</sup> Fayda, "Siyer ve Megāzī," 324; Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," 366-367.

were undertaken in the Islamic world that resulted from these studies, I will review Western studies on the Prophet and his life.<sup>65</sup>

### 1.3 Works of *Sīrah* in Western Scholarship

It is possible to analyse the different perceptions in the West concerning the biographical works on the Prophet Muhammad, his historical existence, and the reasons for his success, as far back as the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and even earlier. When looking chronologically at the studies, there is information concerning the life of Prophet Muhammad attributed to various sources between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, but this information is still quite a long way from being a healthy biography. The underlying reason for this is the process that began with John of Damascus (d.750) presenting the Prophet as a ‘heretic’ or a ‘false prophet’, and increased through the writings of Abd al-Masīh ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, whose aim was to defend Christianity, and who, with this purpose, made strong allegations.<sup>66</sup> Later writers continued under the influence of these individuals, and in their attempts to embrace this ideal, wrote books that express hatred towards Islam, and introduced the Prophet as ‘a deviant’, ‘imposter’, ‘the founder of a false religion’, ‘the devil/Anti-Christ’, ‘lecherous’, and ‘a warmonger’.<sup>67</sup> These types of biographies used distorted facts and false information. While there were some differences among these works, fundamentally they were comprised of fictitious arguments such as that the Prophet Muhammad, and as such all Muslims, were descendants of Hagar and therefore devoid of nobility. They also alleged that the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad was barbaric, pagan, illiterate and uncultured, and that the Qur’an was taught to him by heretic and deviant religious leaders from among the Jews and Christians.<sup>68</sup> During this process, and in particular in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, there were some translations of Muslim sources claiming to provide correct information about the Prophet Muhammad, under the supervision of Peter the Venerable, Archbishop of Cluny.<sup>69</sup> However, as the aim was

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<sup>65</sup> For detailed information on chronological works concerning the life of the Prophet, see A. Noth, “Muhammad,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), VII, 360-387; Hilal Görgün, “Muhammad,” in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2004), XXX, 476-478; Jabal Muhammad Buaben, *Image of the Prophet Muhammad in the West, A Study of Muir, Margoliouth and Watt* (United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, 1996); Hüseyin Yaşar, *Batı’nın Kur’an Algısı* (Istanbul: Işık Akademi Pub., 2010), 78-110.

<sup>66</sup> This book, which is said to have been written in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, was translated into English by Sir William Muir, under the title, *The Apology of al-Kindy* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1887). However, Muslim writers believe this book does not belong to him. Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, “Kindī, Abdulmesih b. İshak,” in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2002), XXVI, 38-39.

<sup>67</sup> Görgün, “Muhammad.” 476.

<sup>68</sup> Rubin, *The Life of Muhammad*, XVI; Noth, “Muhammad,” VII, 379-380. For the motives behind the approach in this period, see 380-381.

<sup>69</sup> The collected works whose real aim was to gather the refutations of Islam that had been written and place them onto a sound basis is famous today under the title “Toledo-Cluny Collection” Görgün, “Muhammad.” 476.

rejection of Islam, the traditional point of view continued its domination for several more centuries.<sup>70</sup>

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century especially, the Qur'an was at the centre of arguments in this area, because it was seen as the work of the Prophet Muhammad, and explanations centred on the Qur'an were provided for his teachings.<sup>71</sup> Although Michael Baudier states in *Historie de la Religion des Turcs* (1625) that he is trying to be impartial, he has written a work that reflects the thoughts of the medieval European church on the Islamic religion and the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>72</sup> Later, Edward Pococke, who had learnt Arabic well, showed in his work<sup>73</sup> that objective points of view could not be presented about the life of the Prophet Muhammad without knowing Arabic; this work, together with the foreword written by George Sale<sup>74</sup>, up until the translation of the Qur'an<sup>75</sup> approximately one century later, has been used as a source for many works written in the West. During the same period, Johann Heinrich Hottinger also includes some prejudices in the foreword to his work, which is about the history of Islam<sup>76</sup>, but at the same time gives a positive view of the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his teachings.<sup>77</sup> Humphrey Prideaux, in his work *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Muhammad* (1697), has used Arabic sources, which then influence other works after him as well, in order to try to present the life of the Prophet Muhammad as that of a confidence trickster and founder of a false religion.<sup>78</sup> In spite of all these and the fact he did not speak Arabic, Laire Comte de Boulanvilliers, in his work entitled *La Vie de Mohamet* (1730), which he prepared using sources which had been translated into Western languages, is acknowledged as the first person in the West to defend the Prophet Muhammad. In this work, Boulanvilliers presents the Prophet, in contrast to the classical view, as an ambassador of God, a source of wisdom, the prophet of the wise, someone who put real worship in the place

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<sup>70</sup> Özdemir, "Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine," 142; Noth, "Muhammad," 379; Görgün, "Muhammad," 476.

<sup>71</sup> Rubin, *The Life of Muhammad*, XV; Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 81.

<sup>72</sup> Trude Ehlert, "Muhammad," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), VII, 382.

<sup>73</sup> His work that is dated 1650 entitled *Specimen Historiae Arabum Sive Gregorii Abūltasajji Malatiensis de Origine et Moribus Arabum Succincta Narratio Oxoniae*.

<sup>74</sup> In the foreword to his translation of the Qur'an in 1734 (*The Koran*, London), George Sale takes into account the reality of Islam whose existence was for many long years rejected in Europe, and which was denigrated and treated with contempt, by basing his work primarily on Islamic sources, and presented various further positive points of view, but could not obtain any result from this. (Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 260-261).

<sup>75</sup> In general, the forewords to translations of the Qur'an that were written in this period included a biography of Prophet Muhammad, as the writer of the Qur'an; these include the forewords to the translations of the Qur'an written by George Sale, Alexander Ross and Maracci.

<sup>76</sup> Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Historie Orientalis* (Zurich: Joh. Jacobus Bodmerus, 1651).

<sup>77</sup> Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 83; A. Noth, "Muhammad," 382.

<sup>78</sup> Ehlert, "Muhammad," 382.

of false worship, a great genius, a lawmaker, a conqueror and ruler, while at the same time defining his religion as tolerant and just.<sup>79</sup>

After Boulanvilliers, Jean Gagnier wrote the work, *Vie de Mahomet* (1732), and claimed he took a middle-of-the-road view between the extreme anti-Islamist Prideaux Humphrey and sympathisers of Islam such as Boulanvilliers.<sup>80</sup> A short time after this work, the famous dramatic work of Voltaire was published.<sup>81</sup> Later still, Joseph von Hammer-Purshall, who also had great influence on Johan Wolfgang Goethe,<sup>82</sup> presented the Prophet Muhammad to Europeans through sources that had never been used before him, such as *Jami'* of Diyarbakrī and *Sīrah* of Ibrahim Halabī. In contrast with the classical belief that he was a liar and a trickster, Hammer presents the Prophet Muhammad as the prophet of a religion that is widespread throughout the world. He also describes him as an influential orator, being someone who has called people from paganism to belief in only one God, and the seal of all the prophets.<sup>83</sup> In his work *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia Called Mohamed or Illustrious* (1829), Godfrey Higgins has also followed a line defending the Prophet, despite Christian criticisms; he has emphasised his fairness and honesty, and denied he was ambitious or that his aims were to fulfil his own desires.<sup>84</sup>

Towards the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western scholars approached Islamic sources and the life of the Prophet Muhammad in a critical way, and, in their activities, which formed the basis of the work of today's Orientalists, they were also critical of the Qur'an, which they had used as a source.<sup>85</sup> Other individuals, such as Gustav Weil, A. Sprenger, Nöldeke and Muir, tried to be more objective than their predecessors. These scholars were separated from the previous writers due to their knowledge of Arabic. Specialist studies in the institutes of leading Western universities had been formed especially to carry out these studies, making direct use of Islamic sources and a seriously critical approach to *sīrah* material and sources. However, while attempting to determine the historical personage of the Prophet, they were still unable to completely free themselves from searching for the foundations of his religion in Judaism and Christianity, which is a prejudiced point of view originating in medieval times.

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<sup>79</sup> Özdemir, "Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine," 143-144; Noth, "Muhammad," 383; Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 85-86.

<sup>80</sup> Ehlert, "Muhammad," 382; Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 86.

<sup>81</sup> While Voltaire does not show Prophet Muhammad in a different way than shown in medieval times, in his famous work entitled *Essai sur les Moeurs*, he has portrayed the Prophet in a completely different way – as a lawmaker, conqueror and religious leader who can play the biggest role in the world. Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 87.

<sup>82</sup> Goethe (1749-1832) researched Prophet Muhammad, and praised him in his poetry and unfinished drama. Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 92-94; Ehlert, "Muhammad," 383-384.

<sup>83</sup> Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 95-96.

<sup>84</sup> Ehlert, "Muhammad," 383.

<sup>85</sup> Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 97.

Whilst some writers, such as Thomas Carlyle,<sup>86</sup> Buhl, R. Bell, and Tor Andrae, attempt to erase the negative image of the Prophet, W. Montgomery Watt states that the typical warmonger image from the medieval ages, as written by Orientalists such as G. Weil, Aloys Sprenger, William Muir, David S. Margoliouth and T. Nöldeke, is still the dominant view.<sup>87</sup>

Muir particularly needs to be taken into account in this period. His work entitled *The Life of Mohammed from Original Sources* was written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It took into consideration original Arabic sources, and was far removed from the polemics and hateful points of view of the Middle Ages. As such, it is one of the important sources acknowledged by many to be objective.<sup>88</sup> His hinting at Christianity being the purest faith, his suspicious approach to the life of the Prophet, and his avoidance of attributing any type of superiority to the Prophet has led to the implication that he has borrowed his views from Judaism and Christianity. Buaben has stated that Muir is unjust in his approach which shows Islam as a religion of violence, comparing it to Christianity as the ideal, and arguing that the biggest deficiency in his study was depicting the Prophet as a prophet who was a believer, someone protected by God, an honest man, and someone fighting against pagans in his Meccan period, whilst drawing completely the opposite profile of him in his Medīnan period. The image he creates of the Prophet on the one hand, of being a global hero and administrator, appears contradictory considering his failure to accept the Prophet's religious identity.<sup>89</sup>

Buaben says the studies carried out for about half a century after Muir were almost identical, until a new approach was exhibited by David Samuel Margoliouth (1858-1940).<sup>90</sup> While his fundamental work, *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam*, received praise in the West, Muslims have approached it with suspicion as to its value and whether it was an academic study. Even though he states he has freed himself from all prejudices and not embraced the view that one religion is superior to another, he has approached Islamic sources with suspicion, and not had anything positive to say about the Qur'an, considering it to be an invention by Muhammad. Despite his wide knowledge of Islam, he is not of the opinion that Muhammad was a divinely sent prophet who preached monotheism, and classifies him as a paganist who believes in

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<sup>86</sup> According to Watt, even though research from earlier times was interested in the historical personage of the Prophet, maybe it was Carlyle (who with his conference entitled "The Hero as Prophet. Mahomet: Islam" was influential in changing the image of the Prophet to a positive one) who discussed the Prophet as an individual who dealt with the problems of people and took an interest in the problems of all mankind, in a sincere, serious and genuine manner, and presented him in this way, taking a very important step towards destroying the belief in the medieval ages that Muhammad was the biggest enemy, and trying to replace this with the real portrait of the Prophet. Buaben, *Image of the Prophet*, 177, 185.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 189-190.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 21; Özdemir, "Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine," 159-160.

<sup>89</sup> Buaben, *Image of the Prophet*, 35-42.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 49.



superstitions, and has deviated and returned to the Ka'bah culture (idolatry) away from the religion of Abraham. Furthermore, he classifies the revelations sent to him as spiritualism, and likens Muhammad to Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism.<sup>91</sup> It is evident that he carries on the classical view in many areas including the source of the Prophet's message, whether it is original, his marriages and his relationship with the Jews.<sup>92</sup> As in Muir and Margoliouth, these individuals have, from time to time, been selective when using *sīrah* materials, with Jewish scholars trying to promote Judaism and Christian scholars trying to promote Christianity. They have placed the discussions on whether *sīrah* is something that originates from Judaism or Christianity (or both) at the centre of their arguments. At the same time, Margoliouth's praising statements concerning Muhammad as a great figure are noteworthy.<sup>93</sup>

When looking at the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it can be seen that the West has looked into Islam as an important matter, and has increased its research in an attempt to obtain the correct information about the basis of the phenomenon known as Islam and its founder. M. Watt was one of the most prolific researchers on the Prophet Muhammad in the West during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the negative and suspicious approach shown before him, Watt has shown it can be possible, by using *sīrah* material, to determine historical truths about Muhammad. Despite being criticised on certain matters, Watt is acknowledged as a researcher in the modern era who approaches Islam and the Prophet Muhammad with sympathy and respect in terms of *sīrah*, is able to be critical of the West, and does not hold a one-sided view of matters.<sup>94</sup> Watt refers to the Prophet as the perfect man who has been subjected to the most ridicule in the history of the world<sup>95</sup>, and criticises the propaganda based on revilement and hatred in the Middle Ages. He does not accept the Western view that the sacred truth is only contained within Christianity, and has removed himself from the general opinion that the Prophet Muhammad was not original, but rather used information selected from Judaism and Christianity.<sup>96</sup> Despite being a Prophet who has received revelations from God, he argues that the Prophet could have made mistakes, just like some of the prophets in the Old Testament.<sup>97</sup> He is mainly criticised for his evaluation of the Meccan period based completely in terms of economic disputes, and therefore concluding that the migration to Abyssinia was for wholly

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<sup>91</sup> Buaben, *Image of the Prophet*, 49-68, 106; Yaşar, *Batı'nın Kur'an Algısı*, 110.

<sup>92</sup> Buaben, *Image of the Prophet*, 71-99.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 103-104.

<sup>94</sup> Özdemir, "Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine," 146; Buaben, *Image of the Prophet*, 155-159.

<sup>95</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 324.

<sup>96</sup> Buaben, *Image of the Prophet*, 234-237.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 183, 197-198, 218.

economic reasons. Furthermore, he is criticised for his emphasis on the Prophet being more a statesman than a prophet concerning certain matters, such as his wish to make pilgrimage.<sup>98</sup>

Watt's positive approach towards *sīrah* material is also later embraced by Rudi Paret and Maxime Rodinson. Rodinson is a Marxist, and in his study he analyses the life of the Prophet in sociological terms, freeing it from the chains of theology. He attempts to relate the ethereal vision of Muhammad and the international political relationships of the time. Rodinson states that above all else it is the unique personality of the Prophet that needs to be emphasised.<sup>99</sup> Despite these positive developments, the views of Goldziher and Shacht<sup>100</sup> on early period Islamic history continued to remain influential during the 1980s. John Wansborough, and individuals such as Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, whom he influenced and who are known as revisionists, have even presented doubts concerning the authenticity of the Qur'an, let alone the authenticity of *hadith* and other narratives. Together with this development, there have been attempts to distance the Qur'an as a historical source of authentic information for the life of the Prophet, which is not particularly debated elsewhere. The underlying argument of these researchers is that the history of the earlier Islamic periods, and in particular the birth of Islam and its conquests, can be written without even taking into account Islamic literature, by using non-Muslim sources, archaeological findings and other historical remains. The leading protagonists of this opinion are Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, with their interesting and extensive work entitled *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, in which they claim neither Islam nor the Prophet Muhammad has contributed anything of any originality to the debate. However, it is clearly evident that the history of no community, religion or culture can be written without making use of its own sources.<sup>101</sup>

Another recent Western researcher who has produced important works is Karen Armstrong. Armstrong's studies emphasise the shared messages of the religions, and her works discuss Islam and especially the life of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>102</sup> Armstrong frees herself from Orientalist traditions and stereotyped preconceptions, and is known for trying to understand Islam and its Prophet, and for putting the emphasis on this, rather than trying to judge them. She reads the history of civilisation and Islam from a secular point of view. This situation and

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 189-190.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 151-152.

<sup>100</sup> Shacht has widened Goldziher's theory that *hadith* were made up as a result of political developments in the second century of *hijra*, in a way which included *sīrah* as well.

<sup>101</sup> Özdemir, "Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine," 147; for the fundamental errors made in this study, see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an, A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, Second ed. (Washington D.C.: George Town University Press: 2003), Chapter 3.

<sup>102</sup> See: Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad, A Western Attempt to Understand Islam* (London: Orion, 1991); Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad, A Prophet for Our Time* (New York: Harper One, Pasennial, 2007); Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2002).

her attempts to fit Islam in with modern thinking, together with her failure to use classical sources in a wide sense, has caused her to make mistakes in terminology from time to time.

Lastly, Martin Lings has taken the verses and *hadith* as his point of reference, as well as the fundamental early period Islamic sources, such as Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Sa'd and al-Tabarī, and using his skill as a teacher of literature has written the work entitled *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, in an easy to understand and flowing manner. He describes the Prophet and his era in a detailed way, beginning the work with Abraham and summarising the period up to the Prophet, thus giving it a historical perspective. Probably the fact that the writer is a Muslim is one of the important factors here.

#### **1.4 *Sīrah* Literature in Modern Islamic Scholarship**

In response to advances within the West, the Islamic World replicated debates concerning *sīrah* materials and authenticity, and from the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a new period in the field of *sīrah* was entered. The likes of Shiblī and his disciple Nadwī of India, the Egyptian Izzet Darwaza and Muhammad Haykal, Ahmed Cevdet Pasha in Ottoman, and others, have felt the need to re-analyse the life of the Prophet. These scholars have emphasised the Prophet as a prime historical role model, rather than relying on his miracles and information concerning his exalted appearance. Among these resources, *Sīrat al-Nabī* in Urdu, which was initiated by Shiblī and completed by his disciple Nadwī, relied primarily upon the Qur'an and subsequent reliable reports; *sīrah* material that was incompatible with authentic *hadith* was not considered. Within these works, it is obvious that when sourcing information from *sīrah* material the reliability of the narrator was important. While Shiblī is presenting Islamic principles and ideas at a scientific level and in the context of logical criteria, it is obvious that those who do not believe, and who therefore approach the subject from a different perspective, endeavour to present practical proofs.

As a result of sceptical approaches to *sīrah* sources, Darwaza proposed and attempted to write only *sīrah* relating to the Qur'an. In this work, he demonstrated it is possible to benefit from the Qur'an to a large extent to clearly determine the *sīrah* of the Prophet and events in his era. Nevertheless, this book was criticised for having omitted valuable information from *sīrah* sources and being unconsolidated with the Qur'an. For that reason, his work has been accepted as important but deficient.

Muhammad Haykal, like Darwaza, endeavoured to use the Qur'an as the foundation of his work *Hayātu Muhammad*. In addition, he critically and selectively used *sīrah* materials

without mentioning them after applying the perspective given by the Qur'an. Consequently, much information and many facts from within the *sīrah* sources were excluded. Therefore, Haykal was accused by Muslim scholars for deviating from the agreed classical *sīrah* route, and ignoring reliable facts, due to Western influence.

In modern Islamic scholarship, Muhammad Hamīdullah has produced significant works on *sīrah*, specifically his meticulous study *Le Prophete de l'Islam*. Hamīdullah prudently engaged the notion of miraculousness due to his awareness of the sceptical approach of Western scholars. Like Wāqidī, he used personal observation as a technique for reliable information, in addition to historical narrations. He dealt with *sīrah* not only as an occurrence in the Arabian Peninsula, but also as an event that had connections with the Asian, European and African continents by social, cultural and commercial relations with Byzantium, Persia and Ethiopia. Thus, he introduced the life of the Prophet as an important event for that era and as having a universal message, rather than being a local incident. Eventually, he also questioned why prophecy came to the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>103</sup>

There are also works entitled *fiqh al-sīrah* in the modern period which focuses more on the teachings and practical lessons of the Prophet, rather than focusing merely on the incidents and their occurrence in their respective historical time. In this regard, the late Said Ramadan al-Buti's (d.2013) work entitled *Fiqh al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyya* (Jurisprudence Biography of the Prophet) is of the importance to underline. Buti in this work chronologically analysed *sīrah* of the Prophet, underlining the teachings, lessons and even legal ruling of incidents. His work is crucial in examining the life of the Prophet as a best model, and how his teachings are implemented in contemporary time and age.

As Western studies affected the Islamic world, so this influence was also reflected in Turkish scholarship. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa planned to write a history of Islam including the *sīrah* of the Prophet, essentially based on verses of the Qur'an and *hadith*, purified from superstitions, and thus he wrote his work *Kıyas-ı Enbiya* [Stories of the Prophets]. Another scholar, Celal Nuri, in his work *Hatemu'l-Enbiya* [Seal of the Prophets], criticised classical and Western approaches towards the life of the Prophet, and engaged with his life and Islam from another perspective. He stated "Prophet Muhammad is aggrieved from an historical point of view. Non-Muslim historians are addicted to considerable and hereditary enmity. On the contrary,

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<sup>103</sup> Adem Apak, "Muhammed Hamidullah'ın Siyer İlmine Katkıları," *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13(1) (2004): 58-60.

Muslim historians have perceived the Prophet as an extraordinary creature, higher than that of a human being.”<sup>104</sup>

Finally, we consider the work of Mustafa İslamoğlu and his book *Üç Muhammed* [Three Muhammads], in which he presented a different approach to prophethood in terms of excess, understatement and balance. He analysed two main pervasive approaches: the mythological Prophetic image, and the Prophet as a historical reality and ‘postman’ who delivered the revelation to humanity. He points out that the first concept covers the Prophet being a good example of a human being, and can lead to his exclusion from normal life. Although the second concept is a consequence of decisive positivism and rationalism, he emphasised that there are also some historical reasons behind it. In the last chapter of his book, İslamoğlu argued against both concepts. He expressed the opinion that the Prophet should be identified according to the attributes and mission that the Qur’an introduced.

### **1.5 Literature on Fethullah Gülen and his Approach to *Sīrah* Literature**

Known globally for educational institutions and centres for inter-religious dialogue inspired by him, Gülen is a religious leader, activist, poet, writer and scholar. He was born into a conservative family in the north-eastern Turkish city of Erzurum on 27 April 1941. His childhood was spent in classical religious schools and their spiritual milieu. There were signs from a young age of his thirst for knowledge and learning when he consequently began focusing on various other areas of study such as art, literature, cinema and theatre.<sup>105</sup> Beginning his educational life with the *sīrah* of the Prophet and his companions’ stories, he continued with reading scientific, intellectual and philosophical books in his later years and also completed the notable Eastern and Western classics.<sup>106</sup> He worked as a government *imam* in different cities in Turkey, as well as a Qur’anic school administrator and voluntary preacher. Gülen gained significant interest from others during this period in which he talked about the key issues of the truths of belief, morality, social and economic problems. He also provided solutions to these problems with reference to a description of the ideal generation in his sermons. When discussing these matters, he drew attention to the people of ‘the era of happiness’ (the early generation of Islam) as a vivid example for contemporary generations. He pointed out that these historical figures are not just characters in a story. On the contrary, he stressed that the people of our own day and age could also be like them. The effect of such encouragement had a huge effect on the different activities he initiated. Gülen underlined the

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<sup>104</sup> Özdemir, “Siyer Yazıcılığı Üzerine,” 154.

<sup>105</sup> M. Enes Ergene, *Geleneğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı* (Istanbul: Yeni Akademi Pub., 2005), 39-40.

<sup>106</sup> Ali Ünal, *Bir Portre Denemesi* (Istanbul: Nil Pub., 2002), 505.

importance of dialogue and education which became the means for the establishment of various educational colleges and dialogue institutions in over 160 countries. Alongside these examples, the Gülen (*Hizmet*) movement is giving a lead at all levels of society, from the sectors of media and health to civil society institutions, from banking to human aid foundations. Gülen has been residing in Pennsylvania, United States, since 21 March 1999, due to health reasons.

When considering the research and works completed about Gülen, it can be seen he is a philanthropic educator, thinker, and sensitive activist on a global scale on issues concerning humanity, and in particular those relating to education and dialogue. Gülen is discussed in the light of social sciences and international relations, by experts in these fields, where he is compared to similar historical figures.<sup>107</sup> Ihsan Yılmaz states that “Gülen does not have an official status and his authority is based solely on his religious and scholarly credentials.”<sup>108</sup> Despite this, he has received very limited attention as an intellectual Muslim scholar. Although special attention has been paid to his understanding of the Prophet’s life, there is not a single complete significant work on the subject.

When considering the source of his interest in *sīrah*, Gülen states that his father experienced love beyond reason for the companions of the Prophet, saying that his and his siblings’ love for the companions was influenced by their father. Explaining in more detail regarding the companions, he says: “Since we were young, we accepted them as though they were a part of our family and loved them accordingly.”<sup>109</sup>

In terms of a social analysis of Gülen, another biographical work on him in the context of past, present and future is *Bir Portre Denemesi* [A Portrait Attempt], where the author, who knows Gülen well, identifies him as:

...a poet and writer who is unique and therefore very difficult to imitate. He is a skilled communicator and preacher whose audiences consider themselves privileged to have heard him speaking. In addition to his expert knowledge of the major branches of Islamic sciences such as Islamic theology, Qur’anic exegesis, Islamic Jurisprudence, Prophetic tradition,

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<sup>107</sup> Some studies focussed on Gülen and his movement are: Muhammed Çetin, *The Gülen Movement: Civic Service Without Borders* (New York: Blue Dome Press, 2011); Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Social Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (New York: Springer Press, 2009); Ihsan Yılmaz and John Esposito’s *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gülen Movement Initiatives* (New York: Blue Dome Press, 2010); Ihsan Yılmaz, et al. (eds), *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (London: Leeds Metropolitan University Press, 2007).

<sup>108</sup> Ihsan Yılmaz, “Civil Society and Islamic NGOs in Secular Turkey and their Nationwide and Global Initiatives: The Case of the Gülen Movement,” *Journal of Regional Development Studies* (2010), 118.

<sup>109</sup> Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 22, 25

biography of the Prophet and Islamic Mysticism, he is also an accomplished lecturer and writer on Western thought, including the fields of literature, history, philosophy, the fine arts, and natural sciences.<sup>110</sup>

Suat Yıldırım, who has known Gülen for over 50 years, considers him a master of the Islamic disciplines, particularly of the *sīrah* of the Prophet and his companions' lives.<sup>111</sup> Ünal outlines three key characteristics present in Gülen's character: his great love for the Prophet, his love for the companions and his love for all creation.<sup>112</sup> Gülen stated: "My life has been spent studying the *sunnah* (practices of the Prophet)" especially the philosophy of the *sīrah*, in which it may be reasonable to suggest he possesses expert knowledge,<sup>113</sup> as demonstrated in this research.

Enes Ergene, author of *Geleneğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı: Gülen Hareketi'nin Analizi* [Tradition Witnessing the Modern Age: An Analysis of the Gülen Movement], suggests that identifying the movement as solely religious may be inaccurate. An examination of the movement reveals that there are three distinct dimensions to it - sociological, cultural and religious. The writer mentions that 'the era of happiness' is always idealised in movements like the Gülen movement, but he believes the Gülen movement is unique and should be dealt with separately:

the intellectual roots and foundations of the movement are based upon this era's ideals and agenda...the ideals of the movement directly or indirectly create practices through this day and age. Consequently, when analysing the movement, people must take into consideration this deep connection and loyalty to 'the age of happiness' ideals. The founding dynamics of the whole movement are based on these ideals. Without taking this ideal into consideration, it can be said that it is not possible to analyse the Gülen movement with real meaning...The ideal of 'the age of happiness' in the Gülen movement is a perfect example and a living model for today.<sup>114</sup>

This emphasises the critical importance of understanding its relevance to this study and research into the Gülen movement. In short, there is a need for a presentation of a worldview

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<sup>110</sup> Ünal, *Bir Portre Denemesi*, 13.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 491.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 304.

<sup>114</sup> Ergene, *Geleneğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı*, 116–119.

of religious and social practices to the liberal people of our day by demonstrating Gülen's past and present personal repertoire, experience and intellect.<sup>115</sup>

After visiting and communicating with the institutions of Gülen and his supporting movement, Egyptian scholar Iman Qandil wrote in her article: "The underlying success behind this social, philanthropic and economic movement is the foundation and origin of God's Book and exemplifying the Prophet's and his companions' lives. I can say that what we have seen in Turkey is like a reflection and glimpse of 'the era of Happiness.'"<sup>116</sup>

It has already been stated there is only a very limited number of works in the personal collection of Gülen as a scholar and intellectual.<sup>117</sup> The work of the late Ibrahim Canan, entitled *Fethullah Gülen'in Sünnet Anlayışı*, sheds light on how Gülen understands *sunnah* and how he developed his own ideas from the material he obtained from the *hadith*.<sup>118</sup> *Sunnah*, *hadith* and *sīrah* share the same source – the second source of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad. They are branches of learning that examine the words, acts and behaviour of the Prophet, each one from a different perspective. Canan was aware of this link and included some comments on *sīrah*<sup>119</sup> in relation to *fatānah* (prophetic intellect), which is one of the attributes of the Prophet, his migration, and multiple marriages in a section on Gülen. Canan states that within Gülen's books there is an emphasis on the age of the Prophet, which is used as a model. For almost every action, article, speech, paragraph and even line, reference is made to this era.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, unlike similar books on the subject of *sīrah*, where only historical information is given, there is an all-encompassing approach, and matters are looked into using a wide range of sources.<sup>121</sup> However, in spite of all of this, there is no detailed practical explanation. That is because the actual objective is to determine Gülen's understanding of *hadith* and *sunnah*.

The final study, where the opinions of Gülen as an Islamic scholar are discussed, is the work entitled '*Mastering Knowledge in Modern Times*', edited by Ismail Albayrak. It discusses Gülen's approach to exegesis of the Qur'an, *hadith*, Islamic law, Sufism, and the different way in which Gülen lectures. One of the disciples taught by Gülen in his private lectures is

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 109–110.

<sup>116</sup> Iman Kandil, "Türkiye'de Sahabe Ruhunun İhyası," *Yeni Ümit* 88(2) (2010), 59.

<sup>117</sup> Faruk Beşer, in his book *Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi'nin Fıkıhını Anlamak*, deals with how Gülen articulated the Islamic culture of jurisprudence; Ismail Albayrak and Suat Yıldırım in their works *Fethullah Gülen'in Tefsir Anlayışı* and *Fethullah Gülen'in Kur'an-ı Hakim'e Yaklaşımı*, respectively, explore Gülen's approaches towards the Qur'an from different angles, such as exegesis of the Qur'an and its methodology.

<sup>118</sup> Ibrahim Canan, *Fethullah Gülen'in Sünnet Anlayışı* (Istanbul: Ufuk Kitap Pub., 2007), 19-21.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 179-185.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 22-23, 149, 153, 209-211.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 63.



the writer of the last chapter, Ergun Çapan. Çapan states Gülen has cited the companions as models in his sermons, conversations, and in particular in his books. Çapan draws attention to the importance of this: “Knowing the companions and *hadith* narrators to be models of knowledge, wisdom, worship and dedication, Gülen treats them as most precious guests in his heart and memory. Gülen has used every opportunity to introduce, teach about and make these people known and appreciated by anyone who listens to him, and especially those attending his classes.”<sup>122</sup>

Together with these studies, I will also evaluate the main criticisms directed at Gülen. These include whether his dialogues possess the basis of Islam. Other questions addressed are: is the emphasis on the era of happiness and its presentation as an ideal, a return to the past and an acknowledgement of the radical claims of certain marginal groups? Is this the same view being voiced in a different way? And finally, how scientific is it for Gülen to use weak or fabricated narratives in his works while discussing the matter? These and other similar topics will be discussed in this study.

Finally, in this study, I will take Gülen’s opinion, the “philosophy of *sīrah*,” and consider how he has taken the period named “the era of happiness” and idealised it. As a result, and as stated by those who know Gülen well, even if he does not directly declare his cognition of *sīrah* and the lives of the companions as one of the most important factors, his constant referencing of these periods and his presentation of diagnoses and solutions are very real. However, there are no studies that specifically explore this side of him. In this study, this aspect of Gülen will be examined in detail and attention will be drawn to what is possibly an alternative reading in the field of *sīrah*.

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<sup>122</sup> Albayrak, *Mastering Knowledge*, 150.



## CHAPTER 2: PROPHETHOOD IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND ITS INNATE RELATION AS A THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION TO *SĪRAH*

### 2.1 Introduction

There are three fundamental areas that form the Islamic religion: *i'tiqād* (tenets of belief), *ibādāt* (worship) and *muāmalāt* (practices required as a result of belief). The principles concerning daily life and its interactions with worship and all of creation (*ibādāt* and *muāmalāt*) are systematised by the discipline of *fiqh*. However, the discipline aiming to systematically set the foundations of the ‘theoretical’ infrastructure of Islam (i.e. the tenets and proofs concerning its belief) by deduction from the authentic sources – the Qur’an and *sunnah* – is known as *kalām*.<sup>123</sup> Interestingly, Gülen cites the *kalām* discipline among the fundamental sources of Islamic cultural heritage (*adilla al-shar’iyya*) – the Qur’an, *sunnah*, consensus of scholars (*ijmā*) and comparisons made by jurists (*qiyas*) – a categorisation different to the classical approach. Gülen’s unique explanation succinctly summarises the definitions of *kalām* made to date:

*Kalām*: which has a variety of meanings such as word, speech, language, the Qur’an, and Divine commandments and prohibitions; is the whole set of information undertaking the defense of Islam’s belief system with rational and revelation-based evidence, the protection of believers’ intellectual integrity, the intellectual elimination of suspicions and doubts that are or are likely to be put forward against the religion from time to time, and the vigilant protection – within the framework of the elevated *sunnah* – of the truths that the old ones used to call *aqāid-i haqqā-i Islamiyya* (the undoubtedly true tenets of Islam) against certain misguided philosophical trends. To put it in another way, *kalām* is the collection of the principles which consist of certain theories of knowledge (epistemology) that link the religion’s core tenets (*usūl al-din*) to the Qur’an, *sunnah* and the interpretational studies of our righteous predecessors (*salaf al-sālihīn*), within the framework of these two essentials.<sup>124</sup>

Scholars of *kalām* state Islam’s belief system is established on three fundamental core essentials (*usūl al-thalāthah*). This triadic classification is used by these scholars when dealing with the fundamental topics of the Qur’an as well. These core essentials are:

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<sup>123</sup> For the different disciplinary names given to *kalām*, why it was popularly named *kalām*, and its definition from different angles such as subject matter and purpose, see: Bekir Topaloğlu, *Kelam İlmi Giriş* [Introduction to the Discipline of *Kalām*] (Istanbul: Damla Yayınları, n.d.), 47-52; Şerafettin Gölcük and Süleyman Toprak, *Kelam: Tarih, Ekoller, Problemler* [Kalām: History, Schools of Thought, Problems] (Konya: Tekin Kitabevi, 2012), 3-8; Şaban Ali Düzgün, ed., *Kelam El Kitabı* [Handbook of Kalām] (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2012), 21-28; Tim Winter, ed., *Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2; M. Abdel Haleem, “Early Kalam,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 2007), 71-88.

<sup>124</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 102.

1. *Ilāhiyyāt* (divinity): Topics concerning the existence, unity, attributes and actions of (One) God.
2. *Nubuwwāt* (prophethood): Topics concerning prophethood and the revelations/books received by prophets.
3. *Sam'īyyāt* (the transmitted and scientifically unproven matters related to religion): Unseen creatures such as angels, spirits and Satan, as well as matters concerning eternal life.<sup>125</sup>

Within this classification, prophethood holds one of the most important positions in theology after faith in God. Before moving on to the historical background of prophethood and discussions thereof, I would like to highlight another triadic classification that looks upon this subject from an ontological perspective. Later, in chapter 3, I will return to take a more in depth look at this ontological classification. In fact, Gülen's evaluations concerning prophethood are at the crossroads where the *kalāmīc* and three-way ontological classifications come together. This partition received even more emphasis as a result of the developments and new tendencies seen in the sciences in the modern era following the enlightenment, and the fundamental theme of various reform movements that deal with the matter from this perspective is prophethood.<sup>126</sup> This discourse, which is clearly seen in the works of Said Nursi, plays a critical role in Gülen's positioning of all prophets in general and Prophet Muhammad in particular. Perhaps in more accurate sense it could be said the notion of prophethood has been dealt with as an important element of this triple classification and based widely on these triadic essentials in Gülen's works. This classification used insistently by Gülen is stated by Nursi:

The numbers of the pieces of evidence and proof which describe and declare the Creator of the universe to us are unknown and incalculable. The biggest of those pieces of evidence are three: *Firstly*: It is this great book of the universe, some of whose verses you see and hear.

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<sup>125</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> century Ash'arī scholar al-Juwaynī (d.1085) is said to have introduced this three-way classification into the science of *kalām* in the era when the history of this science underwent a turning point in terms of its classification and ordering, and saw important renewals in its terminology and methodology. M. Sait Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayışları* [The Search for a Renewal in Kalām] (Istanbul: Isam Yayınları, 2008), 21. Some scholars, including Gülen, have also added 'justice and worship' to these three foundations. Said Nursi, *Isharat al-I'jaz* [Signs of Miraculousness] (Istanbul: Sahdamar Yayınları, 2007), 9, 121; Said Nursi, *Muhakamat* (Istanbul: Sahdamar Yayınları, 2007), 9, 86. Expanding his view even further to encompass all prophets, Gülen makes the following remark: "Since the first human and prophet, every prophetic tradition has followed a common path: it has consistently focused on the oneness of God, resurrection, prophethood, servanthood and justice; it has set guidelines and warnings pertaining to secondary matters of religion according to the time and context and considering the level of human beings' understanding; and has established lofty goals for its followers. Thus, the fundamental areas of the religion have been the same, unlike the secondary matters pertaining to detail which have experienced some natural variations." Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 150.

<sup>126</sup> Yusuf H. R. Seferta, "The Doctrine of Prophethood in the Writings of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida," *Islamic Studies* 24(2) (1985), 139.

*Secondly:* It is the Prophet Muhammad who is the greatest commentator on this book, the seal of the council of prophets and the key to the secret treasure. *Thirdly:* It is the Qur'an, which is the exegesis of the book of the universe and the proof of God to His creatures.<sup>127</sup>

This triple classification and justification, as well as different words (such as God – the universe and life) and their nuances at times, are used frequently by Gülen, and are shown continually as a reference in the understanding of prophethood and the position of the Prophet Muhammad. Gülen has also entitled one of the most important articles in his book on the study of prophethood, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, where he emphasises these three partitions as “God – the Universe – Man and Prophethood.”<sup>128</sup>

It is evident that some contemporary scholars, including Gülen, having outlined the principles of Islamic belief on prophethood and its place in Islamic thought, went on to attach particular importance to this matter of prophethood and made great efforts to justify it. There was good reason for this. As a result of certain trends, such as positivism and materialism, which quickly impacted on the Muslim world, along with atheism and deism ravaging everywhere like an illness, special importance has been attached to the matter of prophethood, which has been one of the three fundamental beliefs of Islam since the classical period. Thus, religious truth, which has been shaken by these external factors, has attempted to re-present the notion of prophethood in order to rediscover its relationship with the Creator and the universe. In this section, I first deal with the progress and development of the science of *kalām* in general, looking at how prophethood is perceived within this discipline. Subsequently, I refer to how prophethood has been approached in the modern era. After analysing *kalām-sīrah* relations, which have become closer in recent periods, I will try to determine Gülen's position in this regard. This will help to explain the reasons for Gülen's '*kalāmisation*' attitude, which is evident in his *sīrah* writings, as well as ascertain the reasons for his differences in *sīrah* readings.

## **2.2 Historical Background and Methodological Survey of the History of *Kalām* and *Nubuwwa* (Prophethood)**

### **2.2.1 Development of the *Kalām* Discipline**

The religious, political and social movements that occurred in the Islamic community following the death of the Prophet, and the religious arguments experienced when coming face-to-face with non-Islamic communities, resulted in the development of political and

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<sup>127</sup> Said Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye* (Istanbul: Sahdamar Yay., 2007), 16; Said Nursi, *Sozler* (Istanbul: Sahdamar Yay., 2007), 248.

<sup>128</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 142.

theological divisions (such as the emergence of the Shia and Khawarij). Almost all of these factions, which surfaced from the first century of *hijra* onwards, used Qur’anic verses and *hadith* to prove their opinions were correct. They needed also to explain the principles of faith specified in the Qur’an and *sunnah* to Muslims in Islamic countries whose borders were continually growing and to defend Islam against external factors. It was at this stage, when disagreements developed concerning different matters, that theological movements appeared, named after those who led them (e.g. Qadariyya, Jabriyya, Mu’tazila etc).<sup>129</sup> The development of the *ilm al-kalām* as a discipline occurred in parallel with these disputes. In general, three periods are referred to in the history of *kalām*, although four periods are referred to if one accepts the scholars who hold the same opinions as the companions of the Prophet (*sahaba*) and their followers, who are also known as the *salaf/salafiyya*.<sup>130</sup> This group is outside the theological grouping referred to above. They prefer to be subject to the word of the Qur’an and *sunnah* without accepting commentary (*ta’wil*), and to deal with the exegesis of the Qur’an (*tafsīr*), accounts of the *hadith* and judgments within these two only, rejecting interpretations and accepting only true meanings. In brief, these are the periods of *salaf*, *mutaqaddimūn* (the older or pre-Ghazzālī), *mutaakhhirūn* (more recent scholars or post-Ghazzālī), and the new *ilm al-kalām*.<sup>131</sup>

Mu’tazila<sup>132</sup> is widely accepted as the founding school of theology in the history of the Islamic worldview. The acceptance of Mu’tazila's rational theology, and on the other hand, the conservative approach of the early scholars (*salaf*), who only adapted the Qur’an and *sunnah* whilst totally refraining from trying to rationalise it, prepared the foundations for the birth of *ahl al-sunnah*<sup>133</sup> theology (mainstream Islam) about a century later.

<sup>129</sup> Khalid Blankinship, “The Early Creed,” in *Classical Islamic Theology*, 32-54.

<sup>130</sup> Ismail Hakkı İzmirli, *Yeni İlm-i Kelam (New Theology)*, I, 98; Topaloğlu, 113-119; For detailed information on the *salafiyya* and their views, see the work of Ramadan al-Buti, *Salafiyya, Marhalatun Zamaniyya Mubarakā La Madhabūn İslamī* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1990); M. Sait Özervarlı, “Selefiyye,” in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2009), XXXVI/399-402; W. Ende, “Salafiyya,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), VII/900-909. *Salaf/salafiyya* in this study, as mentioned above, refers to scholars who hold the same opinions as the companions of the Prophet (*sahaba*) and their followers and it has nothing to do with modern *salafi* groups.

<sup>131</sup> For the emergence of *kalām*, its position at the beginning, the first factions and its stages of development, see Topaloğlu, *Kelam İlmi*, 19-40; Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1973); Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 43-66.

<sup>132</sup> The birth of the Mu’tazila was around the beginning of the second century after *hijra*. For detailed information on the Mu’tazila, see Kemal Işık, *Mutezile’nin Doğuşu ve Kelami Görüşleri* [The Birth of the Mu’tazila and their Views on Kalām] (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1967); Ramazan Altıntaş, “Mutezile: Önemli İsimler, Temel İlkeler ve Ana Esaslar” [The Mu’tazila: Important Names, Fundamental Principles and Guidelines], in *Kelam*, ed. Şaban Ali Düzgün (Ankara: Grafiker, 2012), 63-103.

<sup>133</sup> In the early periods, the notion of *ahl al-sunnah* was used for the majority who refused Shia, Kharijites or Mu’tazili’s and followed the path of the companions, acted upon the sayings of the Prophet and interpreted issues in the light of Qur’an and *sunnah*.

The rapid spread of Islam during its early period acted as a catalyst in its fractionalisation and soon there arose a need to address the questions of people who embraced Islam in foreign lands and cultures, such as Damascus, Basra and Baghdad. Hence, these developments resulted in the emergenc of a school that received the conclusive approval of the majority of the scholars (*jumhur*) and followed the tradition of the companions, namely *ahl al-sunnah*.<sup>134</sup> While they interpreted issues in light of the Qur'an and *sunnah*, just like the early scholars, they also integrated a rational approach, like the Mu'tazilites.<sup>135</sup> In other words, they developed an *ahl al-sunnah* theology that corroborated the topics of theology and faith with rationality. The schools of thought that represent this method are the Ash'āriyya, established by Abū al-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d.936), and Māturidīyya, established by Abū Mansūr al-Māturidī (d.944). The most notable characteristic of this period, which is known as the “era of the *mutaqaddimūn*,” and lasted until the 11<sup>th</sup> century, is their belief that the logic of Aristotle is not consistent with Islam, and their decision to keep their distance from it. While they dealt with various philosophical concepts and matters, which began with the Mu'tazila, *ahl al-sunnah* did not use the science of logic. Instead, they used *usūl* (the methods) used in the science of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), which is dependent on views (*ra'y*) and judicial opinion (*ijtihād*), which can be said to be a type of Islamic logic, and the theory that was established by Imam Shāfiī (d.820), who had been involved in Islamic law since the period of the companions of the Prophet. This could be the reason why the *kalām* of the *ahl al-sunnah* is not considered to be a philosophical metaphysics during the *mutaqaddimūn* period, but is said to be a science which is the equivalent of ‘theology’, described as ‘*ilm usūl al-dīn*’ (the science of the fundamental doctrines of Islam).<sup>136</sup>

An important milestone reached in the history of *kalām* during the 11<sup>th</sup> century and differences occurred in this science's terminology and method. Imam al-Haramayn Juwaynī (d.1085), one of the scholars of the Ash'arī school of thought, laid the foundations for the logic of Aristotle in *kalām*, while certain other practical changes began with the works and studies of his student, Abū Hamid al-Ghazzālī (d.1111). Ghazzālī stated that the use of some of the rules of the logic of Aristotle would create no problems, and, in any case, these pieces of evidence, which are a part of *kalām*, had been included in the works of theologians under

<sup>134</sup> Topaloglu, *Kelam İlmi*, 23-25; Gölcük, *Kelam*, 53.

<sup>135</sup> It should not be forgotten there are various differences between the logic/rationalism of the Mu'tazila and the *ahl al-sunnah*. For the differences, see Gölcük, *Kelam*, 54-55. Further, the use of logic/intellect by the scholars among the *ahl al-sunnah* carries the purpose of preventing the extremism of spreading the use of intellect to matters that are transmitted (*sam'iyyat*). Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 18.

<sup>136</sup> Richard M. Frank, *The Science of Kalam*, ASP (Arabic Sciences and Philosophy), II (1992), 36-37.

different concepts.<sup>137</sup> Through this idea, the tendency that was present in *kalām* and other Islamic sciences was made legitimate and accelerated.<sup>138</sup> With his insistent advocacy of evidence-based deductionism in sciences, al-Ghazzālī is accepted as the person who ended the era of the “*mutaqaddimūn*” (early period), which started with Mu’tazilites and continued with *ahl al-sunnah* theologians, such as Ash’arī, Māturidī and Bāqillanī, and started the “*mutaakhhirūn*” (later period), which opened the doors to philosophy and logic.<sup>139</sup> The *mutaqaddimūn* scholars until al-Ghazzālī had strived against the false schools, whereas the *mutaakhhirūn* scholars had to deal with Muslim philosophers.<sup>140</sup> The *mutaakhhirūn* period continued with scholars such as al-Rāzī (d.1210), Shahrastānī (d.1153), Āmidī (d.1233) and Baydāwī (d.1286). The period between the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the history of *kalām* is acknowledged as one when annotations (*sharh*) and footnotes (*hāshiya*) were written to the works that had been written earlier, where authentic works were not produced to a great extent, and as a period of stagnation.

A significant mentality and paradigm change was experienced in thought, philosophy, literature, art and science together with the renaissance, enlightenment and modernity in the West. The emergence of epistemology, based exclusively on experimentation and observation, as well as the determinist approach to interpreting the universe that started in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and peaked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulted in the alienation of metaphysical topics, mainly God and divinity, as unscientific, and gave birth to a stern secular understanding. On the other hand, there were significant moves and developments in science and technology. The need to address the doubts and concerns planted by ideologies seemingly against religion, such as positivism, materialism, determinism and Darwinism, embarked and disseminated in parallel to this progress, and affected the whole world in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was clear the old philosophical approaches and methodologies were not sufficient to address such changes and new problems. There was an effort to generate a solution for the problems present in the science of *kalām* as well as in other disciplines, and new scientific and scholarly methods were presented in an effort to find a solution. The statements that “new scientific and philosophical data should be used,” and that it is not

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<sup>137</sup> Ghazzālī, “al-Munqiz min al-Dalal,” in *Majmūat Rasāil* (Egypt: al-Mektaba al-Tawfiqiyya, n.d.), 586; Ghazzālī, *Muqaddimat Tahāfut al-Falāsifa al-Musammāt Maqāsīd al-Falāsifa* (Egypt: Dar al-Maarif, 1961), 32, 33; Ghazzālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, 45; Ghazzālī, *al-Mustasfa*, 10.

<sup>138</sup> Philosophy began to be used gradually as a discipline by Sunnī scholars of *kalām*, from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Tim Winter, *Classical Islamic Theology*, 13).

<sup>139</sup> Topaloglu, *Kelam İlmi*, 28-32; Watt, “al-Ghazali,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1986), II, 1040; Winter, *Classical Islamic Theology*, 14; Oliver Leaman, “The Developed ‘Kalam’ Tradition,” in *Classical Islamic Theology*, 77-81; Michael E. Marmura, “Ghazali and Demonstrative Science,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3(2) (1965): 183-204.

<sup>140</sup> Topaloglu, *Kelam İlmi*, 28; Gölcük, *Kelam*, 65; Leaman, “The Developed ‘Kalam’ Tradition,” 77.



possible to respond to the existing problems with the logic of Aristotle or the methods and arguments of classical *kalām*, continued to increase, and the period known as the “New *Ilm-i Kalām*” began in response to this. Scholars such as Jamal al-Din Afghānī (d.1897), Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan (d.1898), Muhammad Abduh (d.1905), Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi (d.1914), Mawlana Shiblī (d.1914), Abd al-Latif al-Kharbutī (d.1916), Muhammed Iqbal (d.1938) and Izmirli Ismail Hakkı (d.1946) were at the forefront during this period. The general consensus of such scholars was that positivism, materialism and other similar currents cannot be addressed with classical theological propositions. It would require the reinterpretation of the secondary (*wasāil*) theological topics, which are open to timely and contextual interpretations, to produce new arguments to solve the problems of the era and repel the attacks on faith, while maintaining the fundamentals of theology (*usūl*), primary topics (*masāil*) and objectives (*maqāsid*).<sup>141</sup> The new theology resulting from such efforts<sup>142</sup> has been defined as “an approach that not only rejects all forms of materialism and positivism as a philosophical concept, an answer to the biological and psychological criticisms (such as Darwinism and Freudism) directed at religion, critical of philosophical trends and tendencies, but also willing to use positive sciences to prove the existence of God, a science that defends the holiness of Islam by explaining and proving the issues pertaining to faith.”<sup>143</sup>

### 2.2.2 Prophethood in Islamic Thought

The discussions concerning prophethood did not present differences in the history of Islamic thought as it did during the developmental stages and schools of thought. Leaving details aside,<sup>144</sup> I will attempt to summarise the general picture of prophethood in Islamic thought with special reference to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries due to efforts made to revitalise *kalām* and strong *kalām–sīrah* relationships. I will also analyse and question this rapprochement, and endeavour to clarify Gülen’s position in this context.

As with every subject on Islamic thought, the most fundamental source of the matter of prophethood is, undoubtedly, the Qur’an. When prophethood is mentioned, it is understood as being the transfer of divine information from God to people, by sending a prophet. Muslim scholars believe that God has inculcated how God–the universe–man, life and history, etc., are to be assessed through revelation and prophethood. There have been those who interpreted this as “the history of the relationship between God and the other areas of being as also the

<sup>141</sup> Ismail Hakkı İzmirli, *Yeni Ilm-i Kelam* (Istanbul: Evkaf-i İslamiyye Matbaası, 1339-1341), 59.

<sup>142</sup> The following works can be seen as an example in this field: İzmirli, *Yeni Ilm-i Kelam*; Shiblī, *Ilm-i Kalām-i Jadīd*; Kharbutī, *Tanqīh al-Kalām fi Aqāid al-Islam*.

<sup>143</sup> Topaloglu, *Kelam İlmi*, 39.

<sup>144</sup> For detailed information on prophethood, see Salih Sabri Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet* [Prophethood in Islamic Thinking] (Istanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2012).

history of the prophethood.”<sup>145</sup> While the subject of prophethood is not dealt with as a specific term in the Qur’an, prophethood is dealt with mainly in terms of prophets being sent and their missions. It is one of the central themes in this sense and constitutes one of the abovementioned three principles (*usūl al-thalāsa*). However, the notion was developed systematically by the scholars of the discipline of *kalām*. In this regard, the various sects had different approaches in terms of the systematic science of *kalām* in relation to the notion of prophethood during the development process.<sup>146</sup>

An examination of the Qur’an shows that religion has existed throughout the history of the human race, it is not possible to find a community without a religion where guides informed people of the divine truths, were in touch with the Divine Being and guided people through revelations (prophet or messenger/*Rasūl* or *Nabī*). From this, there were people who accepted these messages and had faith, and those who did not believe and chose to reject them.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, the scholars and schools of *kalām*, who approached the matter from the perspective of the Qur’an and *sunnah*, discussed whether people would have been able to make the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled and civilised lifestyle without the guidance of prophets, and reached the following general conclusions: “It is not possible to form human civilisations without a guiding influence, and this was the beginning of prophethood. The technological civilisation possessed by humanity today has developed and come about through divine guidance, reaching its current status. The information on the prophethood given in the Qur’an, from the very first humans, shows this clearly.”<sup>148</sup> In this respect, the following observations made by Gölcük represent an important stage of development in this process: “...the origins of civilisation related to the arts and technical matters is also Divine. The general principles of the knowledge and skills held by people on the arts and technological matters have been set in place by the prophets who were sent by God. This opinion is accepted by the representatives of both the Māturidī and Ash’arī classical schools of *kalām*.”<sup>149</sup> Gülen with reference to Nursi made a similar approach. They

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<sup>145</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 49.

<sup>146</sup> Seferta, “The Doctrine of Prophethood,” 140.

<sup>147</sup> See for instance the verses that express human beings as one nation (in the beginning of the creation they were following one single way of life without disputes over provision and other things), the fundamentals of prophethood and the reasons for revelation (Qur’an 2:213; 10:19).

<sup>148</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 310-311.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 319. As an example see, *Muhassalu Afkar al-mutaqaddimin wa al-mutaakhhirin* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyya, n.d.), 157, for the views of Fakhr al-Din Rāzī, one of the important representatives of the Ash’arī school of thought.

believe the miracles of prophets, which are referred to in the Qur'an, define the upper boundaries that humanity will be able to reach in the scientific realm.<sup>150</sup>

When the history of *kalām* is examined, it is evident that the subject of prophethood, which has its foundations in the Qur'an and *sunnah*, only has a small place in the first *kalām* sources (the works of *salaf*). Even up to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the era the triple classification (*usūl al-thalāsa*) was introduced, the notion of prophethood was dealt with as part of divinity (*uluhiyya*), which was understood as unifying the creed under one single essential truth (*asl al-usūl*). The needs, different perceptions, and internal and external motives that surfaced in later periods caused the doctrine of prophethood to gain importance, and command attention as a special subject. According to some researchers, the most satisfying and persuasive responses on the matter of proving prophethood were given by Māturidī and Bāqillānī, among the scholars of *kalām* in the *mutaqaddimūn* period; and after Bāqillānī, prophethood became an integral part of the works on *kalām*.<sup>151</sup> There are even those who state the religion of Islam has its foundations in prophethood, and Islam derives all of its importance and value from the fact it is based on prophethood.<sup>152</sup> The facet that brings its own characteristics to a religion and separates it from other religions is, in particular, its principles that come through revelation. With revelation, religions are separated from each other in terms of general principles and provisions. In any case, it is clear that a faith system that does not contain prophethood, and which is based only on a perception of God and is perceived only with the intellect, cannot extend beyond a philosophical doctrine.<sup>153</sup>

When the arguments on prophethood are considered in terms of their development within the historical process, rather than being born and developing on a merely theoretical basis, the socio-cultural events in some periods have made it obligatory for the matter to be discussed. In this respect, certain internal and external reasons, which draw prophethood to the centre of discussions on the *kalām* in Islamic thought, are cited. These are listed as: 1. Coming together with the Jewish and Christian religions as a result of conquests, and the discussions and disputes with them; 2. The criticisms and objections brought by scholars such as Barāhima, Ibn Rāwandī and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, to prophethood; 3. The perception of the Shi'ites of 'innocent imams'; 4. The opinions of philosophers on the matter; and 5. The Mu'tazilite perception of prophethood. Some of the reasons deal directly with the prophethood of

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<sup>150</sup> Nursi, *Sozler*, 268-284; Gülen, *Yol Mulahazalari* (Istanbul: Nil Yayinlari, 2007), 101-105; Gülen, *Kur'an'in Altin Ikliminde* (Istanbul: Nil Yayinlari, 2010), 523-537; Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/176-178; Gülen, *Kendi Ruhumuzu Ararken* (Istanbul: Nil Yayinlari, 2013), 219.

<sup>151</sup> Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 111; Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 216.

<sup>152</sup> Gölçük, *Kelam*, 305.

<sup>153</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 7.

Muhammad, while others deal with the nature of prophethood in general. For instance, while the prophethood of Muhammad was defended against the Jews and Christians, the concept of prophethood per se was defended against Barāhima.<sup>154</sup>

The first atheist and deist movements that surfaced in the Islamic world, and led also to the opinion of rejecting prophethood, began after coming face to face with dualist (*thanawī*)<sup>155</sup> opinions such as Māniyyā<sup>156</sup> and those of the Mazdakiyyā<sup>157</sup>, after the conquests in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century of *hijra*. A significant atheistic movement was not observed in the Islamic world until Islamic geography expanded and met foreign cultures.<sup>158</sup> The topic of prophethood became one of the priorities of Islamic theology (*kalām*) with the introduction of the movements and ideas that threatened the foundations of the Islamic belief system, which are named Barāhima (Brahmans)<sup>159</sup> and Sumaniyyā in Islamic sources. These movements criticised and rejected the office, notion and necessity of prophecy and prophethood. In particular, the Barāhima group became the flagbearers of criticisms against prophecy and the source of arguments used by later movements against prophethood. According to Barāhima and Sumaniyyā, who are seen to be forerunners in Islamic history of those who hold the deist perception of God today, and accept logic and science as the only source of knowledge that leads to the truth, and reject the revelations and prophethood, it is not possible for prophets to be sent. That is because, according to them, it is not consistent with the profundity of God that He would send someone to guide people who already possess wisdom. If the prophet sent brings something that is already discovered or discoverable by the mind, then the mind is content with its own ability at arriving at it, and does not need prophetic reaffirmation. If they bring something that is not accepted by the mind, the mind rejects this in any case. The mind of humans created with the nature (*fitrah*) of liking goodness and hating evil is sufficient for them to distinguish

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<sup>154</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 305.

<sup>155</sup> *Thanawiyya* is the general name of schools that believe the world was created by light-darkness and goodness and evil. Shahrastani, *al-Milal wal-Nihal* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2005), 198-199. Also see, Mustafa Sinanoglu "Seneviyye," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2009), XXXVI/521; Ugo Bianchi-Yuri Stoyano, "Dualism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. L. Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), IV/2504-2505; Richard A. Watson, "Dualism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. R. Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 244-245.

<sup>156</sup> Maniyya is the group that upholds the thoughts of Mani b Fatiq. They also perceive the world as comprised of darkness and light. (Shahrastani, *al-Milal*, 198)

<sup>157</sup> Mazdakiyya: The school that is named after a person named Mazdak. This school believes the world is comprised of darkness and light. (Shahrastani, *al-Milal*, 201.)

<sup>158</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 161-162.

<sup>159</sup> For detailed information on Barāhima, see Bāqillānī, *Kitab al-Tamhid* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1947), 96; B. Carra De Vaux, "Brahmanlar," in *Islam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1979), II/741; Gunay Tümer, "Brahmanizm," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 1992), VI/332-333; Binyamin Abrahamow, "The Barāhima's Enigma A Search for a New Solution," *Die Welt des Orients* 18 (1987): 72-91.

right from wrong. Therefore, there is no need to send a prophet. On the other hand, it could not be proved, according to them, that the prophets have a divine message.<sup>160</sup>

Ibn al-Rāwandī (d.913-914?) – together with those who laid the foundations for him and advised him – is accepted as being the representative of the movement which rejected prophethood, by introducing opinions that are not in accord with Islam (such as atheism and deism) into Islam. While the infidelity of al-Rāwandī is approached with suspicion, he is accepted as the head of those in the Islamic world who are materialists and accept intellect as the only measure, and therefore reject prophethood. With reference to Barāhima, who is identified with the rejection of prophethood in the Islamic world, he also takes a dishonest route in prophethood.<sup>161</sup> Another figure who stands out in this context – and who may be an even more important figure than Ibn Rāwandī – is Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d.925). It is ascribed to al-Rāzī, who is also accepted as a pioneer of materialistic philosophy in the Islamic world, that the opinion of God's appointment of certain people for the mission of prophethood, and their being superior to other people, is against logic. To solve problems or come to conclusions naturally, through the proficiency of the intellect that the human being has been endowed with in its creation, is more appropriate to wisdom.<sup>162</sup>

While the early *kalām* scholars attempt to explain the necessity and proof of prophethood against the rejections cited by Barāhima on the one hand, they also, on the other hand, attempt to describe what prophethood is in Islam and prove to other religions that the Prophet Muhammad is a genuine prophet. Between them, Māturidī and Bāqillānī gave the most convincing answers to this question, in the *mutaqaddimūn* period.<sup>163</sup> Topics such as the inadequacy of the human intellect in achieving truth and happiness, the need for an adviser and teacher as a result of various conflicts observed in history, the need to know the right way to worship the Creator and the inability to understand the rewards that correspond to one's worship, are the leading rational proofs that make prophethood a necessity. In addition, topics such as dissimilarity of revelation to other speech and the miracles (*mu'jiza*) performed by

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<sup>160</sup> A. Saim Kilavuz, *Ana Hatlariyla Islam Akaidi ve Kelam'a Giris* (Istanbul: Ensar Nesriyat, 2013), 226-227.

<sup>161</sup> Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 96-97. For detailed information on Rāwandī, see Ilhan Kutluer, "İbnu'r-Ravendi," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2000), XXI, 179-184.

<sup>162</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 166, 174-177. Yavuz says the opinion of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī was taken from Abū Hatim al-Rāzī, *A'lam al-Nubuwwa*, ed. Salah al-Sawi (Teheran: Anjumani Falsafa-i Iran, 1977), 3-5). For detailed information on Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, see Mahmut Kaya, "Rāzī, Ebu Bekir," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 2007), XXXIV, 479-485; Paul Kraus, S. Pines, "Rāzī," in *Islam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basimevi, 1964), IX, 642-645; Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 97-106.

<sup>163</sup> Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, 126-187; Māturidī, *Kitab al-Tawhīd* (Istanbul: al-Maktaba al-Islamiyya, 1979), 176-210. While Māturidī responds to Barāhima on the subject of prophethood, he does not clearly state the name of this faction; Qādī Abduljabbar, *al-Mughni fi Abvab al-Tawhīd wa al-Adl* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Misriyya li al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjama, 1963), XV, 109; Abū al-Mu'in al-Nasafī, *Tabsirat al-Adilla fi Usūl al-Din* (Ankara: DIB Yayinlari, 2003), II/1-28.

prophets, are some of the other leading proofs and signs used in proving prophethood in *kalām* sources. A new body of literature called *dalāil al-nubuwwa*<sup>164</sup> was written, which consisted of rational, sociological (e.g. the need for prophets at an individual and social level) and revelational proofs to establish prophethood as part of Islamic theology. The main and strongest proof used by all the schools of thought, including the *salafiyya*, is the Qur'an, with its eloquent, unequalled and miraculous nature (*i'jaz*). The specific literature called *i'jaz al-Qur'an*<sup>165</sup> was a result of this initiative. Furthermore, in addition to the Qur'an and other miracles revealed by the Prophet, his character, morals, manners and individuality are used as additional proofs by Muslim theologians.<sup>166</sup> The fact that other holy books also mention Muhammad (*bashairu al-nubuwwa*) has also been used as evidence for his prophethood.<sup>167</sup>

### 2.2.3 Prophethood According to *Kalām* Schools

After referring to the literature that has been established to discuss and prove the essential existence of prophethood through its works on *kalām*, it is appropriate to briefly describe how the notion of prophethood is perceived according to the different sects within *kalām*. Presenting the general situation in this way will give the opportunity to better understand the perception of prophethood in the contemporary or new *ilm al-kalām* period.

All Islamic sects agree upon the existence of prophethood throughout history; that prophets have been sent to man by God, that the final prophet is Muhammad (*khatm al-nubuwwa*), and that they receive divine orders and revelations (*wahy*) from God. However, there are various different approaches among the sects in relation to the explanation, details and evidence of prophethood.

While the two schools of thought of *ahl al-sunnah*, Māturidīyya and Ash'āriyya, are fundamentally the same, there are certain differences in the detail that must be addressed. According to the *ahl al-sunnah*, prophethood is a grace and gift of God. The mission of prophethood is not futile, but is of benefit to humanity. It is an error of judgment to consider the intellect sufficient and not in need of the office of prophethood. As in many examples, such as the arbitrariness of worship, the establishment of justice, etc., the scope of intellect

<sup>164</sup> Yusuf Sevki Yavuz, "Delailu'n-Nubuvve," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfi Pub., 2001), IX, 116. For works written on the subject of *dalāil*, see for instance: Abū Nuaym al-Isfahānī, *Dalāil al-Nubuwwa* and Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāil al-Nubuwwa*.

<sup>165</sup> Yusuf Sevki Yavuz, "I'cazu'l-Kur'an," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfi Pub., 2000), XXI, 403-406. For an example of these types of works, see Bāqillānī, *I'jaz al-Qur'an*.

<sup>166</sup> Māturidī, *Kitab al-Tawhīd*, 202-210; Nasafī, *Tabsira*, II/54-56; Rāzī, *Muhassal*, 208.

<sup>167</sup> Mehmet Aydın "Besairu'n-Nubuvve," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfi Pub., 1992), V, 549-550. For detailed information on this subject, see: Ali Unal-Harun Gultekin, *The Prophet Promised in World Scriptures* (New Jersey: Tugra Books, 2013).

does not cover everything. Therefore, it is clear there is a need for prophecy. The roles of the prophets in the practice of religion, as well as in gathering people, social administration, ethics, and worship, is required where the role of intellect is insufficient and limited.<sup>168</sup> Prophethood plays a very similar role to that of the intellect: “Just as intellect is required for individuals, prophethood is required for humanity, in the same way.”<sup>169</sup>

In Islamic theology, the matter of prophethood has been dealt with in close connection with the subjects of good and bad (*husn-qubh*), and good and the best (*salah-aslah*). In this respect, there are three fundamental approaches that are defended by the Mu'tazila, Ash'ariyya and Maturidiyya. Although there are further evaluations belonging to the different scholars within the sects, these three approaches below have been described in general terms.

According to Mu'tazila, the beauty–ugliness or goodness–evil in an object are the stable values inherent in their nature. The responsibility and liability (*wujūb*) is realised by depending on this main principle in all of these provisions of the acts. The goodness of an act requires that there are no bad or evil parts to it. If this goodness is also present and truth in the sending of the prophets, and if there are no bad or futile parts to it, then its performance is necessary and compulsory. In short, Mu'tazili scholars believe, as prophethood is for the benefit and happiness of people, “it is compulsory (*wajib*) for God to create the most beautiful and beneficial one for people.” The views of the Mu'taziliyya were grounded by persons such as Qādī Abd al-Jabbār.<sup>170</sup>

On the other hand, the Ash'ariyya is of the opinion that the intellect does not play a determining role in specifying the beauty–ugliness or goodness–evilness of things. That is because the nature of things does not include (or portray) anything that will demonstrate this. Therefore, there needs to be some form of canonical law (*sharia* or prophethood) that will determine the goodness–evil or beauty–ugliness of something, so one may distinguish between the two. Here, the following questions come to mind: while the intellect does not have such a determining function, is there a need for prophets? Is God bound, by this insufficiency of the intellect, to send prophets? Is it obligatory upon Him as the Mu'tazilites have said? In response to this, the scholars of Ash'ariyya are of the opinion that the sending of prophets is an act of God. Sending a prophet does not represent an obligation (*wujūb*) for

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<sup>168</sup> Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqāsid* (Beirut: Alam al-Kutub, 1998), V/19-25; Pazdawi, *Usūl al-Dīn*, trans. Serafettin Gölcük (Istanbul: Kayihan Yayınları, 1980), 129-134.

<sup>169</sup> Muhammad Abduh, *Risala al-Tawhīd* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1994), 101, 106, 109.

<sup>170</sup> Qādī Abd al-jabbar, *al-Mughni*, XV, 19; Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqāsid*, IV, 282-283, 294-295; Shahrastani, *Kitabū Nihāya al-Iqdām fī Ilm al-Kalām*, ed. Alfred Guillaume (London: n.p., 1934), 417-440; Sayfuddin al-Amidī, *Ghayāt al-Marām fī Ilm al-Kalām* (Cairo: Wizarat al-Awqaf, 1971), 317f.

God, as in all other acts. In this respect, from a logical point of view, the sending of a prophet by God is not obligatory (*wujūb*), but rather it is a possibility (*mumkun*).<sup>171</sup> So, sending a prophet is a blessing and gift from God; but the reverse is not a weakness or deficiency. Further, according to the Ash'āriyya, the real source of the responsibility of people is not their intellect, but religious law (*sharia*), and, in order to not escape responsibility and to eliminate excuses, there is a need for prophets.<sup>172</sup> While the views on prophethood of the Ash'āriyya are not contained in the works of Abū al-Hasan al-Ash'arī, they are present in the work of Ibn Furak (d.1015), where he has collected together Ash'arī's views.<sup>173</sup> Additionally, by the works of leading Ash'arī scholars of the *mutaqaddimūn* and *mutaakhhirūn* periods, such as Bāqillānī, Juwaynī, al-Ghazzālī and al-Rāzī, the doctrine of prophethood that I have summarised has been dealt with in detail and established. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that when Ash'arī scholars refer to the notion of prophethood, they essentially take into account the points of objection raised by Barāhima, and aim to disprove the intellect to be sufficient when dealing with the subject matter and they endeavour to prove the need and possibility of it.

However, the Māturidī School believes there is good and evil present in every entity. Divine information and orders notify that one thing is good or evil. God orders or prohibits something because it is good or bad. However, human beings may not apprehend it every time for various reasons. In this respect, there is a need for prophets. However, this matter is not one that is obligatory for God, but one that is possible. As the acts of God are based on reason and wisdom, the subject of prophethood is also a result of divine wisdom. As it is not possible for there to be anything futile among the acts of God, it is also not possible for prophethood not to exist. In short, according to Māturidī scholars, prophethood is logically possible, and in terms of people needing it, it is compulsory from the perspective of wisdom.<sup>174</sup> The views of the Māturidī sect on prophethood have been established by scholars such as Imam Māturidī and Abū al-Mu'in al-Nasafī (d.1114).

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<sup>171</sup> For arguments on the possibility (*mumkun*), legality (*jaiz*) and obligation (*wujūb*) of God to send a prophet, see Gölcük, *Kelam*, 323-326. According to the Mu'tazila, prophethood and the sending of a prophet is a moral obligation (*wujūb*); for the Shi'a it is a necessary (*wujūb*) grace; for Islamic philosophers it is a physical and actual obligation (*wujūb*); and for the scholars who follow mainstream Muslim thought (*ahl al-sunnah*), it is the manifestation of the will of God, and a grace that is both legally and rationally possible (*mumkun*).

<sup>172</sup> Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqāsid*, IV, 284-289, V/19-25; Ghazzālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-'Itiqād* (Damascus: Dar al-Qutayba, 2003), 119-136.

<sup>173</sup> Ibn Furak, *Mujarrad Maqālat al-Shaykh Abū al-Hasan al-Ash'arī* (Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1987).

<sup>174</sup> Nasafī, *Tabsira*, II/12-13; Māturidī, *Kitab al-Tawhīd*, 129-141; Nur al-Din al-Sabūnī, *al-Bidāya fī Usūl al-Dīn*, trans. Bekir Topaloglu (Ankara: DIB Yayınları, 2005), 45-47.



The scholars of *ahl al-sunnah* disagree with the views of the Mu'tazila, and of the Islamic philosophers, on prophethood.<sup>175</sup> They believe, in the absence of divine laws, revelations and religion notified to the prophets, humanity could not know its obligations for obtaining its perpetual wellbeing, would be unable to perform them, and could not establish a good and organised order that operates in accordance with legal and administrative codes on earth. When the need for prophets is considered from this perspective, it is compulsory, and neither intellect nor the narratives reject this; on the contrary, they ratify it.

### 2.3 *Kalām–Sīrah* Relations in Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Scholarly Discourse

After summarising prophethood in Islamic thought and setting the general framework, the aforementioned changes in Western thought and the influence of the resulting ideologies, established the view that the contents and methodologies of the Islamic sciences did not address the needs and gaps, hence there was a need for renewal and revival (*tajdid* and *islah*). Varied influences of this movement, which has been named the new *ilm-i kalām* period in *kalām* discipline, can be observed in respect of different disciplines in Islamic studies. For example, the first and most distinct impact of this search for innovation, revival and movement appeared in the science of *tafsīr* (exegesis of the Qur'an), and various interpretations have been written using new methods and systems.<sup>176</sup> The influence of this reform also began to be seen in the area of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and the thought that the door to *ijtihād* was closed was criticised, emphasising the importance of and need for *ijtihād*, and discussion began around the re-interpretation of Islamic law in line with the changing needs of the time and conditions. In this context, works on Islamic law, which included *ijtihād* and preference (*tarjīh*), began to be written from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and this was followed by works on new methodologies.<sup>177</sup> However, the intense search, effort and perseverance in connection with the need for reform and revival were in the field of *kalām*:

The reason for the emphasis on *kalām* was because its critical position in relation to the creed of Islam. Thus scholars thought, both from the perspective of movements and ideologies, that this discipline has to provide efficient responses, and also that the scientific and philosophical methods used by this discipline were far behind current needs. As philosophy began to threaten faith and values with its new ingredients, and the more educated and “enlightened” class people became more and more influenced by trends which

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<sup>175</sup> For Islamic philosophers' and other sects' approaches to prophethood in Islamic thought, see appendix 1.

<sup>176</sup> Examples of these types of works include: Sayyid Ahmed Khan, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, Abū al-Kalam Azad, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Abduh and Rashid Rida, *Tafsīr al-Manar*.

<sup>177</sup> For these types of works and their authors, see Hayrettin Karaman, *Islam Hukuk Tarihi* [The History of Islamic Law] (Istanbul: Iz Yayincilik, 1989), 338-347.

excluded religion, scholars first veered towards complaint, and then towards new searches. Under these circumstances it was stated that urgent responsibilities rested on *kalām*, which is the protector of the Islamic religion, and that new studies were needed as a matter of urgency.<sup>178</sup>

As a result, they came face to face with a movement and written works known as new *ilm al-kalām*. Here I will leave these searches for reform in *kalām* to the relevant studies<sup>179</sup>, and focus on the emphasis on prophethood and the convergence of *sīrah* and *kalām* at this time. While there have been certain partial studies, this aspect of the matter has been largely overlooked.

The matter of prophethood was the lengthiest and most detailed subject dealt with in the works of recent period scholars such as Muhammad Abduh and Mawlana Shiblī. Although Mustafa Sabri Efendi is not recorded among the reformists, as he has not accepted but strongly opposed the notion of “new *ilm al-kalām*,” he attributed one volume of his work to prophethood.<sup>180</sup> His strong emphasis on the fundamentals of theology is particularly evident, especially regarding the essentials of belief (*iman*) used by Nursi and his insistence on repeating them with different expressions. In this context, Gülen is also among those who strongly emphasised prophethood in the last period. Gülen analyses the matter when asked why this is felt to be necessary:

The Western world lacked divine values so they employed different thoughts, such as rationalism, positivism and other similar thoughts in the name of science, to fill this gap. Especially in the Middle Ages this approach was quite apparent and with the Renaissance it was developed and it gained significant importance and attention. One of the main results of this approach is secularism, separation of religion and science. According to this new understanding, Christianity turned out to be a system where only moral issues were

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<sup>178</sup> Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 56.

<sup>179</sup> The published doctorate thesis entitled *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari: 19. Yuzyil Sonu 20. Yuzyil Basi* [The Search for Innovation in Islamic Theology: The End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – The Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century](Istanbul: Isam Yayinlari, 2008) of M. Sait Özervarlı constitutes an example of these types of works. For his relevant other works see: Özervarlı, “Attempts to Revitalize Kalam in the Late 19th and early 20th Centuries,” *The Muslim World* 89, 1 (1999): 90-105; Özervarlı, “Transferring Traditional Islamic Disciplines into Modern Social Sciences in Late Ottoman Thought: The Attempts of Ziya Gokalp and Mehmed Serafeddin,” *The Muslim World* 97, 2 (2007): 317-330; Özervarlı, “Alternative Approaches to Modernization in the Late Ottoman Period: İzmirli Ismail Hakki’s Religious Thought Against Materialist Scientism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, 1 (2007): 77-102.

<sup>180</sup> Mustafa Sabri Efendi, *Mawqif al-Aql wa al-Ilm wa al-Alam min Rabb al-Alamīn* (Beirut: Daru Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1981), IV/3-280. The author dedicated a major part of this volume to prophethood. The topic of miracles is especially explained in detail. There are comprehensive responses to modernists like Muhammad Haykal who claim the Qur’an is the only miracle of Prophet Muhammad and rejects the Prophet’s physical miracles. Also see: Faruk Terzic, “The Problematic of Prophethood and Miracles: Mustafa Sabri’s Response,” *Islamic Studies* 48, 1 (2009): 5-33.

discussed and was a protector of such values. Therefore, the religion and the institution of prophethood that has been conveying the message that comes with religion were all devalued. Those who were not able to stay within the boundaries God has placed, have sanctified science and scientific knowledge and have denied religion and religious values by claiming them to be irrational. By looking at it from the angle of Western history, this argument could be based on some concrete evidence and might seem to have valid points, but unfortunately the same argument has also found space in our (Islamic) belief system and has been imitated without considering the importance of religion and the significant differences between the two religions. In past years, I have used the analogy of gallows to elaborate the issue. Although not deserved, the gallows established for others have been used to devour our religion, beliefs and culture.<sup>181</sup>

Gülen stated that, at this time when respect for the prophetic institution has disappeared and religious values are being opposed, these issues need to be constantly revisited, otherwise the mending of such damage would not really happen. In fact, Gülen, underlining the importance of the issue and responding to the critiques on the matter, claims that the idea of elaborating on an issue from different perspectives is a Quranic method. Thus, according to Gülen, with rational and logical evidence of the position that the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets hold in our lives, we need to remember their status and keep them alive in our lives. Otherwise, if we do not give this matter due importance and consistent attention in different ways, we will go astray.<sup>182</sup>

In the modern period, although the classical understanding of prophethood has been sustained, new approaches and understandings have been developed. The first main argument that attracts attention during this period is scholars emphasising that prophethood in Islam is different and superior to the understanding of it in other religions. In other religions, prophets are seen as beyond humankind and have been given a position where, in some cases, they are regarded as gods. On the other hand, in Islam, prophets are clearly known to have limits, like other humans.<sup>183</sup> Shiblī supports this idea by giving the example of the declaratory phrase uttered upon entering Islam (*shahadah*), which states that the Prophet Muhammad is firstly God's servant and then that he is the Messenger of God, indicating that prophethood comes

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<sup>181</sup> Gülen, *Sohbet-i Canan*, 55-56.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 57-58.

<sup>183</sup> Qur'an 4:172, 6:50, 7:188, 41:6.

after servanthood.<sup>184</sup> The following opinion propounded by Muhammad Iqbal also underlines the significance and difference of the Islamic perspective on prophethood:

The birth of Islam is the birth of inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings; that, in order to achieve full self-consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Qur'an, and the emphasis that it lays on nature and history as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality. The idea, however, does not mean that mystic experience, which qualitatively does not differ from the experience of the prophet, has now ceased to exist as a vital fact.<sup>185</sup>

According to contemporary scholars like Shiblī, Islam has shown that physical miracles are not essential to accept prophethood and the Divine Message. Due to the expectations of people, prophets have shown miracles throughout history. Whenever people asked for similar phenomenon, the Qur'an has urged the Prophet to reject such requests.<sup>186</sup> Rashid Rida states the same fact by saying the Prophet's prophethood is evident with scientific and concrete knowledge valid for all times, so it is not appropriate to present his prophethood by only drawing attention to physical miracles and extraordinary events.<sup>187</sup> On the other hand, since it does not imply any rejection of miracles and gives more emphasis to the importance of the Qur'an, Gülen's similar perspective on the matter is more conservative, moderate and falls within the borders of the *ahl al-sunnah* understanding:

Turning the mountains into gold, changing the flow of rivers, turning deserts into gardens of paradise, making a path through the sea and walking through it or having a table of food come down from heaven, are all extraordinary events, but not the Prophets' main goal and actual mission. It is true that it is the Qur'an itself that mentions all these kinds of miracles as part of their mission. However, these miracles need to be seen as minor events that are not the actual main orbit of prophethood. They happened with the will of God which was to

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<sup>184</sup> Shiblī, *Ilm-i Kalam-i Jadīd*, 118-120 (taken from Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 112). While Rashid Rida explains the notions of revelation and prophethood in his work, he delves into their place in Christianity under a special sub-heading and makes a comparison using Christian sources. Rashid Rida, *al-Wahy al-Muhammadī* (Beirut: Muassasatu Izz al-Din, 2006), 95-98.

<sup>185</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought Islam* (Malaysia: Masterpiece Pub., 2006), 143. Similar to Iqbal, Muhammad Abduh says "the door of prophethood has closed as humanity reached its maturity and perfection" Muhammad Abduh, *Risala al-Tawhīd*, 106. Philip Hitti's following statement is also likely to be in line with both Iqbal and Abduh: "Islam, too, in its original form is the logical perfection of Semitic religion." Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 8; Muhammad Hamīdullah, *Islam Peygamberi*, 29.

<sup>186</sup> Shiblī, *Ilm-i Kalām*, 118-119 (taken from Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 112).

<sup>187</sup> Rida, *al-Wahy*, 115.

confirm the Prophets' message and to convince the person at hand or the people who were addressed with the message, and lead them to genuine submission.<sup>188</sup>

An interesting recent development is the perception of prophethood as an “internal natural aptitude,” “inner faculty” and “capability” as opposed to the classical understanding of the institution of prophethood as one based on divine revelation and selection. Mawlana Shiblī's opinion that prophethood is not randomly granted, but rather given to people after specific training and possessing certain qualities, is based on classical scholars' understanding of the notion of *nubuwwa*, such as Ibn Hazm, al-Ghazzālī, al-Rāzī and Waliyyullah Dihlawī. He states:

God equips some individuals with special faculties and abilities that will not be found in some other individuals. Amongst these spiritual faculties is the *quwwa al-qudsiyya* (sacred faculty) otherwise known as the *malaka al-nubuwwa* (faculty of prophethood), which pertains to purifying the self and moral and spiritual purification. The person equipped with this faculty will influence others to undertake spiritual growth. Unseen secrets of creation will be revealed to this person without having to train under other people. This is why no one can deny the truth of prophethood. As a matter of fact, the illiterate Prophets' (*ummī*) authority and power in eloquence, poetry, speech and expression; superiority in various other sciences and innovations; ability to shape world history with their guidance and directions; prevailing principles and methodologies in values and philosophy, over that of philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, all are proofs of this claim.<sup>189</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad Khan revives the philosopher's thoughts by removing the unseen component of prophethood (the vehicles of revelation between God and human being) and introducing a new concept that prophethood is only a natural process.<sup>190</sup> Rashid Rida has opposed the view of prophethood being attained through internal growth and inspiration rather than being granted externally, and equates this to denial of the unseen world. This is because prophethood is not obtained based on effort (*kasbī*) and also a prophet does not train himself for this office or know this outcome.<sup>191</sup> Ozervarli sees Rashid Rida's approach as “an approach that is more accurate and appropriate than entirely rationalizing and sacrificing the religious/unseen concepts of revelation as the most important dimension of the God-human

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<sup>188</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 138.

<sup>189</sup> Shiblī, *Ilm-i Kalām*, 118-120 (taken from Özervarli, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 112-113).

<sup>190</sup> Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 193; Sayyid Ahmad Khan, “On the Mode and Nature of Prophetic Revelation,” in *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, ed. C. W. Troll (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 280-281; Saeeda Iqbal, *Islamic Rationalism in the Subcontinent: With Special Reference to Shāh Waliullāh, Sayyid Ahmad Khān and Allāma Muhammad Iqbāl* (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1984), 163.

<sup>191</sup> Rida, *al-Wahy*, 119, 153-155, 159-162.

relationship and the Prophet as its intermediary and to ascribe it to a philosophical discourse.”

He further concludes:

Since the acceptance of prophethood as a special faculty and capacity (*malaka*) which will not be present in people of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who try to understand this office, they will never be able to decipher its relationship with the unseen world. Although this explanation might suffice the intellectual inquiries of some scholars influenced heavily by Western rationalists, it does not propose a religiously binding concept.<sup>192</sup>

Although there have been various approaches with regard to the essence of prophethood under conventional as well as Western positivist and rationalist influences, the recent significant focus has been on the necessity of prophethood. This implies the essence of prophethood was preceded as secondary matter in comparison to its necessity and proof. A similar approach can also be seen in Gülen’s works. This shift could actually be seen as a necessity due to contemporary needs, because, if the issue of the very old yet recently re-occurring concepts and ideologies that began and gradually spread among Muslim theologians, such as “solely Muslims of the Qur’an” and “the Qur’an alone is sufficient for us” is not resolved, the core beliefs and critical institution of prophecy and prophethood would suffer and it might even pave the way to more serious problems, such as denial of divinity. Gülen, aware of this danger, felt the need to persistently focus on the notion of prophethood and its proof. He strived to establish a sound understanding of prophethood in his works by emphasising the proofs of prophethood, reasons as to why they are sent, missions, characteristics, the relationship between revelation and reason, as well as the attributes of prophets. In this regard, his important work on *sīrah*, *Sonsuz Nur*, entirely revolves around proving prophethood and reads the life of the Prophet on a foundation of *kalām*.

### 2.3.1 Approaches to Prophethood in the Modern Era and Gülen’s Stance

The recent scholarly approach on the topic of prophethood has primarily focused on the need, necessity and proof of prophethood. From this point of view, as a scholar who has works in *sīrah* as well as the new *ilm al-kalām*, Shiblī thoroughly examines the arguments raised against prophethood in the early theologian al-Rāzī’s work *al-Matālib al-Aliya*.<sup>193</sup> The main defence against the fundamental argument of ‘reason/logic is sufficient and thus prophethood is not required’ has been: Although human logic has the ability to distinguish between good and evil, this alone is not sufficient to make a person happy. Human beings need guidance on

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<sup>192</sup> Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 114.

<sup>193</sup> Shiblī, *Ilm-i Kalām*, 66-67 (taken from Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 114). Compare with Rāzī, *al-Matālib al-Aliya min al-Ilm al-Ilahī* (Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut: 1987), VIII/87-92.

issues that are beyond the comprehension of reason to attain happiness in this world and the afterlife. These guides can only be prophets who have certainty of knowledge as a result of divine revelation. Regardless of the intelligence of human beings, they cannot deprive themselves of the enlightenment of prophethood.<sup>194</sup> Muhammad Abduh summarises the need for prophethood in two concise points: the first being the desire for immortality (*baqa'*), which is accepted by all religions and philosophers; and second being a need for noble manners, virtues and values to live as a society.<sup>195</sup> Some theologians have expressed the idea that philosophical systems cannot replace the functions of prophethood and have opposed the idea that belief in God, the need to exalt and show gratitude to God, and even the concepts of the afterlife and Islamic laws, can be established through reason alone. This is because revelation, as a source in terms of accuracy and effectiveness, is much more superior to reason, which is based on human knowledge and ideologies. The philosophical ideologies are not only insufficient and hard to understand, but also do not comprise worship rites and other devotional aspects.<sup>196</sup>

In addition, it is interesting to see that scholars in the new-*kalām* period have shown the Prophet's practices, indisputable success during his life, and his character, as the greatest proof of his prophethood. His ability to establish fine principles on religion, divinity, the afterlife, etiquette and civilisation, without receiving any philosophical or theological education, which cannot be achieved by any philosopher, lawgiver or leader, is proposed as proof of this. Furthermore, his ability to transform the lifestyles of a society submerged in ignorance, violence and oppression to sublime morals and virtue is viewed as an undeniable fact and proof.<sup>197</sup> According to Shiblī, the practices, individual and collective achievements of all prophets are clear concrete proofs that make it unnecessary for people to look for further theoretical evidence. A person of sound conscience will believe and follow the prophets' legacies and practices without the need for unnecessary research and investigation. In this

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<sup>194</sup> Abduh, *Risala*, 80-83; İzmirli, *al-Jawāb al-Sadīd fī Bayan Din al-Tawhīd* (Ankara: Tadqiqat wa Ta'lifat Islamiyya, 1339/1341), 29-34.

<sup>195</sup> Abduh, *Risala*, 84-94.

<sup>196</sup> Rida, *al-Wahy*, 85-86. See Seferta's article, "The Doctrine of Prophethood," for comprehensive information of Abduh and Rashid Rida's views on prophethood.

<sup>197</sup> Shiblī, *Ilm-i Kalām*, 66-67 (taken from Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 115); Kharbutī, *Tanqīh*, 300-301; İzmirli, *al-Jawab*, 40-45. While Muhammad Iqbal prefers to clearly show the need for prophets through demonstrating the difference before and after Prophet Muhammad (Iqbal, *Rumuz-i bi-Khodi*, 20-21, taken from Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 115), İzmirli emphasises that his life and character are his main focus as a proof (İzmirli, *Yeni Ilm-i Kelam*, 1/17).

regard, he explains how people accept prophethood through Shiblī's analogy of a person or hungry baby eating the given food or milk, without inquiring about its sustenance.<sup>198</sup>

Although it might be argued that the recent approaches to prophethood might have been similar to the classical era and even the early *kalāmīc* discourses, the concept of prophethood has recently regained primacy in theology after a period of stagnation during *mutaakhhirūn*.<sup>199</sup> On the other hand, along with the changes in thought and ideologies after the enlightenment, the heavy criticism of Islam and specifically of the Prophet by the Orientalists, has led to an increased focus on prophethood in which Islam is distinguished from other religions. Thus scholars, endeavoured to display Islam's superiority by emphasising the place of prophethood within it. In the meantime, the denial of revelation and prophethood by modern sciences and philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, rooted in the West, gave rise to a rigid secularism whose impact was also felt in the Islamic world. The actual problem or possibly threat that arises with such ideologies is not the existence of a Creator, but rather a system of belief that is based on divine commandments and revelation. In truth, throughout human history, people have always accepted some sort of belief system. The increasing commonality of such ideology has led people to think that all issues can be resolved through reason, thus encouraging them to deny divine knowledge. As a result, the real struggle and challenge in the Islamic world has been against ideologies such as positivism and deism that simplify and exclude religion. This situation threatened the very foundation of Islamic belief and led Muslim scholars to promote as much interest and belief in the need for prophethood, as they do in the existence of God.

Some scholars (such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan) followed the thinking of Islamic philosophers in perceiving prophethood through the positivist and rationalist lenses of the age, believing it to be a natural and innate faculty, whilst ignoring the metaphysical and spiritual aspects of it. Although this is not an accepted approach, it is fair to say that almost all scholars accepted the limitations of human intelligence. Thus, their acknowledgement of the need for a superior intelligence (revelation and prophethood), over the sum of individual minds is quite appropriate. The dilemma facing the current era's people in pursuit of science and rationality attests to this reality. Moreover, in addition to theoretical proofs, the pursuit of proving

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<sup>198</sup> Shiblī, *Ilm-i Kalām*, 66-67 (taken from Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 115). Shiblī also references Ghazzālī for this view. (Compare Ghazzālī, *al-Munqiz*, 598-600.) Similarly, according to Filibeli, "It is unnecessary to show detailed proofs for prophethood. A natural proof of the need for prophethood is the status that prophets held in a vast area of history. It is unnecessary and a waste of resources to look for further investigation when the leading individuals have affirmed and excelled through them for many thousands of years of history." (Ahmet Hilmi Filibeli, *Uss-i Islam: Hakaik-i Islamiyye'ye Mustenid Yeni Ilm-i Akaid* (Istanbul: Hikmet Matbaa-i Islamiyesi, 1332), 42). Also compare Filibeli's opinion with Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 18-27.

<sup>199</sup> Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 170; Seferta, "The Doctrine of Prophethood," 139.



prophethood through the practical and personal achievements of prophets, particularly that of the Prophet Muhammad's, and the acknowledgement that the gap they leave cannot be filled by mere leaders or philosophers, is another question that is keenly debated during this period.

In this regard, Gülen's focus on the personality of the Prophet Muhammad, his life and practical achievements, or in other words the transformation that he led and the civilisation he established in the pursuit of proving prophethood, draws parallels with the aforementioned approach. While this can be seen in many of his works, books such as *İnancın Gölgesinde* [In the Shade of Faith], *Asrin Getirdiği Tereddütler* [Questions and Answers] and *Sonsuz Nur* especially, use this method to prove prophethood and establish humanity's need for prophets. It is important to note that Gülen's books are not theological or academic works written as part of the *kalām* discipline. Thus, they do not have a structured or comprehensive analysis of prophethood, which is common to classical and modern theological works. Despite this, the definition, proof, evidence, need for prophethood and the attributes of prophets are discussed in detail. While these works do not demonstrate the intention to write a theological work, they comprehensively address the problems and issues of the era, and the delicate position of prophethood is restored to more solid foundations. Although the essence and proof of prophethood is discussed in detail through his work *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru* [Towards Our Own World], the aforementioned works specifically focus on the position of the Prophet Muhammad, his personality, life and practical achievements, to prove his prophethood and constitute an effective response to various criticisms.

Another focus of attention in the recent era has been the general approach to miracles, and in particular those of a physical nature (*hissī/kawnī*). Although some individuals, influenced by modern-day scientific understanding and beliefs, claim the impossibility of miracles, it would be a mistake to think this is the majority opinion. However, almost all scholars have agreed that physical miracles do not play a major role in Islam; therefore, there is no great need to prove the essential tenets of belief through such miracles. While there are some who derive evidence from the classical theologians, the notion that '20<sup>th</sup> century individuals can make their own judgments using reason and logic' became the main driver of scholars during this period. In this context, Gülen's thoughts provide an important perspective and in a way reiterate a balanced mainstream Muslim's understanding of the discussion. Although Gülen classifies the physical miracles as secondary, he does not see them as unnecessary or insignificant; on the contrary, he employs them as important proofs. Furthermore, the aforementioned quote from *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru* gives important hints as to his insight and ideas and fundamental approach to the subject. This is because this book has a critical

standing in his own understanding of Islamic thought's revival and activism. On the other hand, the detailed explanations of the miracles in his various books, including *İnancın Gölgesinde*, *Asrin Getirdiği Tereddütler* and *Sonsuz Nur*, adds to its importance and affirms his perception of the idea as an undeniable truth. Furthermore, the fact that Said Nursi, one of Gülen's influences whom he values greatly, dedicated space to more than 300 miracles of the Prophet<sup>200</sup>, shows that miracles play a significant role in their proofs of prophethood.

It is notable that this is also a period when Islamic scholars have made great efforts to deal seriously with their critics and to clarify those areas which have attracted robust criticism. It is interesting to see an emphasis on the need for a different approach with some new content in some areas of theology (*kalām*), *sīrah*, etc. The works in the field of theology, including human rights, polygamy and slavery, and the focus on the criticism of the private life of Islam's Prophet by Western researchers, are important examples of this new approach. Shiblī stands out as an exemplary figure in this regard. It was also Shiblī who attempted to link *kalām* with the *sīrah* discipline (*kalāmisation of sīrah*). According to him, it is not correct to perceive religion as merely belief in God. Prophethood is an important part of religion. As a result, the questions raised concerning the Prophet, who is the recipient of divine revelation, including all criticisms relating to his personality and life, i.e. politics, slavery, marriage and practices, should be focussed on and addressed by theologians.<sup>201</sup>

It is almost impossible not to agree with Ozerverli's fair identification of the latest trend. According to him, the trend of the recent modern era is parallel in essence and scope to the "usūl al-din" aspect of the *kalām* discipline. The science of *kalām* treats Islam as an integral entity and reaches decisive conclusions on almost every topic. Thus, every subject that is within the sphere of Islam is the concern of theology. The expression *al-fiqh al-akbar* (roughly meaning the greater science, understanding, insight, knowledge) by Abū Hanifa to describe this discipline in the early eras, is significant in this regard. Even though other Islamic sciences' perception may propose technical and detailed solutions to various issues, they cannot establish the purpose and philosophy of Islam on that particular topic. Since religion is not a philosophy or ideology, theology, which strives to establish the essentials of the religion, cannot remain as a discipline that deals only with philosophical concepts. It addresses the problematic matters of each era and draws connections with other Islamic disciplines. Therefore, scholars such as Mahmud Shaltut, Mahmud Aqqād and Said Nursi of the modern era have produced works that establish Islam's integrity from a holistic point of

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<sup>200</sup> Nursi, *Mektubat*, 93-252.

<sup>201</sup> Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, trans. Yusuf Karaca (Istanbul: İz Yayincılık, 2010), 36, 84-85.

view. They viewed it as a necessity in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and recommended for the essentials of religion, whether it is from belief to practices, or morality and ethics to legal and economic order. With the increased socio-economic problems of today, there is an even greater need for such works.<sup>202</sup>

In this regard, Gülen can be viewed as a continuation of the aforementioned tradition, and his assessments can be considered as evaluating *sīrah* on the foundation of theology. In other words, Gülen's methodology is an extension of the Islamic tradition, since the early generations evaluated the problems of the age, not just through the lens of a single discipline, but rather through a holistic approach that addresses problems by employing all types of rationale appropriately and, if occasion arises, by combining all relevant sciences. That is why his works attempt to remove doubts and reject criticisms by establishing a holistic understanding of *sīrah* and the Prophet's life from the *usūl al-din* perspective of *kalām*, on the grounds of a well-established understanding of prophethood. This is necessary as in the modern era individuals perceive the office of prophethood as doubtful and problematic, given the aforementioned ideological tendencies. In this regard, it is of critical importance first to remove these wrong perceptions of the life of the Prophet and second to deal with other aspects regarding prophecy and his being a role model.

Before moving on to Gülen's understanding of prophethood, it is necessary to state the reasons for dwelling on these general theological discussions in analysing his approach to the *sīrah* genre in this thesis.

First of all, from the holistic perspective of Islamic sciences, a correct *sīrah* work and analysis requires a correct understanding of prophethood. The discipline of *sīrah* is based on the life and doctrines of the Prophet of Islam. Thus, a focus on prophethood (in particular Muhammad's prophecy) constitutes one of the main pillars in Gülen's conceptualisation of the God-universe-human relationship. According to Gülen, prophets in general, and the Prophet Muhammad and his doctrines in particular, are the key to unlocking the mysteries and secrets of this concept. They have taught human beings the meaning and purpose behind creation in the most beautiful manner. These considerations establish the need to define Gülen's perspective in this study. In addition, as in the aforementioned exegesis and theological studies, due to being influenced by certain ideologies, the focus on trends in the modern period *sīrah* writings makes it necessary to cover these topics.

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<sup>202</sup> Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 151.

In addition, Gülen's evaluation of *sīrah* concepts, such as the attributes of the prophets, plays a central role, which is evident in *Sonsuz Nur* and will be clearly emphasised in this study. The attribute of *fatānah* (prophetic intellect) is the central concept in Gülen's *sīrah* works. In this regard, it is necessary to clarify and establish the place of the attributes of the Prophet in the creed of Islam, which are studied in theology under the topic of prophethood. There is no need to emphasise the significance of having a detailed discussion on these topics to reach an accurate understanding of prophethood. However, I have evaluated this topic through footnotes and references while having a general approach and summarising what is necessary for this study.

Finally, various concepts that Gülen uses to underpin his *sīrah* work can be attributed to the field of theology. In the pursuit of enhancing the depth and breadth of this topic, the PhD thesis entitled *Kalāmiyat-i Sira*<sup>203</sup> not only provides a strong support for my hypothesis, but also demonstrates the existence of scholarly works on the relationship between theology and *sīrah*. Abdulhamit Birisik highlights the thesis, which examines topics relevant to *kalām* that started to be discussed within *sīrah* works and compares Mansurpuri's *Rahmatan li al-Alemin* with Shiblī and Sayyid Nadwī's *Sīrat al-Nabi*:

According to this study, after the Western scholar's works generally on Islam and particularly on the *sīrah*, some fundamental topics such as divinity, prophethood and miracles, which would normally be classified as subjects of theology, have been the focus of *sīrah* studies. This was because the Westerners perceived the life of Jesus as a divine concept, whereas the Muslims viewed it as prophethood. Thus when Muhammad and Jesus are compared, the topic of prophethood would naturally be discussed in depth. And miracles were considered to have a deep connection with divinity as well as prophethood. So, the aforementioned PhD paper examines in detail theological topics that methodologies covered in *sīrah* works.<sup>204</sup>

Furthermore, in introducing Shiblī's *Sīrat al-Nabi*, Birisik draws attention to the sub-heading *Ilm-i Kalām ki Haysiyet sey Siret ki Zaruret* [The Need for *Sīrah* from the Perspective of *Ilm-Kalām*], which was unfortunately not found in my translations. Birisik states "this title shows us how the science of theology is linked to the science of *sīrah*."<sup>205</sup> As already discussed,

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<sup>203</sup> Muhammed Cavit Ahter, "Kelamiyat-i Siret: Sibli Nu'mani, Seyyid Suleyman Nedvi aor Kadi Muhammed Suleyman Selman Mansurpuri key Efkar ka Tekabūli Caize" (Doctorate Thesis, Islamia University, 2004).

<sup>204</sup> Abdulhamit Birisik, "Siret Kitaplarindaki Konu Degisiminin Sebepleri: Hint Alt Kitasi Ornegi," in *Turkiye'de Siret Yaziciligi: Siret Sempozyumu-I* (Ankara: TDV Yay., 2012), 579-580. See same article with slight differences: "Hint Alt Kitasinda Son Uc Asir Siret Kitaplarinda Gorulen Muhteva Degisiminin Nedenleri" *Uludag Univ. Ilh Fak Dergisi*, 20(2) (2012), 21-52.

<sup>205</sup> Birisik, "Siret Kitaplarindaki Konu Degisimi," 584.

Shiblī has a significant place in the formation of the new *ilm al-kalām*, and his book *Ilm Kalām al-Jadīd* [New Theology] is a good testament to this. He has displayed awareness of the dangers posed to the essential beliefs and creed of Islam through topics relating to *sīrah*. Although it might be difficult to state that Gülen understood the latest developments and hence has written an academic work in response to these trends, it would not be incorrect to claim that he has pursued a similar method that would address the existing problems and overcome misunderstandings and doubts. It is for these reasons that *kalām* and the historical developments of theology have been discussed in detail, with a view to understanding more accurately Gülen’s approach to *sīrah*.



## CHAPTER 3: *NUBUWWA* – PROPHETHOOD – IN GÜLEN’S THOUGHT

In this chapter, I will establish the main topics and basic arguments of Gülen’s approach to prophethood, and compare them with the previously mentioned theological schools of thought and individuals.

### 3.1 God, the Universe, Humans and Prophethood

The most interesting and fundamental part of Gülen’s works on prophethood is his conceptualisation of the God-universe-human relationship. He bases his arguments on this premise and his focus on prophethood and prophets (human) constitute one of the main pillars of this classification. In this classification the “human” category is used as a substitute for prophethood, representing the highest form of communication between the Creator and the created, as well as the culmination of the relationship between God and human beings, which takes place through revelation and prophethood. While God wanted to be recognised through His creation, the material world and events, He also wants the rules pertaining to the universe (*Sunnat Allah*: the laws of nature created by God) and also the laws relevant to religious commands, to be followed and known through revelation and the revealed books.<sup>206</sup> It is important to perceive the truths that emanate from the same source as an integral entity to accurately see the full picture. According to Gülen, the most important characteristic of the prophets, who he says are “the masters of material and spiritual progression”<sup>207</sup> and their transcendent aspect that distinguishes them from others, is their ability to correctly interpret events and creation, strike a good balance around the human-universe-God relationship, and embody the appropriate place of the human within this trilateral relationship.<sup>208</sup>

In fact, since the beginning of creation, human beings have sought answers to questions such as “Who am I? Where am I from? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is my purpose in life?” This inquiry is a necessary part of being human, and it is natural to seek answers to such challenging, as well as critical, questions. Although many philosophers and sociologists have proposed solutions to such questions, the propositions are viewed as inadequate and the pursuit has continued. From an Islamic perspective, as the creator of the universe, God will not abandon humans carelessly to such confusion in face of this mystery. Gülen highlights that these questions have been answered by prophets through revelation (and hence prophethood). These answers also provide an insight into the depth of character seen in the prophets’, which is what he underlined as their most important transcendent aspect. In various

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<sup>206</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 130.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 142, 155.

verses of the Qur'an, it is stated that humanity will be guided through the prophets, who are sent in every era as guides.<sup>209</sup> In a similar way, the sublime purpose of creation, and the reason for sending many prophets, is expressed through other verses.<sup>210</sup> According to Gülen, the prophets, specifically the final prophet, Muhammad, explain what seems to be a mystery in a detailed manner, by helping others to comprehensively perceive the creation, events and nature as a whole, and thus recognise the place of the human in this equation. They do this by helping human beings recognise their place as vicegerents of God using a holistic approach to the God-universe-human relationship, teaching them to understand the dual aspects of being human<sup>211</sup>, with its hidden-displayed or inner-outer feelings, material-spiritual, physical-metaphysical and other subtle faculties, while acknowledging that order, harmony, unity and all living things come from a single source.<sup>212</sup>

Muslim scholars have expressed the need for prophets to be guides and role models in understanding the purpose of life and attaining happiness in this world and the afterlife, which would otherwise be impossible to grasp.<sup>213</sup> In a similar way, it is stressed that every prophet is responsible for teaching the pathways to happiness in this world and the afterlife, which can be summarised as: 1. The purpose of creation; 2. The place and responsibility of the human within creation; 3. The obligations of human beings towards God and other humans; and 4. Teaching the paths to happiness and the nature of being human.<sup>214</sup> The place and responsibility of the human being within creation can also be clearly observed in these points. While there was an emphasis on this concept in the classical period, the modern reformists, such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, have also focused on prophethood in their works and, according to some academics, have even established prophethood and its teachings as the main theme of their reform movements.<sup>215</sup> Despite this, their evaluation with

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<sup>209</sup> Such as Qur'an 16:36.

<sup>210</sup> Qur'an 51:56, 23:115, 67:2.

<sup>211</sup> Gülen talks about two universal, holistic and comprehensive perspectives: One is to perceive God-universe-human using a holistic approach and the second is to have a comprehensive understanding of human beings through their inner-outer, physical-metaphysical faculties. According to him, prophets are masters in explaining both in great detail.

<sup>212</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 142, 164, 172-173, 114-115, 118, 119-120; Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/221-223. Gülen express that the human being should be viewed from a holistic perspective, stating: "The human does not only comprise of an intellect and brain; he also has a heart, spirit, and subtle faculties, all of which require satisfaction. Thus, Prophets understand the desires of human beings and address all of these faculties. They communicate the religion in a way that does not lack in any aspect pertaining to the human, removing doubts and unfolding mysteries and helping the addressee to reach the true faith in the Oneness of God, which ultimately is the purpose of creation"(ibid, I/112).

<sup>213</sup> Such as Abduh, *Risala*, 80-94.

<sup>214</sup> Ibrahim Canan, *Peygamberimiz'in Tebliğ Metotları* (Istanbul: Yeni Akademi Yayınları, 2006), 33.

<sup>215</sup> Seferta, "The Doctrine of Prophethood," 139. Almost half of Muhammad Abduh's work, *Risāla al-Tawhīd*, is based on prophethood and Prophet Muhammad's prophecy, and the tendency of reinterpretation of other scholars on these concepts according to the needs of the time. Likewise, Rashid Rida's *al-Wahy al-Muhammadi* completely focuses on proving prophethood.



regard to the God-universe-human trilogy is very limited. However, it is important to carefully analyse Gülen's emphasis on the Prophets' holistic interpretation of events relevant to the universe and human faculties, within an integral and inclusive framework, by placing this understanding at the core of his works. Thus, Gülen's approach to prophethood, which will be examined in this section, considers the role of the intellect and scientific findings, in a way that is appropriate to methods of modern research based on science and philosophy.

Gülen insists that, despite advancements in technology and sciences, human understanding of the universe and events transcending the natural world is limited. Prophets, on the other hand, instead of relying on the trial-and-error method, have been supported by revelation and especially equipped with the necessary gifts and talents, to be able to explain the meaning of such truths thousands of years ago. By emphasising the All-Knowing and All-Powerful presence everywhere and in everything, prophets have redirected humans to the only salvation, which is the Oneness of God. Gülen's thoughts on this are interesting to read:

It is difficult to say that science has proposed valid explanations of the human-universe-God (divinity) trilogy, which the prophets gave hundreds, even thousands of years ago. In this way science is still at a primitive stage and making slow progress...It continues to question its own findings, protects its partial truths by making certain assumptions and cannot transcend its limited boundaries of examination of particular things (*al-juz'ıyyāt*). We could say that it (science) has not been able to establish any propositions about the aforementioned topics that it did not have to change and has not been successful in arriving at absolute truths. Its findings are only imperfect material for people who pursue these truths and a bonus for the researchers of the field.<sup>216</sup>

Gülen's purpose is not to mock or devalue science and its results; on the contrary, he has shown his appreciation and respect for science and its findings countless times. His real purpose is "to remind us that the most important source of knowledge (prophethood) is most accurate, perfect, comprehensive and undeceiving, yet ignored in our day" and to underline that "this source of prophethood has always stayed fresh except for some distorted and altered scriptures."<sup>217</sup> He also addresses the claims and objections to prophethood that suggest

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<sup>216</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 143, 148

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, 143-144. Also see Gülen, *Mefkure Yolculuğu*, 118-125 for his comments on revelation as an undeceiving source as opposed to scientific findings and the transfer and Islamisation of science. In the modern era, there are many scholars like Ismail Hakki who state that the Qur'an should not be treated as a science book or studied with an extremely scientific approach. This opinion resembles Gülen's views. For instance according to İzmirli, sciences are based on experience (experimental) and thus subject to change. However, the Qur'an (the knowledge that comes through prophethood is in the same category), since it has a Divine origin (referring to it as *azalī* and *abadī*, pre-existent without beginning and eternal without end), establishes a truth that transcends time and hence is not subject to distortion. Hence, it would not be appropriate to attempt reconciliation of the

discoveries have only been made regarding the order and harmony in creation and existence using the latest technologies of recent times by stating that these findings were also succinctly voiced in the very early days but were neglected.<sup>218</sup>

The second important function of prophethood that Gülen underlines when speaking of the God-universe-human trilogy and prophethood, and the place of humans in this integral existence, is that it offers a two-sided, holistic perspective. The office of prophethood and prophets establishes the relationship and harmony that exists between the universe and existence on the one hand, and human life and actions on the other. God is revealed as the source of this harmony and the responsibilities of humans towards this Being are made clear. According to Gülen, only prophets have been able to decipher most accurately and with conviction where the whole of existence, and specifically human existence, comes from and where it will go; why it came about and why it will cease. It is for this reason that prophets know best the requirements and can give the most correct information about the purpose, wisdom and rules that need to be followed on this journey of life to arrive at a good result at the end. Others (people) are in need of the messages that prophets give about such topics and have to follow them.<sup>219</sup> According to Gülen:

if people can follow this method, they will be able to fully understand the operation of the universe, the essence and unseen elements of existence, the purpose behind the mysteries of the world and find contentment in thought and feeling; a contentment that will be a result of knowing and evaluating the apparent and hidden facets of existence...and a contentment that results from grasping our place as an important part of the universe and hence blend with its natural harmony...<sup>220</sup>

Gülen also responds to the question of why there is a need for prophetic guidance in these areas. The means of knowledge and its vehicles at our disposal as humans are specific and

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verses with hypothetical knowledge that can change any time. According to him, such verses are only evidence and vehicles to give lessons and remind us of God. (İzmirli, *Yeni İlm al-Kelam*, 15-16). Although İzmirli's views may overlap with that of Gülen's in certain aspects, it is the exclusive approach attached to İzmirli's last view in his last sentence that sets Gülen apart from him and his contemporaries. That is because these verses also have other dimensions that are open to comment in line with science and technology, and even further point out the pinnacle of scientific developments. The persistent expressions of Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, regarding hypothetical knowledge not being absolute and subject to change, matches more closely with Gülen's views. According to him, hypothetical knowledge rests on assumptions and needs further examination. It is not possible for scientists to show a single unchangeable proven and absolute scientific finding over thousands of years of humanity. On the other hand, there have been many incorrect and negative hypotheses that are recorded by science. As a result, there is no necessity to have scientific dogmatism, blind acceptance and understand revelation in the light of positive sciences. (Filibeli, *Huzur-i Akl u Fende Maddiyyun Mesleki Dalaleti* (Istanbul: Himet Matbaa-i Islamiyesi, 1332), 88).

<sup>218</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 144.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 145, 149.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 145-146.

limited. It is also obvious that knowledge obtained with limited resources will be limited. So, according to Gülen,

with the knowledge available, it is not even possible to grasp the reason for our presence on this planet or to explain our relationship with the universe at even a basic level, or to explain the harmony and essence of the ecosystem on Earth, let alone to comprehend the purpose of our creation...If [the human] does not submit to a guide who knows the ins and outs and the tricks of a journey that is a total mystery for him, then he will make many mistakes and be exposed to serious difficulties in the life journey that has ups and downs, sharp corners and many uncertainties; and perhaps never discover the purpose behind his creation.<sup>221</sup>

In short, according to Gülen, the correct understanding of the book of life, a holistic approach to existence and beyond it, correct interpretation of events, having the right attitude in face of difficulties encountered throughout the journey of life, “converting pieces of data into knowledge,”<sup>222</sup> all require seeking refuge in a merciful Creator’s messengers and guides (prophets) and acting according to their instructions.

### **3.2 The Proof of Prophethood**

I previously mentioned that the approaches and trends of the modern period mainly focus on the need for prophethood and the Prophet’s characteristics, along with his practical success. In parallel to such trends, Gülen emphasises the need for and proof of prophethood. In his works *İnancın Gölgesinde*, *Asrın Getirdiği Tereddütler* and *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, he approaches this topic from different angles, using many arguments to specifically prove the prophethood of Muhammad. In the following paragraphs I will touch on these main arguments.

In general, the subject of proving prophethood within Islamic thought has been in response to the sects (such as Barāhima) rejecting prophethood, as summarised in Chapter 2. From another point of view, proving prophethood is also connected to the idea that the unending desires of the finite human will be addressed by an infinite authority, and the establishment of justice in the social sphere by means of a system that transcends the human. Also, in the classical works, the *ahl al-sunnah* theologians have used the miracles to prove and indicate the need for prophethood.<sup>223</sup> In this regard, al-Ghazzālī and al-Rāzī are scholars of the classical era who treat prophethood in separate works and use independent evidence. Apart

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 146, 149.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>223</sup> See for instance Māturidī, *Kitab al-Tawhīd*, 176.

from these two scholars' interpretations, prophethood has been treated as an extension of proving the existence of God in the classical works.<sup>224</sup>

According to Gülen, the office of prophethood is a necessity for humanity (not for God). This is because “just as the topics regarding the correct understanding of the absolute unseen (*ghayb al-mutlaq*)<sup>225</sup> require revelation, revelation ultimately requires the office of prophethood. It is for this reason that God has blessed every era, and in some eras every continent, with the presence of a prophet.”<sup>226</sup> Gülen supports his argument by using a concise statement made by Nursi: “just as the Eternally Powerful has not left an ant without a commander, a bee without a queen, He has never left humanity without prophets.”<sup>227</sup> Gülen's stance on this issue and emphasis on the wisdom behind God's sending of the prophets, which I will mention shortly, shows conformity with mainstream Muslims' understanding and distinction from other ideologies, such as the Mu'tazilites. It is also important to note the emphasis on the limits of human intellect and the need for guidance from a superior authority. This applies particularly to questions of metaphysical and theoretical topics, which is a similar approach to that of classical theologians, as well as the modern era scholars like Abduh and Rashid Rida. Furthermore, it is important to note the emphasis Gülen gives to the need for a superior authority to order divine laws and to send guides to establish order and justice in society.

The second important proof Gülen uses in proving prophethood is the wisdom of God. Following a subtle expression showing Nursi's influence on him, Gülen summarises this issue: “...God has wanted to tell us about the mysteries of Lordship and servanthood, the purpose of creation, our natural disposition (*fitra*), the place of humans on earth and the final destination.”<sup>228</sup> Consequently, because humans needed to know these things, yet were unable to understand them on their own, prophethood became inevitable. Thus his statement that “the enlightenment of humanity through specially qualified individuals should be viewed as a blessing even more important than the blessing of being created and given a status”<sup>229</sup> clearly shows he follows the path of *ahl al-sunnah*, because he describes the sending of prophets as “a blessing” and not an obligation of God.

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<sup>224</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 200-201.

<sup>225</sup> *Ghayb* is the realm beyond the physical sense. The absolute unseen is the Divine Being, including His Names and Attributes, and the worlds of the afterlife. The world of angels, jinn, spirits and other immaterial beings may also be considered as such.

<sup>226</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 130.

<sup>227</sup> Nursi, *Mektubat*, 528.

<sup>228</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 131. Compare with Nursi, *Mektubat*, 253-254.

<sup>229</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 131.

In addition to this holistic approach and the evidence put forward, Gülen’s writings contain a comprehensive discussion of the subject of prophethood, with special reference to Prophet Muhammad’s life. His arguments to prove the prophethood of Muhammad include references to his life before prophethood, the conviction of his enemies, his life after prophethood, his personal and practical achievements, the wisdom behind his marriages, his character, his reforms in every aspect of life, his predictions about the unseen and finally his miracles clearly demonstrate his views on the subject.<sup>230</sup>

### 3.3 The Purpose of Prophets

Another important point in Gülen’s thought on this subject, in addition to and slightly different from the need for prophethood and its proofs, is his emphasis on the purpose behind the sending of the prophets, and especially his emphasis on their fundamental missions (general structure) actually being the same for all. There may occasionally be differences in detail relating to secondary issues, such as the style of worship (the spirit and essence of worship is always the same for all prophets<sup>231</sup>) and rules on actions pertaining to daily life, but the fundamental principles, including the oneness of God (*tawhīd*)<sup>232</sup>, prophethood and resurrection, have always been the same for all prophets. He gives the following noteworthy example on this matter: “No one can claim that there is a contradiction or opposition between the prophets regarding the issues pertaining to family law and other rules. Apart from the specific permission for the temporary marriage of the children of Prophet Adam, the prohibited marriages are the same in all religions. The forbidden marriages in the Torah are also forbidden in the Gospel and the Qur’an.”<sup>233</sup> Gülen states it is normal to see differences in small things as some people had to be temporarily forbidden specific things as a test, or compelled to carry out certain tasks as a way of punishment<sup>234</sup> since humanity has developed

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<sup>230</sup> For details on the evaluation conforming to modern era understanding and trends of prophethood, see Gülen, *İnancın Gölgesinde*, 2/21-115.

<sup>231</sup> All prophets in essence have invited people to servanthood of God. Many prophets have told their tribes and nations “Oh my people! Worship God, there is no other god but Him for you” (Qur’an 7:59, 65, 73, 85; 11:61, 84; 23:23, 32.)

<sup>232</sup> For example, the cornerstone of the prophetic mission is a call to God’s unity. Gülen explains the example of all prophets inviting people to Divine unity from different perspectives, as a proof of prophethood and the purpose behind their work, the essence of their messages being the same and all representing the same mission. As is seen in verses mentioned in the previous footnote and many other verses (like Qur’an 2:21; 7:158; 61:6; 21:25, 92; 43:45; 16:36), the Qur’an highlights that all prophets stress God’s unity. According to Gülen, the mission of each prophet begins and ends with this noble truth. Undoubtedly, this shows they convey messages they receive from God instead of voicing their own opinions. Otherwise, it is not rational for people of different characteristics and skills to live in different times and locations yet agree on the same thing. There have been differences on simple, minor issues between the philosophers who even belonged to the same school of thought and lived at the same time. This fact confirms their prophethood and shows they represent the same mission (Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/115). For detailed information on the fundamental mission of prophets, especially to rightly introduce “Divinity” as a central doctrine, see Gülen, *Cemre Beklentisi*, 155-162.

<sup>233</sup> Gülen, *Kendi İklimimiz*, 181.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

since its primitive stage at the time of Adam, until its pinnacle with Prophet Muhammad. Gülen's opinion is reminiscent of that of Abduh and Rashid Rida who said that humanity as a whole goes through the stages of infancy, youth and maturity/adulthood, or natural, cognitive and rational stages, just as an individual does.<sup>235</sup> He asserts that it is very natural to have differences between a tribal society and an established civilised state, and some differences in the rules pertaining to details cannot be denied by sociologists, economists, philosophers or theologians.<sup>236</sup> The abstract knowledge at the time of Adam was partially expanded with Moses and fully explained and developed with Muhammad.<sup>237</sup> Gülen's analysis in this regard is important for this thesis and for interfaith dialogue, which is beyond the limitations of this study:

All the religions have focused on the same fundamental principles and emphasised the same truths. Every prophet who is sent by God has continued, perfected and complemented his predecessor, repeated the messages of their seniors, contributed according to the times and laws, explained the issues that were left in brief, renewed the issues that needed new interpretations and always focused on the same fundamental topics, all according to the conditions and necessities of the time...constant changes can be observed in the secondary matters with the messages of all prophets and messengers from the first to the last, which has not distorted the essence of the message. The division and conflicts and the resulting arguments and battles between the followers of Abrahamic religions are not due to religion or its practice but the wrong interpretations, deviations, desires and ambitions of the ignorant followers of the religions, who have not stayed loyal but submitted to hatred, enmity and personal benefit. In this regard, the only way to avoid conflicts and division is through accepting faith and religion with the truths dictated by God and by making it a part of our nature.<sup>238</sup>

Consequently, the question of the fundamental purpose of prophets is raised and Gülen's response to this is:

to take the people away from the darkness of disbelief and deviation into the light of faith, to warn the people and help their hearts to recognize God, to remove doubts and hesitations by explaining the purpose of creation, to clarify the mysteries of existence and its

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 180-183; compare with Abduh, *Risala*, 147-150; Seferta, "The Doctrine of Prophethood," 144, 154.

<sup>236</sup> Gülen also reminds the following important principle in *Majalla* (The Ottoman Courts Manual-*Hanafi*) "It is an accepted fact that the terms of law vary with the change in the times." Gülen, *Kendi İklimimiz*, 181, 183.

<sup>237</sup> Gülen, *Kendi İklimimiz*, 182; Gülen, *Vuslat Mustusu*, 295-296.

<sup>238</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 188-189. For the parts that give the same meaning through a different expression, see p. 150.

interpretations, and then to enlighten the people of the time, making the world a step, a bridge, a fertile place and an exchange where they can achieve eternal life.<sup>239</sup>

The Qur'an also draws attention to the same points in various verses as it sets the framework of prophethood.<sup>240</sup>

In *Sonsuz Nur*, Gülen lists the purpose behind sending prophets in five points:<sup>241</sup>

1. Servanthood: According to Gülen, the purpose in sending prophets is the same as the purpose of creation,<sup>242</sup> which is servanthood. Prophets are first and foremost sent to demonstrate how to be a servant of God.<sup>243</sup>
2. Communication (*tabligh*): Prophets are also sent to teach religion. If prophets were not sent, humanity would never discover their responsibilities regarding matters of worship and obedience to commandments and prohibitions. It is through the teachings of prophets, that the rules about how to practice servanthood through prayer and fasting, and about, for instance, adultery and interest, are learnt.<sup>244</sup> Hence, this mission is named *risālat*. The Qur'an also emphasises this responsibility.<sup>245</sup>
3. A good example: Gülen includes being role models for their people as another reason why prophets are sent. The Qur'an also refers to prophets setting the best examples.<sup>246</sup>
4. Establishing a balance between this world and the afterlife: Prophets are sent to save people from extremes of behaviour and to guide them to a balanced path.
5. To be God's witnesses and resist making excuses: Prophets teach people not to resist God and not to claim ignorance as an excuse. The Qur'an clarifies this point in the verse: "Messengers of God bring glad tidings, but also warnings, so that people might have no argument against God after the Messengers. And God is all-Glorious with irresistible

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<sup>239</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 127. For the parts that give the same meaning through a different expression, see pp. 130, 138-139, 145, 150.

<sup>240</sup> For instance, the linkage of the verses to Prophet Moses where the addressee was Prophet Muhammad after the first and fifth verses of Chapter Abraham (Qur'an 14:1, 5) can be viewed in the same light.

<sup>241</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/85-103.

<sup>242</sup> Qur'an 51:56.

<sup>243</sup> Qur'an 21:25; 16:36.

<sup>244</sup> Gülen treats the concept that prophets come with the same message despite some differences in detailed matters to do with communication and uses the following *hadith* as evidence: "The prophets are paternal brothers, their mothers are different but their religion is one" (Bukhārī, *anbiyā*, 48; Muslim, *fadāil*, 145). Meaning the prophets are in unison with the essence of religion (Divine unity) but have differences in detailed matters. Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/89.

<sup>245</sup> Such as Qur'an 33:39; 5:67.

<sup>246</sup> Such as Qur'an 6:90; 33:21.

might, All-Wise.”<sup>247</sup> It is due to prophets that humans have learnt that nothing in the universe has been created without a reason;<sup>248</sup> everything is created for a purpose. There is wisdom and deep meaning behind existence and events.<sup>249</sup> God has conveyed everything to humanity through prophets and assured people that he will not punish them unless he sends prophets.<sup>250</sup>

As can be clearly seen from Gülen’s comments, his understanding of these issues is firmly based on theological and dogmatic points of view.

### 3.4 Prophets as Human Beings and their Inner Dynamics

When dealing with the notion of *nubuwwa*, there has also been discussion on how prophets are chosen; can they earn or acquire the position by their own effort and hard work (*kasbī*) or are they selected and appointed by God (*wahbī*)? This matter is important because it shows the value of the sources of knowledge in Islam. For this reason, prophetic knowledge, revelation (*wahy*), is accepted as absolute knowledge.

In Islamic literature, prophets are chosen people and cannot attain this state through their own work, effort or preparation. Thus, prophethood is not earned (*kasbī*), but given (*wahbī*). The majority of the theological schools of thought, which include Māturidī, Ash’ārī and Mu’tazila, perceive prophethood as a given office. This idea is shared with all religions which believe in a divine being. However, those who would deprive Islam and its heavenly nature of its divine origins have tried to explain it away with stories of natural events and claims of an internal purification process. Although this may not be directly related to the fact that prophethood is a blessing from God, it still prepares the ground for others, particularly Orientalists, to claim Muhammad’s prophethood is self-acclaimed.<sup>251</sup> Moreover, the Muslim philosophical interpretation of prophethood as “the affiliation of human intellect with active intelligence,” which is based on rationalism, also paves the way to an understanding of an effort-based proclamation of prophethood. Despite all this, according to Muslim scholars, prophethood and messengership is a divine gift, grace and blessing from God to his chosen servants.<sup>252</sup> As a matter of fact, the *wisdom* in the verse “God gives wisdom to whom He wills”<sup>253</sup> is interpreted to be prophethood, and along with many other verses<sup>254</sup> this is used as evidence that it is God-

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<sup>247</sup> Qur’an 4:165.

<sup>248</sup> Qur’an 75:36; 23:115.

<sup>249</sup> Qur’an 2:129, 151; 3:164; 62:2.

<sup>250</sup> Qur’an 17:15.

<sup>251</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 25.

<sup>252</sup> Ibn Furak, *Mujarrad*, 175-176; Amidī, *Ghayat al-Marām*, 317.

<sup>253</sup> Qur’an 2:269.

<sup>254</sup> Such as Qur’an 14:11; 6:124; 22:75, 2: 29, 151; 3:164.



given.<sup>255</sup> Gülen refers to this verse when he talks about prophethood being given to specially equipped individuals<sup>256</sup> and emphasises another meaning of *hikmah* (wisdom) as being *sunnah* along with other interpretations.<sup>257</sup>

Gülen persistently concentrates on and deals with this topic because it is not broadly dealt with in works of classical theology. He highlights the choosing and sending of prophets as “a lofty decision of God,” initially stressing their human nature and the wisdom behind their choices. According to him, the reasons behind God sending a human prophet, whose every action carries wisdom, should be studied and understood in the light of intellect and logic. He explains:

Actually, it is important that we should recognise the wisdom and reason which lay behind the messenger being one of us; hearing what we hear, taking pleasure from what we like, sharing all the suffering and pain we go through, feeling what we perceive as necessities in his soul, sharing the responsibilities his audience carries, followers being able to emulate him and follow him...in a nutshell the ability to share with the worldly, the truths that are heavenly.<sup>258</sup>

In addition to prophethood being a God-given office, it is also interesting to see Gülen’s emphasis on the concept of prophets having characteristics and traits that reflect and suit prophethood.<sup>259</sup> Also, he expresses that all prophets share the same dynamics and characteristics “apart from differences in rank.”<sup>260</sup> “God has recognized them as his intimate friends and thus has protected and prevented them from pursuing anything else other than Him.”<sup>261</sup> According to him:

no prophet has started with a plan to establish a system. In terms of messengership, God wills to choose an individual as a prophet...when the time arrives, he dictates the responsibility and prophethood of the individual to the chosen person and in return the person declares his prophethood. Thus, according to his level, every prophet comes with

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<sup>255</sup> Ibn Furek, *Mujarrad*, 175-176; al-Tabari, *al-Jami’ al-Bayān* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1988), I/557, VIII/25, XIII/190-191; Baghawī, *Maalim al-Tanzīl* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’rifa, 1987), I/116-117; Qurtubi, *al-Jami’ li Ahkām al-Qur’an* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1967), III/330, VIII/25, IX/347.

<sup>256</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 136.

<sup>257</sup> Gülen, *Kalbin Zumrut Tepeleri*, II/32-36; Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 122-123; Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/398-399.

<sup>258</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 137. Also refer to Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 120-123.

<sup>259</sup> Gülen, *Cizgimizi Hecelerken*, 253-256.

<sup>260</sup> There is an allusion to following verses: Qur’an 2:253; 17:55.

<sup>261</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/85.

revelation, lives under the shade of revelation and leaves upon its seizure. Revelation for a prophet means the same as air, water, bread and basic needs mean for us.<sup>262</sup>

Gülen states that these topics need special attention and focus for two reasons: First of all, not treating them as ordinary individuals by understanding the lofty and sublime status of prophethood and to have convincing arguments for those who want to see and perceive it this way. Secondly, to demonstrate the path and system that needs to be followed for those who are in a position to represent the prophetic legacy.<sup>263</sup>

So, how does Gülen respond to the question, ‘what are these inner dynamics and characteristics?’ He answers this question in different places, sometimes enumerating his points. For example, in *Sonsuz Nur*,<sup>264</sup> he summarises their characteristics in five points: 1) total dependence on revelation and submission to God (*rabbānīlik*),<sup>265</sup> 2) being trustworthy and asking no wage (*hasbīlik*),<sup>266</sup> 3) having complete sincerity (*ikhlas*),<sup>267</sup> 4) calling people wisely and with kindness (*maw’iza hasana*)<sup>268</sup> and 5) inviting others to unity with God (*tawhīd*).<sup>269</sup>

After expressing the great wisdom of prophets chosen by God, Gülen emphasises that for a very important and particular task, it is quite reasonable that God would not choose a random individual, but only especially equipped characters.<sup>270</sup> He comprehensively summarises the inner dynamics of prophets, whom he describes as “the treasure of the purest divine knowledge, transcending any possible excellence that our emotions, thoughts, logic and reasoning could achieve.”<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, I/104. Gülen’s evaluation is that, due to possessing the appropriate inner dynamics and special faculties, prophets are able to fully comprehend the revelation from God and convey it to people in its entirety. It is a rare approach in Gülen’s works, which examine prophets’ duty of *tabligh* from different angles, to perceive the inner dynamic of the prophets, God-given competence, ability and talent as natural requirements. On another occasion, he draws attention to the similarity of ordinary humans and other creations living and producing activity by Divine urging. Thus, prophets “internalize the messages from God with their inner dynamics and convey it to the required people as a part of their natural disposition; convey it with tireless devotion as they are commanded. In doing so, they do it without any expectations as though they are carrying out a natural action.” (For further details, see Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 135-136).

<sup>263</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/86.

<sup>264</sup> For further details, see *ibid*, I/104-116.

<sup>265</sup> Prophets are attached to God with all their faculties and live a life based on revelation.

<sup>266</sup> Prophets do not have material or spiritual expectations in return for their efforts.

<sup>267</sup> Doing everything for the sake of God and refraining from everything for the same reason.

<sup>268</sup> To explain the wisdom behind existence and creation with a gentle approach, convincing manner, without offending and by satisfying the heart and mind of the addressee.

<sup>269</sup> To invite his audience to the servanthood and Oneness of the Creator.

<sup>270</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 131.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, 133. See for a similar summary of prophets’ inner dynamics through the lenses of Gülen, *ibid*, 128-129, 132.

The qualities mentioned are closely related to the attributes of the prophets (truthfulness, trustworthiness, communication, infallibility, prophetic intelligence) that Gülen uses as the backbone of his book, *Sonsuz Nur*, in his pursuit of presenting *sīrah* on the basis of theology. This aspect and Gülen’s approach are the main focus of Chapter 4 in this study.

These dynamics that Gülen persistently emphasises are unfortunately ignored today and merely considering them (prophets) to be humanbeings can pave the way to mistaken beliefs. There have even been extremes on the other side of the spectrum by associating divinity with them. However, Gülen states that the majority of scholars believe it is natural for prophets to be chosen and given responsibility by God, and for them to perceive the service and action they are able to carry out because of their exceptional gifts, as obligatory.<sup>272</sup> Hence, a reasoned approach would be to view their lives within the above framework and perceive them as humans of special status, equipped with certain exceptional capabilities and qualities.

Lastly, Gülen gives his definition of a prophet and of prophethood in these words: “In prophethood, all inner faculties achieve the purpose for which they were created– we can also understand this as complete development – including the conscience, a pure nature, a steadfast character, a divine blessing that can convey the essence of the message, a gift: and the prophet is the special representative of this holy gift and blessing. In this regard, prophethood has also been defined as understanding things that can otherwise not be understood with human comprehension, and conveying them completely and perfectly to the relevant audience. That is why it is also considered to be the connection between the origin and the end.”<sup>273</sup>

### 3.5 Miracles and the Guidance of Prophets

The miracles performed by prophets are the leading proofs used to validate prophethood in classical theology books. There are even specific books on the essence of a miracle and it being a proof for prophethood.<sup>274</sup> A miracle is defined as an extraordinary event (*khawāriq*) that is facilitated by God through the hand of a prophet to prove his prophethood, remove the stubbornness of disbelieving people and strengthen the faith of believers.<sup>275</sup> In other words, it should defy natural laws, be impossible to imitate in normal conditions, and be superior - in the sense that it should challenge (*tahaddī*) any possible confrontations of its like. It should also be performed by the hand of a prophet. Since these are actions that are beyond the power of humans, they are considered God’s actions. Theologians generally divide miracles into two

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 135-136.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 136. To compare the classical understanding and definition of prophethood and prophet see Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 10-15.

<sup>274</sup> Such as Bāqillānī’s work entitled *al-Bayan*.

<sup>275</sup> al-Jurjani, *Kitab al-Ta’rifat* (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnan, 1985), 234.

categories - physical/existential (*hissī/kawnī*) and spiritual/rational (*ma'nawī/aqlī*). There is general consensus among them that the Qur'an is Muhammad's miracle, giving rise to a specific genre called *i'jaz al-Qur'an* regarding this aspect of the Qur'an.<sup>276</sup>

Although Mu'tazilite and philosophers have doubts about miracles being proofs for prophethood due to their very definition, the majority of theologians perceive them as such.<sup>277</sup> In addition, there have evolved new perceptions in the recent era under the influence of various ideologies, particularly positivism. While some have completely denied the physical/existential miracles,<sup>278</sup> other scholars have expressed that miracles are not irrational and accepted the previous prophets' miracles mentioned in the Qur'an. However, they have also said that Muhammad does not have any physical/existential miracles to his name, his only miracle being the Qur'an, which is rational and spiritual.<sup>279</sup> Shiblī, who has dedicated most of his book *Ilm-i Kalām Jadīd* to miracles,<sup>280</sup> points out that miracles are not explicitly beyond the natural laws and can be understood by scientific discoveries that conform with natural causes and laws. While he persistently expresses that miracles are not necessary to prove prophethood, he also does not approve of the manipulation of these events by what he calls the "new group," to deny the existence of miracles in the Qur'an.<sup>281</sup>

Undoubtedly, the possibility of miracles is the main topic of discussion among modern theologians. With the influence of scientific and rationalist perceptions of the Western world, the idea of not being able to exceed natural laws spread to the Islamic world and an effort to rationalise miracles began. With the influence of such opinions, the idea that the physical miracles used in proving prophethood in the classical works should not have priority in the modern era has strengthened.<sup>282</sup> I refer any theological discussion regarding approaches to miracles in the classical and modern period to theology books<sup>283</sup> and focus on Gülen's<sup>284</sup> approach to miracles, which he has interestingly blended with the notion of prophetic guidance.

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<sup>276</sup> Such as Bāqillānī's *I'jaz al-Qur'an*.

<sup>277</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 209-210.

<sup>278</sup> For example, Sayyid Ahmed Khan rejects miracles based on *hadith* and explains prophetic miracles in the Qur'an with great effort and forced interpretation.

<sup>279</sup> Such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida and Muhammad Husayn Haykal.

<sup>280</sup> This work's chapters pertaining to prophethood and miracles have been translated into English by C. W. Troll with the addition of some notes. See Troll, "The Fundamental Nature of Prophethood and Miracle: A Chapter from Shiblī Nu'mani's al-Kalam, Introduced, Translated and Annotated," in *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries*, ed. Troll (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982).

<sup>281</sup> Shiblī, *Ilm-i Kalām*, 72-73 (taken from Özerverlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 119).

<sup>282</sup> Özerverlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 123-124.

<sup>283</sup> For detailed information on the topic, see Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 209-222; Özerverlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 116-124.

<sup>284</sup> For a detailed discussion on miracles, see Gülen, *Inancın Gölgesinde*, II/71-103.

According to Gülen, prophets' guidance is not limited to religious or spiritual realms, but also covers worldly fields. Gülen's views on the relationship between intellect and revelation, as well as his approach towards miracles, can be deduced through these ideas. According to Gülen, prophets are "masters of material and spiritual progress, leaders of mental and inner growth, and architects of worldly and heavenly lives."<sup>285</sup> It is through this leadership that the human has been able to understand his own essence and realise his unique status. Gülen's perception is based on his treatment of the human from a holistic perspective, a perfect pattern of creation (*ahsan taqwīm*) in every aspect, rather than a mere biological being, and an important pillar of the God-universe-human integrity. I believe the approach that views prophets' guidance in a holistic manner will play a key role in changing the paradigm of modern people, whether religion contradicts science or there is a clash between rationality and revelation. In view of this, Gülen's views on rationality-revelation will be separately discussed in the next section.

Gülen's perception of prophets as masters of material progress as well as spiritual growth highlights his understanding of the prophet's miracles. In the words of Nursi, with Gülen's interpretation: "in addition to giving them the honour to engage with their spiritual depth and benefit from this blessed source, by commanding humans to follow prophets, God has shown the way of material progress, and at the very least, prepared the ground for sensitive souls to brainstorm and pursue technological developments through the given signs and hints, as a product of the different manifestations of miracles which are the very proof of their prophethood."<sup>286</sup>

Inspired by Nursi, Gülen examines, through the use of examples, how miracles, and ultimately prophets, act as guides in scientific and technological developments. In this regard, some of the examples that draw attention are:

The miraculous ship that Prophet Noah built within the shipyard of prophethood...the clothes of Prophet Abraham that, with reliance on God, became fireproof against the fiercest fire, foreshadowing the fire-resistance of asbestos and maybe even more resistant materials...the granted unknown clock of Prophet Joseph in response to his agony and pursuit of time scale...the remarkable staff of Prophet Moses that resembles modern drilling equipment and centrifuge machines...the miracle of Prophet David that forms the basis of the iron and steelworks and its fabrication...the extraordinary work of Prophet Solomon in

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<sup>285</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 133.

<sup>286</sup> Nursi, *Sozler*, 268-284; compare with Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 134; Gülen, *Kendi Ruhumuzu Ararken*, 219; Gülen, *Kur'an'ın Altın İkliminde*, 523-537; Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/176-178; Gülen, *Yol Mulahazaları*, 101-105, 212-214.

the transportation of Bilqis' throne with the image, sound and maybe even its surroundings, foretelling television, the internet and other high tech wonders of the modern era...the amazing travel of a two-month journey in a single day of this exalted Prophet that predicts airplane technology...his works indicating intervention with the metaphysical world that influenced its creation (jinn, devils...etc.) and opening the door to the pinnacle of research carried out in this field that transcends the material and metaphysical realms...in addition, the example of animal training or animal dialects (*mantiq al-hayawanat*) that shows the techniques in communicating with birds, ants and other animals...the remarkable medical treatments of Prophet Jesus that are beyond the genetics of the modern era and which include giving life to inanimate objects, curing the blind and giving life to the dead...are all commandments pertaining to creation that act as signs, implications and reminders and also invitations to study the works displayed in different fields by these chosen individuals.<sup>287</sup>

Gülen's thoughts present humanity's limitations to surpass the miracles of the prophets displayed centuries ago, regardless of the scientific and technological progress in areas transcending the human-universe and natural world. With such thoughts, he does not oppose scientific research and development; on the contrary, he emphasises that these should be carried out in the light of prophetic guidance and teachings, and should be pursued in line with the targets set through their miracles.

On the other hand, Gülen states: "it is not the responsibility of prophets to turn mountains and stones into gold, change the currents in rivers, turn the barren desert into green valleys, split the rivers and walk through them and bring food from the heavens."<sup>288</sup> As mentioned earlier, this does not mean Gülen does not accept miracles (particularly physical and existential ones). Rather, he reminds us that the true responsibilities of prophets are in giving guidance and acting as role models and witnesses to God. He demonstrates the importance he attaches to miracles through using miracles as proofs of prophethood in many of his works, his rejection of the critique of the people who deny them, discussing its scientific aspect in detail and stating that the Qur'an mentions many such miracles. The emphasis he puts on wisdom is important in providing the correct perception of its purpose and that it should not be disregarded. According to him, "while these extraordinary things are rewards and special blessings for the sincere servanthood displayed by those chosen individuals, conscious of

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<sup>287</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 134-135.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

responsibility and their stance in the path of God, they are also godly favors granted by divine will to satisfy and fulfil their people.”<sup>289</sup>

Gülen’s comments on how miracles should be understood is a response and balanced *ahl al-sunnah* approach to people who deny their existence due to shortcomings in explaining them and the influence of positivist ideologies, and only accepting the Qur’an as a miracle:

Yes, as a part of prophethood, God has changed the stones-earth into gold and coal into diamonds through their hands, given life to the dead through their breaths – but none of these are more remarkable than planting the seeds of faith in defiant souls, softening the hearts that are locked with disbelief and giving life to the sick hearts – which are manifestations of divine blessings in establishing their prophethood, and of favours in turning their hopes into certainty. In other words, the miracles are secondary issues that are created by God and extraordinary in nature, to affirm and console the prophet and encourage his audience to submit to him.<sup>290</sup>

### **3.6 Prophethood in Relation to Discussions on Science vs. Religion**

During the modern era, with the influence of positivist-materialist movements, science and rationality have become the most important concepts, whatever the topic. As a result, any teaching or worldview not fitting the mould has attracted doubt and ridicule. The Islamic world has also come under this modern influence and issues such as the reconciliation of revelation with rationality, and whether miracles are probable or not, have come to be discussed. In relation to the issue concerning the reconciliation of revelation with rationality, the discussion has revolved around whether revelation is necessary, what is its essence and true nature, and whether it is rationally possible for information from another unseen and otherworldly dimension to be delivered to certain specially chosen human beings via revelation. Regarding the issue of miracles, which is examined above, discussions have focused on whether they can be reconciled with rational and established natural causes. While there have been those who have aimed to prove the possibility of both these matters, there have also been those who have chosen to deny it or tried other methods of explanation and interpretation. Another matter of importance in the modern era is the formulation of a response to the accusations that the Islamic world has not shown sufficient sensitivity towards knowledge, science and technology. Also, that it has fallen behind by turning its back on scientific developments, while the Western world has gained power and supremacy through the consequences of its emphasis on science and technology.

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

Islamic scholars of the modern period have emphasised that, at its core and by its nature, Islam is not opposed to science, but rather perceives the sciences in a positive light. Moreover, scholars have demonstrated that Islam accords great value to science by comparing the conditions of tribes pre- and post-Islam, and have emphasised that Muslims took knowledge, science and civilisation everywhere they went.<sup>291</sup> Once again, the rejection of idolatry and superstitious beliefs of all forms and the embrace of intellect and rationality, as well as the transition from worshipping entities out of superstitious belief, to worshipping the One Creator, were achieved with Islam.<sup>292</sup> Islam removed any form of imitation except the imitation of prophets (due to their attribute of infallibility and immunity from committing sin, *ismah*) and as such encouraged reflection, deliberation and reasoning, preparing the foundation for the establishment and development of scientific and philosophical thought.<sup>293</sup>

With regard to the issue of rationality and revelation, Muhammad Abduh, a leading scholar of Muslim modernism, has claimed that the modern human does not accept any information as true, except that which can be experienced with the human senses and faculties. He perceives this distanced stance tendency to revelation as a sign of ignorance and believes this negative approach to revelation arises from a desire to escape responsibilities. According to him, just as there are different degrees of understanding and comprehension among ordinary humans, it is not reasonable to consider God's selection of prophets, who in every respect are by far superior to other humans, for the delivery of revelation as positive discrimination or anything other than absolute justice. Adversely, this perspective is nothing but an attempt to escape the truths of revelation which bring with them responsibilities, such as being deprived of certain selfish desires.<sup>294</sup>

If this is so, Muslim scholars have stated that, once the prophethood of a prophet has been established and proved, everything he conveys must be accepted. At this point the real question that is commonly debated in the contemporary period is: What will happen, as has been expressed in classical works, if a conflict or contradiction arises between rationality and revelation? The general view regarding this issue is: if there are matters that are not conceivable by the mind or seem to conflict with it from the outset, then these matters will

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<sup>291</sup> Shibli, *Ilm-i Kalām*, 201-202 (taken from Ozervarli, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 124).

<sup>292</sup> Abduh, *Risala*, 136-139.

<sup>293</sup> Farid Wajdi, *al-Islam Dinun Ammun Khalid* (Beirut: Matbaatu Daira al-Maarif al-Qarn al-Ishrin, 1932), 54-60 (taken from Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 124). Farid Wajdi links Islam's status as a universal and lasting religion to its close connection with science and knowledge and determines the following core principles: 1. Its emphasis on giving rights to reason and science; 2. Giving priority to knowledge; 3. Not giving any exceptional status to certain groups or progeny and always keeping the door for research and renewal open; 4. Systemising revival of religious thought; 5. Closing the path of gossip and unnecessary discussions (*qilu qal*) (ibid, 130-131)

<sup>294</sup> Abduh, *Risala*, 102-104.



either be subject to interpretation or the real interpretation is left to God.<sup>295</sup> In support of this, İzmirli İsmail Hakki states that, while there may be matters of religious knowledge that cannot be understood or proven as fact, there is nothing that can be rejected.<sup>296</sup> Contemporary scholars, and especially scholars of the new *ilm al-kalām*, have argued primarily that, from this perspective, Islamic teachings cannot conflict with rational and scientific findings and in this sense Islam is more open to rationality and reform compared to other religions and civilisations.<sup>297</sup> They have refrained from adopting an approach that excludes revelation and puts rationality to the fore, but instead have emphasised that rationality that excludes revelation does not benefit humanity in any way. According to this viewpoint, it has been observed that social degradation and excessive materialism in the West has resulted from the exclusion of religion and it has been stressed that alongside progressing in the sciences, incorporating religious principles within it is the correct and ideal balanced way.<sup>298</sup>

Besides defending the possibility of and need for revelation, theologians of this era have not neglected the outcomes of modern science and technology, and have attempted to interpret verses in light of the new information available and provide explanations not available in classical works. Shiblī is a good example in this respect. According to him, certain apparent expressions in the Qur'an may have deeper meanings<sup>299</sup> and uncovering these could eliminate some of the objections raised.<sup>300</sup> However, some scholars' reduction of many matters within the Qur'an to a level of basic understanding, as a result of the influence from the positivist science perspective, is the main issue of concern regarding these matters. With reference to Abduh, the theory that jinns may be a form of microbe can be used to illustrate this point.<sup>301</sup>

There have also been those like Sayyid Ahmad Khan from the recent period who have shown excessive trust in rationality and modern science, and have upheld it and scientific studies as superior to everything else. According to Khan, a religion's authenticity is based on whether it

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid, 117-118. According to Rashid Rida's determination in such contradictions, an outcome of absolute reason is preferred to outward tradition and narration. Narration is either interpreted or referred to God. (Abduh, *al-Islam wa al-Nasraniyyin* (Cairo: Dār al-Manar, 1948), 73). While Abduh accepts interpretation of the revelation by reason, he does not extol it over revelation. Thus, he differentiates from Mu'tazila, as he is not of this opinion to defend certain sects' ideology. (See and compare with Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt: A Critique of al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida* (London: The Muslim Institute, 1976), 24-25).

<sup>296</sup> İzmirli, *Yeni İlm-i Kelam*, 52.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 14-15; Abduh, *Risala*, 13-14.

<sup>298</sup> Rida, *al-Wahy*, 252-255; İzmirli, *Yeni İlm-i Kelam*, 47-50. Muhammad Iqbal is among the scholars who emphasise inadequacy of the intellect in the modern period. Özervarlı says that he expresses this thought eloquently in his poems as follows: "Our intellect cannot comprehend eternity/It makes one, a thousand with numerous struggles/It is crippled, loves tranquillity/Cannot see the inner side but falls in love with the superficial" quoted from Iqbal, *Gulshan Raz*, 15. (Taken from Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 126)

<sup>299</sup> *Ahl al-sunnah* theologians accept the Qur'an might have figurative, metaphorical and allegorical (*majaz, tashbih...etc.*) verses.

<sup>300</sup> Shiblī, *İlm-i Kalām*, 163-165, 168-169 (taken from Özervarlı, *Kelam'da Yenilik Arayislari*, 127).

<sup>301</sup> Rashid Rida, *Tafsīr al-Manar* (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1948), III/96; VII/319.

is aligned with the realities and principles of nature, or the outcomes that modern science has determined as principles of nature.<sup>302</sup> Coming from this perspective, he has excluded supernatural involvement completely and argued that everything occurs within the sphere of the natural laws, which can be comprehended with the human mind.<sup>303</sup>

With this state of affairs, where the appropriate measure for the balance between rationality and revelation is still debated and where the reasons for the slow progress of the Islamic world are questioned, Gülen's position and approach carry great significance. Starting first with the matter of the slow progress of the Islamic world which is failing to keep up with other civilisations, it is evident that Gülen and Nursi share similar convictions. The interesting fact here is the concept of *taqwa* (piety) and "the second dimension of *taqwa*," which has been identified by Nursi and supported and expanded in more detail by Gülen.

Gülen's views regarding rational/scientific developments, his concepts of prophethood based on a religious/revelation-focused perspective and his analysis of the guidance of prophets, in many ways comprise very original opinions. They also provide important arguments that may benefit those who struggle with the revelation-rationality debate and dilemma. The need for revelation for the development of one's rationality, as well as one's spirituality, should not be ignored. In this respect, Gülen's remarks provide solutions for the majority of the issues discussed, and from one aspect uniquely present the core of mainstream Muslim views:

Essentially, as long as the human mind, logic and reasoning (these can all be considered to be the same thing) accept prophethood and its merit and they can completely benefit from this rich source, from one aspect they will have the opportunity to reach the heights of their sphere and from another, they will be saved from being vehicles of deceit for others. Before all else, in this kind of acceptance, there is an act of submission to an Eternal Power and Comprehensive Knowledge who commands the whole of creation and the material world. If you like you can refer to this as the exaltation of all worldly outcomes including the products of the mind and logic, projects developed through logical explorations, investigations from different fields and experiences or as the examination of everything with revelation for the purpose of enlightening the true spirit of all consequential matters and thus make the terrestrial things (*ardī*) celestial (*samavī*). Indeed God is the creator of the mind and He is also the One who has shown the way for its development through revelation. God has opened the eyes of human beings through the mind and has given the mind a greater sphere of reasoning by allowing it to see accurately and think appropriately through revelation and

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<sup>302</sup> Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* (London: Trubner & Company, 1870), IX-X.

<sup>303</sup> Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 183-184.

thus view his comprehensive Speech (revelation) He established as His most binding sign over human being. In other words, God has turned the encompassing and uniting institute of revelation into a laboratory which connects the scattered and disorderly situations brought about by the mind and reasoning and which puts to test their comparative outcomes.<sup>304</sup>

Using this argument, Gülen persistently emphasises that humanity cannot walk successfully on this seemingly complicated material and spiritual life journey without the guidance of prophets. According to him, revelation is an elixir that protects the mind of the human being from different delusions, and prophets are all expert physicians who use this elixir in the most appropriate way. Consequently, those who follow them will be saved from deviations of the mind and form a strong understanding of the metaphysical realms beyond the physical being. As a result, they will be able to attain the furthest boundaries that can be reached by humanity in these domains. In this respect, Gülen has absolute conviction that, just as the mind, logic and outcomes realised through them cannot ever fulfil the place of revelation, no one can replace the invaluable position of the impeccable communicators of this divine revelation (prophets).<sup>305</sup>

Gülen's perspective provides important clues as to how he perceives the life (*sīrah*) of the last Prophet, as well as other prophets' lives, and helps explain why he refers to *sīrah* of the Prophet as means of solving many problems. Additionally, it gives valuable hints on how he distinguishes the prophetic intelligence (*fatānah*), which is one of the key trajectories in his attribute-based analysis of the life of the Prophet in his work *Sonsuz Nur*. From his understanding, *fatānah*, which means "prophetic intellect," is at the same time an opportunity for "overcoming the mind with the mind."<sup>306</sup> What he means by this last phrase is, I think, clarified in the above quoted paragraph.

Also, Gülen's approach, together with his previous comments on the God-universe-human concept and prophethood, with its possession of absolute knowledge, shows the primitiveness of scientific efforts in comparison to prophetic knowledge. The question of "does rationality clash with revelation?" in light of the above discussion, makes clear the intrinsic impossibility of any such clash between the two. It is appropriate to conclude this topic with the words of Gülen: "...For this reason, the responsibility and authority of teaching about the human, creation and the Creator and the right to speak, should be left to the specially equipped

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<sup>304</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 140-141.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

<sup>306</sup> For comprehensive and unique information on prophetic intelligence and the relationship between rationality and revelation, see Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 140-141, 73-85, 87, 114; Gülen, *Isigin Gorundugu Ufuk*, 10; Gülen, *Kalbin Zumrut Tepeleri*, III/244-252.

individuals (prophets), who have strong connections with God Almighty, and only they should make statements about the meaning and essence of the material and unseen worlds.”<sup>307</sup>

### 3.7 The Seal of Prophethood

One of the most important doctrines of Islam is that prophethood and messengership (*khatm al-nubuwwa*) has come to an end. Accordingly, Islam is the final religion and Muhammad is the final prophet sent to humanity. The impossibility and unacceptability that a person should claim prophethood is clearly emphasised in the Qur’an: “...Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets.”<sup>308</sup> In this verse, the phrase *khātam al-nabiyyīn* (the seal of prophets) is used for the Prophet Muhammad. The word ‘*khatm*’ meaning “to end something, to seal, to reach an end and to read as a whole” is derived from the root word *kha-ta-ma*, which means “seal, result, and completion.”<sup>309</sup> In reference to this verse, the title “last/seal of the prophets” has been used to imply the end of prophethood with the coming of Muhammad and an end to the messengership between God and his servants.<sup>310</sup> It has been said these notions have been used before Islam.<sup>311</sup> Other religions mentioned this concept with reference to Prophet Muhammad and not in reference to the prophet at that time. There are also narrations in *hadith* sources that express the reality of the finality of prophethood.<sup>312</sup>

There is no school or sect in Islamic thought that advocates the continuation of prophethood. Only some extreme mystics interpret the *hadith* as the finalisation of prophethood that establishes religious law only and not the end in the spiritual world. One of the important

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<sup>307</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 145.

<sup>308</sup> Qur’an 33:40. In addition, the following verses have been used to prove the finality of prophethood, Islam as a final religion and its prophet with the final and universal message: 5:3; 3:85; 15:9; 6:19; 7:158; 25:1; 34:28.

<sup>309</sup> Raghib al-Isfahani, *al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur’an* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’rifa, n.d.), 142-143; al-Rāzī, *Mukhtar al-Sihah* (Beirut: Maktabah Lubnan, 1995), 142.

<sup>310</sup> For detailed information on the notion, refer to D.S. Powers, *Muhammad is not the Father of any of your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 52-54, 68-69; B. M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Qur’an: An introduction to the Qur’ān and Muslim Exegesis* (New York: Continuum, 2002); R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur’ān and Muslim Literature*, trans. M. Robertson (Richmond: Curzon, 2002); I. B. Hussain, *Prophets in the Qur’ān: the Early Prophets* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1994), I/vii-xxiv; F. Donner, *Origins of Islamic Narratives, The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1998), 151; W. M. Watt, “The Nature of Muhammad’s Prophethood,” *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 8 (1987): 77-84; J. al-Haqq, “Epistemology of Prophethood in Islam,” *al-Tawhīd* 4(ii) (1987): 53-71; S. Stroumsa, “The Signs of Prophecy: the Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature,” *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1985): 101-114; U. Rubin, “Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shi’a Traditions,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 41-65; Abed el-Rahman Tayyara, “Prophethood and the Making of Islamic Historical Identity,” *Modern Languages Faculty Publications* paper 116 (2003).

<sup>311</sup> Metin Yurdagur, “Hatm-i Nubuwwet,” in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 1997), XVI/477-478.

<sup>312</sup> For example, it is narrated from Abū Hurayra that the Prophet stated: “My similitude in comparison with the prophets before me is that of a man who has built a house nicely and beautifully, except that in one corner there is one brick out of place. The people go about it and wonder at its beauty, but say: ‘Would that this brick be put in its place!’ So I am that brick, and I am the seal of the prophets” (Bukhārī, *manaqib*, 18; Muslim, *fadail*, 20-23) and “there is no prophethood after me” (Muslim, *fadail al-sahaba*, 30, 33; *masajid*, 5).

leaders of this thought, Ibn Sab'īn, is narrated as saying: “the son of Aminah [meaning Prophet Muhammad] has narrowed the scope by saying there is no prophet after me.”<sup>313</sup> It appears these extreme groups make such comments to somehow claim they also possess prophethood. Regardless of the reason, it is clear these thoughts contradict the scriptures mentioned previously.

Islamic scholars have responded with scriptural and rational arguments to non-Muslim researchers who claimed that to say that prophethood ends with Muhammad is dogmatic and selfish. The rational proof is that, just like everything in the world, there is also progression in religious thoughts and thus Islam, being the most perfect religion, represents the final stage and step of this progression.<sup>314</sup> In this sense, Muhammad Iqbal sees the end of prophethood as the pinnacle of rational stability and inductive intellect.<sup>315</sup>

In Islamic intellectual history an effort is being made to find answers to questions such as: What would happen if prophethood has ended? Are people not in need of guides anymore? If there is a need for prophets, who will they be? Muslim scholars have established that the mission continues, but the flag bearers are not prophets according to *hadith*: “the scholars of my nation are like the prophets of Israelites”<sup>316</sup> and “scholars are heirs of prophets.”<sup>317</sup> Generally, the Shi'ites accept this mission is to be carried out by “innocent imams,” Sufis see them as “saints, *awliyā*” and classical Muslim scholars view them as “revivers, *mujaddids*.” Consequently, the function is to manifest the active and dynamic revival of revelation through *ijtihad*, which is the scholarly deductive reasoning used to establish new religious precedents in Islamic law and to consider and correctly interpret the circumstances and conditions of the time; and to actively engage with the parts of religion which are flexible and open to interpretation and its dissemination.

In addition, like Bahatism, the notion of “the seal of the prophets” has been used to indicate that, although prophethood (*nubuwwa*) has ended, messengership (*risāla*) continues. This has also been interpreted as Muhammad being the final prophet, but not the final messenger. However, this ideology, which is advocated by contemporary representatives of the classical Bāṭiniyya school,<sup>318</sup> has been described as making interpretations in line with their desires and

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<sup>313</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Rad ala al-Mantiqiyyin*, 486-487 (taken from Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 36).

<sup>314</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 80-81.

<sup>315</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 143.

<sup>316</sup> Ajluni, *Kashf al-Khafa*, II/64.

<sup>317</sup> Ahmed ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, V/196; Darimî, *muqaddima*, 32; Abū Dawud, *ilm*, 1. In another *hadith* it is stated: “Prophets do not leave dinars and dirhams as inheritance, but they leave knowledge. Whoever attains this knowledge, will have attained a great share” (Tirmidhi, *ilm*, 19; Abū Dawud, *ilm*, 1; Ibn Maja, *muqaddima*, 17).

<sup>318</sup> Seekers of inner interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an.

as having contradictions within itself; therefore, as scholarship it is rejected as illogical and inconsistent.<sup>319</sup>

In Islamic thought, this topic has also been discussed with regard to sainthood within the Sufi tradition, being part of prophethood and its continuation.<sup>320</sup> Ibn Arabi's (d.1240) comments on prophethood are the most renowned and acknowledged among Sufis: The saint and prophet are the same in comprehending things while awake, while normal people would comprehend them in their sleep. This saintly state can be achieved through two paths: First, through hard work and effort. Second, only through heavenly knowledge (*ilm al-lādunniyya*), which God grants as a direct blessing. It is only saints who reached this state (he uses the term *nubuwwa al-walāya*) who are the inheritors of prophets after being subject to such blessings.<sup>321</sup> Ibn Arabi's comparison of prophethood and sainthood has been mostly misunderstood as holding sainthood superior to prophethood; thus, it has been subject to accusations including disbelief. However, he distinguishes between the sainthood of a saint and that of a prophet; thus he indicates the sainthood represented by a prophet is superior to prophethood.<sup>322</sup> According to him, prophets continuously benefit from the sainthood they possess. The comparison here is not about a saint being superior to a prophet or messenger, but between sainthood and prophethood. In his thought, the attribute of sainthood is superior to the attribute of prophethood; since prophets possess both attributes, they are naturally superior. Despite the end of prophethood and messengership, sainthood continues. His remark means it is the law-making side of prophethood, the rules and judgments, that has ended. Thus, the sainthood pertaining to prophethood (*nubuwwa al-walāya*) has not ended and continues through saints, who are referred to as the inheritors of the prophets' mission.<sup>323</sup>

Looking at Gülen's approach to the topic, it is a continuation of the abovementioned tradition, while offering original perspectives with new concepts and a more comprehensive outlook. In this regard, the starting point is Nursi's emphasis of Imam Rabbani's (one of the important

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<sup>319</sup> Ethem Ruhi Figlali, "Bahailik," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 1991), IV, 464-468.

<sup>320</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 130.

<sup>321</sup> Ahmed Avni Konuk, *Fususul-Hikem Terceme ve Serhi*, ed. Musrafa Tahrali and Selcuk Eraydin (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2014), 1/209-215.

<sup>322</sup> Konuk, *Fususul-Hikem*, II, 62.

<sup>323</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 135-136. Ibn al-Arabi approaches the notion of *nubuwwa* through these two categorisations and has limited his interpretation within this framework: First is *nubuwwa al-amma* or *nubuwwa al-walaya*: This is the station that strictly belongs to chosen eminent servants of God, prophets. This office, which is also named *walaya al-amma* or *walaya al-mutlaq* (absolute sainthood), has not been concluded. Second is *nubuwwa al-hassa* (private prophethood), which refers to law-making prophethood (*nubuwwa tashri'i*). This has been concluded with the departure of Prophet Muhammad. There is no other authority or Divine law (*shariah*) that will abrogate its rules. That is what is meant by sealed prophethood. The Prophet foretold there will be no prophet after him, which is particularly relevant to this law-making prophet. *Kalāmīc* school's statement that prophethood cannot be earned or acquired by human effort applies here as well, according to Ibn al-Arabi. (Konuk, *Fususul-Hikem*, 1/212)

representatives of the Naqshbandi order) remarks. According to Imam Rabbani, sainthood (*walāya*) can be categorised into three types: “One is the minor sainthood which is the known sainthood; the other is the middle and the last one is the major sainthood. The major sainthood is through the inheritance of prophethood, which is a direct opening to the truth without having to go through the stages of mysticism or strictly following a specific Sufi order.”<sup>324</sup> Nursi further explains major sainthood as:

The sainthood of companions is the rank of major sainthood which is attained through direct inheritance of the Prophetic mission and without having to follow a religious order, by full observance of the shariah, penetrating to the truth and ultimately gaining nearness to God. Such sainthood, though much greater and more valuable than the other, is rarely favoured with performing supernatural wonders (*karāmat*). Therefore it is safer, for performing wonders can lead saints to attribute wonders to themselves and thus bring about spiritual desolation. Without having to follow a religious order’s discipline for many years, the Companions attained the rank of major sainthood through the grace and elixir of the Prophet’s presence...In just this way, prophethood and sainthood which is attained through direct inheritance of the Prophetic mission, enables people to draw nearer to God because of this direct, unrestricted relationship. Accordingly, major sainthood is much greater than minor sainthood, which can be attained only through long years of spiritual discipline within an order.<sup>325</sup>

The concept of “inheritance of prophethood” (*warāthat nubuwwa*) voiced by Imam Rabbani and Nursi holds a significant place in Gülen’s works on prophethood and *sīrah*. The notion of inheritance of prophethood, which has an important place in Islamic tradition, such as the prophetic reports and literature of the mystics, has found a comprehensive place in Gülen’s works through different concepts. Since the place and mission of the companions must be studied in parallel with the life of the Prophet, and will be discussed in the following chapter, I will touch only on how Gülen reconciles or examines this topic in conjunction with the notions of “the ending of prophethood” and “the inheritance of prophethood.”

For Gülen, this emphasis on major sainthood or inheritance of prophethood as the tradition or the way of the companions (*sahabe mesleği*) provides an overall benefit for the people to stick to the truths of the religion by accepting the mentality of the companions, and trying to share the same attributes and religious values. In this regard, the inheritance of prophethood, set as an ideal by Gülen to be pursued, carries certain responsibilities. According to him, the

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<sup>324</sup> Imam Rabbani, *al-Maktubat*, I/240; Nursi, *Mektubat*, 19.

<sup>325</sup> Nursi, *Mektubat*, 51-52.

responsibility that was shouldered by the companions after the Prophet could only be carried out by people with the same power, qualities and characteristics. This is why Gülen frequently emphasises these qualities in his talks and works, and establishes a target for his followers based on the vivid examples taken from these ideal people's lives. Consequently, while this approach influences people who carry the sacred mission of being the heirs of the prophets, it also motivates them and keeps them in check (auto-control) by reminding them of the weight and significance of the responsibility. Another significant point is that, in addition to the qualities of the people who pursue the inheritance of prophethood, they will also have noteworthy achievements in the world. According to Gülen, there are specific qualities that what he names *Yeryüzü Mirasçıları* (Inheritors of the Earth) must possess.<sup>326</sup> Hence, his emphasis is on efforts to establish this community, which is believed to carry out the tradition of the companions, so that the inheritance of prophethood is kept alive. The spiritual and other-worldly rewards are expressed in parallel to the weight of the responsibility, along with the achievements pertaining to the world, and in turn enhance the enthusiasm and motivation of his audience. Gülen encourages those who listen to him to follow a path of spiritual development along the lines of that of the companions, which is service to others and self-sacrifice - the path his predecessors (namely Nursi and Imam Rabbani) have described as the 'greater sainthood'.

Gülen's general framework of inheritance of prophethood is a continuation of the tradition and mission of prophethood. However, this framework is far distant from the Shia concept of the innocent imam's and the extreme Sufis' interpretations of sainthood. Contrary to the comparison of saint and prophet, the emphasis is on the attributes of prophets, the struggle to attain them and live a life in their shade. Thus, the rhetoric is on attaining the prophetic attributes. In this regard, the guidance of the Qur'an and *sunnah*, perceiving the human in a holistic manner, is a Qur'anic path that aims to satisfy all the faculties including rationality, spirit, soul, self, etc., and viewed as a must in his work. According to Gülen, this path, which is named as the "tradition of the Companions," since it was represented by them, is accepted to be the most commonly used and safest path by the heirs of prophets or the friends of God (*awliyā*) after the time of the Prophet.<sup>327</sup> This path, which is based on the correct understanding of Qur'an and following the *sunnah*, is in fact the shortest path to attaining the truth. While there is no need to display extraordinary capabilities, there is also no need to join an order and go through the procedures dictated by them. So, Gülen argues that the most

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<sup>326</sup> Such as Gülen, *Ruhumuzun Heykelini Dikerken*, 16, 39-49.

<sup>327</sup> Gülen, *Olumsuzluk İksiri*, 99-104.



important factor in this tradition is engaging with the topics pertaining to the religion and serving faith.

This issue holds an important place in Gülen's works on prophethood as well as *sīrah*. The similarities and realities he establishes between the themes represented by the companions and those of today, not only adds dynamism to his works but also authenticates and attracts the attention of his followers. This is no mere attempt to take pride in the past or read historical anecdotes, but an effort to establish a "community of action/deeds" by painting a vision and ascribing missions and responsibilities to individuals. The followers are constantly nurtured and kept active by reminding them of the material/spiritual, worldly/other-worldly rewards and responsibilities of the "heirs of the prophets" and "inheritors of the Earth," who will carry out this mission. In this regard, it is an attempt to establish a civilisation and its flag bearers, which Gülen defines as "our own civilisation." Ultimately, while the notion of the inheritance of prophethood that Gülen has focused on can be seen as an approach to grasp the essence of Prophet Muhammad's message, and the qualities he possessed, and ultimately implement it in actual life, it has also been a means to concentrate on prophethood and *sīrah*, resulting in understanding the attributes, practical principles and more importantly, in Gülen's words, "the philosophy of *sīrah*."



## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF *SONSUZ NUR*

In this chapter, I will focus on the *sīrah*-oriented two-volume book<sup>328</sup> *Sonsuz Nur*, which differs in many ways from traditional *sīrah* works. *Sonsuz Nur* is a significant work of recent times that deserves a full stand-alone study. This study focuses on Gülen's generic approach to the *sīrah* genre in all of his works and his holistic *sīrah* understanding. Thus, in this chapter, I will look at the compilation of the book, its publication process and sales numbers to give an indication of the attention given by the readers. Furthermore, I will critique its characteristics, evaluate it as a work of *sīrah* and focus on its unique contribution to *sīrah* writings. Throughout the study, comparisons will be made between Gülen's book and other *sīrah* works to establish a clear structure.

### 4.1 Introduction to *Sonsuz Nur*

*Sonsuz Nur* is a compilation of 53 Friday sermons delivered by Gülen at the Uskudar Walida Jadīd mosque in Istanbul, Turkey from 13 January 1989 to 12 January 1990.<sup>329</sup> A pre-Friday prayer talk culture exists in Turkey that is not common in many other Muslim countries. In other countries, the norm is to recite the Qur'an before the Friday prayer and then have a long sermon with many reminders. In contrast, in Turkey, the sermon is kept short and the main religious recommendations are given before the prayer. Gülen considers the office of a preacher<sup>330</sup> to be a very important role, believing these types of sermons "would comprise a dimension of (spiritual) revival in the end times."<sup>331</sup> While his talks given since the age of 14<sup>332</sup> are well known, his talks after 1972 have been specially recorded.<sup>333</sup> Gülen's talks are not only restricted to religious topics such as Islamic belief, actions and worship, but they also

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<sup>328</sup> I have used the two-volume 2007 edition.

<sup>329</sup> There is a common view that these series of talks happened over 62 weeks starting from 13 January 1989 and ending on 16 March 1990. However, through an interview that was conducted on 25 May 2012 with a close associate and pupil of Gülen, who attended these talks and was one of the three people involved in its compilation, I have concluded the series lasted for 53 weeks. The website that lists Gülen's talks chronologically shows the topics changed after the aforementioned (16 March) date (the website has 62 weeks noted and this could be the source of the mistake). While earlier talks discuss the place of *sunnah* in Islamic legislation and its transmission by the companions, the topic of "Holy Ones and their Characteristics" was delivered after 19 January 1990, which is related to the book. Thus, I have found it more accurate to use the duration of 53 weeks in my work. Finally, the first editor Mustafa Gundogdu who prepared the book for publication has confirmed the information provided and has expressed the total number of talks given was 61 because of Gülen's illness.

<sup>330</sup> Gülen's official employment was as a preacher in the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

<sup>331</sup> Eyup Can, *Ufuk Turu* (Istanbul: AD Yayincilik, 1996), 152.

<sup>332</sup> FGülen, "İlk Vaazi 14 Yasında Verdi," FGülen, November 27, 1999, accessed March 29, 2013, <http://fGülen.com/tr/ses-ve-video/fethullah-Gülen-hitabet/fethullah-Gülen-hocaefendinin-vaizligi/14784-fGülen-com-İlk-Vaazi-14-Yasında-Verdi>

<sup>333</sup> FGülen, "1966-1973 Yıllarındaki Vaaz ve Sohbetleri" FGülen, November 20, 1999, accessed March 29, 2013, <http://fGülen.com/tr/ses-ve-video/fethullah-Gülen-hitabet/fethullah-Gülen-hocaefendinin-vaizligi/3577-1966-1973-yıllarındaki-vaaz-ve-sohbetleri>

cover social, family and economic topics and a wide range of other issues.<sup>334</sup> Gülen has addressed every aspect of a human being, more so a believer, by deeply analysing and then providing innovative solutions in an academic and eloquent manner. While the topics vary in content, there are times when the same topic has been addressed on different occasions in detail.<sup>335</sup> Some examples of the systematic<sup>336</sup> and organised talk series<sup>337</sup> he delivered over a period of time include: “Proofs of Oneness and Unity” – a 15 week theological series of talks started in 1975; “Prophethood Series” – a series on prophethood and specifically the proofs of the prophethood of Muhammad; “the Qur’an series” – a series on belief in the books; “Resurrection series” - later to be converted into a book;<sup>338</sup> and the series “Education of the Child.”<sup>339</sup> I will not focus on this system since it is not directly related to my topic.<sup>340</sup>

In 1989, Gülen recommenced his talks after a nine-year break<sup>341</sup> and delivered the series that became *Sonsuz Nur*. In this series of talks, Gülen gave impromptu talks<sup>342</sup> about all the aspects

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<sup>334</sup> Ali Unal and Alphonse Williams, *Fethullah Gülen: Advocate of Dialogue* (Fairfax, VA: The Fountain, 2000), 289.

<sup>335</sup> Since the focus of the book is a compilation of his sermons, I cannot avoid acknowledging the nature of the talks. However, Gülen is not just a preacher, who only offers talks in the mosque. He is an important representative of traditional Islamic scholarship with a rich profile and also offered talks at coffee houses, homes, seminars on various scientific topics in the pursuit of reaching different profiles of individuals (Ali Unal, *Bir Portre Denemesi* (Istanbul: Nil Yay., 2002), 292).

<sup>336</sup> A rigorous glance at Gülen’s preaching life shows he has followed a systematic approach in general as if following the *hadith* from Gabriel in delivering the topics of *iman* (belief), *islam* (worship) and *ihsan* (righteousness) in detail. He has firstly emphasised the theological topics, such as belief in God, prophets, books, the afterlife, divine destiny, and followed it with religious practices like prayer, hajj, alms giving and fasting, which are reflections of belief in day-to-day life. Finally, as the third leg of the narrated Gabriel *hadith*, he has given talks on the thoughts of the moral and spiritual character.

<sup>337</sup> FGülen, “1975 Yili Vaazlari” FGülen, November 18, 1999, accessed March 29, 2013, <http://fGülen.com/tr/ses-ve-video/fethullah-Gülen-hitabet/fethullah-Gülen-hocaefendinin-vaizligi/3586-fGülen-com-1975-Yili-Vaazlari>

<sup>338</sup> This series addressed belief in the afterlife and the proofs for the existence of the afterlife as one of the six pillars of faith. It was later compiled as a book, Fethullah Gülen, *Olum Otesi Hayat* [The Life Beyond Death] (Izmir: Nil Pub 2002).

<sup>339</sup> This series incorporated the topics of education in the family and of the child. It was also formed into a book, Fethullah Gülen, *Cekirdekten Cinara* [From Seed to Cedar] (Istanbul: Nil Pub, 2002).

<sup>340</sup> Nevertheless, it is appropriate to note the messages Gülen gave in an interview four years after his last talk: “The congregation must be addressed through different platforms and in doing so the level of the congregation must be considered. The congregation should not be fed with daily issues in each talk. On the contrary, there must be progress with new ideas every day. The emotions and excitement of the congregation at the mosque is very important. It is crucial for a person to practice what he preaches. This should not be neglected. By the by, the congregation should also be educated in sciences. Islam should be presented to the congregation using a systematic approach. The topics pertaining to theology should be delivered in its entirety and the truths and essentials of Islam should also be delivered. I believed that this is how it had to be.” Can, *Ufuk Turu*, 152.

<sup>341</sup> Gülen had to have a break after his talk in Izmir Bornova on 5 September 1980 due to political issues (Muhammed Cetin, *The Gülen Movement: Civic Movement Without Borders* (New York: Blue Dome Press, 2011), 38-41). He gave only one talk on 6 April 1986 at the opening ceremony of the Great Camlica Mosque in Istanbul until 1989 (Ertugrul Hikmet, *Himmeti Millet Olan Insan: M. Fethullah Gülen* (Istanbul: Isik Yayinlari, 2008), 110). Since it was on the night of the Ascension (*mi’raj*), he talked about the importance of the night FGülen, “1986 Yili Vaazlari” FGülen, November 18, 1999, accessed March 29, 2013, <http://fGülen.com/tr/ses-ve-video/fethullah-Gülen-hitabet/fethullah-Gülen-hocaefendinin-vaizligi/3578-fGülen-com-1986-Yili-Vaazlari>

<sup>342</sup> In addition to the methodology and skill of his talks that I will comment on shortly in this chapter, the impromptu nature of the talks had a strong effect on the congregation. Besides, the Prophet’s sermons were also impromptu in nature, which was the example Gülen followed.

of Prophet Muhammad and his *sunnah* in a systematic and unique manner. These talks were transferred to script and compiled into books after revisions by Gülen. The book has different editions: it was initially published as three volumes in 1992, but was revised into two volumes after 2007. While the two-volume version was still being published, the book was turned into a five-volume work where each volume dealt predominantly with one aspect of the Prophet. It was re-published in 2012 with the removal of the last relatively technical section – “the *Sunnah* and its place in Islamic Legislation” – in order to appeal to a wider audience. All the narrations mentioned by Gülen in his sermons were identified and noted following the first publication of the book. The rich resources used are deemed as trustworthy in Islamic literature and show the strong foundations of the author.

It would not be an overstatement to say that Gülen is commonly followed and his books are best sellers. As of 2010, cassettes and CDs of his audio/video talks and sermons since 1970 had reached 11.5 million copies.<sup>343</sup> The interest in his books is no different and sales are in the millions. His work *Sonsuz Nur* commands great attention and is a bestseller.<sup>344</sup> It is also the subject of many scholarly works and used as a textbook in universities around the globe.<sup>345</sup> *Sonsuz Nur* has been translated into around 40 different languages, including English,<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> This is the approximate official number in 2010 given by Nile Production, which publishes Gülen’s works. However, the number will be much higher considering pirate usage, which is very common. Adem Akinci, “The Oratory of M. Fethullah Gülen,” in *The Gülen Hizmet Movement: Circumspect Activism in Faith-Based Reform*, ed. Tamer Balci and Christopher L. Miller (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 29.

<sup>344</sup> Authorities from the publishing house for Gülen’s book stated that each book reached approximately 200-300 thousand prints in the first two months. In 2011, the total number of prints of Gülen’s books was above 3.5 million. *Sonsuz Nur* is the best seller among Gülen’s more than 70 books. Its sales are counted in the millions since its first print in 1992. Overall circulation of the book is 250 thousand per year. Each volume is around 650 pages. According to other data, in 2012 the book’s circulation was 2 million (Samanyoluhaber, “‘Sonsuz Nur’, şık tasarımıyla sizleri bekliyor,” samanyoluhaber, December 22, 2011, accessed December 23, 2011, <http://www.samanyoluhaber.com/kultur/sonsuz-nur-sik-tasarimiyla-sizleri-bekliyor/724176/>).

Events have also been held that feature *Sonsuz Nur*. In 2014, Peygamber Yolu (Prophet’s Path) Foundation organised a book reading competition on the *sīrah* of the Prophet and selected *Sonsuz Nur* for the adult category. It was officially announced that over two million people sat for the exam. Similar contests have been organised in India, where several universities and religious leaders, including Darul Ulum Deoband University, which has the office for 200 million Muslims’ supreme religious court, participated. *Sonsuz Nur*’s English and Urdu translations were selected for this reading competition and 110,000 people sat the exam.

<sup>345</sup> For instance, in Shuayb Dukayr University, Morocco, *Sonsuz Nur* is the textbook for *sīrah* lectures. Likewise in Azhar University, Cairo, Professor of *sīrah* Fathi Hijazi teaches the life of the Prophet based on *Sonsuz Nur* (Samanyoluhaber, “‘Sonsuz Nur’ kitabı Mısır’da ders kaynağı,” samanyoluhaber, April 20, 2012, accessed April 21, 2012, <http://www.samanyoluhaber.com/gundem/sonsuz-nur-kitabi-misirda-ders-kaynagi/746959/>; FGulenAR, “‘يزاجح يحتفد 26 سرد دل اخل رونل بائك حرش’ [Explain the book light eternal lesson 40 Fathi Hijazi], YouTube video, 32:15, October 4, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zArHW2XYwBQ&list=PLdrN-H-5UMAZL17m0PkuCWr8AoT\\_AYfij](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zArHW2XYwBQ&list=PLdrN-H-5UMAZL17m0PkuCWr8AoT_AYfij)). In another example, the Gülen Chair in Jakarta University organised around 14 panel discussions and conferences on this book. Similarly, in Morocco a conference on *Sonsuz Nur* was organised by the 5<sup>th</sup> Muhammad University in 2014.

<sup>346</sup> For the English translation of the book, see M. Fethullah Gülen, *The Messenger of God, Muhammad: An Analysis of Prophet’s Life*, trans. Ali Unal (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2005). Although this book is successful in terms of the language used and is a concise summary of *Sonsuz Nur*, it is not an exact translation. Since the English version is only a skilful summarised translation, I have used the original Turkish version and made comments and evaluations based on this copy in my entire study.

Arabic, French, Urdu, Persian, German, Japanese, Spanish<sup>347</sup> and some of the African indigenous local languages, i.e. South African Zulu, and Romanian.

## 4.2 *Sonsuz Nur* as a *Sīrah* Work

Almost everyone who reads *Sonsuz Nur* accepts that it is different to other *sīrah* works. However, is it really different and original? If so, what are its differences? In this section, I will discuss the unique aspects of the book, focusing on *sīrah* as part of an oratory tradition, the systematic nature of topics covered and the work as “*sīrah* philosophy.” Thus, I will endeavour to determine if Gülen introduced anything unique or original to *sīrah* writings.

### 4.2.1 *Sonsuz Nur* in Terms of Oratory Tradition and its Orator

Firstly, it is necessary to focus on this topic since *Sonsuz Nur* is a compilation of Gülen’s talks and sermons have a significant place in his life. However, I will not be able to cover Gülen’s oratory skill in its entirety.<sup>348</sup> I will focus on what I deem as important, such as preparation for his presentations and the state of the congregation (as these are paramount in oratory literature). The topics covered will offer important input about how Gülen views topics pertaining to the *sīrah* genre.

#### 4.2.1.1 Ability of Expression (*Bayan*) and Oratory in Islamic Thought

*Bayan* (literally means speech or ability of expression) and oratory in Islamic culture are two important topics that are mentioned along with creation. The fundamental approach in this tradition can be summarised as: Human beings are the most responsible beings among the creation, burdened with a great responsibility.<sup>349</sup> God has made them viceregents on Earth<sup>350</sup> and made His honourable servants exhibit that reflect His names and attributes.<sup>351</sup> Thus, human beings, who have been equipped with such important qualities and blessings, have the superior ability of interacting with the universe. This elevated position and responsibility inevitably leads to certain qualities and obligations. In this regard, free will, the ability to contemplate in the process of using this free will, the ability to use hands and feet to execute this free will, the ability to acquire knowledge, character development, etc., are qualities specific to human beings. Since other beings do not have free will, they also do not possess its

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<sup>347</sup> Apart from the later ones I discovered, I learned there are 37 translations, including Indonesian, as of 2 June 2012 (Samanyoluhaber, “37 farklı dünya diline çevrildi,” samanyoluhaber, June 2, 2012, accessed June 3, 2012, <http://www.samanyoluhaber.com/kultur/37-farkli-dunya-diline-cevrildi/768931/>).

<sup>348</sup> Although it does not cover entirely all aspects of Gülen’s oratory, I have only come across one specific study, which is Adem Akinci’s article.

<sup>349</sup> Qur’an 33:72.

<sup>350</sup> Qur’an 2:30.

<sup>351</sup> Qur’an, 95:4; 17:70.

underlying principles, such as acquiring knowledge. Thus, one of the most important blessings given to human beings in this regard is the ability of self-expression. Consequently, there has been an emphasis on the ability of self-expression within this tradition. *Bayan* is the faculty of expressing one's thoughts, making them comprehensible and conveying them to others through written or other forms. This faculty is described as a valuable trait along with creation in the Islamic tradition: "The All-Merciful. He has taught the Qur'an. He has created human. He has taught him speech."<sup>352</sup> The verses that highlight the importance of the ability of expression, sets apart human beings from the rest of creation and has been the basis of many works.<sup>353</sup>

Gülen emphasises the importance of the ability of expression, its connection with the purpose of creation and the reason the human being is the possessor of such ability:

Divine Knowledge has designed the scheme of existence, while His Speech has drawn its architecture. After emerging as twins in the most intimate sanctuary of the unchanging essence (*ayan al-thabitah*), creation and Speech took on physical forms. In creating humankind, the Most Merciful gave us the ability to speak of the human essence, our inner depths, the entire cosmos, and the truth beyond material existence before sending us to the dimension of external existence. In this sense, one can argue that speech was the first drop of ink that flowed from the pen of Divine Power to give life to non-existence. Speech has revealed and displayed the mysterious relation between the Creator and the created...In a sense, humankind is in a position to speak not only on its own behalf but for other beings (like jinn) as well. It is through speech that human beings have become the addressee of God and it is thanks to this faculty that they can address Him.<sup>354</sup>

It is the significance of the art of expression, its magical effect<sup>355</sup> and the prophets representing the pinnacles of this art that the section "Muhammad from the perspectives of *fatānah* and expression" found its place in *Sonsuz Nur*. The Prophet's concise speech,

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<sup>352</sup> Qur'an 55:1-4. The following verses are also of importance regarding my topic: "Have We not made for him a pair of eyes, And a tongue and two lips" (Qur'an 90:8-9).

<sup>353</sup> The word *bayan* in this verse comprises three aspects: First is oratory, which is verbal expression. Second is expression through writing. Third is expression through the language of representation, which gives more insight than the previous ones. When dealing with Gülen's life, these three are separately regarded, as he has an oratory aspect, writing expressions and representation dimensions in his life. In this regard, his sermons comprise important sections of his oratory dimension.

<sup>354</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Beyan* [Speech and Power of Expression], trans. Korkut Altay (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2011), 1-2.

<sup>355</sup> Bukhārī, *nikah*, 47.

effectiveness of expression and ability to solve difficult and diverse problems are described at length to show his *fatānah* and establish significant proofs for his prophethood.<sup>356</sup>

The art of oratory can be defined as: “A strong and powerful talk given in simple terms that explains a purpose to an audience in a planned and methodological manner while informing, advising and helping them to internalise a concept and encouraging them to take action about a specific thing.”<sup>357</sup> Words such as discourse, speech and rhetoric are also used to express similar meanings. The art of oratory has been a topic of interest for many centuries and been researched in many different ways.<sup>358</sup> Ability of expression has a long history starting with Corax of Syracuse (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) who gave the first class in return for money and wrote a book on this notion, extending to Socrates (470/469-399 BCE) who confronted the established misconception of “deceiving your addressee and convincing him to accept your view” in Greek philosophy, Plato (427-347 BCE) and Aristotle, as well as the best speakers of Rome including Perikeles (495-429 BCE), Demosthenes (427-347 BCE) and Cicero (106-43 BCE).<sup>359</sup> Aristotle not only narrated the ideas of his predecessors and contemporaries, but he also contributed to the art of expression by applying logic to oratory in his work *Rhetorica*, which is known as *Kitāb al-Khatāba* by Muslim philosophers. In this regard, his book is the first and systematic work of its kind and still is a source used today.<sup>360</sup>

In the history of Islamic tradition, Kindi has stated that the word rhetoric corresponds to eloquence in meaning.<sup>361</sup> Oratory has been viewed as linked to eloquence and has been treated together with the literary sciences expression as *maānī*, *bayan* and *badi*. For this reason, the philosophers after Avicenna have not given space to this topic in their works.<sup>362</sup> It is well known that the Arabs in the time of ignorance (*jāhiliyya*) put great emphasis on oratory and each tribe had famous orators. However, from the early days of Islam, oratory developed into a sophisticated type of prose.<sup>363</sup> The use of oratory by the Prophet of Islam as an important

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<sup>356</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/288-397.

<sup>357</sup> Michel Meyer, *Retorik*, trans. İsmail Yerguz (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, 2009), 9-10; Rodney K. Duke, *The Persuasive Appeal of the Chronicler: A Rhetorical Analysis* (Sheffield/England: Almond Press, 1990), 29-30; Abdülhakim Yuce, *Konusma Sanati Hitabet* (İstanbul: Isik Yay., 2013), 13.

<sup>358</sup> For more information, see: Aristotle, “Rhetorica,” in *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. II of *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1952); Yuce, *Konusma Sanati Hitabet*; A. Lutfi Kazancı, *Peygamber Efendimiz’in Hitabeti* (İstanbul: Ensar Yayınları, 2012); I. Lutfi Cakan, *Dini Hitabet: Cesitleri-İlkeleri-Ornekleri* (İstanbul: M. U. İlahiyat Fak. Yayınları, 2015); Abdurrahman Cetin, *Hitabet ve İrsad: Din Hizmetlerinde İletişim ve Güzel Konuşma* (Bursa: Emin Yayınları 2012).

<sup>359</sup> Mahmut Kaya, “Hitabet,” in *DIA* (İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 1998) XVIII/156; Kazancı, *Peygamber Efendimiz’in Hitabeti*, 45-46.

<sup>360</sup> Kaya, “Hitabet,” 156-157.

<sup>361</sup> Mahmut Kaya, *Kindi, Felsefi Risaleler* (İstanbul: Klasik Yay., 2002), 265, 274.

<sup>362</sup> Kaya, “Hitabet,” 157; Yuce, *Konusma Sanati*, 22.

<sup>363</sup> Kazancı, *Peygamber Efendimiz’in Hitabeti*, 48-61; Huseyin Elmali, “Arap Edebiyatı,” in *DIA* (İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 1998), XVIII/158-160.



instrument in conveying his message significantly effected its development. Many of his speeches, such as the farewell sermon, were recorded<sup>364</sup> and passed down to today in *hadith* and *sīrah* books.<sup>365</sup> The Age of Happiness and era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs are accepted as the golden time of oratory.<sup>366</sup>

Although oratory has been classified into different topics<sup>367</sup> and types,<sup>368</sup> due to its close relation to the area of my study, I will focus on religious oratory in my work.

#### 4.2.1.1.1 Religious Oratory and Gülen

Religious oratory is defined<sup>369</sup> as speeches that are given by religious workers, scholars or those competent in the field to explain religious truths.<sup>370</sup> Since communicating God's message is seen as the most important duty of prophets, or in Gülen's words "purpose of their creation," this type of oratory is viewed as an inheritance of prophethood.<sup>371</sup> It is possibly for this reason that Gülen emphasises communicating God's message and expression-oratory in his works.

It is possible to categorise Gülen's talks into four groups.<sup>372</sup> Although these talks may incorporate many different topics, they can be generally classified as religious oratory:

1. Preaching talks (*wa'z*): the talks given in mosques on occasions such as Friday prayers, Eid and holy nights.
2. Friday sermons: sermons that are complementary to the pre-Friday prayer preaching talks, but are different in style and duration.

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<sup>364</sup> Ibn Kutayba has tried to determine all the sermons of Prophet Muhammad (Ibn Kutayba, *Uyun al-Akhbar* (Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1986).

<sup>365</sup> The famous talk given by the Prophet to his kindred on Safa Hill was the first example of Islamic oratory, which has been expressed in almost every *sīrah* book and also by Gülen in many of his talks (Elmali, "Arap Edebiyatı," 159.)

<sup>366</sup> For more detailed information about this period, see Mehmet Resit Ozbalkıci, *Asr-ı Saadet ve Raşit Halifeler Döneminde Hitabet* (Istanbul: Yeni Akademi Yayınları, 2005).

<sup>367</sup> Such as military, politic, juristic and religious oratory.

<sup>368</sup> Such as oratory, conference, conversation, debate, panel and symposium.

<sup>369</sup> Cakan, *Dini Hitabet*, 8; Yuce, *Konusma Sanatı*, 27; Kazancı, *Peygamber Efendimiz'in Hitabeti*, 36.

<sup>370</sup> Gülen's definitions of *irshad* (guidance) and *sohba* (conversation) are more restrained and high level: "*Irshad* can be understood as an invitation to capable people to become decent people by those whose hearts are reconciled with their minds" (Gülen, *Kalbin Zumurut Tepeleri*, III/35). "*Sohba* is to make beneficial conversations that direct people towards God, to enlighten people with words and thoughts, to channel people towards eternal bliss and to always encourage people to goodness" (ibid, II/248).

<sup>371</sup> Gülen, *Kalbin Zumurut Tepeleri*, III/36-37; Cakan, *Dini Hitabet*, 8-9.

<sup>372</sup> FGülen, "Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendinin Konusmalarları" FGülen, November 28, 1999, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://fGülen.com/tr/ses-ve-video/fethullah-gülen-hitabet/fethullah-gülen-hocaefendinin-vaizligi/8344-fGülen-com-Fethullah-Gülen-Hocaefendinin-Konusmalarları>.

3. Conferences: talks given in different cities and other countries on topics that are more scientific and academic, such as the Qur'an and science, Darwinism, Golden Generation, social justice and the pride of humanity.
4. Private talks: conversations with his guests or private discussions with people and pupils around him as well as the conversations he had in coffee houses, cinemas, etc.

The first group of talks are the source of *Sonsuz Nur*. Terminologically, a preaching talk (*wa'z*) is defined as a soft and agreeable talk that is given in a place of congregational worship by religious clerics before or after prayers to soften the heart, encourage good and discourage evil, inform and increase spiritual awareness.<sup>373</sup> These talks have an important place in Islamic tradition. The Qur'an uses this terminology where verses highlight that God gives advice (*yaizukum*) to the people.<sup>374</sup> The Prophet, whose words and actions gave clear advice to people, also mentioned that religion is about giving sincere counsel (*nasīha*)<sup>375</sup> and this is a Muslim's right and he should not be deprived of it.<sup>376</sup> This shows the importance of the topic.<sup>377</sup>

The companions would have talks on *sīrah* topics in their gatherings at the mosques. The fact that Ibn Abbas from the companions learnt the verses related to *sīrah* from his elders and dedicated one of the days to discussing campaigns of the Prophet in his private lectures, clearly shows this.<sup>378</sup> Also, the narration from Zayn al-Abidin, the son of Prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn, clearly highlights this: "We acquired knowledge on *sīrah* as if we were learning a verse from the Qur'an."<sup>379</sup> *Sīrah*-related topics also became the subject of ongoing *ayyam al-arab* (the days of Arabs) and *qissa* (story telling) tradition, which pre-existed and continued in this manner. It is also well known that Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz gave Asim ibn Umar ibn Qatada, a famous scholar of the age, the duty of teaching people about Prophetic campaigns and *sīrah* in the Damascus mosque to prevent problems arising

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<sup>373</sup> Yuce, *Konusma Sanati*, 41; Cakan, *Dini Hitabet*, 53.

<sup>374</sup> Qur'an 16:90, 125; 3:138; 4:58; 10:57; 24:17, 34; 50:45; 51:55; 88:21.

<sup>375</sup> Muslim, *Iman*, 95.

<sup>376</sup> Muslim, *Salam*, 5.

<sup>377</sup> The notion of *wa'z* (preaching) can be found in the Qur'an and *hadith*. In the *hadith* that is narrated by Irbad ibn Sariya, there is emphasis on the Prophet's effective oratory in the statement "*waazana...maw'izatan balighatan*," the notion of preaching is used: The Prophet gave a very affective and eloquent talk after a morning prayer at which hearts shivered and eyes wept. One of the companions said: These words are the words of farewell so what would you advise us?: "I advise you to fear God and to obey your leader, even if he is a black slave. Those who will live long enough will witness many conflicts. Hold on to my traditions and the traditions of my Rightly Guided Caliphs firmly. Abstain from innovation as every innovation is a path to straying..." (Tirmidhi, *ilim*, 16; Abū Dawud, *sunna*, 5; Bayhaqi, *Sunan al-Kubra*, 10/114; Ibn Majah, *muqaddima*, 6)

<sup>378</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Bidaya*, VIII/298; Mustafa Fayda, "Siyer ve Megazi," DIA, 37/320.

<sup>379</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Bidaya*, III/242.

from doubtful narrations, in response to an increase in storytelling in the early days of Islam.<sup>380</sup>

In the era of the Ottomans, *sīrah* became the focus of literature, spiritual talks and spiritual knowledge, rather than being the subject of historical literature.<sup>381</sup> Gülen's talks in this regard can be put in the same category and considered a continuation of this tradition. Gülen internalised and conveyed this knowledge with passion, sincere feelings and often with his unique animation of the story via his preaching skills, able to make the audience experience the incident as though it was live.

#### **4.2.1.1.2 Sermons of *Sonsuz Nur***

“Orator/rhetorician, topic and audience” are accepted as the three unchanging components of oratory since Aristotle.<sup>382</sup> In the contemporary era, modern communication is still based on these three components.<sup>383</sup> In addition, preparation before the talk, its effective communication or delivery to the audience and methodology are other important components of oratory. Thus, in this section I will focus on the backstage factors in Gülen's talks, such as preparation, state of the audience, presentation and methodology. When viewed holistically, the topics in his talks are not abstract and the examples are predominantly chosen from *sīrah*, the Age of Happiness and the companions. It could be said that one of Gülen's abilities in being able to affect the masses is his talent at presenting *sīrah* in an understandable and affective manner.

##### **4.2.1.1.2.1 Preparation for the Sermons**

In the modern era, there is noteworthy research on personal development, methods of communication and presentation as well as the factors to consider in preparing effective oratory. In this part of the work, I will highlight how Gülen prepares for his talks and the phases he goes through before going into the presence of people. The majority of modern communication techniques for effective talks are in common with Gülen's preparation and

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<sup>380</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* (Beirut: Muassasa al-Risala, 1995), II/258; Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 40-41.

<sup>381</sup> Mustafa Uzun, “Turkce Siyer Kitaplari,” in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfi Pub., 2009), XXXVII, 324.

<sup>382</sup> Aristotle, “*Rhetoric*,” 595-596, 598. For more information on audience from the perspective of religious communication, see Mustafa Koçlu, “Dini İletişimde Hedef Kitle Sorunu,” *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi* 1(1) (2003): 111-138.

<sup>383</sup> L. Stewart Tubbs and Sylvia Moss, *Human Communication* (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 6; L. Stewart Tubbs, *Human Communication: Principles and Contexts*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 380-408; Anita Taylor et al., *Communicating*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 4-35; Unsal Oskay, *İletişimin ABC'si* (Istanbul: İnkilap Yayınları, 2015), 23-26; Yusuf Macit, *İletişimde Model Olarak Hazreti Muhammed* (Istanbul: Yeni Akademi Yayınları, 2006), 18-19.

presentation techniques.<sup>384</sup> However, in addition to physical preparation, Gülen undergoes spiritual preparation and views this as the more important factor that affects the audience in the long term. This is reminiscent of Aristotle's saying "the effectiveness and credibility of the talk depends on the moral virtue of the orator."<sup>385</sup> There is also a positive correlation between the factors that contribute to the success of the orator and the "orator's attributes"<sup>386</sup> when dealing with religious oratory. Finally, Gülen systemises his topics and delivers them with the concepts he has developed.

### **i) Gülen's Preparations**

Whether the topic is business-related, political or religious, one of the most important factors in delivering a successful speech is, unquestionably, preparation. This preparation carries more value in the Islamic tradition if it is religious oratory. The status of prophethood is represented, thus the responsibility and preparation is paramount regardless of the speaker giving the talk. Gülen made significant preparations before his talks. Hence, it would be difficult to comprehend the effect Gülen had on his audiences without carefully examining and understanding his preparation phase. Any attempt to understand Gülen without this examination would be inadequate.

Gülen's preparations before the talks had two phases.

#### **a) Spiritual Preparation Phase**

People who were with Gülen would see certain changes in his behaviour and daily relations in the time leading up to a talk. The people around him would associate the changes in his behaviour to either a talk that was soon to be held or an article that would be written shortly. Cemal Turk, as one of the closest witnesses of those days and a disciple of Gülen, states:

The Hocaefendi that we would spend time with eating, praying, talking would go into a different realm; his mood would change, he would become serious and would display signs

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<sup>384</sup> For effective presentation and communication techniques see. L. Stewart Tubbs, *Human Communication: Principles and Contexts*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 2010); Gail E. Myers and Michele T. Myers, *The Dynamics of Human Communication: A Laboratory Approach*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book, 1980); Sabanci Universitesi, "Etkili Sunum Teknikleri," Dilek Tokay, September, 2004, accessed 29 March 2013, [http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/bagem/writingcenter2/eng/documents/pdfdocs/Fall\\_2004\\_Etkili\\_Sunum\\_Teknikleri.pdf](http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/bagem/writingcenter2/eng/documents/pdfdocs/Fall_2004_Etkili_Sunum_Teknikleri.pdf); Hayati Hokelekli, "Gunumuz Iletisim Teknikleri ve Dini Iletisim," in *Diyanet Ilmi Dergi* XLII, 1 (2006): 41-58; Yusuf Macit, "Din Hizmetlerinde Sunum," *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 1/5 (2008): 479-499; Ahmet Koc, "Etkili Iletisim ve Ogretim Teknikleri Acisindan Vaaz," in *I. Din Hizmetleri Sempozyumu* (Ankara: DIB Yay., 2008), I/151-170.

<sup>385</sup> Aristotle, "Rhetoric," 595. Edwin Du Bois Shurter lists the personality and character/manner of the orator as one of the three factors that affects the audience. The other two factors are the subject matter and the style, namely the quality of rhetoric used (Shurter, *The Rhetoric of Oratory* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 108).

<sup>386</sup> Cakan, *Dini Hitabet*, 114-130; Yuce, *Konusma Sanati*, 41-49, 99-130.

of agony similar to the labour pains of a mother. You would understand that he had gone into the preparation phase for a talk or an article from his face, walk, stance and other behaviour. A very painful phase...He would think over and over again on how I should deliver, what should I deliver, which topics should I touch on, which style should I use...After deciding on these factors, he would supplicate to God, which made his nights an important focus as well. If Hocaefendi's vigilant nighttime worship is not understood, he cannot be understood. However, once the talk or the article was completed, the atmosphere would change and the mood would become joyous and light-hearted again...<sup>387</sup>

Although it is very difficult to discern Gülen's feelings about this, he mentioned his preparation phase before talks and articles in an interview:

I would start going through a painful phase one to two days before the talk thinking that I may give wrong information. I would experience discomfort that I cannot reveal and I would get ill...I would try not to talk on the phone for 24 hours before the talk in case 'I become angry and carry that into the mosque and misinform people'. I would watch what I ate. When I left home, I would watch my gaze so that no unlawful sights came into view. My Lord knows all this. What is more important was seeing my friends not helping me enough with this recently. I would face many negative situations. I would feel awkward for many reasons. I would ascend to the pulpit feeling very tense. Thus with such discomfort and worry I could not listen to my soul and convey what I felt with my soul. I realized that I wasted people's time with superficial talks. I felt very uncomfortable with this. Although I asked some of my friends 'Do not bother me for 24 hours before my talk, do not come to me with worldly affairs, do not let anyone contact me, let me listen to myself, repent and turn to my Lord', I ended up in difficult situations. Thus, with these painful thoughts, I said to my self 'I will stop' and thus I made my decision...<sup>388</sup>

Another witness of those days explained what he experienced: "...Especially on certain occasions, the orator would worry: 'What shall I give them and tell them!' and he became sleepless for many days worrying about preaching in the pulpit. He would resort to painkillers and needles to put up with this pain. If this state leaked out to the people, they would become

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<sup>387</sup> Küre.tv, "Talebeleri Hocaefendi'yi Anlatıyor," Küre.tv video, 2:12:48, April 2, 2014, <http://www.kure.tv/izle/asri-asan-sirlar-talebeleri-hocaefendi-yi-anlatiyor>.

<sup>388</sup> Can, *Ufuk Turu*, 153-154. The psychology and state of Gülen is also described on the website. It is highlighted that 24 hours prior to his talk, he would go into a self-critique and self-examination, as well as making thorough preparation by firstly practising his talk in his own surroundings. He would try to become one with the topic to be covered, but if this were not possible, he would sometimes not practise delivering the talk. FGulen, "Fethullah Gülen Hocaefeindinin Konusma Psikolojisi" FGulen, November 29, 1999, accessed March 30, 2013, <http://fGülen.com/tr/ses-ve-video/fethullah-Gülen-hitabet/fethullah-Gülen-hocaefendinin-vaizligi/8343-fGülen-com-Fethullah-Gülen-Hocaefendinin-Konusma-Psikolojisi>

very nervous and wish that the days would pass quickly, so that they could once again attend his talks.”<sup>389</sup>

It can be seen from these narratives that Gülen goes through a serious preparation phase before giving a talk. This preparation can be attributed to overwhelming sense of responsibility he felt.<sup>390</sup> In this regard, he emphasises going into presence of his audience with “an inner preparation and spiritual contentedness.”<sup>391</sup> Fostering a connection with God and avoiding wasting people’s time are fundamental criteria that he adopts. Religious orators should especially not see a talk as a simple speech. This kind of approach shows a lack of responsibility and a shortcoming in understanding the significance of the job. This is because the aim of religious talks is to guide, not to fill a given amount of time. Guidance is defined as “removing the obstacles between humans and God.” In essence, the speaker should be aware that their role is to build a bridge or strong bond between the subject matter and the audience. An orator who does not understand this notion and addresses his audience without preparation will have superficial acts, inappropriate words, misplaced jokes or harsh expressions. Thus, the oratory will achieve the opposite of its purpose.<sup>392</sup>

Gülen sets the bar high with his preparation criteria to minimise shortcomings and achieve the real purpose: “A person should prepare intellectually, spiritually, emotionally for a thirty minute talk a couple of days in advance; he should avoid unnecessary things, should scrutinise his heart to please Him; supplicate abundantly and seek refuge and plead to God to utter words that He would be pleased with.”<sup>393</sup> Gülen emulates significant figures from Islamic history, such as the companions and successors, in this regard. A good example is Tawus ibn Kaysan, one of the senior successors. When a person asked him to supplicate for him, he said he did not feel the required awe to supplicate. Thus, Gülen’s principles for preparing for a talk can be listed as the sentiment of responsibility, feeling awe, meeting the audience after spiritual preparation and seeking refuge in God with the worry of being a bad example.

Preparation, in Gülen’s view, is necessary, not only in the intellectual sense, but it also has strong relevance to practice and manner, as he stresses that the speaker’s talk should be the

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<sup>389</sup> Sizinti, “O Caminin Hatibi,” Osman Simsek, November 2003, accessed 20 April 2013 <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konular/ayrinti/o-caminin-hatibi.html>

<sup>390</sup> The criteria Gülen establishes are not only relevant to orators, but also to authors who want to convey messages through the written medium. He would also critique himself after the talk. For examples of his critiques, see Gülen, *Sohbet-i Canan*, 132; Gülen, *Kalbin Zumrut Tepeleri*, IV/60-61.

<sup>391</sup> Gülen, *Sohbet-i Canan*, 132.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 132.

“voice of his heart,” a reflection of their inner being and the expression of their soul. No subject matter should be shared without feeling it or it sitting comfortably with their conscience. “The orator should first hear the words in his heart; he should experience it as though someone is advising him; he should walk amongst the exemplary heroes he presents; he should experience deep concentration, as though he feels the presence of Utba, Shayba and Walid in explaining the chivalry of Hamza.”<sup>394</sup> This aspect and Gülen’s understanding seem to be an “oral performance” or “performance criticism”<sup>395</sup> of the *sīrah* in his sermons, since he successfully performs with effective speech and physical behaviour. The process of consciously preparing is a spiritual preparation, since it reflects the relationship between important religious notions *tabligh* and *tamthīl* (representation), which stems from the Qur’an in verses such as 61:2<sup>396</sup> and the Prophet’s example. Gülen has not only practiced these principles, but also has covered them comprehensively in his written works with the addition of new terminology, such as “The Tongue of the Heart, the Accent of Disposition,” “*tabligh-tamthīl* relationship” and “Conscientious Approval.”

Gülen emphasises that the orator or speaker should believe from the heart, implement this faith in their life and then convey it to others. In his view, if this process is not followed, then the audience will not accept the words of the speaker. Gülen explains this subject matter thus:

If expression is a key, then the luminous world that spreads from it is the heart. The effectiveness of each word is correlated with its connection to the heart. I think the words that are expressed through the tongue are only the shadows of heartfelt expressions. Nevertheless, the tongue of the heart, which is the shadow of the zenith of Speech (the Word of God), can only be understood by those who are open to that realm and who can hear the breath that arises from it.<sup>397</sup>

Gülen does not deny or despise the importance of using words of reason, eloquence and literacy that beautify and make a talk more effective. However, his emphasis is on a factor that is more effective than all others. Gülen also touches on this subject matter in another

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>395</sup> For the notion of “performance criticism” and especially its emergence as a new methodology regarding oratory and the New Testament, see David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part I,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 36(3) (2006): 118-133; David Rhoads, “Part II,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 36(4) (2006): 164-184.

<sup>396</sup> The text of the verse is: “O you who believe! Why do you say what you do not do. Most odious it is in the sight of God that you say what you do not do?” For other relevant verses, see Qur’an 2:44; 35:10.

<sup>397</sup> Gülen, “Gonul Dili Hal Sivesi,” *Yagmur* 29(4) 2005: 2. Gülen’s whole article is actually very important for this topic. Also see another similar article parallel to this topic Gülen, “Kalbin Soluklari,” in *Sukutun Cigliklari*, 75-79.

work, providing various proofs to show this path and methodology were adopted by the prophets:

A spiritual guide is one who is a man who reflects his disposition and a hero of loyalty who voices his practices. One who cannot be credible with his actions cannot make others accept anything. A strong belief from the heart and preaching what you believe and practice is the only way for a conveyed message to find acceptance in people's consciences. I believe the following reminder would be sufficient to prove this point: God said to Jesus: "O Jesus! Advise your nafs (soul) first; advise others after following this advice yourself; or be ashamed of me or be humble towards me."<sup>398</sup> This is also in conformity with what the Qur'an says<sup>399</sup> about Prophet Shuayb: "I do not act in opposition to you (myself doing) what I ask you to avoid."<sup>400</sup>

As mentioned above, Gülen's thoughts are based on the Qur'an and *sunnah*. When Gülen covers *tabligh* under the attributes of prophets in *Sonsuz Nur*, he mentions practising what is preached and preaching what can be implemented as one of the three most important attributes of a person communicating God's message. According to Gülen, a communicator of God's message should not preach what should be practised by others, but what they practise themselves, and should invite people to such a lifestyle. In this regard, the best example according to Gülen is Prophet Muhammad: "one of the dynamics that Prophet Muhammad used in conveying God's message is the congruity of his life with this post. He would represent his words with such perfection that a person who observed him would conclude the existence of God without the need for any other proofs. On many occasions, seeing him would be sufficient to accept his prophethood."<sup>401</sup> It is important to note the evidence Gülen proposes after this expression. That is, the Prophet committed followers rather than gullible individuals who were convinced with his *tabligh-tamthil* integrity,<sup>402</sup> such as Abū Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali who were geniuses and would govern large states after the Prophet. Gülen states the secret in the effectiveness of world-famous people like Rumi is also hidden in the speech of characters similar to prophets: "In Rumi's *Diwān-i Kabir*, there are not many

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<sup>398</sup> Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *zuhd* I/54; Abū Nuaym, *Hilyatu al-Awliya*, II/382.

<sup>399</sup> Qur'an 11:88.

<sup>400</sup> Gülen, *Kalbin Zumrut Tepeleri*, III/40-41.

<sup>401</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/262.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid*, I/262. For more discussion on the prime importance of *tabligh-tamthil* integrity in delivering the message and its being prerequisite, see Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/51-53; Gülen, *Irsad Ekseni*, 167-170, 190-191; Gülen, *Umit Burcu*, 125-132; 217-219; Gülen, *Prizma*, III/71-74.



statements aimed at convincing the mind but rather a unique language more to do with depth of character (*tamthīl*).”<sup>403</sup>

## **b) Scholarly and Intellectual Preparation Phase**

Another important aspect of Gülen’s talk preparation is the intellectual and scholarly preparation. The criteria of being an expert and having a good grasp of traditional sources in religious oratory are strongly emphasised as the most important in this regard.<sup>404</sup> Although this is the case with every other talk, religious oratory is even more important since it affects the afterlife of the person as well as their current life. Thus, as well as employing the methods already outlined, the orator should also prepare their talk with reference to the sources. When looking at Gülen’s preparation in this sense it is difficult to state which books he referred to in his intellectual preparation for a talk. However, there is no doubt he has a very good grasp and profound knowledge of traditional sources. In various articles and books his competence in almost every Islamic science is analysed in detail.<sup>405</sup> In addition, evidence of his preparation can be deduced from the subtle conclusions hidden in his talks. The narration of *hadith* with its narrators and references to sources, including the six authentic *hadith* books (*kutub al-sitta*), referencing major *sīrah* books such as Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hisham and Ibn Sa’d in his statements on *sīrah*, and critiquing the sources and narrations of *hadith* using *hadith* style and methodology, all show how seriously he took the preparation phase before his talks.<sup>406</sup> He would also include passages from the Torah and Gospel, citing chapter references, exact wording from the Arabic translation of a Gospel<sup>407</sup> and references from the two trustworthy sources in the Islamic world, Huseyin al-Jisri’s *Risāla al-Hamīdiyya* and Rahmatullah al-Hindī’s *Izhar al-Haqq*, stating that these books encompass the necessary knowledge on the subject matter.

Another indication is his persistent effort to give a general description of the people cited in the talk, such as the companions and followers of the companions’ biography. His references from *tabaqāt* sources such as Ibn Athīr demonstrate his care about a scholarly approach to the information used and his emphasis on preparation.

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<sup>403</sup> Gülen, *Sohbet-i Canan*, 101.

<sup>404</sup> Yuce, *Konusma Sanati*, 112; Cakan, *Dini Hitabet*, 139-164.

<sup>405</sup> For more information about Gülen in this regard, see Ismail Albayrak, ed., *Mastering Knowledge in Modern Times: Fethullah Gülen As an Islamic Scholar* (NY: Blue Dome Press, 2011); Hamza Aktan, ed., *M. Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi: Bir Alim Portresi* (Istanbul: Nil Yayinlari, 2014); Ali Unal, *Bir Portre Denemesi*, 17-18.

<sup>406</sup> Many incidents and specifically the “Predictions of the Unseen” (Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/138-192) and “Comment of a Number of Hadiths” (ibid, I/297-387) sections are clear examples.

<sup>407</sup> See Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/66-77 for the subject matter.

His use of three examples to elaborate on the subject matter in many of his talks (as if inspired by Prophet Muhammed's *sunnah* of repeating things three times) and expressions such as "I had these topics and examples to cover but will continue next time" or when delivering *khutba* ascending the pulpit immediately, show that he had prepared for the talks using traditional sources and had an order of execution in mind.

Gülen prepares himself materially, spiritually, intellectually and scientifically. He deals with worldly subjects, but turns to the Creator of the subjects knowing that He will move his audience and hence the result is from his Lord. His advice not to preach what he does not practise gives an insight into his personal practice and preparation. All this clearly highlights the significance Gülen attached to his work and professionalism. In this regard, the contribution of his effort and determination to succeed cannot be ignored. Although this was his general approach, there were occasions where he had to give talks without preparation, due to the insistence of his close associates. He was still successful in giving these impromptu talks, despite not making thorough preparation.

## ii) Preparation of the Congregation

Another important factor in oratory is to know the spiritual state of the audience, their general reputation and intellectual capacity.<sup>408</sup> Gülen's congregation would also go through a thorough preparation, which played a role in the success of these talks. In one article, Gülen uses the metaphor "mobile house of worship" for the mosques where the talks took place, and narrates the overall atmosphere from different perspectives. In this article, Gülen points out the depth and uniqueness of the congregation as he attributes the spiritual experiences to the congregation and their spiritual preparation in coming to the talks.<sup>409</sup> Osman Simsek gives the answer to the question "What kind of preparation would the congregation go through?":

It was not long ago, only 13-15 years. There was a rumour, good news that Hocaefendi would address the hearts and would take us to the time of *sīrah* and the lives of the companions. We were to begin preparing many days in advance. People would fast, recite the Qur'an and make supplication, praying and going through a material and spiritual cleansing, as though preparing to embark on a journey to another realm...<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Aristotle, "Rhetoric," 598; Yuce, *Konusma Sanati*, 110-111; Cakan, *Dini Hitabet*, 121,126-127.

<sup>409</sup> Gülen, *Ornekleri Kendinden Bir Hareket* (Istanbul: Nil yayinlari, 2008), 197-204.

<sup>410</sup> Simsek, "O Caminin Hatibi."

Gülen strongly emphasises the significance of being open to receiving advice, having a positive attitude and a right approach, to gain any benefit from talks.<sup>411</sup> In addition to other factors, such comments by Gülen might also contribute to the preparation of the congregation. It is also good to remember Gadamer’s metaphor called “fusion of horizons”<sup>412</sup>, which in this context means the perfect bonding and union of the orator and the audience, prior to the talk in the mosque. In such a positive atmosphere, both the orator and congregation have the roles of giving and receiving. Thus, the result of this interchange was an important book and a motivated individual who laid the foundations for a successful social movement.

#### **4.2.1.1.2.2 Presentation, Methodology and Style of the *Sonsuz Nur* Sermons**

The adopted methodology, style of presentation, gestures and mimics used, as well as the general state of the congregation during the talks, are just as important as the preparation before the talk. Thus, a thorough analysis shows that such information is reflected in the sermons.

##### **a) Presentation and Methodology**

While Gülen’s talks are systematic when viewed as a collection, each talk has its own methodology. This methodology is adopted in a framework.<sup>413</sup> Prior to starting his talk, Gülen focussed completely on praying and gave the verse on which he would base his talk. He would then give an “introduction” to the topic of the week and a general framework of the issues to be focused on. The necessity of relating the Prophet’s life, its relevance despite the passage of the time, its ability to provide solutions to the problems of today if understood correctly, as well as the emphasis on fundamental issues, re-emphasis on the Prophet being the perfect guide through various subsections and “who he is” as a human being, are all presented within the introductory framework. He then gave the annual plan of the talks while also touching on the holistic approach he would adopt in due course. It could be said that this introduction was well planned, to the extent that it could be easily used as the contents page of a book, as can be seen in the *Prophethood and Sonsuz Nur* series. This method gave the audience the opportunity, not only to approach the subject holistically, but also to come mentally prepared for the next talk. This also shows that Gülen’s sermons had continuous

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<sup>411</sup> Gülen, *Prizma*, I/96-100; Gülen, “Gonul Dili Hal Sivesi,” 2-5; Gülen, *Kalbin Zumurut Tepeleri*, III/280-283.

<sup>412</sup> For more on this metaphor, refer to David Vessey, “Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, 4 (2009): 531–542.

<sup>413</sup> I came to this conclusion after listening to many of his other talks, some of them several times, while taking notes on the style, topic, methodology and content, including the 38 week (I could only find 35 of the talks) 1975-1976 “Prophethood” series that has similar content to the *Sonsuz Nur* series of 1989-1990.

audiences. It would not be an exaggeration to see this as a set of extraordinary Friday sermons within the context of Turkey.

For the later talks in the series, he would firstly give a summary of the previous week<sup>414</sup> and then make an introduction as per above. In these later parts, known as the “development phase,” the subject matter was extended into various subsections and elaborated on using striking examples specifically from the *sīrah*. In addition, the differences in Gülen’s talks were hidden in his spiritual bonding with the examples, arguments and the heroes he used. The summaries not only cemented the subject matter through examples, but ensured the audience could absorb the information more effectively.

The talks were recapped at the end with a “conclusion” and more importantly they were made relevant to the congregation by stressing that the topics are relevant to today’s people and similar attitudes are expected from them. A very brief introduction to the following week’s topic was also made to raise interest and curiosity in the congregation. If the talk was part of a series, this system would always be followed. The same methodology also seems to have been followed even if it was a stand-alone sermon, but it was followed even more strictly if the talk was one of the *Sonsuz Nur* series. When starting this series of sermons, Gülen mentioned “God willing, I will focus on different dimensions and aspects of Prophet Muhammad for about a year”<sup>415</sup> and after 53 weeks, his comprehensive systematic work became the basis for *Sonsuz Nur*.

Gülen clearly put extraordinary effort into assessing the level and degree of understanding of the congregations listening to his talks. When he sidetracks onto topics that are not part of oratory tradition, i.e., linguistic or more academic analysis, he shows sensitivity by explaining the reasons for doing so. For example, when he analyses *hadith* from a chain (*sanad*) and literature (*ishtiqaq*) perspective, the statements he makes, such as “this normally would not be given to the mosque congregation” or “I should not normally dwell on this, but it will be an answer for those who will listen to the recordings and direct criticism,”<sup>416</sup> show that, while he addresses the congregation, he also gives serious attention to the sciences in the field. In the tenth sermon from the *Sonsuz Nur* series, after giving some literal linguistic definitions and other derivatives from the same root word as the prophetic attribute of *amānah*

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<sup>414</sup> Gülen expresses that Ottoman institutions used this methodology and called it *mefhum arzetme* (announcements of the concepts).

<sup>415</sup> Nil tv, “Sonsuz Nur, 02,” Nil tv, 1:37:26, September 20, 1989, <http://www.nil.tv/vaaz-detay/vaaz/tumu/seri/436>.

<sup>416</sup> Nil tv, “Sonsuz Nur, 10,” Nil tv, 1:37:26, 17 March 1989, <http://www.nil.tv/vaaz-detay/vaaz/tumu/seri/442>.

(trustworthiness), he states that these topics are very engaging, but would be heavy and boring for the congregation and thus keeps it short. On the other hand, this information is important in demonstrating the preparation phase for his talks. Gülen also aims to address more knowledgeable people in the congregation and encourage others to push themselves to understand these concepts. This may also be an attempt to bring the congregation onto common ground, while observing the differences in their abilities and avoiding a monotonous talk.

Another noteworthy detail is his insistence on giving general characteristics and biographical information about the companions and successors. This is very important as it shows the subject matter has come through safe hands and representatives while painting the ideal generation and providing examples of real guides.

## **b) Style**

Gülen's style can be appraised through a careful analysis of his works and expressions. That is because the points he raises in describing the conveyance of God's message are things he implements in his own life. For instance, when Gülen describes the power and effect of literature in his book on language, aesthetics and belief, entitled *Beyan*, he takes the discussion on style and identifies three distinct categories: scientific, oratory and literary styles. His words on the oratory style give an indication of his own style when he gives the specific characteristics of these three categories.

Oratory style emphasizes proofs and arguments, maintaining interest and enthusiasm, making occasional repetition, supporting the narration with paraphrases when necessary, using colorful expression, and enlivening the speech by inspirational shifts without detracting from the main axis.<sup>417</sup>

Noble thoughts and lofty subjects must be explained with a style to penetrate minds, excite hearts and receive acceptance from spirits. If not, people will only see the torn and miserable "clothing" over the meaning, and thus will not seek the inner jewels.<sup>418</sup>

From these two quotes we can see the importance of using proofs, exciting language, observing the taste of the people in terms of literature and vivid presentation in oratory style, which can be observed in Gülen's speeches.

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<sup>417</sup> Gülen, *Speech*, 16.

<sup>418</sup> Gülen, *Olcu veya Yoldaki Isiklar*, 51.

Another noteworthy observation made by Gülen about style in his talks is the importance of a holistic approach. Gülen tries hard to appeal to all the faculties in his addressees, which is also a style used in the Qur'an and the practice of Prophet Muhammad. He does not neglect the soul while convincing the mind, nor does he neglect the free will while addressing the emotions, by adopting illogical expressions. Thus, while Gülen uses the same style and methodology in his talks, he re-emphasises the two sources that contain the principles and examples for the daily life of a believer. Gülen's opinion on how the Qur'an addresses issues is:

Its addressee is not only the intellect, the heart or the soul. It treats human beings in the totality of their feelings, covers all the material-spiritual faculties and aspects of the human being; its message is brief and concise but addresses both the inner and outer world of the person at the same time. The Qur'an generates and forms a common understanding, unity of feeling, thought and intelligence about the entire universe, entities, all things and all of humanity.<sup>419</sup>

The same holistic notion is especially covered in these talks – and naturally in the *Sonsuz Nur* – as one of the three fundamental approaches Prophet Muhammad used in his style and methodology when communicating the divine message.

A Prophet uses the appropriate path, style and methodology as an expert in the field of presenting messages from God and issues incumbent on him as a messenger. He perceives the human as a holistic being and thus conveys the message in a holistic manner. That is why no faculty including intelligence, sense, heart, reason and emotion is neglected and left wanting after enlightenment of the revelation. In this light, those whose communication methods do not conform with the Prophets will not be successful. Intellect, reason and senses are intertwined and shoulder-to-shoulder in the communication of a Prophet...<sup>420</sup>

Gülen bases this approach on a Qur'anic verse: "Say: This is my way: I call people to God on clear evidence, with sure knowledge and insight (*basīrah*) –I and those who follow me."<sup>421</sup> Thus, a path that promotes the integration of intellect, reason and sound judgment with sense, heart and conscience is the subject matter, which is also the path of prophets and their

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<sup>419</sup> Gülen, *Beyan*, 21-22.

<sup>420</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/221-222.

<sup>421</sup> Qur'an 12:108.

followers or, in the words of Gülen, the path of prophets' inheritors. It is necessary to use a holistic and visionary approach in this path and Gülen's use of oratory conforms to this.<sup>422</sup>

However, Gülen's style has drawn certain criticisms from the perspective of the audience, as pointed out by people who listen to him for the first time. The advanced scientific language and words he adopts in expressing religious truths can be hard to understand, especially by people who do not consistently follow him. In a similar way, those who are foreign to Gülen's style find his emotional talks, and his and the congregation's tears, strange, as these are outside the standard religious leader profile in Turkey. In this regard, having a regular congregation makes Gülen's job much easier and allows him to comfortably adopt this style.

Gülen uses the same methodology in addressing his audience through his talks in an attempt to convey what he calls "our (Islamic) system of thought," which is based on the Qur'an and the Prophet, despite variations due to time and context. A close look at his sermons shows that he has addressed all faculties of his audience from a holistic perspective, including logic and reason, emotions and ideals, but at the same time without neglecting the realities of life. It can be said that the influence of the talks on people can be attributed to his style and methodology. The ability to blend the past and the present and to convey it with this style or again, in Gadamerian terminology, successfully combining the two (fusion of horizons), has resulted in an effective presentation. This is because the people who listen to him receive satisfaction in many ways, believing that the talks address many of their material and spiritual needs; on the other hand, they strive to reach the ideals presented together with the realities, while questioning themselves.

#### **4.2.1.1.2.3 Other Aspects and the Main Theme of the *Sonsuz Nur* Sermons**

I will conclude this section by touching on a few points that are relevant to oratory tradition, methodology and style.

The first point I will highlight is the love the Prophet Gülen displays through almost all topics he covers. The love he sometimes claims "to be stolen from us"<sup>423</sup> is experienced very vividly and strongly by him and is also impressed on his audience. The same love and strong connection can also be sensed in almost every page and chapter of the book. Gülen sees this as beyond love and affection, and deals with the rhetoric as "to be with him and to reach

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<sup>422</sup> Gülen deals with this holistic manner in another work as part of the methodology of Islamic thought, what he calls "our system of thought." For more information, see Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 114.

<sup>423</sup> For one of the talks that deals with the stolen love of the prophets, see FGülen, "Allah sevgisini çaldılar bizden," FGülen, February 27, 2013, accessed March 29, 2013, <http://www.fethullahGülen.com/tr/ses-ve-video/hitabet/herkul-nagme-ve-bamteli-aciklamalari/34574-allah-sevgisini-caldilar-bizden.html>.

him.” This expression is not only a part of deep mystical understanding, but also conforms with the concept of prophethood and the place of prophets in Islam. According to Gülen, while today’s people have lost most of their general criteria for sentimental values, their perceptions, attitudes and thoughts about prophets in general, and Prophet Muhammad in particular, have also been completely reversed. It is not correct to judge prophets with the criteria of a mere human being, despite refusing to accept them as human beings. They are not ordinary, but specially entrusted people sent to humanity by God, as discussed in Chapter 3. When the subject is the final Prophet, in Gülen’s thought: “He has been sent with an exceptional soul and exceptional qualities to redesign the world and give new horizons to humanity.”<sup>424</sup>

According to Gülen’s perception, therefore, one of the foremost issues to be focused on is consciously being worthy followers of the Prophet. He consistently revives the ideas “does the community of Muhammad take him as a role model to enlighten their lives and do they show the effort to be with him?” in his audience. The Qur’an presents him as the best example,<sup>425</sup> upholds obedience to the Prophet as being tantamount to obedience to God,<sup>426</sup> and teaches that the love of God can be attained through loving and obeying the Prophet.<sup>427</sup> The Prophet also expresses the importance of loving him more than anything else to taste true belief, and without it the impossibility of tasting this belief.<sup>428</sup> This topic is not something that remains as mere theory in Gülen’s talks. Gülen proposes the idea of meeting him as a reality and insists that they will achieve it collectively. In doing so, he uses verses that state the immortality of martyrs,<sup>429</sup> and their rank being third after the prophets,<sup>430</sup> as evidence. According to Gülen, prophets, and especially Prophet Muhammad, have not died but have changed dimension. Thus, it is possible to meet with him, but there are certain requirements for such meetings. According to Gülen, what befits his audience “is to align themselves with his path and frequency. When this is obtained there will appear a conversation...The relationship will be of commander, being the Prophet, who gives commands to those receiving orders, being the audience.”<sup>431</sup> Gülen also mentions that these expressions may not

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<sup>424</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/77.

<sup>425</sup> Qur’an 33:21.

<sup>426</sup> Qur’an 3:32, 132; 8:1, 20, 46; 58:13.

<sup>427</sup> Qur’an 3:31.

<sup>428</sup> Bukhārī, *iman*, 8, 9, *ayman* 3; Muslim, *iman*, 67, 69, 70; Nasai, *iman*, 19; İbn Maja, *muqaddima*, 9.

<sup>429</sup> “And say not of those who are killed in God’s cause: ‘They are dead.’ Rather they are alive, but you are not aware” (Qur’an 2:154); “Do not think at all of those killed in God’s cause as dead. Rather, they are alive; with their Lord they have their sustenance” (Qur’an 3:169).

<sup>430</sup> Qur’an 4:69.

<sup>431</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/80.



be found objective by some. However, this is proposed not only by him, as people like Imam Suyuti state that he has openly met Prophet Muhammed over seventy times.<sup>432</sup>

Gülen's deep-rooted and vivid affection can be seen in the introduction to the book through his narrations of memories during his visit to Medina:

Time is not obsolete and has not reduced any of the truths attributed to Him. Yes, he is still very fresh. As I always tell my friends, whenever I go to Medina his fragrance affects me so much that I almost feel that, if I mention his holy name, it is as if I am about to meet him, and he is about to appear and welcome us a few steps ahead. This is how fresh he is in our hearts, and will only become more and more refreshed overtime.<sup>433</sup>

It is important to note Fathi Hijazi's words about *Sonsuz Nur*. He says that Gülen does not use narrations like other scholars, but it is as if he is living the story alongside the Prophet. "The love of the Prophet is reflected and can be seen on every page of the book anyway."<sup>434</sup> In the same sermon, Gülen recounts his memories of Medina and his feelings during the visit:

When God had allowed me to rub my sinful face on the blessed lands, the village of the Messenger of God seemed so luminous and spiritually pleasing that at that time, if all the doors of heaven were opened and I was invited in, I would have preferred to stay there and not pass through any of them...I do not mean that I deserve such a post, but I am just expressing my love for the Messenger of God. I have been praying all my life to serve as a servant for one of the junior ranking companions of the Prophet.<sup>435</sup>

Thus, the following points about Gülen should be noted when reviewing his series on the Prophet. First, Gülen's love for the Prophet, which he perceives as the foundation to what he preaches in all these sermons. Second, his pursuit of understanding the Prophet as a person with exceptional qualities and dimensions, rather than as an ordinary human being. Third, his persistent stress on the possibility, and maybe even his objective, of meeting with him. Gülen's main purpose in these talks is to revive love for the Prophet, "to ignite the flame of prophetic love in the generations" and to restore awareness and appreciation of the Prophet

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<sup>432</sup> Nabhānī, *al-Fath al-Kabīr* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1932), I/7; *Jāmiu Karāmāt al-Awliyā* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1989), II/158. Mawlana proposes a similar perspective as in: "The followers of truth are alive with another life. The birds which flap wings with its wing have a different nest. Do not see them in the same way as others because you cannot see them; they are beyond the two worlds in another realm" (*Kalbin Zumrut Tepeleri*, II/314).

<sup>433</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/20.

<sup>434</sup> Samanyoluhaber, "'Sonsuz Nur' kitabı Mısır'da ders kaynağı," samanyoluhaber, April 20, 2012, accessed April 21, 2012, <http://www.samanyoluhaber.com/gundem/sonsuz-nur-kitabi-misirda-ders-kaynagi/746959/>.

<sup>435</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/24-25. While Gülen is reserved about explaining a personal virtue, he does not hold back from expressing this love if he can feel that other people would become much deeper in their love.

and prophets in general. This is because, according to Gülen, one of the fundamental problems of people today, and thus the material/spiritual problems they face, is a lack of understanding of these excellent personalities. Consequently, “beyond the promotion of the excellent and exalted character of Prophet Muhammad, presenting Him as a recipe for the salvation of humanity and a remedy, not only for Muslims, but for all of humanity’s problems, has become an important agenda for Gülen, and a priority pursued with passion and strong drive.”<sup>436</sup> Thus, it is very natural for a person with such passion and energy to reflect this ambition through his gestures and expressions. In my view, the enthusiasm, excitement and sincerity of his sermons are the result of this passion. It is important to note Muhammad Imara’s statement in the introduction to the Arabic translation of the book: “The most important and original aspect of the work is it being the product of the combination of a heart filled with love for the Prophet and intelligence that is scholarly insightful.”<sup>437</sup>

It is due to this deep love that Gülen never uses the Prophet’s name without a respectful quality, title or attribute and stands up upon uttering his name, as much as he can. Gülen uses more than 150 different respectful names or attributes to express his veneration of the Prophet in *Sonsuz Nur*.<sup>438</sup> This is important because, if they are carefully scrutinised, there are only three or four different names and attributes used in contemporary Turkish *sīrah* sources. In addition, Gülen automatically stands up each time he utters the name of the Prophet. Some scholars have stated that it is not sufficient to send blessings to the Prophet by tongue only, upon the utterance of his name. These scholars have said that while the tongue sends blessings to him, the whole body (body language) should also acknowledge this. This should not be artificial, but sincere, as Gülen always pays the utmost attention to actions being sincere and from the heart. This portrait of the imam, above all, leaves a lasting effect on the

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<sup>436</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/19.

<sup>437</sup> Gülen, *al-Nūr al-Khālīd Muhammad: Mafkharat al-Insaniyya*, trans. Orhan Muhammad Ali (Cairo: Dar al-Nīl, 2007), 10.

<sup>438</sup> While Gülen does not plainly use the name Muhammad, he also does not use the “Hazreti Muhammad” or “Hazreti Peygamber” titles that are used in other Turkish sources. The names, titles and phrases he uses always represent respect and love, such as the Pride of Humankind, the Prince of Two Worlds, the Matchless Pearl, a Monument of Compassion, the Exalted Prophet, etc. The name of the book is also noteworthy in this regard: *Sonsuz Nur* means Infinite Light. The following words explain Gülen’s understanding: “Sometimes when I take notes, I only write the name using the title “Hazreti” with his name instead of including the salutation *sallallāhu aleyhi ve sellem*. I quickly get shaken and could almost hear a whisper saying ‘do not be impudent. I have *sallallāhu aleyhi ve sellem* attached to my name. You should respond with this salutation upon every utterance of my name’. When the books are opened in the Afterlife, I would be very embarrassed at the presence of the Pride of Humanity to see that I have addressed him like an ordinary person.” (Gülen, *Zihin Harmani*, 20). Even writing the salutation in full instead of an abbreviation is a topic of discussion among *hadith* scholars. See for instance Ibn Kathir, *al-Baith al-Hathīth Sharh Ikhtisār Ulūm al-Hadīth* (Cairo: Maktabat Dar al-Turath, 2005), 112. For more information on this topic, see Gülen, *Yol Mulahazalari*, 194-195; Zeki Saritoprak, “Love of The Prophet in Gülen’s Sufism,” The Gülen Movement Conference Chicago 2010, Panel 1: Hizmet & Spirituality, <http://Gülen-movement.net/Gülen-movement-conference/Gülen-movement-conference-chicago-2010-panel-1-hizmet-spirituality/>; Mustafa Yılmaz, “M. Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi’nin Gönül Dünyasında Peygamber Sevgisi,” in *Yeni Umit*, 17(67) 2005.

congregation. Thus, Gülen not only conveys his message through words, but also with his whole body, self and heart. This style has differentiated him from many other orators and attracted many people to his message.

Further, Gülen has written close to twenty poems, arising from his love of the Prophet. The excessive love, his strong wholehearted connection to and longing for the Prophet, are the dominant themes in these poems.<sup>439</sup>

It is insufficient to classify *Sonsuz Nur* as a mere *sīrah* book when these matters are taken into account. Although I am unable to detail it here, Gülen provides many mystical and spiritual truths of different aspects of the Prophet in this work and various others. Gülen's articles on *Haqīqat al-Ahmadiyya* [Truths of Ahmad], *Haqīqat al-Muhammadiyya* [Truths of Muhammad] and *Insan al-Kāmil* [A Monument of a Perfect Human Being] where the archetype for the *Nūr al-Muhammadi* (Light of the Prophet)<sup>440</sup> is the theme, need special attention and study, in my view. *Sonsuz Nur* also encompasses connotations, signs and words that highlight this aspect of the Prophet. I have not gone into detail, as these concepts and topics are not given in detail, but rather delivered in his talks through subtle references and implied meanings. Apart from information on various proofs for prophethood (*dalāil*), Gülen's work resembles works like Qādī Iyad's *al-Shifa bi Ta'rif Huqūq al-Mustafa* [The Book of Healing by the Recognition of the Rights of or News of the Chosen One] with similar characteristics. Thus, when such topics are focussed on through mysticism and love, there is a sense of excessiveness. It could be due to the dominance of such aspects in *Sonsuz Nur*, and the lack of knowledge of people on these issues, that people critique Gülen's work as depicting a world he has envisaged in his head. It could be more appropriate to perceive the *Sonsuz Nur* talks as a collection of works from the gnosis tradition (*majlis of irfan*), where the congregation shares and deals with the *sīrah* as part of this spiritual knowledge which usually has a strong connection with the Prophet, rather than the classical Salafī approach which merely narrates incidents that took place in his life.

Since *Sonsuz Nur* is delivered in the setting of a mosque with a congregation present, it has the style of a *wa'z* talk. The understanding and receptivity of the congregation has an

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<sup>439</sup> These poems can be found in his work *Kirik Mizrap*.

<sup>440</sup> For example, Fethullah Gülen, "Hakikat-i Ahmediye," in *Sizinti*, 33(385) 2011, 26-27; "Hakikat-i Muhammediye," in *Sizinti*, 33(386) 2011, 78-79; Gülen, *Fikir Atlası*, 58-61; Gülen, "Insan-i Kamil," *Kalbin Zumrut Tepeleri*, II/302-316. This topic is better understood if it is studied in comparison to Aziz Mahmud Hudayi's work along with other scholars' studies that deal with the issue in a central theme of trial order of appearance of the world, appearance of Adam, appearance of Muhammad that the archetype for the Light of Muhammad is discussed. Aziz Mahmud Hudayi, *Khulāsāt al-Akhhbār*, trans. K. Kara and M. Özdemir [Alemin Yarattığı Ve Hz. Muhammedin Zuhuru] (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2011).

important place and all the features of what Gülen calls “oratory style” have been appropriately used. Another interesting part of the talks is Gülen’s deliberate avoidance of controversial issues. This is because, in the classical Islamic tradition of the *sohbat* (conversations), these kinds of topics are never discussed. Thus, the examples and messages he gives from the companions serve this purpose. There are almost no divisive topics, but rather uniting incidents, and people from different backgrounds would easily accept them. In parallel with all this, if there are any misunderstandings that need to be resolved, such as the infallibility of the Prophets, he visits the topic and gives it attention. It is also very interesting to see the analytical approach to issues in his talks, to systematise an approach while evaluating it from a current perspective. With this in mind, it is very inappropriate to classify *Sonsuz Nur* as a ‘folk lyric in praise of *sīrah*’. A rational approach is adopted in which what is beautiful is justified and what is perfect is also justified. The comprehensible and holistic approach adopted in his methodology and style not only finds acceptance from the congregation, but also motivates them to achieve goals with enthusiasm and sincerity.

#### **4.2.2 *Sonsuz Nur*’s Novel Systematic Approach to Subject Matters**

Unlike other biographies from the *sīrah* tradition, which usually begin with a chronological biography of the Prophet, *Sonsuz Nur* strikes the reader immediately as being different. This is because the book comprises topics that are chosen in a unique systematic way, peculiar to the author. A closer look shows this systematisation is based on prophetic attributes outlined by Islamic theology or, in other words, based on a foundation of *kalām* discipline. In this section, I will outline the systematic approach to subject matters in the book, question the style/methodology used and highlight the reasons behind this approach. Understanding the approach and system used in *Sonsuz Nur* will reveal the original insights Gülen has contributed to the field of *sīrah*.

*Sonsuz Nur* is the product of an effort to revive the distorted institution of prophethood and establish recognition and respect toward the prophets, which were negatively affected by materialist and positivist currents in the Islamic world, as was discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Although these currents started to lose their force towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the West, the Islamic world still suffered the effects of these ideologies. It was as a response to the impact of these ideologies, and to respond to doubts of the century pertaining to theology, the unity of God and other crucial issues, that Gülen began giving the talks that would become *Sonsuz Nur*, presenting *sīrah* in a different and original way. Why did Gülen feel the need to respond to these issues in detail? What was his ultimate aim? Also, if he was going to analyse the life of the Prophet in detail, why did he not use a chronological approach? What was the

methodology he used? In light of these questions, I will examine the systematic approach seen in Gülen's work and the reasons behind it.

A close look at the contents of the book suggests answers to most of these questions. The first volume comprises a preface, introduction and the first chapter.<sup>441</sup> Almost all the topics covered in this volume are directly linked to the topic of prophethood within the *kalām* discipline.

In the preface (pp. 19-31), Gülen emphasises the need to introduce and to understand the Prophet in a genuine way, which would address many of the problems and the love of prophets. He also gives a brief blueprint of the book, as if to establish the importance of a work that includes the prophethood of Muhammad, his distinctive place *vis-à-vis* other prophets, his distinguishing characteristics, his religious, family and military leadership, as well as the specialist knowledge and other personal attributes, which singled him out as an exemplary human being. This is an important methodology that can also be found in the Qur'an, as well as in some modern communication methods. Presentation of overall topics and emphasis on their importance increases the interest of the reader. The Qur'an uses this approach in explaining *qisas al-anbiyā*, stories of the prophets (*sīrah* also can be viewed as one of these stories). For example, when the Qur'an recounts the story of the Companions of the Cave, it first gives a summary,<sup>442</sup> then goes on to the details including their religion, works, revival, reasons behind their retreat to the cave, how they stayed there, their resurrection, their discovery and finally the disputes on the duration of their stay and the number of people involved.<sup>443</sup> Thus, the abstract picks out the most important aspects of the story and acts as a teaser to stimulate the interest and attention of the audience.<sup>444</sup> Hamīdullah uses a similar approach as he firstly concentrates on the chronological life of the Prophet before focusing on the topics he has chosen in detail.<sup>445</sup>

The introduction (pp.35-81) is entitled, "The Prophet Sent as a Mercy to the Worlds." The notions of "the Awaited Dawn" and "a Dark Period" are used at the beginning of the introduction to refer to the period of darkness, called *jāhiliyya* (the age of ignorance), and deal with this darkness symbolically as the sign of a new dawn. Although such a beginning brings

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<sup>441</sup> The introduction written by the publishing house was not reviewed.

<sup>442</sup> Qur'an 18:9-12.

<sup>443</sup> Qur'an 18:13-26.

<sup>444</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Zilal al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1986), IV/2261; Sayyid Qutb, *al-Taswīr al-Fannī* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2002), 180-181; Suleyman Sertkaya, *Konulu Tefsir Metodu Isiginda Kehf Suresi'nin Tahlili*, unpublished Master thesis, Marmara University Institute of Social Sciences, 2009, 44-45.

<sup>445</sup> Hamīdullah, *Islam Peygamberi*, 45-235. The lengthy chronology is perceived as small in consideration of the book's length.

to mind the classic *sīrah* works, which generally started with a portrayal of the darkness of the age, Gülen's approach differed in that this was a clear sign for a new dawn. It is very common for the authors to analyse the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula in *sīrah* works. Whether it is the early classical *sīrah* works or Shiblī, Hamīdullah, Mubarakphuri and various other modern *sīrah* scholars' works, there is detailed discussion on the socio-economic situation, lifestyle and religious rituals of the Quraysh tribe, which the Prophet belonged to, and other tribes including even the neighbouring tribes in or around Mecca.<sup>446</sup> The core aim of these scholars is centred on the intention to present the period as a historic and socio-political reality.

However, Gülen's summarised presentation of the age is what sets him apart from other *sīrah* authors. He covers the topic in the context of *jāhiliyya*, with the people being in a state of spiritual crisis and in need of a saviour. Gülen's fundamental argument is the need for a light in time of darkness, where the barbarism of the Arabs and world powers (namely the Roman and Persian empires), indecency and immorality, polytheism, which Gülen describes as "a deception placed in human nature," and deviant beliefs hold sway.<sup>447</sup> In summary "*jāhiliyya*" was widespread and things were judged from a false point of view because moral standards had totally collapsed. This moral, spiritual, scientific, social and economic state of ignorance is defined as *jāhiliyya* in the Qur'an as well (24:40). This technique paints a picture of humanity that lacks the light of prophethood, at the same time preparing the audience for the truths of prophethood to be presented later.

According to Gülen, *jāhiliyya* is not the opposite of knowledge, but a synonym for disbelief that is the opposite of faith and belief. Thus, *jāhiliyya* is not a term used for the Arabs of the time, rather it is a generic term for communities and time periods that are not enlightened with the light of prophethood, prophets in general or the luminous light of the Prophet in particular. In other words, lifestyles that are outside the sphere of the Prophet are in a state of ignorance, according to his definition.<sup>448</sup> Gülen's definition of *jāhiliyya* is original, but it is reminiscent of Sayyid Qutb's view<sup>449</sup> on the same subject. However, there are significant differences with Qutb, although some of the expressions might state otherwise. Qutb makes *jāhiliyya*, which is mentioned in four places in the Qur'an, the central focus of his exegesis. His interpretations

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<sup>446</sup> For example see. Shiblī, *Sīrat*, 89-125; Hamīdullah, *Islam Peygamberi*, 23-49; Mubarakphuri, *al-Rahīq al-Makhtum* (Cairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2010), 21-61.

<sup>447</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, 1/40.

<sup>448</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, 1/35, 40, 47. Gülen's following statement is quite noteworthy: "Yes, the time that he lived was in fact named as the age of *jāhiliyya*, but this was a term used for the situation away from his individual lifestyle. This is used to refer to the life and time apart from his distinctive personal time and lifestyle. Otherwise, he has never lived the time of *jāhiliyya*." Also refer Gülen, *Kendi İklimimiz*, 122-130.

<sup>449</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones, Ma'alim fi'l-tareeq*, ed. A.B. al-Mehri (Birmingham: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2006). The author frequently uses this term and has detailed arguments around the term *jāhiliyya*.

are generally political. On the other hand, Gülen has a spiritual and ethical approach and covers the notion as an instrument that can be used to better understand the elements introduced by the Prophet. Hence, it is very difficult to argue a similarity in the train of thought.

The childhood and travels of the Prophet are Gülen's focus following the introduction. He describes Muhammad's lifestyle as "a prophetic lifestyle" even before his prophethood and thus suggests this stage was a journey towards being a prophet. This approach gives rise to discussion on whether infallibility, one of the essentials of prophethood in the *kalām* discipline, also spans the time before prophethood. Gülen clearly expresses his view: "His childhood, youth and maturity took the form of an introduction, steps and a ladder towards his prophethood."<sup>450</sup> Also, being known as Muhammad the Trustworthy, "*al-amīn*," and as a person who represented trustworthiness and security throughout his life, points to another essential attribute of prophets, *amānah* (truthfulness). This section emphasises infallibility and God's direct protection of the Prophet, as he loses his protectors one by one and lives as an orphan relying only on God. Different interpretations<sup>451</sup> of the time spent in the cave of Hira (*tahannuth*), and interesting points raised, such as the fact that Ali was master of saints and sainthood, was in some way a response to Abū Talib's protection of the Prophet.

The introduction emphasises the prophetic lifestyle Muhammad lived, despite not yet having the title, the prior life being a preparation phase<sup>452</sup> which displayed the potential he had to become a prophet. While the reader is drawn into the book by demonstrating the need for the Prophet, there is also an emphasis on the purpose of prophets in general, their characteristics and attributes based on a *kalām* perspective, as well as briefly considering the chronology of

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<sup>450</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/47. In the later parts of the book, Gülen states: "They are entrusted people. They were prophets in the womb" (ibid, I/101).

<sup>451</sup> Gülen's approach to the time spent in the cave of Hira (*tahannuth*) and the life of Muhammad before prophethood is: *Tahannuth* means to seclude one's self and commit to worship. According to Gülen, Muhammad was contemplating existence, the meaning behind existence, creation and purpose of creation while considering the corruption of humanity, its shocking and sorrowful state (Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/45). Gülen also interprets this seclusion as a silent protest against the deviation of the community. (Herkul, "Dinin Afeti Üç Zümre," Herkul, October 19, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.herkul.org/bamteli/dinin-afeti-uc-zumre/>).

<sup>452</sup> Gülen also considers the intensified *ru'ya al-sādiqa* (true dreams) the Prophet experienced prior to prophethood as a preparation for revelation. According to Gülen, "God – I ask for the Prophet's forgiveness if this expression is not right – had rehabilitated him through these dreams to be ready for the receipt of revelation. He saw and saw and saw...until he was confronted with the revelation 'Read, in the name of your Lord' which he understood to be real. He perceived the dreams as glad tidings and this as the real revelation" (Herkul, "Bayrama Hasret Asırlar ve Yumruklandıkça Güçlenen Bahadırlar," Herkul, October 4, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://www.herkul.org/bamteli/bayrama-hasret-asirlar-ve-yumruklandikca-guclenen-bahadirlar/>). Gülen's commentary on the term in one of the early revelation *tabattul* is also along this line: "*Tabattul* is an order given to the Prophet with the commencement of his prophethood in surah Muzzammil (73:8). The Prophet was slowly being prepared and rehabilitated for the weight of revelation, experiencing a different realm and dimension and direct exposure to the divine World. Thus, in preparation for this hard task, he was told "and keep in remembrance the Name of your Lord; free yourself from relying on temporary things and turn to God with all your heart" (Gülen, *Yasatma Ideali*, 34-35).

his prophetic career. In the later chapters, attributes of the prophets pertaining to stories and incidents from *sīrah* are covered from different perspectives in a rational framework. Although the topic is exclusively based on *sīrah*, Prophet Muhammad's life, Gülen does not neglect contextualising and relating the topic to other prophets and prophethood. Thus, he maintains the link between the inclusive and exclusive (or particular-general) in Qur'anic methodology. In addition, he also makes sure theological shortcomings on perspectives, thoughts and intentions about prophets are also addressed.

The book continues with the section that can be considered the heart of the topic – “love of the Prophet” – where the author states: “I am intending to make all I will say now a foundation for what I am going to talk about.”<sup>453</sup> Thus, in later chapters, *sīrah* is represented under different headings where historical, social, empirical, psychological arguments are discussed in a reasoned way, and one of the most important, sensitive and spiritual aspects is also covered: the love and connection of individuals with the Prophet. Such an introduction is not only original in the sense that it takes a holistic approach on historical, intellectual and spiritual needs, but is also quite logical and systematic. It gives a reader the impression that this systematic and logical link is an outcome of thorough thinking and pre-planning.

Another point of interest in the introduction is Gülen's analysis of what people, including a handful of individuals called *hanīf*, were actually expecting with regard to the appearance of a prophet in the time of ignorance. Gülen considers the intellectual and spiritual suffering of the *hanīfs*, and their avoidance of idol worshipping, to be part of the preparation for the coming of the Prophet. It is clear he does not skip any detail regarding this issue and puts it into historical context. The *sīrah* is seen from a different viewpoint when it is read from this original perspective. The disbelief of the people upon such expectations in the time of *jāhiliyya* is evaluated from a socio-psychological perspective and explained through the notions of jealousy, envy, competition and stubbornness.

The news of the coming of the Prophet by the scriptures and other prophets is another topic examined in the introduction. In addition to verses and sayings of the Prophet, the topic is summarised and discussed with the inclusion of wording from the Gospel and Torah (from Arabic translations). As I indicated at the start of the thesis, Ibn Ishāq, his contemporaries and other *sīrah* authors view Islamic history as the history of the world, humanity and prophethood, and thus start their work with the first human, Prophet Adam, and the

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<sup>453</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/81.



creation.<sup>454</sup> In this section of *sīrah*, Gülen seems to give the impression of standing other prophets alongside the final Prophet, instead of going into well-detailed narrative of creation and other prophets. The reader can sense an emphasis on the gratitude, respect, connection and appreciation of the prophets towards the Prophet Muhammad, in common with the rest of creation. Even though there is a place for such understanding, this perspective resembles the content of very traditional Islamic works, and whilst there are individual studies where this topic (the promised Prophet in other scriptures) is the main focus, there is no other *sīrah* work that covers this topic as comprehensively. Also, he has established the connection between the Qur'an and *sīrah* by highlighting that he was awaited, promised, the last Prophet and final seal of a chain, rather than being a *bid'an min al-rasul*<sup>455</sup> (an unexpectedly appeared prophet).

The introduction ends with the words: “He is of a Different Realm,” which highlights that prophets are not ordinary people; thus, it would be incorrect to judge them against the criteria of ordinary men, as broadly discussed in a previous chapter. In this part, it is as if Gülen provides the following message to the reader: Yes, though he has honoured the world as a human being, you should be careful how you speak and think when talking about the Prophet and all prophets. They are human beings of different realms. It would be a mistake to judge them against your ordinary criteria. This is especially true of the coming of the last Prophet as a human being. You also take your share from that light and mercy or to mention and narrate it with the words of the introduction's title: “A Prophet sent as a Mercy to the Worlds.” Finally, such an introduction and end to this section delivers the message that “the perspective conveyed is what the view of the prophets should be” and then “see the rest of the topics from this perspective.” Analysis of his prophethood, characteristics and details of his life after prophethood in later chapters, show the appropriateness of the introduction.

The topics that comprise chapter 1, the remaining (almost 90 per cent) of volume 1 (p.83-617), cover “Prophets’ and Prophet Muhammad’s Characteristics and Attributes.” The topics covered, regardless of being *sīrah* centred, are set apart from classical *sīrah* works as the perspectives, titles and systematic approach are quite different. For example, the analysis, structure and original comments are stated clearly in this volume and as a continuation of the attributes of *fatānah* in the second volume. Gülen’s *kalām*-based approach could be called the “*kalāmisation* of *sīrah*.” Furthermore, the renewal and revival Gülen pursues is directly based

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<sup>454</sup> Mustafa Fayda, “Ibn Ishak,” 95.

<sup>455</sup> There is an indication of the following verse in this view: “I am no novelty (either in my person or in the message I have brought) among the Messengers, and (being human) I do not know (unless God informs me) what (will happen in the future in the world and therefore what will) be done to me and to you. I only follow what is revealed to me, and I am only a plain warner” (Qur'an 46:9).

on a combination of *sīrah* and theology. In this regard, while he gives a fresh angle and direction to *sīrah* works, he also renews his readers' understanding of religion, its practice and theological understanding of prophethood. As was mentioned in the oratory section, and will also be the focus in later parts, Gülen not only takes readers to the Age of Happiness with his work, but also applies the same period of happiness to today, and thus establishes a strong connection between the two. His vivid style and dramatisation of events through the use of emotional language enhances the effectiveness of the work.

The first chapter starts with an examination of the purpose of prophets being sent, which is unusual compared with other *sīrah* books, and continues with the characteristics of prophets. As discussed in Chapter 3, Gülen focusses on the purpose of sending prophets. Gülen gives two explanations of why he emphasises the purpose of prophets being sent, and its significance today. The first is to prove the prophets are not ordinary people by outlining the lofty stations they occupied. The second is to set out a roadmap for the people who represent the mission of prophets or, in other words, show the system for the inheritors of prophets.<sup>456</sup> This kind of emphasis gives a summary of the overall purpose of the book, but also proves the need for prophets in every age to address issues, including the problematic and doubtful approach of the current era. A large portion of the book supports the institution of prophethood, the exalted status of prophets and their prophetic attributes, with original ideas and examples quoted from prophets in general, but from the Prophet Muhammad in particular, in order to restore and revive a distorted understanding of this institution. In this regard, the book answers questions such as: What degree of respect should be given to a prophet? What is the correct understanding of prophethood?<sup>457</sup>

There is a clue in the second point that Gülen makes as to why he uses a subject-based approach to *sīrah* rather than a chronological one. As each consecutive subject in the book is to some degree connected to the people who represent the prophetic mission in the current day, an attempt is being made to explain the particular method and approach used. An important aspect of the work is that the audience is involved and that there is a direct link from third person language to the audience (second person), which is known as *iltifat* (the art of alternating/changing the subject of the sentence), in the literature of eloquence. For example, while the purposes of prophets are explained, the audience is told to have the same

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<sup>456</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, 1/86.

<sup>457</sup> As Huiqiu Huang states, this aspect of the book not only introduces a true perspective of Islam towards prophethood, perhaps it also gives the impression of realising the true wisdom of Christ. Huang says: "One may wonder whether Mr Gülen only introduces Islam in *The Messenger of God: Muhammad*. I believe, when a Christian reads the book thoroughly, he will also realize the true wisdom of Christ." Taken from the back cover of *Sonsuz Nur*'s English translation, *The Messenger of God*.

purpose as inheritors of the prophets. Hence, after the attributes and qualities of the prophets are described, the focus is changed to the readers who are told they are sometimes obliged to display similar attributes.<sup>458</sup> In this unique presentation, Gülen establishes a dialogic medium between the age of the Prophet and the contemporary reader/listener, in the context of *sīrah*. There are no similar *sīrah* works in the classical period or modern *sīrah* works, including Shiblī, Hamīdullah, Mubarakphuri, Muhammad Abū Zahra, Muhammad Abū Shahba, or even in the *fiqh al-sīrah* works, such as Buti’s study.

By this method, a strong understanding of prophethood is established in terms of its theology and theory. While the readers are also engaged in the subject matters through analysing and connecting topics with them via what he calls *sīrah* philosophy, he saves *sīrah* and historical incidents from becoming a dull concept left behind in history. In other words, *sīrah* in Gülen’s work is not only used to learn about incidents in history, but also to create an impact on the actions and attitudes of the people who read it today. For these reasons, *Sonsuz Nur* has a unique position in *sīrah* works. This actually conforms with the idea which Gülen persistently expresses, and that I have highlighted in various parts of this work, that “the philosophy of the *sīrah* should be understood so that it can produce solutions to the problems that will be confronted until the day of judgement.”<sup>459</sup> In this regard, one of the most important qualities of *Sonsuz Nur* is that it is a significant example of dynamic *sīrah* philosophy. It evaluates the philosophy of *sīrah*, based on the overall life of the Prophet, and produces solutions to current problems by extracting appropriate lessons from incidents in the past.

The main section, which comprises the outline of the first volume and the first chapter (pp. 117-617), deals with “Attributes of Prophets.” The attributes *sidq* (truthfulness), *amānah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (communication), *fatānah* (intellect) and *ismah* (infallibility) are analysed in depth, with new insights and varied approaches. Gülen depicts truthfulness as an axis for prophets, around which prophethood progresses. One of the novel aspects of the book is the hundreds of predictions the Prophet makes about the unseen, which is also approached from the angle of truthfulness. The second attribute of trustworthiness, which means to fulfil one’s promises and be trusted, is addressed in detail by categorising and analysing etymologically the following: The name “*mu’min*,” given to believing people; “*iman*,” the course they have to believe; the values derived from the Divine Name “al-Mu’min”; “Jibril al-

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<sup>458</sup> For example, in first volume alone, the following pages’ topics are linked to the audience: 78, 80-81, 86, 92,93, 106-108, 203-204, 212, 217-218, 226, 228-229, 230-231, 253, 266-268, 270, 346, 368, 369, 459, 463, 511, 520, 527, 531, 541, 552-554, 569, 580-581, 588, 593.

<sup>459</sup> Such as Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 131.

Amin,” one of the names of the angel of revelation; and “al-Amin” – the Prophet as the addressee of the first revelation. All these names are derived from the word *a-m-n* and other original classifications. In his explanation, Gülen provides vivid examples from the *sīrah* and reminds the readers of their responsibilities on this path towards setting goals.

As for the attribute of communication, first its essence and methodology is explained, followed by practical examples from the life of the Prophet. The Prophet’s generous displays of compassion are emphasised as main approach, as well as his extreme efforts in trying to save people from hellfire. In this regard, Gülen presents the practices of the Prophet as an exemplary model to guide people and highlights this methodology to address people’s problems. The analysis of this attribute is important because it focuses on the notion of “compassion” which seems to be one of the two essential concepts of *Sonsuz Nur*. The fourth attribute in this section is intellect, which is described by Gülen as “to overcome intelligence with intelligence.” In my view, besides the concept of compassion, the main axis of the work is this notion of *fatānah*. Although it is not difficult to understand and predict the statements and practices of the Prophet from the perspective of intellect (despite Gülen’s original analysis of this aspect), the established relationship between intelligence and mercy, compassion, patience, mildness, generosity and modesty is quite interesting and original, and is not observed in other *sīrah* works or any other book that deals with the notion of *fatānah*. This section comprises original perspectives on what is meant by “understanding the philosophy of *sīrah*.” Finally, the attribute of infallibility (*ismah*) is covered broadly under the title “Attributes of the Prophets,” as what distinguishes the prophets in general (and Prophet Muhammad in particular) and sets them apart from ordinary people. One of the interesting subtitles under the infallibility section is supplications and worship of the Prophet.<sup>460</sup>

This section generally covers the essential compulsory traits, attributes and qualities given to prophets by God, as divine gifts. These attributes also show that prophets are chosen people equipped with certain special characteristics that make them superior to others. This should not be understood as other people not having or being eligible for these attributes. As was mentioned in Chapter 3, these are necessary by default and consistent with prophets. When it comes to other people, these attributes can also exist, but they are not necessarily by default or in their true form. Truthfulness, trustworthiness and communication are attributes expected of all people. However, as Gülen puts it, these attributes are “the purpose of creation” for the prophets and part of their nature.

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<sup>460</sup> For more information on infallibility besides prophets and the pursuit of infallibility, see Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/459, 463, 467-475; Gülen, *Gurbet Ufuklari*, 139-149.

In my opinion, this is what is neglected in Orientalist and many Muslim *sīrah* writings. The issue of problematic approaches to prophets arises in terms of Islamic theology when they are not viewed with this innate difference and superiority. Hence, understanding *sīrah* on the basis of theology, and an approach based on the attributes of the prophets, is the main theme and focus of discussion deliberately taken to the axis of this work by the author (if the expressions are not used in this sense, than at least as contents). Thus, one of the distinguishing aspects of *Sonsuz Nur* is the approach of systematic coverage of the *sīrah* around the core attributes of the prophets.

After establishing a strong theological and theoretical foundation, the second volume delves into different topics of the Prophet's exemplary life as a human being, focussing particularly on different dimensions of his *fatānah* - his exemplary actions as a human being, representing perfection in every aspect of life; the unerring guidance in every aspect of life (family, social, military, political), delivered through awareness of the philosophy of *sīrah*.<sup>461</sup> Thus, in the second volume Gülen elucidates the human character and exemplary actions of the Prophet, without contradicting the aforementioned attributes. The topics covered in the second volume from this perspective include the Prophet as an educator but with a prophetic intellect, and as a leader and commander but strengthened by revelation. Thus, he accentuates both sides of the Prophet, giving neither side a "too simplistic or reductionist" emphasis, nor an "over-estimated or exaggerated approach," but rather a more balanced view. Gülen provides a view that is comprehensive and does not dwell on details of modern academic discussion as well as controversial, over-praising or reductionist approaches of *sīrah*.

Gülen's work basically interprets and explains events without contradicting fundamental principles, such as prophetic attributes. In this regard, his work employs a similar approach to Shātibi's *Muwāfaqāt*, which focuses on the methodology of jurisprudence and higher objectives of Islamic law. Shātibi's principle is to use and consider clear and firmly established truths, and to use only narratives that comply with the methodological crosscheck, or those that are in line with the essentials and do not contradict them in any sense, otherwise to leave them.<sup>462</sup> This is because the fundamental principles and methodology are used as a crosscheck mechanism for Gülen's entire work. Thus, *Sonsuz Nur* with all these aspects presents the Prophet as a powerful mirror that reflects God's divine essential qualities, names

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<sup>461</sup> This does not mean *sīrah* philosophy was not the focus in the first volume. Since there would be a special focus on the *sīrah* philosophy regardless, I have only given parts that stand out in the first volume.

<sup>462</sup> Shātibi, *al-Muwāfaqāt: Islami Ilimler Metodolojisi*, trans. Mehmet Erdogan (Istanbul: İz Yayincılık, 2010), I-IV. For some exemplary places in the work of Shatibi, see I/1-7, 23-95 Introduction, vol. II on *maqāsid al-Sharia* and IV/87-244 on *Ijtihād*.

and attributes, while establishing him as a unique father, husband, military commander; a mild, patient and generous friend, one who prefers others over himself and a representative of wisdom, chastity and chivalry. Hence, his unique human qualities are combined in an elegant style with prophetic characteristics.

After this general evaluation in the second volume, it is clear that Gülen prefers a different classification of the exemplary life of the Prophet, in this case appraising him from a social aspect. All the evaluations and classifications are covered in relation to the attribute of prophetic intelligence (*fatānah*) and his successes in so many different fields are related to his being equipped with prophetic intellect, supported by revelation. Thus, the second and third chapters (pp.17-170) cover the Prophet as an educator and a unique problem solver. The steps the Prophet took in reforming people and society, the ways to educate people on a familial and social level, and the strategies adopted to address the problems of the people, are covered in great detail. The main aim of this section is to identify the method used to reform or transform the companions from a state of ignorance into perfect, fully-matured human beings, and apply it to every single person of the day to turn them into teachers of humanity. Also, the emphasis on the attributes of the leader and his explanation of the matters with “enlightened intuition supported by revelation” points to prophetic intelligence being the focal point of the work.

In the fourth chapter (pp.171-188), the theme is the deliverance of people by the Messenger of God from a low level to new heights and horizons with numerous clear-cut examples; the schools of thought in Islamic tradition, the fascinating works of the school of *sīrah* in the fields of jurisprudence, exegesis, language, science and spirituality. The fifth chapter (pp.189-378) sheds light on the Prophet’s military aspect and battles. The coverage of the battles provides interesting analysis, with the compassion of the Prophet holding centre stage. This is important because in today’s world, the perception of Islam and its Prophet is completely opposite to that provided by *sīrah* sources, relating to battles and fighting (the religion or prophet of the sword). However, as is explained in this chapter, the Prophet always chose to go on the defensive (all battles were defensive in Gülen’s view, based on Mustafa Azzam’s work) and preferred not to attack in battle. Gülen states that the Prophet would never go into battle without exhausting all other options, preferring to seek a way to solve problems with diplomacy and internal law, even when enemies initiated battles or attempted to attack. A thorough analysis of appropriate actions, tactics and choosing a strategy to minimise the loss of life in the case of fighting – in other words choosing to defend– are also explained, so as to portray a true exemplary model in every aspect. Hence, through an analysis of the battles

using *sīrah*, it is shown that the Prophet's aim was not to go into battles and conquer new lands, but rather to win the hearts of the people. In addition, in this chapter there is a discernible emphasis on the military genius of the Prophet, which added to his gifts as a role model.

An interesting point about the second volume is that it ends with the detailed chapters (chapters 6 to 8, pp.379-594) on "The Establishment of Sunnah and its Place in Islamic Legislation." The in-depth analysis of this topic is not something that is normally seen in classical *sīrah* works. In this section, the definition of *sunnah*, its function, the assumed perception of *sunnah* by a believer, the place of *sunnah* in the religion and its binding aspect, the identification, compilation and transmission of *sunnah*, and even the observed sensitivities in the transmission, are explained in detail by citing the original sources.<sup>463</sup> In this way, there is emphasis on the importance of this established issue (supported by strong sources) that needs to be practiced, and is actually practiced, in every era. Gülen emphasises the meticulousness and sensitivity of the early scholars in establishing and narrating the *sunnah* and *hadith*, and he provides painstaking detail despite producing a *sīrah* work. Furthermore, this information demonstrates that Gülen strictly adheres to the methodology of *hadith* from the extensive and detailed analysis used in his *sīrah* work.

In addition, by investigating *sunnah* and its place in such an extensive and detailed manner in these last chapters of the book, Gülen strongly suggests it is not possible to make a strict distinction between *sīrah* and *sunnah*. They cannot be considered independently. Rather, an important aspect of *sīrah* that is the basis for practical legislative rules (*sunnah*) cannot be neglected or underestimated. In other words, although the Qur'an, *sunnah* and *sīrah* may seem to be different sources, *sīrah* is the combination of the two and their practical result. On the other hand, *sunnah*, being covered in detail in this *sīrah* work, is also related to the historical context that I have expressed since the beginning. This is because in the West and the Islamic world there are serious doubts about the establishment of the *sunnah*, which are

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<sup>463</sup> In this regard, it is important to note Gülen's following statement, which highlights the place of *sunnah* for his worldview. Moreover, these thoughts are also significant in underlying the *sunnah-sīrah* relationship: "Sunnah is the life of God's Messenger, the way that Islam should be lived and the approach of wearing the characters of God and His Messenger: It is as if God commands him and has given him the duty of showing humanity the right path when decision-making becomes difficult, and to have the last word and give the final judgement. Thus, he has fulfilled this with his words, actions and tacit approvals which together comprise the *sunnah*. Sunnah is a window that opens to the Prophet and a blessed and holy path that reaches everyone in every era, giving prosperity and blessings to its followers. Wherever a sincere heart calls 'Muhammad', Prophet Muhammad manifests in his soul and responds 'what is it that you want?' Yes, He is present in every gathering where his words, his *sunnah* and He is mentioned" (Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/417).

covered comprehensively in the academic world.<sup>464</sup> Further, one of the discussion topics of the recent period is doubts about the *sīrah* sources, despite the sound nature of *hadith* and *sunnah* narrations. While Gülen’s in-depth analysis of these topics serves to remove doubts and prove their accuracy, using *sīrah-sunnah* sources collectively – despite being selective and cautious in using these sources – gives the impression it would be more correct to have a collective perspective rather than such an individual approach to this topic.

Finally, it is important to note the emphasis made on the companions’ and their followers’ place in religion, their functions and services, and the significance attached to this generation in transmitting the religion. Normally, Gülen has a deep respect for the righteous scholars of the early period of Islam (*salaf al-sālihīn*); however, the companions hold an extra special place and significance, in his view. According to Gülen, the companions are a miracle of the Prophet, just like the Qur’an, and are an exceptional community. Or, more accurately, it can be said the Qur’an is the Prophet’s miracle and the companions are the Qur’an’s miracles.<sup>465</sup> One of the main aims behind Gülen’s referring or attaching discussions to the reader is the pursuit of cultivating a generation like the companions.

Almost all of the events presented in *Sonsuz Nur* can be seen to be matters under the category of *ithbāt al-nubuwwa* [proofs of prophethood] or *dalāil al-nubuwwa* [evidences of prophethood].<sup>466</sup> As the framework and topics covered are a known and established genre in Islamic tradition, Gülen uses matters that have not fallen under this category in the past to prove prophethood.<sup>467</sup> The prophethood of Muhammad and the veracity of his being the

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<sup>464</sup> For Gülen’s approach on this issue and further remarks specifically for this section in *Sonsuz Nur*, see Osman Guner, “Oryantalistlerin Hadis Hakkındaki İddialarının Kritiği: Fethullah Gülen Örneği,” [Critique of the Orientalists’ Claims about Hadith: A Fethullah Gülen Example], in *Bir Alim Portresi*, ed. Hamza Aktan (Istanbul: Nil Yayınları, 2014), 45-86.

<sup>465</sup> Gülen, *Olumsuzluk İksiri*, 113-121; Gülen, *Sohbet-i Canan*, 45-49.

<sup>466</sup> The following impression has been a catalyst in reaching a conclusion after listening to the talks on prophethood: Gülen usually uses similar themes and examples pertaining to *sīrah* on the basis of prophethood and prophetic attributes. In comparing the Prophethood talks from 1975-1976, it can be seen that the same topics are covered using very similar and even the same examples during the *Sonsuz Nur* talks in 1989-1990. It is interesting to see the same examples being used in the *Sonsuz Nur* talks, although they have a different style and a more comprehensive and advanced approach. In my opinion, Gülen has fully established the matters and grown a strong conviction. Thus, later he made it a duty on himself to convey the truths that he internalised to everyone.

<sup>467</sup> While covering the Prophet as an educator and householder, the focus on his multiple marriages and their wisdoms is presented as another proof of his prophethood. After covering the topic from different angles, Gülen ties it up with the following statement: “Yes, his house holding attribute also exclaims the truth that he is the Messenger of God. He had managed nine wives at one time without facing any serious problems. Thus, he was such a soft and elegant householder.” Gülen sometimes expresses this through the statement: It would be enough as a sole evidence for him to manage nine women at the same time under the same roof even if there was no other proof of his prophethood (*Sonsuz Nur*, 2/21, 25, 36). He gives some concrete examples on the topic and ties it up as: “Finally we say that all of God’s Messenger’s statements are a proof of his Prophetic intelligence. Some words have special significance as they are *jawâmi’ al-kalim* (concise speech). The expression and style in his supplication can also come under this very category. Thus, both his statements and supplications show his Prophetic intelligence or in other words intelligence based on inspiration, revelation and oriented to the Afterlife.



Prophet is explained and proved at every opportunity. According to the topic, Gülen would state: “this matter just like previous matters also proves him to be a Messenger of God.”<sup>468</sup> When questioning the reasons for this kind of methodology, there are two fundamental reasons why he has developed this style. First, everything in the universe has a connection with the Prophet. Thus, every part of the creation is a witness to his prophethood in its own language to prove they belong to him. While this is the case with human beings, it can also be seen in his miracles with trees, clouds, animals and other parts of creation. Secondly, there are the doubts in the Islamic world concerning the truths of prophethood, as this study has frequently pointed out. This practical problem in Gülen’s understanding has urged him to talk insistently about this issue.

It is remarkable to see different methodological inquiries due to various concerns in the modern period of *sīrah* works.<sup>469</sup> Thus, although Gülen’s work is original, with a new style and methodology in the field of *sīrah* (as an example for such pursuits), it is incorrect to state that avoiding a chronological approach is specific to Gülen. For instance, Muhammad Hamīdullah, a contemporary of Gülen, in his meticulous work *The Prophet of Islam*, uses a systematic approach to *sīrah* based on the topics and distinct methodology he has determined, although he begins with a slightly chronological approach. In this regard, it is important to compare these two works in terms of their methodology, which would also clarify the system used in *Sonsuz Nur*. Before beginning a comparison of the two works, it is appropriate to consider why Hamīdullah has used such a system and methodology.

Hamīdullah’s explanation is: “...It would not be possible to determine the relationship of the Prophet who has struggled on many fronts simultaneously with certain communities if the

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Thus he is no one but a Prophet and the sultan of the prophets...” (ibid, I/396-397). There are numerous other examples on this topic. Some early examples use the conformity between the predictions made centuries ago as a part of his truthfulness and the information achieved with the developments in the modern sciences, medicine and technology as a proof of his prophethood (ibid, I/174-193), his ability to solve the most complex problems under the topic of Prophetic intellect and also the *hadith* he mentions in highlighting his concise speech in same way (ibid, I/276-389). Gülen clearly states the fact at the end of the first volume when he analyses the Prophet’s generosity and modesty from the angle of intellect: “All logics can get stuck at a point...sciences may not go beyond a certain point...but it is the Prophetic intellect that will flap its wing like a bird and overcome the seemingly insurmountable issues and pinnacles. This is another proof of his prophethood. In fact, we try to capture his prophethood in every subject matter that we explain. It is not possible to prove his prophethood after witnessing his patience. The truth of ‘*Muhammad is the Messenger of God*’ is apparent in the face of his patience and people with fair-minded and conscientious approach read it. Only a Messenger of God can bear such dangers and show endurance in the face of such calamities” (ibid, I/434).

<sup>468</sup> While the examples given in the previous footnote can be regarded in the same category, the topic is sealed with the emphasis on the prophetic attribute of communication: “As we have tried to show the seal of ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of God’ stamped on the clear message brought by God’s Messenger in our analysis of the topic. In the meantime, the style and methodologies he adopted in communicating the message is an important proof of his prophethood and are also hints on this undeceiving path for those who want to pursue the prophetic path” (Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/270).

<sup>469</sup> Inquiries about new methodologies and aspects of *sīrah* writing, especially in Turkish academia, see Tahsin Kocuyigit, ed., *Siret Sempozyumu I, Turkiye’de Siret Yaziciligi* (Ankara: Turkiye Diyanet Vakfi, 2012).

*sīrah* works are analysed using a chronological approach. We will analyse the issues under particular topics like Mecca, Byzantines, Persia and Jews. Despite making some repetitions, this approach will give more consistency and dynamism to our work.”<sup>470</sup> In another place, Hamīdullah makes the following statement specifically on the Medinan period:

His life in the Medinan period is full of different events so that to explore them in chronological order would not enable us to understand the fundamental approach and essential points in his acts during this time, as it is not possible to comprehend his life in general. Thus, we believe that it will be more beneficial to analyse the issues based on subject matters and their formation. Although this might create some repetition, it will allow us to make an independent analysis and clear examination of his methodologies and ideas, which is the real purpose of this humble work.<sup>471</sup>

Hamīdullah highlights that this methodology allows for a better understanding of the incidents and provides a holistic outlook. In fact, later works approve of Hamīdullah’s approach and confess that it provides the opportunity to evaluate incidents in context, within a holistic framework.<sup>472</sup> However, Hamīdullah expresses that this methodology may result in repetition. This same repetition of some incidents can be seen in Gülen’s work, but it would be incorrect to view it as repetition. Although the incident or example may be the same, the context and approach are different, and a new perspective is presented each time. On the other hand, this style recalls the Qur’anic notion of *tasrīf*,<sup>473</sup> which is renewal of format. In the Qur’an, various incidents are repeated for different reasons.<sup>474</sup> The Qur’an calls this *tasrīf* and draws attention to this style in different verses.<sup>475</sup> Finally, it is important to note that repetition was an

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<sup>470</sup> Hamīdullah, *Islam Peygamberi*, 17.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>472</sup> Adem Apak, “Muhammed Hamidullah’in Siyer Ilmine Katkiları,” *Uludag Universitesi Ilahiyat Fakultesi Dergisi*, 13, 1 (2004): 61, 68; Maside Kamit, “XX. Yuzyilda Hz Muhammed’i Anlama Cabasi,” in *Muhammed Hamidullah’in Islam Peygamberi Eserinin Siyer Ilmine Katkiları* (Istanbul: Siyer Yayinlari, 2011), 69-70; Kevser Beyazyuz, “Muhammed Hamidullah’in Islam Peygamberi Adli Eserinin Siyer Ilmine Katkiları,” in *Muhammed Hamidullah’in Islam Peygamberi Eserinin Siyer Ilmine Katkiları* (Istanbul: Siyer Yayinlari, 2011), 186.

<sup>473</sup> *Tasrīf* is to put something into different shapes by playing with it. In Arabic grammar, *tasrīf* can mean to change a word according to a different time or context, and the variation of the word within different rules. As a Qur’anic style, *tasrīf* is to explain the sublime truths and divine commandments with different contexts and from different angles. In the words of modern exegete Elmalili, it is to explain the same understanding, message and observation using aesthetic art, eloquent style, different forms and shapes in various and numerous verses and sometimes to gather many different verses into one concise statement (Gülen, *Dirilis Cagrisi*, 68).

<sup>474</sup> For example, different incidents regarding the life of Moses are presented in different surahs in the Qur’an, but almost each time it is narrated with a different style. According to the general atmosphere of the chapters and specifically in relation to the verses the story is mentioned, diverse language and style is used. Thus, the same meaning and content is presented with diverse forms and styles, and both intellects and hearts are addressed, as believers and non-believers, scholars and ordinary people are confronted.

<sup>475</sup> “Assuredly, we have set out in diverse ways for humankind in this Qur’an all kinds of parables and comparisons (to help them understand the truth); but human nature is, above all else, given to contention” (Qur’an 18:54). Also refer to following verses on the subject matter: Qur’an 17:41, 89; 6:105.

important and essential characteristic of religious oratory, adopted and explained by Gülen earlier, rendering repetition in his work a significant example of this style.

Although Gülen's methodology is similar to Hamīdullah's subject-based work, there are significant differences. These differences are due to the adopted style and content as well as the reasons for their selection of the content and methodology. While Hamīdullah bases his work on relationships with different communities and the relationship of the political, cultural and social aspects with religious life, state laws and matters that include the state, Gülen has based it on a system that comprises prophetic attributes. In other words, while Hamīdullah approaches the *sīrah* from a socio-historical perspective, Gülen deals with it (*sīrah*) from a theological perspective.

Gülen used this style and methodology for three reasons, the first of which concurs with Hamīdullah's reasons, namely, as he expressed it, subject-based methodology gives the opportunity to view incidents in a holistic way. Hence, it is possible for a reader of Hamīdullah's work to see the relationship with different communities before Islam and its development within the Islamic era. On the other hand, Gülen's work gives a holistic perspective to the roles of truthfulness, trustworthiness, prophetic intelligence, etc., in the overall life of the Prophet, to envisage the perfected soul as well as access the formula and critical codes that result in a successful family leader, educator, commander and administrator. The second reason for Gülen's preference for a different methodology and categorisation is his conviction that it is a more effective way of explaining prophethood as an institution, and the characteristics of prophets and their personality in a precise manner. Using a chronological approach, the true understanding of the prophet can be reduced to a simple question of how an incident happened, who narrated it and if the sources are reliable. Another reason is that it breaks the monotonous nature of the storytelling that people are used to and enables the *sīrah* writer to portray the life of the prophet in a more attractive way. As this is a book of sermons, perhaps Gülen evaluates the subject matter using different approaches for these very reasons.

In addition to this difference, what is of greater importance in Gülen's methodology is his dynamic *sīrah* reading or original representation, which enables him to motivate readers. There is no doubt that Hamīdullah's classification and style has significant benefits in understanding state law, comprehending and analysing the Prophet's time with the pre-Islamic era, as well as the social, cultural, economic and political relations with neighbouring tribes and states, and highlighting the changes that were introduced with the teachings of the

Prophet. However, the readers do not self-interrogate or question where they stand, and thus transform their lives. It is more helpful for the reader to go on a historical journey and explore the time and incidents as they happened. In this regard, as Ali Bulac puts it, Hamīdullah's work plays the same role as Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hisham's *Sīrah* or Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqāt* and is undoubtedly among the most important works of the *sīrah* discipline.<sup>476</sup> On the other hand, important aspects, like the philosophy of *sīrah*, which would be read to guide and enlighten the contemporary audience, appear deficient. Gülen, on the other hand, reads *sīrah* based on a reader-centred or reader response technique, which puts the focus on the text rather than its reading. Gülen makes the reader the focus and aims for the work to be practiced rather than merely read.

Overall, when the background and notions of the time are considered for the sermons of *Sonsuz Nur*, it can be seen there is a serious attempt to give theological education through *sīrah*, specifically in understanding and delivering a sound understanding of prophethood. There was serious theological confusion affecting the youth in their understanding of the Qur'an, the Prophet and his companions, due to studies emphasising historical hermeneutics such as Fazlur Rahman, Hasan Hanafī, Abū Zayd, Arkoun Jabiri and Tayyib Tizini in theology faculties in Turkey, trying to adopt a modern approach. With the aim of restoring its reputation, Gülen presents a novel interpretation of *sīrah* and its methodology, with a new tradition and style. The timing of Gülen's presentation, which followed the thoughts of the aforementioned scholars, gives support to this understanding. His emphasis on the companions is also a very important concept that should not be neglected. Gülen portrays an exemplary community that has helped in the understanding of the Qur'an, and a community which itself is the miracle of the Qur'an. Hence, the effort to revive the belief system and shape the thinking of the audience can be perceived, rather than simply the narration of an incident or anecdote. Consequently, the effort to extract the meaning of the narrative is clearly evident as an essential characteristic of Gülen's *sīrah* writing. Thus, he uses many other disciplines to reach this goal, such as theological, jurisprudential, sociological and psychological meanings, instead of having a chronological focus and dwelling on the details. In this sense, the use of theology in the work finds good ground. Gülen uniquely covers *sīrah* by basing it on the *kalāmīc* approach. It is thus possible to describe this as "*kalāmisation of sīrah*" or "*amalgamation of kalām and sīrah*," as was broadly discussed before. The doubts and reservations of the people of his time were the catalyst for Gülen following this path and methodology. Based on this approach, *fatānah* (prophetic intelligence) plays a crucial role, as

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<sup>476</sup> Samanyoluhaber, "Ramazan'da siyer okuma mevsimi," samanyoluhaber, September 4, 2007, accessed March 29, 2013, <http://www.samanyoluhaber.com/kultur/Ramazanda-siyer-okuma-mevsimi/171100/>.

it seems to be the core of the work from an intellectual standpoint. From the perspective of the practical life of the Prophet, relationships with individuals and communal relations, *shafqah* or *rahmah* (compassion, tenderness and affection) emerges as the core focus.

When *Sonsuz Nur* is read thoroughly, it would be true to say that the reader might well be reminded of, and agree with, the comments made by the interpreter who has translated the book from English to Urdu: As a product of extensive study and profound knowledge in *Sonsuz Nur*, despite the avoidance of a chronological approach, the *sīrah* has been analysed in the light of the Qur'an and *sunnah*, based on intellectual discourse, with fluent and persuasive language, through attractive examples, almost without neglecting any aspect of *sīrah*, while presenting the Prophet and his companions as role models. While the book has expanded the intellectual world of the reader, it has also filled the hearts with wisdom and minds with knowledge.<sup>477</sup> Moreover, the author did not cover the topics relevant to this monumental figure, extraordinary personality and his life, by presenting them merely as a part of the faith, but rather they are presented with the use of wise and rational proofs to convince the reader, which is a further positive aspect of the book and one which sets it apart from others.<sup>478</sup>

#### **4.2.3 *Sonsuz Nur* as a “*Sīrah* Philosophy”**

One of the unique aspects of Gülen's *sīrah* works is the emphasis on the *sīrah* philosophy and the introduction of solutions to the problems of today through understanding *sīrah* and its applications. This is also the case with *Sonsuz Nur*. It is interesting to see that Gülen presents many of the topics that would fall under the *sīrah* philosophy as a part of the prophetic intelligence (*fatānah*) section. In the light of this perspective, in Chapter 5, I will analyse what Gülen means by *sīrah* philosophy using a specific example.

#### **4.2.4 *Sonsuz Nur* from the Perspective of Narrations Used**

While analysing *Sonsuz Nur*, it is also necessary to examine the narrations used and sources referenced. Just as with other works of history, it is important to know the sources of the book and its authentication from a scientific perspective. On the other hand, there is discussion on whether *Sonsuz Nur* was based on weak narrations, made up of reports by authors that include anachronistic evaluations, which has given rise to some criticism. There is an academic requirement to analyse carefully the sources used and narrations adopted in the work.

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<sup>477</sup> In this regard, the book serves as pastoral care because, just as in the works of Nursi, the work contributes to the development of a text-based religiosity. In addition to his many other works, this book is consistently used to meet the spiritual needs of the followers of the movement in an ordered and systematic manner.

<sup>478</sup> Mohammad Aleem, “An Adoring Journey through the Wisdom of Words,” *Fountain Magazine* 92 (2013): 58-59.

However, it would be a work on its own to analyse each incident in such a comprehensive work that is not limited to *sīrah* sources only as references. In light of all this, I have dedicated Chapter 5 to the analysis of a specific incident in *sīrah* as a case study. In this section, I critique one of the most important incidents in *sīrah*, al-Hudaybiya, from the perspective of sources, texts and Gülen's commentary. The sources and narrations used in the deliverance of the incident are clear enough to give a good indication of the sources used and types of narrations adopted for the rest of the work. In addition to this specific case, the references for the sources used in some of the incidents I have mentioned, and the comparison of modern *sīrah* works with Gülen's, can be seen in this category as well.

### 4.3 Comparison Between Shiblī's *Sirat al-Nabi* and *Sonsuz Nur*

In this study, I have compared other masterpieces of *sīrah* and Gülen's evaluation of *sīrah* on different topics. I will now make another comparison, this time to *Sirat al-Nabi* by Shiblī, who is an important figure for *sīrah*, which will give a clearer and more robust appraisal of Gülen's approach to *sīrah*. Shiblī was chosen for three reasons. First, because of his important position in post-19<sup>th</sup> century new *ilm al-kalām* discussions about integration and the close connection between the *kalām* and *sīrah* disciplines, which was analysed earlier in this study. Second, Shiblī is a prominent *sīrah* writer in modern period. Third, Shiblī is similar to Gülen in his understanding of *sīrah*. *Kalām* is of prime importance (hence my argument for *kalāmisation* of *sīrah* prevailing in both works), as well as the methodology and system used in their work, making them both pioneers in recent *sīrah* writings.

One might ask why the writings of Western scholars, who were broadly mentioned in the literature review for instance, have not being consulted and cited more regularly. Also, why another scholar from Western scholarship is not compared with Gülen's work. The perspective and the methodology of Western scholars, or more accurately the Orientalists' readings of *sīrah*, are significantly different from Gülen's approach. Montgomery Watt appears to be the fairest scholar, to judge by his writings on *sīrah*, such as *Muhammad at Mecca*, and *Muhammad at Medina*, as he seems to accept the prophecy of Muhammad. However, the highest status he accords the Prophet Muhammad is that of a farsighted statesman. This, or similar methods and perspectives, are so vastly different that it causes methodological or technical difficulties when attempting to make a comparison with Gülen. On the one hand, Gülen regards *sīrah*, the life of Prophet, as an essential source that should guide one's path in life and be a source to resort to when searching for a solution to problems. On the other hand, scholars like Watt question him, are sceptical in their approach and read his life through the frame of the social theories prominent in their era. The judgmental,

questioning and critical approach to the Prophet, regarding him only as a historical figure, makes it obvious that a comparison would be difficult even with an average Muslim academic's writings. Hence, it is possible and appropriate to compare only specific individual topics in this writing, which is occasionally done. In my opinion, this kind of comparison is also methodically very inappropriate. Moreover, Gülen's work is not written with academic concerns and his reader profile is quite broad. As a Muslim cleric, it is based on faithful believers' approach to this subject. Thus, his thoughts about "outsiders" are very clear in his article entitled "The Main Characteristics of Islamic Thoughts":

Eventually, to be a vicegerent of God on Earth requires a Muslim to have a deep love for truth, passion for knowledge, to work with enthusiasm on research and study, and to have proficiency in every aspect of life. Besides this, for Muslims, different sources cannot be accepted as references for their belief and system of thought. The same is true for their Holy Book, *sunnah* of the Prophet, representation of the Prophet and methodology of *sīrah* and Islamic history, art and literacy. Because all their thinking has been centred on being the enemy of Islam, at the very least, they have viewed Islam as not being a divine religion. Therefore it cannot be deemed likely that they will act with good intentions, thinking benevolence of Muslims and desiring their advancement. With regard to those scientific and technological topics that are outside our frame of reference, as they have been exchanged between nations so far, they will continue to change hands through various custodians. Besides, this cannot be categorised within certain nations or religions. As such, societies that are strong in emotion, thought and belief and that can stand tall as themselves, can take the aforementioned positive sciences, investigate every detail in them and pass it through their souls, manifest it in their hearts and use it as a means to lead people to God.<sup>479</sup>

In short, according to Gülen's perspective, faith is essential and always plays a prime role in terms of the evaluation of *sīrah* and Islamic disciplines. Thus, to understand Gülen's thoughts and make a decision about his worldview on certain topics, one should keep in mind the above philosophy.

Shiblī's book is written with the aim of correcting and completing the misperceptions and shortcomings in *sīrah* writings. His book is academically written by a substantial team of scholars who scanned the writings of *sīrah* in Islamic and Western scholarship as far as access to sources in their time would allow. It is a study from the very beginning; the main aim was to answer the criticisms of Orientalists and provide solutions to problems that were put forward about the life of the Prophet. Therefore, the language used in this writing is heavily

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<sup>479</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 66.

academic. On the other hand, as was broadly mentioned earlier, Gülen did not write his book with academic concerns, nor was his aim to write an academic piece. Nevertheless, as was covered earlier, Gülen gives solutions to the problematic nature of current *sīrah*. He knows where the present *sīrah* writing is heading and its possible future paradigm. In so doing, it can be said his book corresponds to the facts and fulfils the needs of *sīrah* writings based on actual problems faced during the current age.

To compare these volumes, I will summarise the content of Shiblī's work. The first item of note is that it was written by a committee. The first two out of six volumes were written by Shiblī and the rest were written by his student, Sayyid Sulayman Nadwī. Later on, other writers made contributions by adding the century of the companions of the Prophet and the successors. This expanded the content widely and turned these books into a history of Islam series. In this respect, the content is not exclusive to *sīrah*. It includes the century of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and other incidents in the early history of Islam. Unfortunately, no complete and sound translation of the book exists, as far as I know. It is seen that, in different (Turkish) translations, translators have altered the format of the book and changed the order of the topics. In this study, my discussions and evaluations will be based on the first two volumes of Shiblī's translated work. The reasons for this choice are: the two volumes are originally and genuinely written by Shiblī; they are related to my subject of *sīrah* only; and also his pupil Nadwī's contribution is strictly very limited, as he underlines in the preface to the book.<sup>480</sup>

At the introduction of his book (pp.31-87), Shiblī touches on certain issues, such as the importance of *Asr al-Saadah* (the era of happiness), why the *sīrah* of the Prophet should be studied, and the analysis of fundamental sources for *sīrah* writings. Also, he gives a literature review in detail about the books that cover the *sīrah* and *hadith* disciplines. In this context, the discipline of *hadith*, *hadith* collections, the endeavours of primarily the companions of the Prophet and their predecessors to collect *hadith* and their serious works are explained. In addition, there is a comparison of the *hadith* and *sīrah* sources in terms of their methodology. Shiblī then clarifies the differences between the two. He considers it more appropriate and accurate to accept *sīrah* narrations after they have been cross-checked and authenticated with *hadith* narrations. Thus, this process constitutes a different method from that which followed in his *sīrah* writing. It would be even more accurate to say that modern history/historiography

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<sup>480</sup> There are a number of translations available for Shiblī's *Sirat al-Nabi*. The translation used in this study is: Mevlana Sibli Numani, *Son Peygamber Hz. Muhammed: Siretu'n-Nebi*, trans. Yusuf Karaca (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2010). The topic of miracles is not in this translation, but in the translation of Ömer Rıza Doğrul entitled *Asri Saadet*, specifically at the end of the second volume and the entire third volume.



and classical *hadith* methodology were combined and therefore originated a new study method in Shiblī's work. Along with the Islamic world, a vast pool of information about Western *sīrah* works is offered. After this technical and methodological introduction, the author goes into detail about *sīrah* topics. Shiblī's introduction resembles the final sections in Gülen's writing, namely "The Establishment of *Sunnah* and its Place in Islamic Legislation." Nevertheless, when compared to Shiblī, Gülen does not allocate any place for *sīrah* and *hadith* comparison. Neither, does he discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this comparison, nor does he offer the review of publications which have emerged from the Western or Islamic world.

In the first volume, Shiblī addresses Prophet Muhammad's life; he offers the life of the Prophet in chronological order, events and especially battles that took place until the last battle in the ninth year of *hijra* during the Medinan period. In this regard, in the first chapter (pp. 89-140), he mentions the pre-Islamic period, general conditions of Arabs and Arabian Peninsula in terms of geography, economy and politics. He provides information about the lineage and ancestors of the Prophet, the history of Mecca and Ka'bah and the incidents that happened from his birth until prophethood. In the second chapter (pp.141-181), he covers the prophethood of Muhammad and incidents that occurred before the migration to Medina. The third chapter (pp.182-202) is allocated to the Prophet's migration to Medina, his first few days in Medina and the establishment of the brotherhood between the Ansar and Muhajirun (the helpers of Medina and migrants of Mecca, respectively). The fourth and last chapter (pp. 203-376) in the first volume includes the Medinan era after migration. It specifically emphasises the battles that took place from the second year of *hijra* with the Battle of Badr up to the ninth year, and investigates these battles chronologically. Shiblī also addresses other incidents chronologically and analyses them in great detail, evaluating their reasons and wisdom. This chapter has crucial importance in terms of understanding the battles thoroughly and analysing them from the perspective of Islam in general, and the Prophet in particular, as well as discovering the essential rules and strategies he applied before or during battles. In addition, he explains and emphasises that the aim of those military campaigns was not occupy lands. He also includes the differences between conquerors and prophets, and elaborates on this important topic by detailing the meaning of *jihad* and its ultimate aims.

The second volume covers the era of peace and the tranquillity of Islam (9-11 years of *hijra*), the formation of discipline, cohesion and public order, the spread of Islam, the death of the Prophet, his character, and accounts of his physical appearance (*shamā'il*), manners and morality. The first chapter of the second volume (pp.381-418) contains the incidents that

developed during this time, the expansion of Islam through the Arabian Peninsula and the world, then the delegates who came to Medina. The second chapter (pp.419-478) covers the establishment of a governing state in Islam, together with the judicial, political, military, economic, agricultural and religious structures. The third chapter (pp.479-489) is dedicated to the last year of the Prophet's life and his Farewell Sermon. Topics such as his death, enshrouding, funeral and inheritance are covered in detail within the fourth chapter (pp.491-507). After chronologically stating these incidents in detail, in the fifth chapter (pp.509-684), under the title "The Prophet in every Aspect," Shiblī gives detailed information about his physical appearance, clothing, moral manners, character, daily works and worship; interaction with non-Muslims; and his mercy and compassion towards children, women and even animals. Finally, the scholar highlights, in detail, the virtue of the wives of the Prophet and his children individually, together with his conduct towards them. Although Shiblī mentions different topics from time to time, his book is based on a structure that can be categorised as a classical chronological style of *sīrah*.

Shiblī's and Gülen's works are different in terms of their methodology and purpose of publication, which was mentioned previously. However, there are remarkable similarities between these two works. For example, these two studies endeavour to provide a clear and sound understanding of the concept of prophethood, which was misinterpreted due to exposure to different ways of thinking (discussed in chapters 2 and 3). From this point of view, these two scholars provide serious answers to the sceptical questions put forward through mainly Western studies about the Prophet of Islam, his position and the incidents in his life. This concept is clearly seen in Shiblī's book. He sometimes mentions this concept by also making reference to certain names.<sup>481</sup> Gülen, on the other hand, based on the same background and incentive, prefers not state any name or study in this regard. Rather, he concentrates on the problematic side of the issue and its solution. Despite this, he gives some information and data in different parts of his writing<sup>482</sup> that present important clues about this approach. When these are taken into account, one can clearly deduce the reasoning behind and essential basis for such approaches. Gülen generally does not cite or mention names of even Muslim scholars in relation to different ways of thinking and understanding. Rather, he merely states that he has different opinions, or even without mentioning it, he approaches issues from other angles, which directly relate to his position. In addition to this general style there is Gülen's philosophy, which was cited when I explained why, according to Gülen,

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<sup>481</sup> For examples, see Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 94-95, 104-113, 120-121, 130-131, 136-137, 166, 173, 203, 207, 345.

<sup>482</sup> He implicitly criticises Orientalists and their followers in the Islamic World in the last chapters on the place of *sunnah* in Islamic legislation. This part can be considered in this category. Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/388, 411, 474-477, 541-542, 555-556, 570, 589.

Western publications cannot be accepted as a prime reference: “Muslims cannot accept other references as fundamental sources of belief, systems of thought, *sīrah* and the methodology of Islamic History...”<sup>483</sup> So, as a result of this mentality, Gülen prefers to explain his thoughts on a subject matter rather than drawing attention to potentially problematic references or sources.

As a result, both scholars endeavour to deal with the notion of prophethood in a sound manner and identify and correct mistaken understandings on the subject. They handle such challenging issues from the perspective and methodology of theology (*usūl al-din*). They evaluate everything regarding the Prophet’s life or religion (Islam) in the content of *sīrah* and therefore deliver a presentation of *sīrah* from a broader perspective and provide detailed solutions to many questions and problems.<sup>484</sup> This approach is one of the remarkable tendencies during the new *kalām* period, which was discussed previously in the second chapter of this study. Moreover, both scholars deal with many narrations, incidents and anecdotes in a constructive way. This approach gives important hints about their conception of *sīrah* and brings together a method beyond the familiar style of Western scholars, who rely largely on historical criticism.

The second remarkable similarity between Shiblī and Gülen has more relevance to their methodology. Gülen allocates a lengthy chapter at the end of his book on *sunnah* and its place. Similarly, in the introduction to his book, Shiblī also devotes a chapter to the place of *sīrah* and *hadith* in Islam, and their methodology. These chapters give clues about not only the similarity between the scholars in terms of their methodology, but also their comparative differences in general. There are many similarities between the scholars when discussing topics such as the definitions of *hadith* and *sunnah*, the subtle differences between these two Islamic disciplines, and the transmission of them by word of mouth and through reliable sound sources. In this regard, they both have similar approaches to the role of the companions and their successors, and the path of the righteous predecessors (*salaf al-sālihīn*). However, there is dissimilarity in Shiblī’s approach as he highlights the differences between the writings of *sīrah* and *hadith*, and often cites and criticises Western studies.

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<sup>483</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 66. Shiblī also has these thoughts and explains them clearly and sharply. Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 34.

<sup>484</sup> Shiblī states a number of doubts about the life of the Prophet that are raised through different movements. He also clearly states he gives answers to these issues. These criticisms are: 1. The life of the Prophet in Mecca was like the life of a prophet. However, he had power when he migrated to Medina. Therefore, the prophethood turned into sovereignty. The inescapable results of sovereignty, which are abusing power, shedding blood and revenge, naturally appeared in the Medinan era. 2. The issue of polygamy. 3. Spreading the religion through force and oppression. 4. Permitting slavery and concubinage, and acting according to this permission. 5. Behaving like a secular individual and watching for an opportunity to make personal gains. (Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 85).

Both of them come to a similar point in terms of their use of references. Shiblī claims that *sīrah* writers do not benefit from *hadith* collections, although *hadith* collections comprise more reliable and authentic narrations in comparison to *sīrah* works. For this reason, he emphasises that *hadith* collections should not be ignored, otherwise there would not be a completely sound and pristine *sīrah* perception. Additionally, Shiblī clearly states his methodology and order of evaluation of the incidents in his work, namely, he first refers to the Qur’anic verses and then the collection of *hadith*, primarily *kutub al-sitta*, and finally to *sīrah* and history books.<sup>485</sup> Although there is no phrase in Gülen’s writing about his order of evaluation, it can be seen that he follows the same order when analysing or narrating events. He describes his thinking or explains topics by first referring to the Qur’anic verses, while *sīrah*-related topics are explained making use of *hadith* collections, usually including quotations. Because Gülen’s book is a written collection of oral speeches, it is not necessarily expected to cite or mention exact references, or from where he has retrieved the information. However, Gülen frequently mentions *hadith* sources<sup>486</sup> and refers to original *sīrah* sources, especially the works of Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa’d.<sup>487</sup>

Another similarity between these two scholars’ books is their deep love of the Prophet Muhammad. Readers easily sense this as they describe and convey their feelings for the Prophet remarkably well. Gülen’s love of the Prophet (as discussed in this chapter) is clearly shown through expressions like “being a servant at the Prophet’s door, meeting with him, purifying the heart and thoughts and calibrating them for him, reserving a place in the heart exclusively for him...”<sup>488</sup> Shiblī dedicates his work to the Prophet at the beginning of his book, which indicates his love: “Although I am such a miserable and poor beggar, with my pure and sincere submission, I dedicate this book which is acquired as a capital for my pure loyalty, due respect and firm faith to the glorious court of his prophethood, Muhammad, Sultan of the Two Worlds.”<sup>489</sup>

Another similar approach used by these two scholars is that they both take the opportunity to put forward issues relevant to the philosophy of *sīrah* presented. For instance, they highlight the Prophet’s way of addressing audiences at their level and his methods of capturing their attention. However, Shiblī only gives a limited number of examples on this topic, while Gülen employs numerous examples. The perspective for the philosophy of *sīrah*, which is one of the

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<sup>485</sup> Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 85-87.

<sup>486</sup> See for instance Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/138-192, 297-387.

<sup>487</sup> See for instance *ibid*, II/154-163.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid*, I/78-79.

<sup>489</sup> Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 28.

main arguments of Gülen's *sīrah* readings, is seen quite a number of times in his work using different examples. For example, Shiblī calls attention to the Prophet's Farewell Sermon and evaluates it as "the most magnificent and the most crucial discourse"<sup>490</sup> in terms of language and style. According to Shiblī, the Prophet gave a summary of rules and regulations according to Islam once more before his death in this final sermon, with topics covered including equality, blood feuds, usury, the rights of women, security and protection of life and property, universality of religion and its immunity, laws of inheritance, family relationships, etc. Shiblī stresses implicitly that the expressions used by the Prophet are important in terms of affecting audiences and should be studied individually. On the other hand, he pays attention to only three crucial topics; namely, the exposition regarding "sacrosanctity of wealth, life and chastity." Shiblī claims these three matters are the focal point of justice-fairness and cruelty-oppression, and it was necessary to eradicate such long lasting problems within the Arab communities of that time. Thus, with this purpose the Prophet used very powerful and influential language in his Farewell Sermon to attract the masses' attention so that these issues were imprinted on audiences' minds. One could narrate this same incident and sermon without any analysis, as is the case in most classical sources, but the difference between these approaches is quite clear: Shiblī's analysis highlights the whole picture and emphasises the philosophy of the decision. Normally a sermon that includes rules and regulations would be expected to be monotonous. However, the way of address, selection of words, fluency, purity of expressions, and choice of an influential and exciting style, promote this sermon as eloquent, wonderful and amazing. Therefore, Shiblī's approach of highlighting these aspects, in contrast to classic ones, made it outstanding.

Gülen has a similar approach, which can be seen when he analyses the speech given by the Prophet to the companions, who were in a minor conflict about the sharing of war gains after the battle of Hunayn. Shiblī does not put much emphasis on this issue and says, "If one insists on this speech and investigates it in terms of literacy and eloquence, a short booklet can be written about the Prophet's literary art of speech and its marvelousness."<sup>491</sup> Whereas Gülen's extensive coverage of the speech places much more emphasis on it, with references from Ibn Ishāq, Bukhārī and Muslim.<sup>492</sup> He affirms it was the Prophet's *fatānah* to give such a speech and only such high quality would explain this success. If each movement he made, each step he took, each sentence and word he spoke were to be examined, it would be evident that each had been planned with balance and precision; even his timing was highly attuned and precise,

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid, 538.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid, 538.

<sup>492</sup> For details of the incident and Gülen's evaluations, see Appendix 2.

down to each second, and arranged with great proficiency. It was one of the elements of *sīrah* philosophy that the Prophet understood the addressees and addressed them accordingly.<sup>493</sup>

It is also clearly evident that Gülen and Shiblī read the *sīrah* similarly. For instance, they both state that the Prophet has an exceptional skill for discovering the capacities and character of people in a very short time. In this regard, his appointment of competent and promising people to the works they could do best was remarkable. Such evaluation of the Prophet's acts could also be seen as commenting and understanding the *sīrah* philosophy. Both scholars assert that this can only be explained by prophethood. In this regard, Shiblī highlights the adaptation and the harmony between the Muhajirun and Ansar's brotherhood, established by the Prophet right after the migration through certain examples. Most of the Meccan migrants were poor and penniless, and those who were wealthy had to leave everything behind. Reintegrating these penniless and jobless migrants into society without any problems is another important issue to analyse.<sup>494</sup> Shiblī draws attention to the brotherhood that was established between the Muslims of Mecca and Medina. The Prophet took characters, capabilities and even emotional synergies into consideration when announcing brotherhood between individuals from the Ansar and Muhajirun. Hence, the Prophet aimed for others to support people in their personal, social and spiritual development as he did. Discovering people's characters and establishing a perfect brotherhood in such a short period of time between this number of people should not have been possible, knowing they had recently migrated to Medina and the population was reportedly in the hundreds. Therefore, according to Shiblī, "This should be agreed that it was the dimension of prophethood and capability of the Prophet whose discovery and identification of characters was faultless and his establishment of brotherhood was harmonious and successful."<sup>495</sup> Thereafter, Shiblī analyses the brotherhoods between Saïd ibn Zayd and Ubayy ibn Ka'b, and Abū Huzayfa and Abbad ibn Bishr, as examples, shows how similar they are in character and describes the harmony that existed between them.<sup>496</sup> Similar to Shiblī, Gülen highlights and verifies this capability and appointment of competent people by providing several examples. For instance, he notes the success of the companions who were sent by the Prophet to guide people and convey the message of Islam to different towns. In this regard, he frequently states that the Prophet always knew his addressees and their characters very well and used this as a strategy when

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<sup>493</sup> After Gülen narrates this incident and the sermon, he provides a short summarised analysis in eight points. For more information, see Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/287-288.

<sup>494</sup> Gülen emphasises how the solution to the problem of migration could bring social, economic and political problems. For more information, see Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/129-136.

<sup>495</sup> Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 195.

<sup>496</sup> Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 192-196.

appointing people.<sup>497</sup> The boundaries of Gülen’s ideas about such issues are both broad and precise. Shiblī states that the Prophet’s success is because of his prophetic attributes. However, Gülen goes beyond that and specifically examines this issue and explains it by pointing to the attribute of *fatānah* that is part of prophethood, confirmed and strengthened by revelation.

Gülen almost always reports the companions of the Prophet in a favourable manner and presents them as an exemplary generation. If there is anything that hints at a negative point or connotation, he refers to such issues with necessary reasonable, rational explanations and tries to dispose of the negative associations. On the other hand, Shiblī’s approach is similar to all Muslim scholars’ positive approach to the generation of the companions of the Prophet. He does not avoid clearly pointing out the negative associations about the companions, and narrates these points as they are. For example, Shiblī comments about Abbas, who was not only the Prophet’s uncle but also an outstanding companion, as being “wealthy but not generous, and stingy.”<sup>498</sup> Contrary to Shiblī, it is impossible to even come close to any negative connotations from Gülen’s narrations about either Abbas or the other companions. He insists on highlighting the positive and portraying attractive qualities of the companions at all times, to emphasise their exemplary attributes. In other words, dogmatic and theological re-reading of the events and lives of significant people is more abundant on the side of Gülen than Shiblī.

Unique to Shiblī, he has a very broad view of “the principle of gradualism.” This perspective cannot be seen in Gülen’s or other *sīrah* scholars’ writings. He states the principle of gradualism (theory of gradual rather than sudden change) is not only for specific cases, such as the statutory prohibition of alcohol, but it was the general theme for almost every rule and regulation of Islamic jurisprudence. According to Shiblī, almost all the articles on Islamic jurisprudence gradually reached the level of perfection. The evidence that the pillars of Islam, such as fasting and alms giving, became compulsory acts during the time in Medina proves this, and highlights its importance. He stresses that this gradualism was essential for all rulings in Islam.<sup>499</sup> His holistic approach, which broadly covers all legislative principles, is also crucial when evaluating incidents and transformations that took place in the Prophet’s life and his teachings, especially in terms of social reforms and *sīrah* philosophy.

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<sup>497</sup> For various examples see Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur* I/277-281; II/101-104, 114-122, 280, 316-319, 348, 358-360.

<sup>498</sup> Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 152.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid*, 448-450.

Another characteristic of Shiblī's writing is the technique and methodology of *hadith* narrations and analysis of sources, which cannot be found in Gülen's writing. Shiblī analyses *sīrah* narrations, criticises the text and chain/reporters, discusses the authenticity of narrations, and tries to find relevant references from the Qur'an and *hadith* through thorough analysis. He comments on the incidents and their narrators based on criticisms in the *tabaqāt* works, as he endeavours to deduce the status of a narration in terms of it being weak, fabricated or sound.<sup>500</sup> However, Gülen does not mention or detail these criticisms, or interpret *hadith* in such a way. Rather, he prefers to give information and examples from books that have been commonly accepted, or that he accepts, as authentic. He even sometimes chooses to cite the sources he narrates. If there is a general misconception about the topic, he gives examples to show it is a misconception and rectifies this understanding. If there is no such issue, Gülen provides details about the criticisms made. As topics were orally delivered during Friday sermons, the nature of these talks might have forced Gülen to follow a certain methodology. However, as I mentioned earlier, he was still citing sources as much as possible at the lectern. Besides sources mentioned in his speech, his publisher confirmed the sources of narrations that Gülen used in his writing. Most of the narrations he preferred are presented as authentic and reliable sources.

Shiblī's work includes a description of the physical appearance of the Prophet as well as accounts of his family life, his own life, his governing of the state and daily life. However, Gülen prefers to emphasise exemplary aspects of his life, such as being a perfect father, his military achievements as a role model and his leadership. Like Hamīdullah, Shiblī covers such topics systematically and broadly for the purpose of reaching and understanding an accurate portrayal of his life. However, Gülen approaches such matters with the purpose of showing the Prophet's exemplary life for the benefit of people in this day and age. Although they have different approaches to such matters, both scholars' emphasis revolves around two points. The first point is the notion of *tamthīl*, which means being a good representative through practice. This is the most influential and reliable way to nurture people in terms of spiritual and moral maturity and take people to the highest point attainable. Being a good representative is far more important than conveying the message of Islam through writings or preaching, according to them, but it does not mean those are unimportant. The second point is about the Prophet being a paragon of human virtue. They emphasise the Prophet's ethical values as his highest moral values, even displaying contrary attributes together (such as being an ascetic

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<sup>500</sup> There are numerous examples on this aspect of Shiblī. See for example, *ibid*, 309-312.



and poor and being a governor of state but generous at the same time). In short, they underline that the Prophet excelled in every aspect of life as an exemplary role model.<sup>501</sup>

In addition, Gülen discusses miracles in his works theoretically<sup>502</sup> and dispersedly in *Sonsuz Nur* due to their being relevant or part of the incidents or topics he covers. This includes the miracles as genuine occurrences that took place in the *sīrah* of the Prophet. Although Shiblī deals with the miracles when he chronologically analyses events, he prefers to allocate a substantial section<sup>503</sup> to the notion and discusses almost in every aspect of them in great detail. Gülen and Shiblī gave special importance to the subject probably due to the belief that limits the miracles of the Prophet to the Qur'an as the only one in the last century and denial of his other physical miracles. Although these scholars differ in methodology, they appear to have the same purpose. They present monumental information about the subject of miracles, which is normally the custom of books called *ithbāt* or *dalāil al-nubuwwa*. Their approach to miracles shows they do not accept the limitation of the miracles to the Qur'an and they support other miracles. From this point of view, Gülen and Shiblī believe that *sīrah* needs to be understood in terms of the *kalām* discipline.

Shiblī concludes his two volumes that are directly regarding *sīrah* topics with highlights from the character of the Prophet and his prophethood.<sup>504</sup> This part covers some important matters and resembles points that are covered extensively by Gülen.<sup>505</sup> Shiblī emphasises characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad which distinguish him from other prophets, innovators and religious leaders. He draws attention to the achievements of the Prophet Muhammad in encouraging people to reach new heights in spiritual belief, principles and ideologies. Unlike other prophets or other religious leaders, for example Moses, Buddha and Zarathustra, Prophet Muhammad fulfilled his aim and achieved success in his lifetime. This is an important point that Shiblī proves, not only to the satisfaction of believers, but also the

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<sup>501</sup> For more information about this subject see *ibid*, 31-32. Also, the last chapter of the second volume (pp. 509-684) is based on this idea. While in *Sonsuz Nur* this idea is embedded in the entire work, specifically in the second volume, the main theme of the topics based on this idea affects different dimensions of the life of the Prophet in education, uniqueness of conflict resolution, leadership and military campaigns, except the *sunnah* section at the end.

<sup>502</sup> Gülen, *İnancın Gölgesinde*, II/71-103.

<sup>503</sup> This part was not present in the translation I used, but it is in the third volume of the other translation. See Ömer Rıza Doğrul, *Büyük İslam Tarihi: Asrı Saadet* (Istanbul: Eser Neşriyat Dağıtım, 1978), II/187-472. In another publication, each volume is published as a separate book, including the part about miracles (İmam Şibli, *Peygamberimizin Ruhi Hayatı ve Mucizeleri*, trans. Ahmet Karataş (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2006). In this section, the Prophet's miracles, primarily the Qur'an and others, virtues and qualities of the Prophet, evidence and proofs of his prophethood, signs of his prophethood before and after his prophecy, were presented. Shiblī uses the main chapter title "The Spiritual Life of the Prophet" for this part.

<sup>504</sup> Unfortunately, I do not have a translation of this part, but it is in the translation of Karataş and Doğrul. Doğrul, *Asr-ı Saadet*, II/181-186; İmam Şibli, *Peygamberimiz'in Risaleti ve Şahsiyeti*, trans. Ahmet Karataş (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2006), 415-423.

<sup>505</sup> For Gülen's similar evaluations on this topic, see Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/55-97, 173-188, 346-378.

admission of non-believers, such as the German scholar Theodor Nöldeke. In this regard, Shiblī addresses some vital matters in the last part of his work. For instance, the Prophet saved people from brutality and made them the founders of civilisations. He brought these uncivilised idol worshippers to an appreciation of ethics, unity, religion and morality, not with a local<sup>506</sup> but with a universal message and values. While other prophets were concerned with one aspect of their characters and ethical values,<sup>507</sup> the Prophet nurtured characters and ethics in all aspects, to help them attain the highest level. Besides all these, he introduced principles that up until him no one had attempted,<sup>508</sup> such as living together in peace and harmony as well as dialogue between different faiths.

These two books have some goals in common: reading the *sīrah* of the Prophet from the perspective of the *kalām* discipline, addressing problematic issues on the subject, providing a correct and sound perception of prophethood, and drawing a clear portrait of the Prophet based on reliable sources. Both scholars have a holistic view and evaluated *sīrah* through the methodology of theology. In doing so, they endeavour to address various issues in *sīrah* discussions. In addition, these two books cover topics that can be the focus of the philosophy of *sīrah*, which puts them one step ahead of biographic or chronological *sīrah* readings. Although Shiblī's corpus is an outstanding work, it does not give the reader a dynamic *sīrah* reading or motivational insight. Gülen's book, however, is quite successful in this regard, as was noted previously when comparing it with Hamīdullah. This can be attributed to the fact that Gülen's books contain sermons, first addressed to an audience using spoken language, which became an advantage when 'using spoken language' in writing. Consequently, it addresses the people of today more relevantly and also provides fluent and riveting writing.

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<sup>506</sup> Shiblī uses the term 'national prophets' meaning locality of their mission for the prophets who came before Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>507</sup> Shiblī gives examples such as the discipleship of Moses, frailty of Aaron, heroics of Joseph, patience of Jonah, bravery of David, dignity and grandeur of Solomon, simplicity of John and modesty of Jesus.

<sup>508</sup> According to Shiblī, before Prophet Muhammad no one had claimed there was a messenger sent for each nation. People did not believe God sent a messenger to every nation to guide them. However, they believed God only favoured their nation as an exception with a messenger. This belief caused a risky thought that restricts the Divine Grace. However, the Prophet stated the messengers who were sent to every nation by God were right and found common ground between the world religions. In addition, there are principles in Islam that could bring all nations under the umbrella of brotherhood. For instance, it discourages people to insult the god of other religions (Qur'an 6:108). Also, it was stated in the letters of the Prophet that were sent to a number of kings around the world as a significant method for communication that "O people of the book! Come to a word that is equitable between us and you..." (Qur'an 3: 64).

## CHAPTER 5: GÜLEN'S PERSPECTIVE ON PROPHETIC ATTRIBUTES THROUGH *SONSUZ NUR*

### 5.1 Introduction

It is possible to view this chapter as the main reason for the *kalām-sīrah* relationship or viewing *sīrah* through *kalām*, which I covered intensively in chapters 2 and 3. Gülen's approach to basing his work on the attributes of the prophets, more specifically, presenting the life of the Prophet and his other qualities through the attribute of *fatānah*, urged me to review this as he reads *sīrah* based on *kalām*. Thus, I will focus on how the attributes are covered, Gülen's view of prophetic attributes, his approach and presentation. I will cover the attributes in the same order as Gülen's work, how they are understood and discussed in the classical works of theology, and how Gülen views and uses them. I will also address the idea that prophets are free from all intellectual and physical defects under the title of *avarizdan selamet* (freedom from all physical and mental defects), which Gülen has included in many of his works, despite the failure of works of theology to recognise this as a separate, necessary attribute.

Theology works highlight that all prophets must possess these attributes (*sifat al-asliyya* or *sifat al-wājiba*) under the topic of prophetic attributes. They emphasise that prophets are competent to be messengers between God and His servants because they possess sublime attributes and the best of characters that take them above and beyond other people.<sup>509</sup> The Qur'an praises prophets for displaying certain characteristics, including moral virtues and intellectual faculties, and confirms their choice because "God knows best who (where, how, which language) to confer messengership on."<sup>510</sup> While these attributes may increase in quantity (covered in Chapter 3 as Gülen draws attention to these through the inner dynamics, characteristic attributes and traits of prophets) and cannot be denied, there is general emphasis on five attributes that all prophets are required to possess.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> Sabūni, *al-Bidaya*, 53.

<sup>510</sup> Qur'an 6:124. Looking at the topic from a different verse (11:28), Noah preaches to his people in the following way: "O my people! What do you think – if I stand on a clear evidence from my Lord, and He has granted me a mercy from His Presence to which you have remained blind – can we force you to accept it when you are averse to it?" The specific blessing mentioned in the verse can also be interpreted as: The explicit and absolute document, message, revelation, the book given to them and miracles that Noah and other messengers depend on are specific to prophets. The specific blessings given to them are: firm belief and certainty of faith, the best of moral virtues and truthfulness, trustworthiness, prophetic intelligence, true and absolute knowledge and wisdom, and being free of all intellectual and physical defects (Ali Unal, *Kur'ani Kerim ve Aciklamali Meali*, 482).

<sup>511</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 337; Kilavuz, *Ana Hatlariyla*, 227.

Gülen believes that the sublime attributes that all prophets possess are actually accepted as good attributes in every period, era and by all people. For Gülen, the prophetic attributes that form the core of his *sīrah* works have a special place; he does not view these attributes as specific to prophets. On the contrary, Gülen, with his dynamic understanding of prophetic attributes, continuously endeavours to make the subject relevant to today. The question Gülen asks implicitly, and at times explicitly,<sup>512</sup> is: what do the attributes that played a significant role in the prophets' success mean for us today? In this regard, Gülen sidetracks from *sīrah* and covers the topic from a history-sociology perspective by stating that a community that possesses these attributes will always be successful. Furthermore, he socialises a theological, ethical and moral issue by applying this general comment and perspective, based on *sīrah*, to the followers of a global movement who will need to internalise these qualities.

## 5.2 *Sidq* (Truthfulness)

*Sidq* etymologically refers to being truthful, making sincere declarations, being honest and trustworthy, and is used as an antonym to deceit (*kazib*).<sup>513</sup> As one of the fundamental concepts of the Qur'an, the word truthfulness, with its various derivatives, is mentioned in 155 places in 49 chapters.<sup>514</sup> In the Qur'an, truthfulness is mentioned as one of the most essential attributes of prophets to signify their greatness.<sup>515</sup> Ordinary individuals are requested to immerse themselves in this characteristic,<sup>516</sup> and those who are truthful and honest to their word are praised.<sup>517</sup> The notion of truthfulness is also covered extensively in the *hadith* of the Prophet as an important and indispensable means for his *ummah* (community) to achieve salvation.<sup>518</sup> The notion of truthfulness is considered a significant quality in works of ethics and mysticism, and it is regarded as one of the overriding virtues of morality. Among the

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<sup>512</sup> For a clearer coverage of these attributes in the book, see Gülen, *Cemre Beklentisi*, 265-272. This topic is also the main theme in the Sunday sermon that coincides with the *Sonsuz Nur* sermons: Hisar 2 Vaazi, Ruhun Dinamikleri: 22.04.1990 (Nil tv, "Hisar 2," Nil tv, duration: 1.43.08, accessed April 3, 2015, <http://www.nil.tv/vaaz-detay/vaaz/tumu/seri/386>).

<sup>513</sup> Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*, X/193; Jawhari, *Sihah*, IV/1505.

<sup>514</sup> M. Fuad Abd al-Baqi, *al-Mu'jam*, "s-d-q." For the concept of *sidq* in the Qur'an and its meanings, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concept in the Qur'an* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2005), 96-113.

<sup>515</sup> Qur'an 19:41, 54, 56-57; 12:46.

<sup>516</sup> Qur'an 9:119; 49:15.

<sup>517</sup> Qur'an 33:23.

<sup>518</sup> Bukhārī, *adab*, 69; Muslim, *birr* 103-105; Tirmidhi, *qiyamat*, 60; Abū Dawud, *adab*, 80; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, I/200, V/323; Tabarani, *Mu'jam al-Kabir*, VIII/262; Bayhaqi, *Sunan*, VI/288.

adherents of mysticism,<sup>519</sup> it is deemed to be the most important rank and position following that of the prophets.<sup>520</sup>

Although its dictionary definition mainly refers to being honest and true to one's word, the notion of truthfulness encompasses a wide range of meanings when considered in light of the aforementioned verses, *hadith* and Islamic tradition. In the wider sense, it is a principle that needs to be considered in every word, action and deliberation pertaining to every sphere of life, and it is presented as an attribute that prophets have exemplified through their virtues of loyalty, honesty and fidelity, via different derivations such as *sādiq*, *siddiq* and *sadāqah*. Alongside all these connotations and implications, in consideration of Gülen's frame of specifications that combine truthfulness, honesty and loyalty (*sidq* and *sadāqah*), the notion of truthfulness is:

true thought, true words and true actions, *sidq* is reflected in the life of a traveler on the path to God as follows: he or she does not lie or tell a falsehood, lives according to truthfulness, and strives to be a trustworthy representative of loyalty to God. In other words, he or she never deviates from truthfulness in all thoughts, words and actions and, in obedience to the Quranic command, strives to: Be truthful (9:119), always seeking truthfulness at both an individual and a social level.<sup>521</sup>

When considering the issue in light of theology and *sīrah*, truthfulness is an essential attribute of prophets and an integral part of their being, demonstrating they are true to their word, displaying good conduct and honesty throughout their lives. It is not possible that there should be any cases of lying, deceit or doing injustice to others' property, as such actions would amount to an infringement of the notion of truthfulness for any prophet. This is because even the contemplation of such an idea would be contradictory to the wisdom and purpose behind their appointment as prophets, and would give rise to doubts concerning the message of truth they are advocating.<sup>522</sup> Any insignificant blunder or error by one who is delivering revelations from the unseen realms to humanity would mean everything would be disrupted. This is due to the role of the prophets in relaying all essential truths to humanity, as discussed in Chapter

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<sup>519</sup> For the usage of term in Islamic mysticism, see Qushayrī, *al-Risala al-Qushayriyya fi Ilm al-Tasawwuf* (Lebanon: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 2005), 202-205; Ghazzālī, *Ihya*, IV/386-392; Gülen, *Kalbin Zumrut Tepeleri*, I/125-130.

<sup>520</sup> This thought takes its reference from the following verse: "Whoever obeys God and the Messenger (as they must be obeyed), then those are (and in the Afterlife will be, in Paradise) in the company of those whom God has favored (with perfect guidance) – the Prophets, and the truthful ones (loyal to God's cause and truthful in whatever they do and say), and the witnesses (those who see the hidden Divine truths and testify thereto with their lives), and the righteous ones (in all their deeds and sayings, and dedicated to setting everything right). How excellent they are for companions!" (Qur'an 4:69).

<sup>521</sup> Gülen, *Kalbin Zumrut Tepeleri*, I/125; Gülen, *Olumsuzluk Iksiri*, 155-156.

<sup>522</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 345; Kilavuz, *Ana Hatlariyla*, 227-228.

3. In expressing this truth, God decrees: “If he (the Messenger) had dared to fabricate some false sayings in attribution to Us, We would certainly have seized him with might. Thereafter We would certainly have cut his life-vein. Then not one from among you could have shielded and saved him from Us.”<sup>523</sup> It is due to this significant status that some scholars like Nursi have stressed truthfulness as the most important principle in proving the prophethood of prophets, and in achieving individual development and social advancement.<sup>524</sup>

Gülen regards truthfulness as the “pivot of prophethood” inclusive of all the aforementioned meanings (*sidq*, *sadāqat*, *wafa’*, *tasdīq* meaning truthful, loyal, trustworthy, confirmative, etc.) and the inalienable attribute of all prophets emphasising their truthfulness, fidelity and steadfastness in their words, actions, feelings and thoughts. According to him, prophethood is practice perfectly aligned with the axis of truthfulness.<sup>525</sup> After pointing to the verses of the Qur’an which emphasise truthfulness as the most important attribute of other prophets, Gülen links the topic to Prophet Muhammad. With the use of striking examples, he explains that the Prophet did not utter any word or undertake any action contrary to truthfulness, neither before his prophethood nor after, and this is agreed to by even his most formidable adversaries. For example, following the Hudaibiya Treaty, the Prophet sent letters of invitation to the rulers in the region. He sent one of these letters to Heraclius, the ruler of the Roman Empire. Heraclius called Abū Sufyan, who was in the Damascus region at the time, to his presence and a dialogue of questions and answers took place between them. Heraclius asked whether he had heard the Prophet lie at any point in his life, after asking if the followers of the Prophet were rich or poor, if their numbers were increasing or falling, and if any of them had retreated after adhering to the religion. Abū Sufyan responded with “no, we have never heard him lie.” Shocked by the answers he received from someone he would have considered an enemy, Heraclius said: “It is inconceivable for someone to lie to God when they have refrained from lying to people all their life.”<sup>526</sup> According to Gülen’s analysis, in this incident there are two pieces of evidence proving the prophet’s truthfulness:

The first is Heraclius, who uttered the quoted phrase. The second one is the answer and affirmation by Abū Sufyan, who has not yet embraced Islam. Actually, what Heraclius said was quite noteworthy and deep. That is because, as he points out, how would it be possible

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<sup>523</sup> Qur’an 69:44-47.

<sup>524</sup> The reference point for Nursi’s reading and thoughts on prophethood in the mentioned context seems to be *sidq* (truthfulness). For more on the concept in Nursi’s collection, see Nursi, *Isharat al-I’jaz*, 82-83, 106-118; Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 100-124; Nursi, *Tarihce-i Hayat* (Hutbe-i Samiye, 3. Kelime), 92; Nursi, *Mektubat*, 330, 532; Nursi, *Sozler*, 526-527, 533, 774-775; Abdullah Aymaz, *Munazarat Uzerine* (Istanbul: Sahdamar Yayinlari, 2006), 101-102.

<sup>525</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/117, 130.

<sup>526</sup> Bukhārī, *bad’ al-wahy*, 6; Muslim, *jihad*, 74.

for someone who never lied up until the age of 40 among ordinary people, to lie after that time, when he is approaching death, or almost at the end of his journey towards the one who is the Most Powerful, God?<sup>527</sup>

In addition to exploring the attribute of truthfulness in the character of the prophets, Gülen is at pains to point out that the Qur'an also singles out the companions of the Prophet as displaying this characteristic. In this respect, he examines examples such as the participation of Anas ibn Nadr<sup>528</sup> in the battle of Uhud, referred to in a favourable manner in the Qur'an,<sup>529</sup> and the incident concerning the lack of participation of Ka'b ibn Malik and his friends in the Tabuk expedition, which is also mentioned in the Qur'an, with an emphasis on their loyalty and the contribution this made to winning their salvation.<sup>530</sup> Having presented his argument, with particular examples, Gülen continues his study of *sīrah* in a more generalised way, relating his subject matter to his addressees, and stressing the need for them also to nurture the same attributes.<sup>531</sup> The fact that the Qur'an mentions the virtue of truthfulness possessed by the companions, demonstrates that those who follow their example, and wish to represent successfully the religion in this day and age, should ensure that they, too, are seen to possess this virtue.<sup>532</sup>

In his analysis of the notion of truthfulness, Gülen points out that the proclamations of the Prophet, which he identifies as different dimensions of truthfulness, amount to a confirmation of his prophethood. In other words, he indicates that the verses in the Qur'an and explanations of the Prophet regarding theology, Divine Essence, Attributes and Names, as well as statements of the Prophet concerning matters of creation, destiny, paradise and hell, are all affirmations of the Prophet's truthfulness. Since religious scholars or saints cannot compete

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<sup>527</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/121-123.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid, I/118-121.

<sup>529</sup> Qur'an 33:23.

<sup>530</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/125-130.

<sup>531</sup> In another talk, Gülen deals with the topic from the perspective of the current addressee as: "One of the most significant characteristics of the devoted souls is truthfulness, faithfulness and fidelity. Faithfulness is such an exalted and lofty term that comprises many praised characteristics. To state some, it is not only being truthful in one's words and actions but also in one's sense, feelings, thoughts, decisions, intentions and aims. It is to strive to be loyal to what is right, righteousness and always be a representative of fidelity towards intimate friends. In other words, it means to never deviate from truthfulness no matter what the circumstances are and to stay on the straight path and seek God's cause in obedience. It is seeking truthfulness both as an individual and at a social level, with the completely sincere intention of clarifying the soul from all sorts of grime like hypocrisy, artificiality and self-benefits. Such people are so careful about being truthful that they never give false evidence or tell lies, even in jest. As related in a Prophetic saying, one who is truthful to that degree is recorded as a truthful one by the Supreme Court, while one whose thoughts, words, and actions are contradictory and who deceives others is recorded as a liar. In short, as the Prophet said in one of his sayings 'Salvation is inherited in truthfulness.'" Herkul, "Doğruluk, Sadâkat ve İş Hayatının Sâdıkları" Herkul, December 15, 2013, accessed December 13, 2013 <http://www.herkul.org/bamтели/Doğruluk-sadakat-ve-is-hayatinin-sadıkları/>; Gülen, *Key Concepts in the Practise of Sufism*, I/84.

<sup>532</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/120.

with the Prophet on these matters, their studies are more about perceiving and explaining the truth behind them. In addition to these supreme topics, the Prophet's description of subtler matters, such as destiny and free will, is another matter that Gülen addresses. For him, these matters are proof of his truthfulness, because if knowledge from the prophets is not respected, it will not be possible for anyone to obtain a true understanding of such essential matters. In Gülen's view, truthfulness is a dynamic phenomenon with a variety of dimensions and a network of relations. For him, the Prophet proves his truthfulness by demonstrating that his mental prowess is superior to that of philosophers, the exploration of his heart deeper than the saints and his soul-searching more profound than that of devout believers. In addition, all this is confirmed by what the Prophet achieves, due to his obvious talents. Alongside this confirmation, the comment that some of these matters will be understood only in the afterlife and will be a testimony to the truthfulness of the Prophet, is quite striking.<sup>533</sup> Gülen notes that all of these matters have been voiced by an uneducated person, indicating he has received knowledge through revelation received from God. His presentation of this point as proof of prophethood is a notable example of Gülen's study of *sīrah* from the basis of theology.

Another prominent issue that Gülen discusses is "the subject of the unseen from the perspective of truthfulness." While this could be considered within the various dimensions of truthfulness mentioned above, Gülen's delivery of the topic, with a focus on examples of the Prophet's reports regarding predictions about the future, indicates it should be considered separately. The Prophet's reports regarding the unseen, usually covered under the headings of *dalāil* (verifications, evidences) and *ithbāt al-nubuwwa* (proofs of prophethood) or miracles in the classic works of theology, are presented as the most important and valid evidence of his attribute of truthfulness. In addition, they can be used as examples of his application of theological material to the study *sīrah*. In this sense, Gülen considers the meaning of the word *ghayb* (unknown) and who may have knowledge of it. The conclusion he arrives at, after examining the subject with verses from the Qur'an,<sup>534</sup> is in line with the general conviction of mainstream Muslim scholars: It would be excessive to declare that the Prophet had absolute knowledge of the unseen or to state he did not have knowledge of the unseen in an absolute sense. As a human being, the Prophet did not know the unseen, but through revelation or by God revealing the unseen to chosen people, that knowledge was conferred on him. God revealed many secrets to His Prophet and explained incidents, in their basic and essential forms, that will happen up until the Day of Judgment. His speech did not come from him; whatever he was saying of revelation and declaration was what he received from God. When

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<sup>533</sup> Ibid, I/130-134.

<sup>534</sup> Qur'an 6:50, 59; 7:188; 72:26-28.



the One who sent the information is God, not merely the Prophet, then there are also some qualified saints among his followers who can make predictions about the unseen. Just as the Prophet states: “Among my nation there are people who are endowed with inspiration;”<sup>535</sup> these are saints who achieved this grace of inspiration.<sup>536</sup> As can be seen from these evaluations, Gülen’s position on this matter is moderate.

The number of predictions made by the Prophet in authentic sources of tradition exceeds 300 reports relating to the unseen of a miraculous nature. Some of these have been realised just as reported, whilst some await the right time to be actualised. Gülen examines these genuine reports under three classifications.<sup>537</sup> While it can be seen that Gülen’s analysis of the subject of truthfulness is clearly influenced by Nursi’s emphasis on truthfulness in his study of prophethood, it is undeniable that Gülen develops a new approach. He pragmatizes and updates the notion through proposing a new categorisation. As it is not possible to mention every single report Gülen has chosen for each category, I will only refer to them briefly. The three classifications Gülen uses in discussing the reports of the Prophet relating to the unseen are as follows:

First, the predictions made by the Prophet regarding his own era, for example, the incident where the Prophet informs Umayr ibn Wahb of the conversation he had with Safwan ibn Umayya in Mecca, of which no one else was aware, after he travelled 500 kilometres to Medina to carry out the plot they agreed upon, to kill the Prophet following the battle of Badr.<sup>538</sup>

Secondly, the predictions relating to the future. Gülen examines this under three headings:

- i) Imminent future: Incidents like his report to Habbab ibn Arat of the companions during the difficult times in Mecca, namely, that there will come a time when a person will be able to travel from San’a to Hadramawt alone without any fear; his report to his daughter Fatima, that he will soon die and she will be the first person from his family to reunite with him; and the realisation of his report that his grandson, Hasan, will be the means for the reconciliation of two opposing tribes.<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi li Ahkam al-Qur’an*, XIII/174; Ibn Hajar, *Muqaddima Fath al-Bārī*, 103; *Fath al-Bārī*, VI/516; Ghazzālī, *Ihya*, III/24. Also refer to Bukhārī, *anbiya*, 54; Muslim, *fadāil al-sahaba*, 23.

<sup>536</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/136-137.

<sup>537</sup> As mentioned earlier, although Gülen delivered this talk in the mosque to a congregation he clearly states the references for narrations used. Most of these references are from authentic and reliable *hadīth* and *sīrah* sources.

<sup>538</sup> See Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/138-141.

<sup>539</sup> See *ibid*, I/142-148.

- ii) Near future: His predictions of the keys of Byzantine, Iran and Yaman being handed to his companions during the digging of the Trench; similarly, his reports to Adiy ibn Hatim that there will be a time of prosperity and security, and the treasures of Iran's Kisra will be shared among the Muslims; and the realisation of these during the times of Umar and Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz.<sup>540</sup>
- iii) Distant future: The fulfilment of his reports, such as reforms in agriculture, the emergence and spread of a harmful ideology, such as communism, from the east, the proliferation of the practice of usury, the spread of knowledge and its attainment by everyone male-female, free-slave and old-young, and distances becoming closer, all confirming his prophethood.<sup>541</sup>

Thirdly, his predictions in the form of *sahl al-mumtani'*,<sup>542</sup> which are reports of the unseen relating to various fields of science and scientific development, the complete realities of which are comprehended with new developments in each field: for example, that every illness has a cure except old age and, as such, treatment methods need to be investigated; his emphasis on preventative medicine; his narrations concerning hygiene and healthcare; his advice for avoiding places inflicted with leprosy, and refraining from leaving, if affected, at a time when quarantine was unknown; his distinction between a woman's menstrual bleeding and undue menses; his emphasis on the importance of circumcision for males and its naturalness; and the superiority over modern dentists of his practical applications and suggestions concerning dental care.<sup>543</sup>

With these examples, Gülen not only undertakes a religious examination, but also an intellectual assessment. The variety of examples, as well as the annexation of interesting and contemporary topics, strengthens the perception that he also addresses modern intellectuals.

Gülen establishes the attribute of truthfulness as the absolute honesty of the Prophet throughout his life, and addresses with various proofs that this is not limited to the 63 years of his life, but encompasses every statement, prediction and report. Essentially, the timely realisation of all his reports provides evidence for his prophethood as well as underlining his truthfulness. This is because it is not possible for him to have knowledge of the matters of the *gayb* (unseen) he reported on, as he made these statements at a time when there were no clues

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<sup>540</sup> See *ibid*, I/148-158.

<sup>541</sup> See *ibid*, I/158-174.

<sup>542</sup> The lexical meaning of *sahl al-mumtani'* is "impossibly easy," denoting profoundly meaningful words and inscriptions that initially appear simple and straightforward, but are actually very difficult to imitate in verbal or written form.

<sup>543</sup> For detailed information and other examples, see Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/174-193.

that could have led to such statements. Gülen references all matters he examines in detail to the verse: “He does not speak on his own, out of his own desire; that (which he conveys to you) is but a Revelation that is revealed to him,”<sup>544</sup> which clarifies the matter and points to the source of the reports.

### 5.3 *Amānah* (Trustworthiness)

The second attribute of prophets is trustworthiness. Meaning “trusting, being free from fear or worry” in Arabic, the word *amāna*, which comes from the same root (*a-m-n*) as the word *īmān* (faith), has connotations such as “being trustworthy” and “an item left temporarily in the trust of someone who is reliable and trustworthy.”<sup>545</sup> It has been included among the attributes of prophets by scholars of theology due to these connotations as well as their perfect fulfilment of the mission of prophethood. Similarly, the word *mu’min*, from the same root, is one of the holy names of God, as well as one of the most important titles of those who believe in Him. When considered as a name of God, it means the source of trust, safety and faith, and with reference to human beings, it means one who believes, infuses trust and reliability. When attributed to prophets, just as they take their place at the forefront of all believers, they are also examples of reliability and trustworthiness. There is an emphasis on this attribute in many verses where the Qur’an mentions prophets.<sup>546</sup> All prophets are trustworthy individuals; they always honour their trust and are never deceitful.<sup>547</sup> According to the discipline of *kalām*, it is essential for prophets to be trustworthy, and impossible for them to be deceitful, as this is one of the conditions of prophethood.<sup>548</sup> Just as trustworthiness is one of the most important attributes of prophets, it is also the most significant attribute of Archangel Gabriel, responsible for the delivery of revelation.<sup>549</sup> Even before he was given the shrine of prophethood in Mecca, Prophet Muhammad was known for this attribute and known as *Muhammad al-Amīn* (Muhammad the Trustworthy) by the non-believers in Mecca.<sup>550</sup>

Gülen specifically emphasises the meaning behind the word, and the names and attributes based on the same roots in Islamic literature, and establishes the topic in its broad etymological (giving consideration to religious, moral, legal and social dimensions) meaning

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<sup>544</sup> Qur’an 53:3-4.

<sup>545</sup> Raghīb, *Mufradat*, “a-m-n”; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisan al-Arab*, “a-m-n.”

<sup>546</sup> Such as Qur’an 26:105-108 (Prophet Noah), 123-125 (Prophet Hud), 141-143 (Prophet Salih), 160-162 (Prophet Lut). For verses that consider truthfulness an essential characteristic of believers, see Qur’an 23:8; 70:32.

<sup>547</sup> Qur’an 3:161; 81:24; 33:39.

<sup>548</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 344-345; Kilavuz, *Ana Hatlariyla*, 228.

<sup>549</sup> Qur’an, 81:21.

<sup>550</sup> Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, III/425; Hakim, *Mustadrak*, I/628; Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, I/146.

and context.<sup>551</sup> According to him, it is not a coincidence that one of the names of God is *al-Mu'min*, that believers are given this title (*mu'minūn*), that the word from the same root denotes the act of belief and faith (*īmān*), and for the angel of revelation and the Last Prophet to be renowned with this attribute. Gülen examines the topic in light of the interaction of these meanings, to provide an accurate understanding of this relationship:

In this sense, this subject matter we identify as peace, security, trust and faith, links us (believers) to the prophets and to an important extent the prophets to God. Overall, this relationship takes us to a liaison between the Creator and the created. All of these meanings are derived from the word 'trust' and included in its etymological meaning. And for this reason, a significant part of the discussion has been centered on comprehending this relationship.<sup>552</sup>

After this foundation and contextualisation, using an original approach, Gülen elucidates the attribute of trustworthiness in the Prophet's life, personality and character from four aspects:<sup>553</sup> in relation to the revelations received from God; towards all creation, existence and beings; his trust and reliance on God; and his invitation to his followers to be trustworthy.

### **5.3.1 In Relation to the Revelations Received from God**

According to Gülen, the Prophet was trustworthy in relation to the revelations received from God, that is, to his mission of prophethood. In this respect, it is inconceivable for him to have dishonoured this trust, such as by altering the content of the revelation when delivering the will and order of God. In fact, all prophets did not fear or shy away from anything while fulfilling their responsibilities and missions. God chose all prophets as individuals who observed the trust given to them and acted in consciousness of this all their lives. In this respect, Gülen draws attention to the verses that show the Prophet's anxiety about protecting this important and holy trust (the Qur'an) upon receiving revelation, his effort not to miss any words,<sup>554</sup> and that he has been given assurance and certainty of this.<sup>555</sup> Also, the question of "Soon, they will ask you about me. Have I observed my duty?" can also be viewed in light of

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<sup>551</sup> Words derived from the root of "a-m-n" are mentioned 879 times in the Qur'an and it has extensive range of meanings.

<sup>552</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/195. Gülen's examination of this concept in this broad framework is quite important. It is relevant to usage of the concept in the Qur'an and it evokes the interpretations made by exegetes regarding the term *amānah* (trust) in surah Ahzab (33:72): "We offered Trust to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains, but they shrank from bearing it, and were afraid of it (fearful of being unable to fulfill its responsibility), but Man has undertaken it; he is indeed prone to doing great wrong and misjudging, and acting out of sheer ignorance."

<sup>553</sup> Gülen covers the attribute of *amānah* under seven sub-headings. Due to the similar content in some headings, I found it more appropriate to use four sub-headings.

<sup>554</sup> Qur'an 75:16-19.

<sup>555</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/197.

trustworthiness towards the duty of messengership.<sup>556</sup> The divorce between his adopted son Zayd and Zaynab binti Jahsh, the verses that commanded the marriage with Zaynab,<sup>557</sup> and Aisha's narration in the most authentic *hadith* books, are different examples of proof of his trustworthiness: "If the Messenger of God were to hide any of the revealed verses then it would be this verse."<sup>558</sup> At that time, an adopted son was accepted as a biological son, thus it was taboo for the father to marry his daughter-in-law. However, this was a commandment from God, and the Prophet utterly trusted the revelation, so it was inconceivable for him to try and dissemble the smallest detail.<sup>559</sup> Gülen also points to his trustworthiness in his messengership, quoting the verse<sup>560</sup> about the Badr captives that apparently seemed to be against the Prophet. According to Gülen, if there were any shortcomings regarding his messengership, he would have hidden these verses.<sup>561</sup> Clearly, Gülen's rationalisation, and to some extent apologetic explanation, is proof of not only the trustworthy nature of the Prophet, but also of the authentic nature of the Book of God, namely the Qur'an.

### 5.3.2 Towards All Creation

According to Gülen, the Prophet was also trustworthy and reliable towards all creation. Everyone would trust him because he had initially shown confidence towards everyone and inculcated trustworthiness in them. In this regard, the examples he gives include human beings as well as animals. Proofs of his trustworthiness towards male-female, children, the elderly and everyone else are seen in incidents such as, when his wife brought him food in his retreat at the mosque, he revealed her face to two passing companions and introduced her as Safiyya, his wife; such as, the Meccan polytheists calling him "Muhammad the Trustworthy" before his prophethood and entrusting him with their belongings, despite not accepting his prophethood; such as, upon hearing a mother call her child and promising him to give something, he said: "you would have lied if you were not going to give him anything"; such as, classifying lies and treachery as signs of hypocrisy and not allowing backbiting/gossip in his presence.<sup>562</sup> Besides rational argument, Gülen frequently uses pastoral means to convey the trustworthiness of the Prophet.

One of the original approaches of Gülen in covering the attribute of trustworthiness is not to limit it to human beings. Gülen's analysis gives the impression that the strongest bond

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Qur'an 33:37.

<sup>558</sup> Bukhārī, *tawhīd*, 22; Muslim, *iman*, 288.

<sup>559</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/197-199.

<sup>560</sup> Qur'an 8:67.

<sup>561</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/199-200.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid, I/200-202.

between theology and *sīrah* that he made is in the context of trustworthiness. In this respect, Gülen emphasises the Prophet's trustworthiness toward animals. For example, the Prophet became upset with a companion's pretence of holding something to deceive a horse, and reprimanded him for this act. A similar example is when a bird fluttered in distress upon the removal of its young by some of the companions on their way back from a battle, and the Prophet's immediate command to put them back.<sup>563</sup> Gülen's emphasis on these actions being inappropriate for the representatives of trustworthiness and reliability is important for the addressees to take messages from *sīrah* as part of his general methodology.

### 5.3.3 Trust and Reliance on God

Another aspect of Gülen's analysis of trustworthiness is the extensive coverage of all prophets' and Prophet Muhammad's trust and reliance on God. The main reason for Gülen's inclusion of this topic is the etymological analysis of the word trustworthiness and the fact that the word is derived from the same root as al-Mu'min, which is one of the names of God. As mentioned previously, God is the source of trustworthiness, trust and reliance. Gülen highlights reliance on God through the personality of the Prophet, and later uses various verses<sup>564</sup> to show the same trust and reliance were placed upon all prophets: "As he was very reliable and trustworthy, he has also full trust in God and relies on God to display his character. His trust and reliance on God elevates the attribute of trustworthiness from the Prophet to God. Trustworthiness comes from God and manifests itself as reliability, serenity and dependability in the Prophet. When these two conditions come together, there results a general sense of safety and confidence."<sup>565</sup> Hence, Gülen perceives trustworthiness as a notion that spans the religious life and demonstrates the Prophet's aim to reflect this in every aspect of his life.

Gülen emphasises the submission, trust and reliance of Prophet Muhammad, following the example of the prophets Noah and Abraham, and goes into detail with various examples from the *sīrah*. The striking examples given on this topic are his departure for migration from his house without any concern, despite being surrounded by people wanting to take his life; his act of complete reliance that relieves Abū Bakr's worries about the polytheists who had come to the entrance of the Thawr cave; his complete reliance on God when, while resting under a tree, he is threatened by someone with a sword in his hand demanding, who will save you from me and his response, "God!"; and his fearless strike with his horse upon the wavering of

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<sup>563</sup> Ibid, I/202.

<sup>564</sup> Like the verses that explain Noah's (Qur'an 10:71) and Abraham's (Qur'an 60:4) trust and reliance in God.

<sup>565</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/206.

the companions at the start of the Hunayn battle.<sup>566</sup> Gülen narrates the words of Bernard Shaw after giving these examples, and mentions his approval of the words: “Muhammad is an astonishing person equipped with various superior qualities. It is not possible to fully understand this mysterious person. In particular, his trust and reliance on God is a superior aspect that cannot be understood.”<sup>567</sup> In summary, trust and reliance is not simply a virtue, but a profound belief and theology. As can be seen, Gülen uses all arguments in this regard that give support to his thought.

#### **5.3.4 Invitation of his Community to Trustworthiness and Reliability**

The last aspect of Gülen’s analysis of trustworthiness is his faith in all creation as well as having faith in the message of God. In this regard, he narrates *hadith* and examples of the Prophet calling his community to equip themselves with the characteristics he displays and live as people of faith. After highlighting the results of these teachings and giving examples of such faith from Islamic history, he also presents this attribute as an obligatory virtue for the audience.

To illustrate his point, Gülen cites the example of the Prophet prohibiting malicious talk about others in his presence. When Aisha remarked that a woman’s dress was too long, he told her that she was backbiting the person and chewing her flesh.<sup>568</sup> He also stopped a person from talking about the companion called Maiz (who sinned,) and refused to allow any backbiting to take place. In addition, the Prophet demonstrated his invitation to his community to be trustworthy and reliable by asking God to provide a place of refuge from betrayal. He adds weight to his argument by citing many prophetic statements, such as on the Day of Judgment there will be a flag to mark every disloyal person, stating breach of trust as one of the signs of hypocrisy, as well as putting trustworthy people among the six groups given glad tidings of paradise.<sup>569</sup> An important matter here is the socialisation of the notion of trustworthiness by Gülen. Although he emphasises individual reliability and trust in the Prophet’s rationale, it also shows there will be no security at an individual level if there is no communal reliability and trust. Thus, just as Gülen socialises the notion of *taqwa* (piety), he also equips the followers of the movement he leads with a feeling of collective trust, through his interpretation of *sīrah*.

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<sup>566</sup> Ibid, I/209-214.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid, I/211-212.

<sup>568</sup> Abu Dawud, *adab*, 35; Tirmidhi, *qiyamah*, 51; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, VI/189.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid, I/204-209, 216.

Gülen's other narration on the topic explains why the meaning of the Qur'anic verse to give trust to the competent<sup>570</sup> was revealed as the Prophet gave the keys of the Ka'bah to Uthman ibn Talha after the conquest of Mecca. According to Gülen "trust is very important and giving a job to the competent is also a matter of trust. This is one of the most important factors in keeping order in the world in peace and security. Breaching of trust inevitably results in the removal of overall balance and order in the universe."<sup>571</sup> In this way, Gülen makes use of sayings, such as; when trust is breached, the Last Day will dawn; responsibility for the people will pass from the state leader to the servant; and one who does not observe trust does not have faith, to draw the general conclusion that civil law and order broadly depends on the observance of the attribute of trustworthiness.<sup>572</sup>

Moreover, Gülen also sees trustworthiness as a characteristic that is displayed by the companions and successful states in the history of Islam. According to him, it is this atmosphere of trust and security that has allowed them to rule for prolonged periods. In this respect, the incident narrated about Abū Ubayda ibn Jarrah is very interesting: Abū Ubayda who was given the title, "the trustworthy of the Muslim community" by the Prophet was the governor of Damascus during the rule of Caliph Umar. When Heraclius came with his army to retake Damascus, Abū Ubayda had a small number of people with him. Thus, they could not defend the city. He quickly gathered the people of Damascus and told them: "We collected tax (*jizya*) from you and we needed to protect you in return for this tax. However, we do not have that power now. Since we cannot protect you, we will return the tax we took from you. It is not lawful for us to keep it without justification." Thus, the taxes were returned to the people. The clerics and priests who witnessed this incident filled the churches and prayed to God asking for Muslims not to leave their land. During the farewell, they said, "hopefully you will come back and save us from the oppression of Heraclius."<sup>573</sup> As can also be seen here, Gülen supports the social impacts of trustworthiness by using historical information and notable anecdotes.

According to Gülen, it was the display of trust, honesty and security, as in the case of Abū Ubayda that was the essential foundation of prolonged Ottoman rule. In light of this work, which extracts general methodologies and a *sīrah* philosophy from the life of the Prophet, it can be seen that whether it is the Prophet, the leaders in the early period of Islam, or later leaders, they conquered the hearts of the people with their display of honesty and security

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<sup>570</sup> Qur'an 4:58.

<sup>571</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/214.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid*, I/214-216.

<sup>573</sup> Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, I/143; Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/202-203.



rather than by use of the sword. In this regard, Gülen frequently emphasises the life of Muhammad before his messengership. As discussed under the attribute of truthfulness, the truthful and trustworthy character he displayed with his words and actions laid the foundations of the message he would later convey. This sense of trust and honesty gave him credibility and made it easier for people to accept his words and prophethood. After giving various examples, he attributes the reign of six centuries to the conquest of hearts and the atmosphere of peace and security they established:

It is possible to see the same atmosphere of trust in the global reign of the Ottomans...the noble representatives of reliability who would hang payments for picked fruits on the trees while going to the battle, conquered the hearts of the people with the sense of trust and magnanimity before the use of the sword...I think that the blood spilled in establishing order in Turkey's past half century has not been spilled during those five centuries to establish harmony and security even among foreign nations...Thus, attributing the Ottoman conquests to brute force is not correct. On the other hand, if the means of transportation and the sheer size of the Ottoman land is considered, the inability to govern with only state authority and military power will be apparent.<sup>574</sup>

In the same way as his other examples and analysis, Gülen also finishes this part by involving and relating to the audience. Thus Gülen conveys a religious truth to his audience and covers an important principle in the life of the Prophet using practical examples and sayings. In addition, he approaches the topic from a different angle and expresses the need to follow the same path to achieve success today. Furthermore, it is important to note the association of world peace and order with the attribute of trustworthiness presented in the light of Qur'anic verses, prophetic tradition and examples from different time periods. Gülen attributes the establishment of world peace to the rule of trustworthy people and places this task on the shoulders of his audience. He expresses that the establishment of a world order will be achieved if people accept the trust given to them and become examples of trust and honesty.

You are the ones who will once again revive the truth of religion...If you could give messages of trust, display trustworthiness and consistency of action, the hearts of humanity will be open for you and you will be able to win their hearts, as your predecessors did. Do not forget that the most important criterion in reaching this goal, in fact this highest achievement, is to be trustworthy...<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/203-204.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid*, I/217-218.

#### 5.4 *Tabligh* (Communication)

The third attribute of prophets is *tabligh*. While its lexical meaning is to communicate, deliver or explain something, its conceptual meaning is the prophet's communication of the commandments from God in its entirety without any alteration. According to Islamic theologians, it is inconceivable for a prophet to conceal, reduce or add anything to the revelation from God. Regardless of the situation and reaction they receive, they have communicated the received messages in their original form and wording. Such communication is seen as their necessary attribute and the opposite is a betrayal of the trust and, as discussed previously, prophets can never be associated with betrayal.<sup>576</sup> In Islamic literature and Qur'anic terminology, *amr bi al-ma'ruf nahy an al-munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) is used along with the notion of *tabligh*.

The Qur'an has drawn attention in various verses to the accomplishment of the duty of communication by prophets.<sup>577</sup> In addition, the word "*qul*: say," which appears in many verses, is also used as evidence of the Prophet's duty.<sup>578</sup> Prophets not only communicate the message, but also have responsibility to explain (*tabyīn*), teach (*ta'līm*), practice, review and correct the teachings conveyed, as well as purify their community of all evil acts, deviations and wrong understandings (*tazkiya*).<sup>579</sup> The Qur'an also draws attention to this aspect by underlining the prophet's duty of communicating the message,<sup>580</sup> reminding him that he is not a protector, representative or guardian of others.<sup>581</sup> Rather, not having the obligation of establishing rule or authority by force,<sup>582</sup> he serves only to remind people, and to express his role in clarifying the revealed commandments and to convey messages.<sup>583</sup> He also has the responsibility of reading, teaching, judging and purifying people from all evil.<sup>584</sup> Muslim theologians express the purpose of communication as knowing the purpose of existence, learning the required actions, responsibilities and duties, not using excuses towards God and the removal of other justifications of defiance.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 343-344; Kilavuz, *Ana Hatlariyla*, 231-232.

<sup>577</sup> Qur'an 7:60-62, 67-68; 5:67; 16:35; 13:40; 24:54; 29:18; 73:1-4; 74:1-3.

<sup>578</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 344. For such verses see for instance Qur'an 6:161-164.

<sup>579</sup> Kharputi, *Tanqih al-Kalam*, 282-284. (Also see Qur'an 3:164).

<sup>580</sup> Qur'an 16:35; 13:40.

<sup>581</sup> Qur'an 6:107; 10:108; 11:86.

<sup>582</sup> Qur'an 88:21-22.

<sup>583</sup> Qur'an 16:44, 64, 89.

<sup>584</sup> Qur'an 2:129, 151; 3:164; 62:2; 4:105.

<sup>585</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 344.

As for Gülen's analysis,<sup>586</sup> he views the attribute as the "purpose of creation" for prophets in addition to other reasons. While other people fulfil this as a responsibility and duty, prophets fulfil it as the purpose of their life and creation. Thus, according to Gülen, prophets live to communicate, fulfil the duty as a part of their character and nature and desire to leave the world once they complete their missions. God has communicated His blessings and bounties through prophets and manifested His mercy and compassion through their lives. The reflection of this on other people could only be possible through communication.<sup>587</sup> This approach helps to understand better why theology works have considered communication as one of the attributes of prophets. Otherwise, analysis of the communication attribute in theology works draws attention to the duty and function, rather than focusing on the personal quality. Gülen's approach considers that communication is a part of prophets' nature, character and an essential trait. The classification of communication among the prophetic attributes can be better understood with this approach.

Gülen's views of communication as a source of God's mercy, in addition to his analysis of it as the purpose of prophets' existence, is noteworthy. He views communication as a blessing and bounty from God and the manifestation of His mercy and compassion. It is through communication that people learn the purpose of existence, where they come from and where they will go, their place in creation and their responsibilities.<sup>588</sup> This issue is covered extensively under the topic of prophethood. Thus, it can be seen that Gülen's expressions on theoretical meanings of communication and its functions, are parallel to the aforementioned explanations of theologians on the prophetic purpose, the necessity of prophethood and its proofs.

Gülen pays particular attention to two main issues while explaining the meaning of communication and its conceptual understanding: First, the place and manifestation of communication in the lives of the prophets, and particularly *sīrah* of Prophet Muhammad, by looking at their practical lives. Secondly, the emphasis on extracting the style, methodology and principles of communication to be used today, by looking at their lives and methodologies they adopted.

A glance at the issue from the first perspective gives the following framework: while prophets convey the message as being the purpose of their lives, they are only concerned about their

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<sup>586</sup> Communication is a topic that finds significant coverage in Gülen's works. The topic is discussed in many of his works including *Irsad Ekseni* in which he analyses communication, style and principles of communication, the spirit portrait of the person of communication.

<sup>587</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/219.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid*, I/219-220.

duties, and do not see the adversities or denials of people as obstacles. According to Gülen, such perspective, concentration and motivation are particular to prophets. When people other than prophets, regardless of their status, do not find a positive response to what they do, or do not achieve positive results, they complain or show discontentment through words such as “my efforts are going to waste” or “these people do not understand me.”<sup>589</sup> In this respect, Gülen uses the verses or incidents that express the suffering of prophets Noah, Hud and Muhammad in trying to save their nations.<sup>590</sup> For example, the Messenger of God did not cut ties with anyone, despite all the adversities at the battle of Uhud. Seventy of his companions’ bodies were mutilated (*muthlah*), his tooth was broken, the metal part of his armour pierced his face and his companion Abū Ubayda lost his teeth in taking it out of his skin.<sup>591</sup> Despite all this, he said the following words while his face was covered in blood: “O my Lord, guide people for they do not know! They would not do this if they knew my prophethood.”<sup>592</sup>

The important factor in Gülen’s explanation of the attribute of communication seems to be the compassion of the prophets. This understanding can be seen as an extension of his perception of communication as an attribute of God’s mercy. He emphasises understanding the struggle and efforts of prophets for their people when reading their lives, particularly the *sīrah* to build relationships and attain happiness in this world and the next, only through the observance of compassion. Although he might use different terminology (ambition in communication, love of communication, struggle of communication), the aim and meaning is always the same. Compassion is one of the key elements and concepts in *sīrah* understanding that lies at the root of prophets’ success and relationships with people, which Gülen emphasises especially under the topic of communication. He summarises the Meccan and Medinan periods from this perspective and attributes the Prophet’s struggles and efforts to the compassion he has in saving the eternal lives of the people. Gülen provides explanations for some incidents, including the Prophet’s willing persistence to communicate despite suffering torture, oppression and boycott by the Meccans for 13 years, his unwillingness in asking for their destruction, despite being insulted and stoned at Taif, his forced migration to Medina and the attempts of the polytheists to destroy the Muslims at different times despite being 500 kilometres away. He states that compassion was a priority throughout the Prophet’s entire life, and was pursued to save the people’s afterlife, and he formulated strategies accordingly, rather than asking for the destruction of things in order to gain worldly success. The main reference for Gülen in making this analysis are the verses that highlight the Prophet as being a

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid, I/224-225.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid, I/225-229.

<sup>591</sup> Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 4/29.

<sup>592</sup> Qādī Iyad, *Shifa*, I/105. For similar prophetic traditions see Bukhārī, *anbiya* 54; Muslim, *jihad*, 105.

mercy to the worlds,<sup>593</sup> his being clement and compassionate,<sup>594</sup> and almost destroying himself with distress because people do not believe.<sup>595</sup> The attribute of communication is centred around winning hearts. In carrying out this duty, it is important not to interfere with the role of the Creator and remember it is an activity based on representation and free from any boastfulness, force or despotism.

Gülen emphasises that while prophets convey the message, they also teach what it means to communicate and how it should be done, including its methodology. This particular point informs the second perspective on this issue. Gülen extracts a number of important methodologies and disciplines from *sīrah* that need to be followed in communication. These principles and analyses act as a “pastoral care handbook” for the participants of the movement that follow him.

The first point Gülen mentions is being holistic. As was mentioned in the oratory section, Gülen expresses that when prophets convey the messages from God and fulfil the necessities of messengership, they do it in an appropriate and specialist manner. In this respect, “they approach their audience in a holistic way and convey their messages also in a holistic manner. Hence, the intellect, logic, heart, soul, emotions and senses are never neglected and are not left deprived of the enlightening rays of revelation.”<sup>596</sup>

The second principle of communication underlined by Gülen is not to have expectations and to ask no wage in return.<sup>597</sup> Prophets communicate only as a duty. Gülen expresses that this is a prophetic etiquette and morality, and it should be followed by those who claim to follow this path. In fact, many prophets state, “my reward lies only with God.”<sup>598</sup> Gülen makes this claim by providing specific examples from *sīrah*, after highlighting it as an etiquette that is adopted by all prophets. For example, the Prophet insisted during the migration that he could only accept his friend Abū Bakr’s ride in return for payment; Abū Hurayra had seen him pray in a sitting position due to hunger; and he had rejected his daughter Fatima’s request for a servant. Thus, he did not carry out this duty with expectations and but only because he sought the pleasure of God. Gülen adds a different dimension to this approach by expressing that the Messenger of God (as all prophets would behave in exactly the same way) did not only serve his audience without expectation, but also bore the hardships and difficulties arising from

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<sup>593</sup> Qur’an 21:107.

<sup>594</sup> Qur’an 9:128.

<sup>595</sup> Qur’an 18:6; 26:3; 35:8.

<sup>596</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/221-222.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid*, I/223, 266-270.

<sup>598</sup> Qur’an 11:29; 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180; 34:47; 36:21.

them. Thus, he describes the incidents of suffering in Mecca as examples. It is worth noting how his words connect the topic with the audience and present it as a principle: “These strong hands carried the heavy burden that needed to be borne for communicating the message during those days. The ones who want to carry the same load today must have the same strength.”<sup>599</sup>

The third principle of communication is to leave the result with God. According to Gülen, prophets always left the acceptance of the message and its result to God, and never interfered with the outcome after fulfilling their duties. In this regard, as mentioned, they only carry out their duties, focus on this and are closed to things other than this. Gülen’s examples of prophets with no followers<sup>600</sup> are an important argument in proving this point. Despite all this, prophets carried out their duties in contentment and did not make complaints or objections.<sup>601</sup>

Another principle Gülen focuses on is the ambition and love of communication. Gülen makes a lengthy analysis of the topic through Prophet Muhammad, who had great ambitions in communication. Even his sleep would be interrupted with thoughts of communicating. Thus, he would show great effort and zeal, in a suitable manner, to convey the message to anyone he saw. Furthermore, Gülen states that the Prophet would go through the same suffering that ordinary people would experience in the absence of food, water or fresh air, on the days when he could not find a pure soul to convey his message:

He would lack the desire to eat or drink when he could not find someone to communicate his message. He would sometimes continuously fast for days and sometimes eat just enough to survive, as though the pain of communication had curbed his appetite. Just as the angels are nourished with praise of God, Prophet Muhammad would receive nourishment through communication. He was energetic on the day he could find a pure soul to receive his message. The Qur’an explains his situation thus: My Messenger! You are almost going to destroy yourself because they do not believe.<sup>602</sup>

Gülen analyses the ambition of communication extensively through the life of the Prophet and his companions. Thus, he shows his audience through the use of tangible examples that this characteristic is not restricted to prophets, but is also one that is adopted by their followers. The parts he narrates from *sīrah* concentrate holistically on the persistence of the Prophet’s communication during the Meccan and Medinan periods, despite all the hardships. On the

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<sup>599</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/268.

<sup>600</sup> Bukhārī, *riqaq*, 50; Muslim, *iman*, 374-375. In a verse that deals with this issue, the Qur’an states “the Prophet cannot guide whom He wishes, but it is God who guides whom He wishes” (28:56).

<sup>601</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/223-225.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid*, I/230-251.

other hand, the invitations of Abū Talib, Wahshi and Ikrima are also presented as specific examples of his ambition and love of communication. In this regard, Mus'ab ibn Umayr who was sent to Medina, Talha who was sent to Dumat al-Jandal, Khalid, Bara and Ali who were sent to Yemen and the letters sent to Negus the Ethiopian king, Heraclius the Byzantium emperor and other state leaders in various regions, are examples which are described in detail.

*Fatānah* (prophetic intellect) is another principle of communication that Gülen focuses on. I will not go into detail here as this will be explained separately as one of the prophetic attributes.

Another principle of communication that Gülen emphasises is *tamthīl* (representation).<sup>603</sup> According to him, the person should demonstrate the characteristic they are going to communicate in the best way possible. First of all, they should practice what they preach and become a living example. In this regard, Gülen draws attention to the life of the Prophet and highlights the compatibility of his lifestyle with the status he represents. Nothing will influence and affect people more than this. The analysis he makes after stating the difficulty of affecting people is noteworthy: “The people who believed in him, accepted him, loved him and addressed him as ‘O the Messenger of God’ are the ones who ruled the world after him. Thus, he did not only become accepted by a small number of naive people. Amongst the people he educated are Abū Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali, each of whom were equipped to rule the world. And none of these characters were likely to submit to an ordinary person.”<sup>604</sup> Hence, Gülen attributes the Prophet’s acceptance by these people as a result of his representation and the conformity of his speech to his actions. In this respect, he expresses that influencing people is not by having great knowledge, eloquent speech or by using force, but by practising what one preaches.

Gülen gives the subject of communication significant standing as one of the prophetic attributes, as well as their mission and lives. In this respect, while communication can be viewed as a divine mercy, it can also be perceived as receiving a divine blessing in terms of prophets. Gülen presents the place of communication in prophets’ lives as the very purpose of life, and similar to water and air in terms of being necessary to survive. On the other hand, their efforts to help others reach salvation is seen as a manifestation of their compassion. Finally, the examples given provide the methodology and principles for people today who dedicate themselves to the same responsibility.

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid, I/262-266.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid, I/263.

## 5.5 *Fatānah* (Prophetic Intellect)

Another necessary attribute of prophets is their advanced intellect. *Fatānah* literally means to have sound judgment, wisdom, intelligence and knowledge. It also means to possess mastery, expertise, advanced skills and proficiency, as it is the opposite of stupidity, heedlessness, ignorance and indifference.<sup>605</sup> Hence in Islamic theology, the word *fatānah* is terminologically used as an attribute of prophets, and refers to their intelligent, wise, clever, quick-witted, observant and insightful nature. This is an indispensable quality and actively promoted for all prophets.<sup>606</sup> Aging will not weaken their intellectual capacities, diminish their acumen or result in any loss of memory. In this regard, they are always under the protection of God and this can be considered to be divine grace, unique for prophets.<sup>607</sup> Further examples are found in the Prophet Jesus and the Prophet Job, whose acuity and intellect were evident even when they were children.<sup>608</sup> Taftazani says of this important notion: “It would have been impossible for them to accomplish difficult tasks and fulfill their Prophetic duties if they had been subjected to any problem that damaged their intelligence or mental capabilities. For this reason, it was not possible for any of the prophets to have been insane, have mental defects or to have experienced any health problems that might have damaged or harmed their rationality.”<sup>609</sup> Every prophet, once assigned to this duty, is responsible for executing it for all their life, which could not be done if they were to lose their mental and intellectual capabilities.

According to Muslim scholars, all prophets have the highest intelligence among the community to which they are assigned.<sup>610</sup> In the same way, all prophets entertain the position of being the most intelligent and wise among all of humankind. God has chosen and sent them, ensuring them with the most complete form of intelligence, reasoning, maturity, integrity and deep understanding.<sup>611</sup> Prophets need to have superior intelligence, perspicacity, foresight and wisdom to confront their enemies, provide solutions to the confusing or demanding questions posed to them, have answers to various topics or problems and convince people they provide appropriate answers. If these attributes were not prevalent, revelation would not have been obtained correctly, communicated truthfully or been well-presented to the people. There would also have been problems in the area of understanding the religion and

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<sup>605</sup> Ibn Faris, *Mu'jam* (f-t-n); Asım Efendi, *Qamus* (f-t-n), II/1605; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān* (f-t-n), XIII/323.

<sup>606</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 346; Kılavuz, *Ana Hatlarıyla*, 230; Selman Kuzu, “Peygamberlerin Sifati Olarak Fetanet ve Hz Muhammed’in Fetaneti,” in *Peygamber Yolu*, ed. Ergun Capan and Selcuk Camci (Istanbul: Isik Akademi Yayinlari, 2011), 303.

<sup>607</sup> Muhammad Ali Sabūni, *Nubuwwat*, 49.

<sup>608</sup> Kuzu, “Peygamberlerin Sifati Olarak Fetanet,” 303-304.

<sup>609</sup> Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqasid*, II/198.

<sup>610</sup> Nur al-Din Sabūni, *Bidaya*, 53.

<sup>611</sup> Muhammad Ali Sabūni, *Nubuwwat*, 48.



its purpose, and in deciphering the responsibilities it brings for humanity. The non-occurrence of these negative outcomes can be attributed to the extraordinary mental qualities being prevalent within prophets. All historical accounts and sacred books that describe the lives of the prophets portray them as possessing a perfect mind, sharp intelligence, deep wisdom and great intuition. For example, Prophet Abraham's exchange with his people regarding the topic of idol worshipping,<sup>612</sup> or his conversation with Nimrod.<sup>613</sup>

In the Qur'an, the word *fatānah* is not mentioned. However, according to Islamic scholars, there are many verses that allude to or indicate this unique quality and attribute of prophets. For example, various verses that mention the wisdom (*hikma*) or authority, provision and judgement (*hukm*) given to prophets can be classified in this category.<sup>614</sup> *Hikma*, although having numerous denotations behind it, has meanings such as the knowledge given to prophets, their deep understanding of events and cognisance of what is behind the veiled reality of natural phenomena and the book of the universe. It also encompasses the ability of prophets to grasp the benefits of religion and its purpose. Therefore, a theological understanding of this concept must embrace all of these notions alongside *fatānah*, and it has been suggested that wisdom cannot prevail without this kind of intellect.<sup>615</sup> As such, the ability to distinguish between good and evil given to Abraham, which is expressed in the Qur'an, together with notions of sound judgement (*rushd*) known as maturity and integrity in thought and action,<sup>616</sup> as well as strong evidence or proof (*hujjat*),<sup>617</sup> are also used as evidence of prophetic intelligence. While considerable other evidence is presented through various verses<sup>618</sup> to prove this notion, I will recall the expression used for Prophet Solomon, namely, that he possessed *fahm*,<sup>619</sup> which means to know and understand something in depth.

In *kalām* sources it can be seen that the notion of *fatānah* is the least discussed among the attributes of prophets. Generally, it is deliberated as an expression that refers to prophets' intelligence and insight. However, Gülen's discussions on prophethood, and in particular *Sonsuz Nur*, emphasise this notion more than any other concept and give it a central position.

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<sup>612</sup> Qur'an 21:51, 58, 67.

<sup>613</sup> Qur'an 2:258.

<sup>614</sup> For verses mention *hikmah* and *hukm*, see Qur'an 2:129, 151, 231, 251, 269; 3:48, 79, 81, 164; 4:54, 113; 5:110; 38:20; 43:63; 72:2.

<sup>615</sup> Kuzu, "Peygamberlerin Sifati Olarak Fetanet," 306.

<sup>616</sup> Qur'an 21:51.

<sup>617</sup> Qur'an 6:83.

<sup>618</sup> A memory that could receive and protect the revelation (72:16-19) and an unforgetting memory (87:6-7) could be cited as examples of such verses. It is possible to include the verse from Nakhil (16:125) as a proof of prophetic intelligence, which highlights the methodology in dealing with the disbelievers and the term *jidāl* used, meaning debating, to get an idea accepted by the other side.

<sup>619</sup> Qur'an 21:78-79.

Approximately 24 of the 53 sermons that constitute the *Sonsuz Nur* series are about the notion of *fatānah*, which is almost half of the two-volume book.

So, how does Gülen analyse and discuss this attribute? Why do Gülen's *sīrah* and *nubuwwa* readings hold this attribute at their core and why does Gülen make this the focal point of his *sīrah* work? The concept has been approached and analysed from two different perspectives. First is what Gülen understands about prophetic intellect or how he defines it in *Sonsuz Nur*. Second is the scope of prophetic intellect and the topics covered within that category.

Although Gülen's definition and explanation of *fatānah* is similar to definitions in *kalāmīc* sources, it is mainly based on his portrayal of the term and addressing "how intellect, reasoning and intelligence of prophets should be understood." For this reason, his definition of prophetic intelligence is a more tangible explanation and slightly different. In this regard *fatānah*, according to Gülen, is not a plain, dry intellect or logic, but it is "prophetic logic" and means "surpassing, overcoming intelligence (or reasoning) with intelligence."<sup>620</sup> As such, it is clear there is a difference between the typical intellectual capacity and ability of the common man, and that of persons who act as messengers between God and humankind. Gülen's definition of *fatānah* is due to various considerations, but especially due to his attempt to rectify the incorrect portrayal of Islam as simply a religion of reasoning and logic, by those who are responding reflexively to external criticism of Islam, with the intention of protecting it. From his perspective, declaring that, "Islam is a religion of logic" or "Islam is a religion of reasoning," and hence degrading it, is not only ignorance of Islam but a step towards corruption. According to Gülen, "Islam is not a religion of logic or reasoning; it is, directly, a religion of Divine revelation."<sup>621</sup>

Gülen is suggesting that the solution to, or the Islamic perspective of, the important relationships of religion-science and logic-revelation, lies within correct readings of prophethood, and especially the endeavour to comprehend and give sound meaning and definition to the notion of *fatānah*. This approach, which was examined in the earlier discussions on Gülen's outlook on prophethood, is understood more clearly when combined with the clarification and evaluations of prophetic intellect. Gülen's evaluation of Islam as a religion of Divine revelation brings to mind the question: "would Islam's perspective on Islamic topics or other issues contradict logic or reason?" In answer to this question, Gülen underlines that such a contradiction is impossible. According to Islamic understanding, all things originally derive from the one with All-Encompassing Knowledge, henceforth it

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<sup>620</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/271.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid*, 271.

already justifies all matters to reason. In another way, the possibility of such a contradiction is prevented by the extensive and comprehensive intellect of the prophet, who interprets matters that come from the one with All-Encompassing Knowledge in a fashion that is appropriate to his Divineness. So, prophetic intellect is being used and performs an important role. Gülen considers this to be “surpassing intelligence (or reasoning) with intelligence” and using prophetic intellect as an “evaluator or benchmark for products, projects, and research originating from logic and reason. Thus, in essence converting all the terrestrial ones to become heavenly; and reflect the soul of the Divine to the hypothetical and nonessential attributes hypostases and essence.”<sup>622</sup> Gülen’s analysis contains important clues on the importance of prophetic intellect with respect to how he looks at the religion-science or logic-divine revelation relationship; how he examines the topics of understanding prophetic intellect correctly; and his outlook on the issue of how divine revelations were received by prophets, which is understood always as being a secret:

It is this frame of mind or intellect that has been created with the capacity to understand Divine revelation. And again it is that same mind that is open to emotion, reasoning, the heart, inner faculties, wisdom and philosophy. It is a mind beyond mind or it is *Fatānah al-A’zam* (The Greatest Intellect and Sublime Perspicacity) and foresight. It is essential and necessary that each Divine revelation that comes down from God must first resonate within this mind. However, this is a necessity that binds human beings. If the Divine revelation did not first resonate with a mind such as this and hence be regulated there so that it may be suitable for human logic similar to alternate current’s transform to continues, then humankind would have been scorched with the holy enlightenment and Divine effulgence of the revelations and inspiration that came down with God’s will from His All-Holy Divine and Most Pure Essence.<sup>623</sup> Yes, it is prophetic intellect that acts as an atmosphere against burning fireballs of Divine revelations. Indeed, this is what we call religion. God lowering and simplifying His speech to the level of human capacity so that it can be understood. It is the logic of prophets and it is the prophetic intellect that achieves this. For this reason, prophetic intellect is an attribute that must be present in all prophets and it is an ability that only exists within prophets. Hence it is also wrong to define this ability simply as ‘geniousness’. As such the logic of a prophet is above all others and it is called *fatānah*, Prophetic intellect.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 141.

<sup>623</sup> There is an allusion for the following *hadith* in Gülen’s explanation that deals with the *nur* as the splendence of God, the completeness of His qualities and beauty: “His veil is pure light (in another narration fire). If he would unveil it, the Holy Light of the Divine Countenance will scorch all existence that is embraced by His Divine Sight” (Muslim, *iman* 293-294; Ibn Maja, *muqaddima* 13; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, IV/401).

<sup>624</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/271-272.

In these expressions, prophetic intellect is the capacity and means by which divine revelation, sent down to prophets, is received and known, memorised, protected and conveyed to people in a way they understand. This attribute, unique to prophets, in addition to its role in understanding and then moderating revelation to better cater for people's intellectual ability, allows a prophet to manage their people, answer all their questions and solve their problems.

Gülen's evaluation of prophetic intellect is not just about the religion-science aspect of the term. It is also closely related to the balance and relation of the God-universe-human trilogy to which he gives great importance when discussing matters on prophethood, and of which he says "it is the most important profundity of prophets." From my understanding of Gülen's interpretation of prophetic intellect, it is due to this attribute that prophets' insight, ability to correctly analyse things and events (as discussed in Chapter 3) and ability to read creation as a whole from the God-universe-human perspective, are made possible. Furthermore, he sees that this type of instruction is a gift from prophets, and also their first lesson, to humankind.<sup>625</sup> Alongside this, according to Gülen, prophetic intellect is used to combine and consider the human logic, soul, heart, feeling and other dimensions, along with the material and spiritual dimensions, in a holistic manner before prophets handle matters. His emphasis of this capacity in his text on prophethood, and particularly the Prophet Muhammad in his work on *sīrah*, quite often expresses that this quality resonates with all prophets.<sup>626</sup> His labelling of this aspect of the notion as "inner or internal prophetic intellect" is something that I have only come across in Gülen's works.<sup>627</sup>

Another matter of importance is Gülen's insistence on the name prophetic intellect (*fatānah*) and not "genius" (*abqariyya*) to describe the special intellectual qualities and mind of prophets. This is because, according to him, prophets entertain a position well above human norms and cannot be compared or placed in the same scale with any genius, hence they are prophets.<sup>628</sup> In addition, Gülen insists that they should not be defined as genius, or other similar names, as he is also against prophets being branded as "heroes," "masterminds" or "super genius/intelligence."<sup>629</sup> According to him, a genius is also an extraordinary human. "This person will have the intellectual capabilities equivalent to the combined understanding of a couple of people. However Prophetic intellect is completely different from this. The Prophetic intellect and sublime perspicacity on the other hand, with respect to its impact on

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<sup>625</sup> Gülen, *Asrin Getirdiği Tereddütler*, I/83-84.

<sup>626</sup> This holistic approach was discussed in the section on *tabligh*. For more information, see Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/257-262.

<sup>627</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/257-258.

<sup>628</sup> Gülen, *Yol Mulahazalari*, 200.

<sup>629</sup> Such as *ibid*, 199-200.

people, having being uniquely embedded in a chosen servant of God for the purpose of fulfilling his mission, cannot be compared with the impact a genius might have.”<sup>630</sup> On the other hand, even if these people are called geniuses, there is still potential for them to make mistakes, forget and be wrong, whereas, as will be discussed during the topic of the attribute of infallibility, prophets are exceptional personalities that are protected from such faults.

The reasoning behind Gülen’s interpretation of addressing prophets with proper attributes and names, stems from the remarkable topic of “characteristics unique to prophets,” in Gülen’s prophethood reading, as discussed in Chapter 3. From this viewpoint, according to Gülen, prophethood, having the highest rank of being chosen and sent by God, should have, in every respect, different characteristics and specific virtues. Gülen also expresses this merit and excellence stating “[it is] the heart and tongue of existence, living within and beyond nature, and the tree branch that sways from the Ultimate Truth to the people.” Thus, their inherent abilities are not just like the superior intelligence ability of geniuses. According to Gülen:

It is a horizon where with all its faculties active, good, continuously surging and with every surge drawing a new arch of ascension beyond the skies, it is waiting to receive Divine inspiration for matters, and the spot where matter meets the transcendent realm. In that, the body is dependent on the soul, and the mind to the heart; vision is within the realm of the Sublime Names and Attributes; steps reach wherever the vision may be and always together. In Prophets, senses are developed and go beyond the natural boundaries of sight, hearing and knowledge. Not only are we unable to measure their vision in wavelengths, we also cannot expound their hearing with soundwaves. Especially within the measures we use to analyse and synthesise, it is impossible for one to reach their knowledge, which forces the boundaries of nature’s walls. It is only through them that humanity can permeate into creation and discover the reality and the truths beyond things, events and existence. It has never been, and never will be, possible to perfectly embrace and interpret creation outside of their guidance and teachings.<sup>631</sup>

From Gülen’s explanations, prophets do not act solely upon the information they attain through their own logic and reasoning. It is stressed persistently that humankind has not reached the stage where they have enough knowledge about these matters, or the right to make statements about the God-universe-human concept, and deep analysis of the issues is not possible with a genius or super-intelligent mind. Prophets, obtaining nourishment from Divine revelations and being under their constant control, gained this insight. In saying this,

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<sup>630</sup> Gülen, *Cemre Beklentisi*, 268-269.

<sup>631</sup> Gülen, *Asrin Getirdiği Tereddütler*, 1/82-83.

however, it is not being claimed that prophets are not humans. On the contrary, Gülen – as will be seen further in this section – examines the Prophet’s human qualities, the various roles in his social life and his successes in every field, thus presenting him as the most exemplary human being. However, he also brings forth the theological background of the issue, as it is not possible to explain how a human being without Divine help, prophetic intellect and prophetic logic could have such a wide scope, and constitute an exemplary position or role in every field. What is emphasised here is that, although prophets are humans, they possess certain qualities that are not found in human beings, as prophethood is a Divine grace (*wahbī*).

The following could be the thought behind Gülen’s persistence regarding the above emphasis and refusal to use any term other than prophetic intellect. In his book *The Hero as Prophet*, Carlyle refers to the Prophet as the first of the most important heroes of history. On the other hand, Aqqād, in his book entitled *Abqarriyyāt*, emphasises the Prophet as the genius of geniuses. Using these terms, the humanistic or farsighted leadership qualities of the Prophet are put under the spotlight, while the unseen and revelation-supported aspect of prophets is sidelined. While Gülen refrains from criticising these books and their authors, he does not agree with the terms used, and states *fatānah* should be used instead, which is a term that is deep-seated in Islamic literature.<sup>632</sup> As can be seen from the beginning of this study, Gülen is extremely sensitive towards any thoughts and approaches that attempt to represent prophets as being unheavenly. He always insists on the correct perception of prophets and prophethood. From this viewpoint, his sensitivity over the term prophetic intellect is in line with his general attitude.

From another viewpoint, his explanations regarding this issue are one of the places Gülen responds to *sīrah* research conducted in the West, which has had negative ramifications on the Islamic world. Putting aside the negative outlook that is based on superstitions and false belief (Western scholars’ outlook on *sīrah* during the Middle Ages), which was discussed in the literature review, in post 18<sup>th</sup> century *sīrah* research a dominant theme has been to portray the Prophet as being not a prophet but a “world leader,” a “great influence on history and Europe,” and a “clear-thinking, self-confident, far-sighted leader or politician.”<sup>633</sup> Several people from the Islamic world were also affected by this type of understanding, which gave rise to such personalities as Shiblī Shumayyil – a non-believer in God and Divine revelation – who said to Rashid Rida: “Muhammad is much greater than ‘The God’s Messenger’ view you have of him.” Other examples of people in this category are Farid Wajdi, Zaki Mubarak,

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<sup>632</sup> Gülen, *Yol Mulahazalari*, 199-200.

<sup>633</sup> Edward W. Said, *Sarkiyatçilik, Bati’nin Sark Anlayışı*, trans. Berna Ulner (Istanbul: Metis Yayinlari, 2014), 163, 130.

Aqqād and Husayn Haykal who ignored the unseen dimension of the Prophet by not accepting the cosmic miracles, and focussed more on his intellectual genius, and his political and soldierly successes.<sup>634</sup> As stated before, Shaykh al-Islam Mustafa Sabri devoted one volume of his work to this matter in response to people whom he accuses of “attempting to replace prophethood with being a genius.”<sup>635</sup> In fact, he states that to deny such miracles, and the unseen dimension of prophethood, is a pathway to the acceptance of the utterings of some Orientalists who claim, “Muhammad is in fact a hero appearing to be a prophet.”<sup>636</sup> From this perspective, Mustafa Sabri is not against talking about the Prophet’s genius. It is not objectionable to talk about his genius, as long as it is in relation to his prophethood. However, his objection is to the attempt to replace with the notion of genius, the performance of miracles, which are an inseparable part of prophethood.<sup>637</sup> In my opinion, Gülen, who has similar views and concerns as Mustafa Sabri, draws attention to this aspect of the issue without directly referencing any name, and endeavours to make clear, with great sensitivity, the correct understanding and meaning of this matter, so any misconceptions are prevented from spreading.

Looking at Gülen’s second fundamental perspective on prophetic intellect, namely its boundaries and framework, one can see that he uses the notion of *fatānah* in a very broad sense. These evaluations are processed as different dimensions of prophetic intellect in the Prophet’s personality and life. Considering his broadly encompassing approach to prophetic intellect and all the analysis he puts forward regarding *sīrah*, prophetic intellect is a central concept in Gülen’s *sīrah* readings.

There is a significant connection between the topics covered within the broad scope of prophetic intellect and the Prophet’s encounters with people, and the role these people have in various aspects of life. The topics covered can be considered to be part and parcel of Islamic understanding of the Prophet as best role-model (*uswatun hasanaturun*, Qur'an 33:21) and his message as universal (*rahmatan li al-alamīn*, Qur'an 21:107). When considering the question from the perspective of the period and taking into account the general composition of the population at the time he lived, the Muslim community can be seen to be quite diverse. The community included non-Muslims; new Muslims; desert dwellers (Bedouins); those who had questions because they were contemplating becoming a Muslim; and those who were with the Prophet from the very first days of his prophethood and had attained the highest of levels of

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<sup>634</sup> Ayhan Tekines, “Modern Dunya’da Hz Muhammed,” in *Yeni Umit* 13, 50 (2000).

<sup>635</sup> Mustafa Sabri, *Mawqif al-Aql*, IV/5-6.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid, IV/6.

<sup>637</sup> Tekines, “Modern Dunya’da Hz Muhammed.”

knowledge. Likewise, these people were not homogenous and included polytheistic and hypocritical Arabs, and those belonging to different faiths, such as the Jews or Christians. The Prophet was in a position to answer all of these people's needs, questions and problems. On occasion he also had to deal with problems and provide answers to questions asked out of curiosity or to cause doubt and suspicion. According to the historical *sīrah* data, the Prophet dealt with all of these actual situations and his success in these matters is accepted by all scholars – Muslim or not. As such, having allocated a major portion of the *Sonsuz Nur* to solid examples that examine how the Prophet solved these types of problems, Gülen's view is that the most critical factor in this issue is prophetic intellect.<sup>638</sup>

In addition to the diverse faiths within the community, the social status of those people also differs. For example, the community included clerics living in churches and monasteries who had excelled to great spiritual heights; intelligent and rational experts in philosophical matters; experts in finance and trade; political and military masterminds; and desert dwellers who have low cultural capital and are far removed from high social standing. Despite addressing and dealing with the entire community, it was expected that the Prophet's words should address and offer solutions to the varied needs of all people, regardless of their status or position. According to Gülen, all prophets were easily able to solve all types of difficult and ambiguous problems and questions coming at them from a variety of aspects of life and status. As if they had done extensive years of research on those matters and thus become experts, they easily solved all problems, regardless of difficulty or sophistication. When examining this topic, Gülen recalls these words of Bernard Shaw: "We need the Prophet Muhammad more than ever at a time when the problems of the world have multiplied and become insoluble. Were he alive, he would solve all of these problems with the same ease as drinking a cup of coffee." In Gülen's understanding, the Prophet was able to solve all the problems he faced in his time relating to all fields of life including economic, international, political and social, as well as family matters. Although it seems his views evoke and expound similar findings from Nursi,<sup>639</sup> the suggestion of prophetic intellect as the source of the solutions separates him from Nursi. Examples of this can be found in the many political and military geniuses among national leaders who refer to and follow him; those he or his companions and followers trained in the religious sciences such as *hadith*, *fiqh* and *tafsīr*; those who consulted him in the fields of literature and philosophy; and those who educate themselves in the system he introduced. In short, and in Gülen's words, those "trained and educated in the school of Prophet Muhammad." Gülen goes further and connects this

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<sup>638</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/273.

<sup>639</sup> Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 16-27; Nursi, *Sozler*, 248-259.



understanding to today's addressees, saying: "in this century there are many economic, social, and political problems that are waiting to be solved. And today it is in no way possible to solve these problems without first consulting the Messenger of God's sparkling fountain of pronouncements."<sup>640</sup> The central theme is that the Prophet's *sīrah* potentially possesses dynamics that offer solutions for today's problems, and a thorough examination of *sīrah* could generate such offers. Hence, together with prophetic intellect, this approach illustrates the main perspective of Gülen's *sīrah* readings. As he coins it, this is the philosophy of *sīrah*. Approaching the Prophet's life with such incentive, Gülen focuses on how the Prophet can be an example in all aspects of life, and his *sīrah* can potentially offer solutions to various problems, together with the notion of *fatānah*. Thus, he sheds light on these as different dimensions of prophetic intellect.

As Gülen handles the frame of the term *fatānah* in this manner, his readings regarding the *sīrah* hence have a wide scope. According to Gülen, Prophet Muhammad came with an architectural approach that could reconstruct a whole life. The previously mentioned message, regarding the universal and exemplary nature of the framework in which prophetic intellect belongs, is clarified through this representation. Hence, every field or every kind of addressee can find a place for themselves in this model. The qualities or endowments that these addressees might need are represented by the architectural aspect of the analogy, which alludes to an extraordinary talent and art in order for things to fall into their proper place. To address this, Gülen, after defining prophetic intellect and illustrating the borders of its frame in his work, reinforces his claims and explanations by presenting his audience with *sīrah* examples which demonstrate how the Prophet would easily resolve problems brought to him by people from different walks and fields of life. Among the first examples he gives to ensure the topic is understood, is the immediate solution the Prophet devised to the question of who would place the Hajar al-Aswad stone in its original place after the Ka'bah's renovation; his speech to the Ansar during the distribution of the spoils of the battle of Hunayn; and the prompt answers he gave to a companion who had asked his permission to commit adultery.<sup>641</sup> In these examples, Gülen reinforces the topic and his claims; he also draws attention to the facts that the problems were sudden and extensive and although his addressees were from various social backgrounds, the Prophet quickly came up with a solution. He would also instantly acquaint himself with the character of the person he spoke to, addressing him in a language and manner that would be most effective to resolve the issue. It is not possible for an ordinary human being to be so prompt and advanced in offering solutions. Hence, according

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<sup>640</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/275.

<sup>641</sup> For more information, see Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/276-288.

to Gülen, prophethood and prophetic intellect are the only factors facilitating these qualities. Consequently, it is not possible to explain the matter by attributing the Prophet's endowments to anything but prophetic intellect.

After presenting a general introduction to the topic with these examples, Gülen shifts the focus to different dimensions of prophetic intellect. An example of this can be seen where he emphasises the Prophet's eloquence and expertise with speech. He covers this topic as one dimension of his prophetic intellect as, while his sentences were short, succinct and plain, they were spoken with a rhetoric that rendered them capable of being expanded to more than one meaning (*jawami' al-kalim*). Further into his work, the Prophet's superiority in possessing attributes such as compassion, patience, munificence and humility are also addressed, illustrated as different dimensions of prophetic intellect. Following these, the Prophet's various roles in his social life are touched upon, in an effort to illustrate the wide scope of his exemplary nature. Some of the topics discussed at length in this regard include his being the head of a family, his leadership and matchless talent in resolving problems as an educator, and his being an expert military commander.

When looking at the topics that Gülen covers under the heading of prophetic intellect and the way he addresses these topics, it can be seen that at the heart of all these lie the potential ideas to be discussed under the category of "*sīrah* philosophy." Since Gülen covers these topics as "the different dimensions of Prophetic intellect," I also placed more emphasis on the prophetic intellect aspect of the topics. As such, when looking at these topics from Gülen's viewpoint on *sīrah* philosophy, there is a vast amount of material that could form a second thesis. The Prophet, coming with a universal message and being a role model in all fields of life including religious, social, economic, military, personal, family, philosophical, scientific and other wide-ranging areas, is appraised by Gülen under the heading of prophetic intellect. In this examination, the topic is studied from the aspect of the successes he had in all these areas relating to humanity and his position as a role model. On the other hand, the frequent analysis and questioning of how these matters can address the modern day person from a *sīrah* philosophy perspective, emphasises that this system is one that could design, and has designed, the life of such people. This is considered to rest upon a foundation of *kalām*, theology and "absolute truth," as a Muslim scholar. The *sīrah* readings from a *kalām* perspective are what make up this side of the matter; the consideration that prophetic intellect is directly connected with being successful in life and all its facets, including being a role model is an original approach. However, since there is such a model, then what is the position of this topic regarding modern day people? Here, Gülen's *sīrah* philosophy perspective comes

to the fore. Gülen takes into account the Prophet's exemplary nature in the absolute sense and contemplates that "something that has been attempted in one era and succeeded, will also work in later eras," which I will evaluate as part of a concept in the discipline of *Mantiq* (Logic). According to this concept which I will name "*mumkun* (probable) theory," the Prophet's actions resulting in success during that period, are also likely to succeed in all eras and act as a model. From this viewpoint, the mentioned topics are constantly being questioned and debated in terms of their philosophy, message, purpose and exemplary nature.

Gülen, with this approach, establishes that, on the one hand, a person who is a prophet, and has the logic of a prophet, is the greatest in all matters and is of exemplary nature (that is *insan al-kāmil* (perfect man) in mystical terminology), and stresses the point that this is connected with prophethood and consequently the world of the unseen. On the other hand, there is emphasis placed on him being a human and also his connection with today's people from the viewpoint of his exemplary nature. In this regard, prophetic intellect and *sīrah* philosophy are two fundamental elements that are intertwined and complete each other. When examined from the basis of prophetic intellect, the Prophet, being an example to all people in all matters, from the Bedouin to the scholar and the slave to the state leader, this topic stands firmly grounded.

## 5.6 *Ismah* (Infallibility)

According to Islamic theologians, another essential and necessary attribute of prophets is *ismah*, which means infallibility. *Ismah* has many meanings including to protect, give refuge to, keep and maintain.<sup>642</sup> As a theological term, *ismah* can be defined as being mainly about God blessing prophets with a pure and unwavering character while at the same time not giving way to sin or creating sin in them,<sup>643</sup> protecting their hearts from negative inclinations,<sup>644</sup> constantly keeping their steps focused on the path to God and on what is right,<sup>645</sup> the gifted faculty or capability of being able to stay away from sin,<sup>646</sup> or a personal will and natural faculty and proficiency in maintaining distance from committing sin.<sup>647</sup> Gülen considers this in a more expansive manner, defining it as "God protecting the prophets, through His Grace, from all sin, big or small; namely, not creating any opportunity for a servant who will be sent as a prophet to commit a sin."<sup>648</sup> Ascribing the term in this manner,

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<sup>642</sup> Ibn Manzūr, *Lisan*, "a-s-m," IV/2976; Raghīb, *Mufradat*, 336.

<sup>643</sup> Raghīb, *Mufradat*, 337; Adud al-Din al-Ijī, *al-Mawaqif fi Ilm al-Kalam*, Beirut: n.d. Alam al-Kutub, 366.

<sup>644</sup> Raghīb, *Mufradat*, 337.

<sup>645</sup> Ibn Humam, *al-Musayara* (Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari, 1979), 195; Baghdadi, *Usūl al-Din*, 169.

<sup>646</sup> Jurjani, *Ta'rifat*, 150; Zabidi, *Taj al-Arus*, VIII/399.

<sup>647</sup> Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, III/449.

<sup>648</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/456.

Gülen emphasises how the path to sin has been closed off from the start and provides a more encompassing understanding of infallibility.

*Ismah* and its derivations are mentioned through a number of chapters in the Qur'an with its lexical meaning.<sup>649</sup> It is also used in many *hadith* with its literal meaning.<sup>650</sup> Based on this usage, it can be understood that, more than a Qur'anic or prophetic expression, over time this concept has developed in the sphere of theological discussions and turn into an accepted *kalām* term.<sup>651</sup> However, there are a number of verses that are used as proof for the terminological meaning of this concept, not due to its connection with its etymological derivation, but rather due to semantic conceptual repository of the verses or because of the implicit or explicit interpretation of the verses.<sup>652</sup>

In *kalām* sources, the first trait of prophethood that is discussed is infallibility, and this also includes its different degrees, what it incorporates and the time periods it covers.<sup>653</sup> Similarly, it is also stated that, among the attributes of the prophets, infallibility is the one that is thoroughly and extensively debated from different angles.<sup>654</sup> In *Sonsuz Nur*, after dealing with the topic of prophetic intelligence, Gülen then discusses in depth, and places great importance on, the infallibility of prophets.

Starting with the time period of the companions of the Prophet, there are a wide range of factors that have caused theological debate of the concept of infallibility that have led to it becoming a part of *kalām* terminology. In the earlier holy books, particularly the Torah, a range of morally deprived concepts, deeds and actions are ascribed to prophets. As such, their names are stained with blame, contributing to debate on the topic.<sup>655</sup> Alongside these, the claims of deviant sects, such as the Azariqa and Fadliyya (or Fudayliyya) branches of Kharijites, that prophets are capable of committing sin and even apostasy have added extra fuel to the debate around infallibility, establishing the groundwork for its entry into early sources.<sup>656</sup> Another group called Hashawis (anthropomorphists of various kinds) approach the

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<sup>649</sup> Such as Qur'an 5:67; 11:43; 33:17; 10:27; 40:33; 12:32; 3:101, 103; 4:146, 175; 22:78.

<sup>650</sup> Such as Bukhārī, *qadar* 8, *ahkam* 42; Nasai, *bay'at* 32; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, I/14, III/39, 88.

<sup>651</sup> Mustafa Akcay, "Peygamberlerin Korunmuslugu/Ismeti," in *Peygamber Yolu* (Istanbul: Isik Akademi Yayinlari, 2011), 280.

<sup>652</sup> It is said that verse 31 of chapter 3 alone is enough evidence for the infallibility of the prophets (Ali Unal, *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* (New Jersey: The Light Inc., 2006), 132.) For other verses used as evidence of this attribute see Qur'an 7:158; 3:31-32, 104; 4:165, 13-14, 65, 80; 6:90; 9:71; 31:17; 20:39; 21:90, 73; 33:21; 36:21; 38:47.

<sup>653</sup> Gölcük, *Kelam*, 306.

<sup>654</sup> Akcay, "Peygamberlerin Korunmuslugu," 279.

<sup>655</sup> For some examples regarding Prophet Lot, David, Solomon and Jacob, see Genesis 19:30-38, 27, 32:24-30, 38:15-18; I King 11:1-8; II Samuel 11:2-26; Exodus 32:35; Deuteronomy 9:20.

<sup>656</sup> Sabūni, *Bidaya*, 54; Rāzī, *Ismat al-Anbiya* (Cairo: Maktaba Khanji, 1986), 15.

Qur'an and *sunnah* only from the perspective of their literal meaning, and claim that prophets are capable of committing major sins, by using anecdotes of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an as evidence.<sup>657</sup> These and other factors forced Islamic theologians to focus on the notion of prophethood in Islamic thought from different angles, such as the physiological and moral characteristics of the prophets, their trustworthiness in spreading their message and especially the attribute of infallibility. From this perspective, the fourth caliph, Ali, declared two penalties and a punishment of 160 strokes with a cane for anyone who narrated a specific passage from the Old Testament<sup>658</sup> that stained the moral character of the Prophet David.<sup>659</sup> It can be understood from such narratives that the political and cultural events of the time and the effects of their interaction led to these issues being addressed from the time of the companions. As a result of such factors, Islamic scholars like *ahl al-sunna* and Mu'tazila, to begin with, started to include attributes of the prophets, their essential characteristics, such as infallibility, as part of faith in the prophets alongside belief-related topics. As a result, this topic began to transform into a theological concept and was developed terminologically and elaborated systematically. Early period Islamic scholars placed great importance on the characteristics and attributes of prophets, especially infallibility; such works include Imam Abū Hanifa's (d.767) *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, Imam Shafi's (d.820) *al-Risala* and Imam Māturidī's (d.944) *Kitab al-Tawhīd*. In later periods, some scholars have independently put forward works on the same topic, due to its importance.<sup>660</sup>

The topics regarding prophets and evaluations that come from *isrā'īliyyāt* have had an effect on Islamic sources regarding the exegesis of the Qur'an and *sīrah*. As such, research conducted in Western academia regarding prophets' lives, particularly those that deal with Islam and *sīrah* of the Prophet, relaying the abovementioned sources, has brought about analyses that are not in accord with the understanding and concept of prophethood in Islam. Being left under the influence of these events or Western research, there have been some people in the Muslim World who disregard the infallible nature of prophets, basically stating, "they are human like us." As this idea gained support, Gülen had to approach the topic with greater depth and sensitivity. During his study he refers repeatedly to the subject of infallibility, which is one of the central themes in his works regarding *sīrah* of the Prophet, but is careful always to take an unwavering yet sensitive stance against ideas that oppose the

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<sup>657</sup> Rāzī, *Ismat al-Anbiya*, 15; Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, III/426.

<sup>658</sup> According to this narrative, Prophet David caused one of his army commanders to be killed and married his wife. For more details, see II Samuel 11:2-26.

<sup>659</sup> Rāzī, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, XXVI/192.

<sup>660</sup> Some independent studies that deal with the notion of infallibility in Islam are: Sayyid Sharif Murtada, *Tanzih al-Anbiya*; Nur al-Din Sabūni, *al-Muntaqa min Ismat al-Anbiya*, Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, *Ismat al-Anbiya*; Jalal al-Din Suyuti, *Tanzih al-Anbiya an Tasfih al-Aghbiya*.

correct perception of prophethood. From this perspective, it can be said that Gülen's analysis and evaluation of the concept of infallibility is explicit and addressed in quite a specific manner.

In *kalām* sources where the topic of *ismah* is evaluated, the main focus is on the existence of *ismah* and the evidence pertaining to this. The presence of *ismah* is based on rational and traditional proofs. Two fundamental arguments<sup>661</sup> are put forward as proofs and Gülen's own views on the matter are similar to these. First, to fulfil the most important mission of prophethood, conveying the Divine message (*tabligh*), *ismah* is a necessary characteristic. This is because *tabligh* is an essential responsibility of prophets and they remain among people for this sacred cause. *Ismah* is regarded as a special attribute that encompasses all of the qualities mentioned above. Based on this, there have been scholars who claim that each attribute, or perhaps all necessary qualities and attributes of prophets such as truthfulness and trustworthiness, prove the existence of *ismah*.<sup>662</sup> Gülen mentions this in *Sonsuz Nur*:

All prophets are infallible. There are no deliberate deviations of thoughts, feelings and acts in their life. They are all exceptional beings created as eminent and holy personalities. Their nature is pure, their soul sublime and elevated, their willpower firm and strong and their hearts brilliant and gleaming...Yes, this is what it is and logically it has to be as such, because they are among us to fulfil their mission of guidance and conveying the message. Their sole purpose of creation is only *tabligh*, and thus they are completely dedicated to their mission...Prophets play a role like that of a mirror to reflect the mysteries belonging to the All-Holy Divine Essence. Thus, this mirror has to be immaculate that its reflection on the hearts of people not mislead or misguide them.<sup>663</sup>

Gülen's evaluation of the notion, together with the concept of the unletteredness (*ummīyyah*) of the Prophet, brings an original insight in another article. After mentioning, "there is no residue or dirt in the exceptional mind of the Prophet which pollutes the pristine nature of the revelation,"<sup>664</sup> he interprets the unletteredness of the Prophet as a special protection. Consequently, according to Gülen, such a protected, pure mind is immune from any wrongdoing, committing a sin or deviation from the straight path, given the special grace that God has given to the Prophet. As a result of such special capacity and grace, he is able to

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<sup>661</sup> The foundation and evidence for the attribute of infallibility is analysed with numerous proofs in the sources. For instance, Akcay deals with the notion based on 18 rational and traditional transmitted evidences. Refer for more details Akcay, "Peygamberlerin Korunmuslugu," 281-288.

<sup>662</sup> Akcay, "Peygamberlerin Korunmuslugu," 283.

<sup>663</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/457-458.

<sup>664</sup> Gülen, *Yol Mulahazalari*, 193.

receive revelation in its original form, as well as convey it without any alteration. Such status and capacities are specific to prophets.<sup>665</sup>

Second, it is highlighted that prophets, being exemplary models and guides of truths for humanity, require this attribute. The Qur'an commands believers to follow the prophets' path and obey them, articulates they are witnesses of God against humanity's plea of ignorance in the afterlife and also expresses they are the most beautiful examples and excellent models of conduct that should be followed consciously. It also states that prophets are among the perfectly purified, chosen ones, truly good guides who command goodness and obedience, and forbid evil, sin and disobedience.<sup>666</sup> Due to their crucial position, people are obliged to learn and follow their religious orders and Divine commandments regarding pillars of belief, creedal provisions, rules related to obligatory or supererogatory worships and social relations. If they were to commit sins or disobey God, according to these verses, they would be followed also in their disobedience and error. According to Muslim scholars, it is invalid for God to command such things and this would be a vain belief or supposition, because sinfulness and prophethood are opposites that cannot co-exist. Thus, it is not possible for prophets to commit sin or disobey God, and verses and Divine commands clearly articulate their attribute of infallibility. Based on this point and relevant verses, the majority of scholars meticulously dealt with the notion, and endeavour to provide evidence of prophets' infallibility, defend the impermissibility of their committing sin and present convincing arguments.<sup>667</sup> All prophets chosen and sent with the mission of prophethood lived a life that avoided disobedience, error and deviation, and due to their exemplary conduct, people are ordered to follow their path.

Another important point that is discussed in relation to infallibility in *kalāmīc* sources is its nature/essence, coverage and time. All Muslim scholars agreed that prophets have the attribute of infallibility. They state that prophets are immune from disbelief, infidelity, polytheism and associating partners with God, before and after prophethood. There is a consensus in this regard among all major schools of thoughts,<sup>668</sup> i.e., Sunni,<sup>669</sup> Mu'tazila,<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>666</sup> Qur'an 7:158; 3:31-32, 104; 4:165, 13-14, 65, 80; 6:90; 9:71; 31:17; 20:39; 21:90, 73; 33:21; 36:21; 38:47.

<sup>667</sup> Rāzī, *Muhassal*, 122-123; Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqasid*, V/51-52; Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, VIII/266-267; Sabūni, *Bidaya*, 54; Ahmad Hasan, "The Concept of Infallibility in Islam," *Islamic Studies* 11, 1 (1972): 5-6.

<sup>668</sup> Yener Ozturk, *Bir Peygamber Sifati: Ismet* (Istanbul: Isik Yayinlari, 2014), 44; Seferta, "The Doctrine of Prophethood," 147.

<sup>669</sup> Pazdawī, *Usūl al-Din*, trans. Serafettin Gölcük (*Ehli Sunnet Akaidi*) (Istanbul: Kayihan yay, 1980), 248; Sabūni, *Bidaya*, 53.

<sup>670</sup> Qādī Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, XV/303.

and Shiite.<sup>671</sup> There is also concurrence among scholars that prophets do not conceal, distort or make alteration, lie or betray on matters they have to communicate.<sup>672</sup> However, there are different opinions about the nature and essence of infallibility, how prophets are distanced from mistakes and what kind of sins are covered. With regard to this matter, most scholars are of the opinion that prophets are immune from committing *kabāir* (major sins),<sup>673</sup> both before<sup>674</sup> and after prophethood.<sup>675</sup> Where opinions differ is mainly centred around whether they commit *saghāir* (minor sins). In this regard, Mu'tazilite scholars are of the opinion that prophets are protected from committing all kind of sins, before and after prophethood, consciously and unconsciously.<sup>676</sup> Similarly, Shiite scholars think prophets are immune from all sins from cradle to grave, and they do not err intentionally or inadvertently.<sup>677</sup>

When it comes to mainstream Muslims, generally they argue it is not permissible (*jaiz*) for prophets to intentionally commit minor sins. However, with the exception of Samarqand (Transoxanian) Māturidī's, the majority of the Ash'arī and Māturidī scholars found it possible for prophets to commit such sins inadvertently. They state these minor sins would not indicate they have a repulsive or repugnant nature; since they are exalted guides, God would correct their lapses promptly.<sup>678</sup> Samarqand Māturidī's opinion resembles the thoughts of the Mu'tazila and Shiite scholars. They think prophets are protected from major and minor sins before and after the mission. They argue that insignificant errors (*khata'*) and slips (*zallāt*) are not to be considered for prophets. In this regard, they prefer to interpret *zallāt*, transgressions

<sup>671</sup> Mehmet Bulut, *Ehli Sunnet ve Sia'da Ismet Inanci* (Istanbul: Risale Yayinlari, 1991), 30.

<sup>672</sup> Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, VIII/281.

<sup>673</sup> Although there are slight differences in its definition among scholars, the major sins are those acts that are forbidden by specific Divine commandment, people are threatened to be punished severely in the afterlife, and requires punitive consequences like *qisas* (retaliation) or *had* (limit or prohibition) punishment if they are committed in this world. The sins might be, for instance, associating partners with God, unjust killing, fornication and adultery.

<sup>674</sup> Some Māturidī and Ash'arī scholars found it possible for prophets to commit sin before their prophethood, arguing there is nothing reasonable to put forward to make it impermissible, particularly in that period, on condition that the sin is committed seldom and forgiveness is asked for later. However, the general opinion is that they will not commit major sins (Pazdawi, *Usūl*, 241, 243; Sabūni, *Bidaya*, 54; Rāzī, *Muhassal*, 223-224). This is because the occurrence of such acts will later cause serious problems, such as there will be accusations of the prophet being a liar and unacceptance of their message and mission, after proclaiming their prophethood (Pazdawi, *Usūl*, 246; Qādī Iyad, *Shifa*, II/101, 140).

<sup>675</sup> Pazdawi, *Usūl*, 246; Ali al-Qari, *Sharh al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, 102, 110; Sabūni, *Nubuwwa*, 53.

<sup>676</sup> Qādī Abd al-Jabbar, *Sharh Usūl al-Khamsa*, 573; Pazdawi, *Usūl*, 240; W. Madelung and E.Tyan, "Isma," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), IV/182-183; Seferta, "The Doctrine of Prophethood," 147; Akcay, "Peygamberlerin Korunmuslugu," 295; Ozturk, *Bir Peygamber Sifati*, 45.

<sup>677</sup> Rāzī, *Ismat al-Anbiya*, 6; Rāzī, *Muhassal*, 224; Madelung, "Isma," 182-183; Seferta, "The Doctrine of Prophethood," 147; Akcay, "Peygamberlerin Korunmuslugu," 296; Ozturk, *Bir Peygamber Sifati*, 46. For more information on the Shiite doctrine of *ismah*, see Aisah Mohamed, "A Critique of the Shia's Doctrine of the Infallibility (Ma'sum) of the Imamate," *The Islamic Quarterly* XLIV/I (2000): 343-357.

<sup>678</sup> Pazdawi, *Usūl*, 240; Sabūni, *Bidaya*, 53; Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqasid*, V/51; Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, VIII/265; Ali al-Qari, *Sharh al-Fiqh*, 52; Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 60-61. For the different Sunni, Shiite and Mutazili interpretations see Hasan, "The Concept of Infallibility," 1-11.



(*ma'siya*) and so-called sins attributed to prophets as: It is either to take a less commendable alternative and leave or neglect the commendable supererogatory one (*tark al-afdal* or *ahsan and fi'l al-fādil* or *hasan*) or it is a relative action strictly relevant to their stations and conditions before God (*muqarrabīn*), that is not sin or mistake if compared to ordinary people.<sup>679</sup>

Even though Gülen's evaluation of the notion seems to be in line with the considerations of the Mu'tazili and Shiite approach, in my opinion it is more compatible with Samarqand Māturidī's thoughts, due to significant differences. In this sense, Mutazili's approach rejects some authentic and reliable prophetic traditions as they might damage the compass of infallibility and their non-compliance with this attribute. In other words, many reliable and authentic reports, in terms of *hadith* methodology and criteria, are declined due to their excessive glorification and sanctification (*tanzīh*) approach to *ismah*.<sup>680</sup> However, such rejections do not exist in Gülen's opinion.

On the other hand, although the Shiite approach seems to be strong and firm, they broaden the notion's limitation to immunity and infallibility of *imamate*. What this means is that prophets are protected from erring or committing major or minor sins, in the same way that imams, as the Prophet's absolute attorney, are also infallible and protected from wrongdoing.<sup>681</sup> It is not possible to find a place for such understanding in Gülen's thought. What really comprises the bedrock of Gülen's opinion are the reasons discussed earlier and verses that prove the notion of infallibility, portraying the most appropriate perception of prophethood, compatible with the Islamic creed, and demonstrating an explicit understanding. In this regard, although his opinion appears to agree with that of Mu'tazila and Shiite, it would be more accurate to state it is compatible with Samarqand Māturidī's. In a way similar to that of Māturidī's, Gülen insistently discusses prophets' infallibility before and after their prophethood and concludes that they are immune from all kind of sins, major or minor. Thus, according to Gülen, prophets' lives before the vocation play supporting roles for their mission after revelation. For a prophet not to face any suspicions and doubts about them truly being prophets and to gain the unwavering acceptance of their followers, they have to live a pure and immaculate life. In

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<sup>679</sup> Abū Hanifa, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar (Sharh Abū al-Muntaha)* (Istanbul: Daru'n-Nil, 2007), 39; Pazdawi, *Usūl*, 240; Abū al-Barakat Nasafī, *Tafsīr*, I/43; Akcay, "Peygamberlerin Korunmuslugu," 295.

<sup>680</sup> Mutazilite's similar *tanzih* approach is well known in their creedal thought of Divinity. For the same reason, they reject some authentic reports of the Prophet since they found them incompatible with their understanding of divinity. Ayhan Tekines, *Bilgi Kaynagi Olarak Hadis* (Izmir: Yeni Akademi Yayinlari, 2006), 207-213; Ozturk, *Bir Peygamber Sifati*, 45-46.

<sup>681</sup> Metin Bozan, *Imamiyye Siasi'nin Imamet Tasavvuru* (Ankara: Ilahiyat yayinlari, 2007), 112-116; Ozturk, *Bir Peygamber Sifati*, 46.

this regard, to clearly demonstrate and make it easy to understand, they are nurtured with the special grace of God. Gülen explains the notion through the following analogy:

It is a fact that the conduct, grades and records of men training for the military are carefully recorded, even from their college days, and their progress closely watched in case of mistakes made, so that an accurate appraisal may be made when later appointing personnel for very critical positions or missions, even after 40 years...In the same way, God protects, observes and preserves prophets and does not allow them to commit any sin, those whom he chosen and sent as commander of spiritual and intellectual excellence. This is the opinion of the majority (*jumhur*) of Muslim scholars. The Qur'an refers to their such nature with the following phrase "*al-mustafayn al-akhyār*"<sup>682</sup> which means "perfectly purified, chosen ones among the truly good."<sup>683</sup>

Gülen stresses that the cases that are perceived to be sin or wrongdoing in some prophets' lives are not sin and should not be named as such. Hence, *kalām* scholars analysed these cases in depth, naming them *zallāt* (slips or lapses) and interpreted different phrases and terms mentioned in the Qur'an that indicate wrongdoing, such as *zanb* (sin), *tawba* (repentance) and *istighfar* (begging for forgiveness), in compliance with the statute of prophethood and prophets' sublime position. Some scholars evaluated these occasions as *sahw* (inadvertence), some considered them as prophets' having chosen less commendable acts over the commendable supererogatory acts, while some deemed them to be *khata' fi al-ijtihād* (a mistake in judgement). Others argued that these cases were due to *nisyān* (forgetfulness) and some claimed them to be a decision to take the lenient (*rukhsat*) rather than the most stringent (*azimat*) route.<sup>684</sup> Taking a holistic approach towards these cases, such slips do not appear to be committed intentionally or consciously by prophets'. For this reason, *āhad hadiths* (solitary narrations or prophetic reports) which suggest, even ultimately conclude, that prophets can commit sin are rejected by Muslim scholars, while verses or *mutawatir hadiths* (absolutely assured and sound narrations) are interpreted, as mentioned earlier, in a manner that complies with the statutory and agreed perception of prophethood.<sup>685</sup>

Gülen's evaluation of the notion of *zallāt* parallels these thoughts. According to Gülen, these slips are not sins and, if they are carefully studied, it can be seen that they occurred before prophethood was established. In both cases, prophets "as a prophet" are infallible. On the

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<sup>682</sup> Qur'an 38:47.

<sup>683</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/466-467.

<sup>684</sup> Abu Hanifa, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, 38-39; Yener Ozturk, "Ismet Sifati Kapsaminda Fethullah Gülen'in Peygamber Algisi," in *Bir Alim Portresi* (Istanbul: Nil Yayinlari, 2014), 215.

<sup>685</sup> Ozturk, "Ismet Sifati Kapsaminda," 215.

other hand, these are matters particularly relevant to their stations and conditions before God. In other words, these seeming slips and mistakes cannot be evaluated in the same way as mistakes made by ordinary people. So, since prophets are accepted as the nearest to God (*aqrab al-muqarrabīn*), their mistakes are also relative to their station.<sup>686</sup> As can be understood from Gülen's evaluations, it is relevant to the spiritual rank of prophets and connected to the following principle in Islamic thinking: *hasanāt al-abrār sayyiāt al-muqarrabīn* (the good, righteous deeds of the virtuous would be regarded as vices for those who are nearest to God Almighty).<sup>687</sup>

Based on this essential approach, Gülen sensitively accentuates the matter of *zallāt* as not committing sin, according to the common definition, and elaborates on how it should be understood, based on three points:

First, if prophets are to decide between two options and they choose the good one (*a'la*) and neglect the better one (*aliyy al-a'la*), this is accepted as a slip for them. Nevertheless, this is not a mistake or slip according to ordinary norms of human beings, because it is still good (*a'la*). A prophet in such a position due to his station and condition before God should choose the better option, because he is among those who are brought into close proximity with the Divine Presence (*muqarrabīn*). However, ordinary people cannot make this judgment. Thus, this decision cannot be considered sin. Similar to Gülen, Husayin Jisri also underlines this prudent opinion in a slightly different form: "Some of the slips, when considering the position and condition of its perpetrator, can possibly be considered as sin. However, this judgment belongs to God, not us human beings."<sup>688</sup>

Secondly, on matters upon which they do not receive a revelation, they make a judgment (*ijtihād*) and put forward their opinion, no matter its relevance to legal terms and conditions, personal, family or social affairs. Their judgments in those cases could be in accordance with the approval and acceptance of God, but sometimes may not match the same level of perfection. In either case, all their rulings and judgments are dependent on God's will. Now, if their judgement is not exactly in accordance with the approval and acceptance of God, due to requirement of love and nearness to God, it can be considered a mistake. That is because they have to find the most correct decision in every case, and this is required from prophets according to Islamic understanding. As accepted as common norm in Islamic jurisprudence,

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<sup>686</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/461-462.

<sup>687</sup> Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, VIII/265; Ali al-Qari, *Sharh al-Fiqh*, 50.

<sup>688</sup> Husayin Jisri, *Risala Hamidiyya*, trans. Manastirli Ismail Hakki (Istanbul: Turdav Ofset, 1980), 508.

mistaken judgment in *ijtihad* is not considered a sin. So, this case will not harm their infallibility, and they cannot be questioned about it.

Thirdly, according to Gülen, cases like these slips, or when the Qur'anic verses and traditions have been misunderstood to sound as if they reprimand certain prophets for some faults, or refer to them seeking God's forgiveness for some sin, generally occurred before their prophethood. Gülen underlines that such cases are insignificant mistakes and slips. Thus, they cannot be considered sins. Clearly, Gülen is ready to reject or minimise any attribution of sin to prophets.

After clearly introducing his view on the theoretical aspects of the notion of infallibility, its proofs and evidences, the wisdom behind such an attribute being a necessary characteristic of prophets and its nature, Gülen dwells on some practical aspects and their place and function in prophets' lives. He then concentrates on the Prophet's life as his main concern, pointing out the importance of commenting on inappropriate incidents and narrations which appear to reprimand certain prophets or give room for the possibility that a prophet can commit sin, in the scriptures of *ahl al-kitab*. Beside the existence of inappropriate reports in other religious scriptures, their narration in some of the exegetical and *sīrah* or in general history sources of Islam seems to be the reason why Gülen analyses these narratives in detail. He endeavours to acquit prophets of such accusations and underlines that such matters narrated in the Torah, the Bible and other scriptures, do not correspond with the understanding of the notion of *nubuwwa* in Islamic thought, and cites and analyses several examples mentioned about certain prophets in those scriptures. While he expresses that bad habits like theft, fraud, intoxication, immorality and indecency are considered to be unacceptable and disgusting habits for ordinary people, it is even less possible to think of such attributes with regard to eminent servants of God, the prophets.<sup>689</sup> As a result, after touching upon abstract details, Gülen strictly rejects those accounts and states that all prophets are endowed with high morals, manners and exalted attributes. He then applies evidence from Islamic sources, predominantly the Qur'an and *sunnah*. Some of the assertions Gülen strictly rejects, stating that it is impossible to accept them, are: Prophet Lot's two daughters causing him to get drunk and have illicit sexual relations with them; a son of Jacob's supposed engagement in sexual relations with his daughter-in-law; Prophet Solomon worshipping idols towards the end of his life; Prophet David falling in love with the wife of a commander, committing adultery with

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<sup>689</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/463.

her, deliberately sending her husband to his death on the front line and then marrying her; and Prophet Jacob's wrestle and victory over God, who appears in the form of a man.<sup>690</sup>

Gülen criticises Muslim scholars who assert that prophets may have committed sins or can make mistakes. He argues that these verses are either misunderstood or misinterpreted:

Those who make the mistake of defending such ideas are generally people who are narrow-minded and have stereotyped ideas; people who strictly comment on restricted linguistic meanings of the words and lack insight. If they were open-minded, perceptive people who could put their prejudice aside, as well as be able to be ready against *isrā'iliyyāt*, they would also think in a similar way to the majority of scholars, and thus be able to act more respectfully towards the prophets.<sup>691</sup>

Having clarified the reasons for such misunderstandings about certain verses of the Qur'an, Gülen then moves to some individual examples and elaborates his thoughts to explain clearly how these verses should be understood. His evaluations in this regard are in line with abovementioned three points. He interprets Prophet Adam's eating of the prohibited fruit as something that occurred before his prophethood, and then mistaken judgment due to forgetfulness;<sup>692</sup> Prophet Noah's supplication for his son was a judgment made for obvious reasons, and a mistake due to the affection and nature of fatherhood;<sup>693</sup> Prophet Abraham's expressions about the stars, moon and sun were to make them listen, based on the wisdom and notion of gradualism (*tadrīj*) and was not an acceptance of those superstitions and heavenly bodies as God;<sup>694</sup> the case of Joseph was a manifestation of firm willpower and a monument of chastity.<sup>695</sup> As such, he interprets these accusations based on logical and textual arguments of the Qur'an, *sunnah* and the righteous scholars of the early period of Islam. It is safe to assume at this juncture that Gülen's re-reading of these events is heavily theological.

After he clarifies and elaborates on the misunderstood and misinterpreted issues regarding the infallibility of prophets from the point of view of Islamic theology, Gülen dwells on the infallibility of Prophet Muhammad, which is his actual concern. Regarding Prophet Muhammad, he takes into account related verses that superficially seem to cast suspicion on his infallibility and includes phrases that can seem to be admonishment for actions. Gülen

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<sup>690</sup> Ibid, I/475-481.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid, I/481.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid, I/483-490.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid, I/490-496.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid, I/496-518. In this section, Gülen also elaborates in detail on Abraham's appeal to God to show him how He revives the dead. On three occasions he used allusions (*ta'rid/ma'arid*) and asked forgiveness for his so-called father Azar, who did not accept his call and remained an unbeliever.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid, I/518-528.

based his arguments on those sorts of verses that are interpreted as either mistakes or errors in the Prophet's acts as narrated in *sīrah* and *hadith* sources. In this regard, the following issues are broadly discussed in his work: The analysis of incidents and verses<sup>696</sup> revealed when the prisoners are taken after the Battle of Badr, together with the events that took place during and after, occasions for the revelation and also Muslim's benefit of the booty taken from this battle;<sup>697</sup> evaluation of the verse<sup>698</sup> that deals with the Prophet's exemption of the hypocrites from the expedition of Tabūk, due to their demand of permission offered via false excuses;<sup>699</sup> clarification of the first verses of surah al-Abasa (He Frowned), and whether these are revealed to reproach the Prophet because he disliked the interruption of the poor and blind companion while he was conveying the message to pagan Qurayshi leaders, as some classical commentaries assert, or whether these reproachments were about the pagan leaders;<sup>700</sup> analysis of the verses<sup>701</sup> regarding the offer made by the Thaḳīf tribe to have some concessions, such as exemptions from religious obligations from the Prophet, in return for embracing Islam;<sup>702</sup> examination of slightly similar verses<sup>703</sup> relevant to Qurayshi leaders who offer to dismiss poor and slave companions around the Prophet when he is off to discuss or convey a message or assign a special day exclusively to the so-called ruling class, prominent leaders and the Prophet's response;<sup>704</sup> and finally a comprehensive elaboration and conspicuous analysis of the wisdom, facts and the verse<sup>705</sup> revealed in relation to the Prophet's marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh, his emancipated slave and adopted son's wife.<sup>706</sup>

Gülen explains and interprets all these verses and incidents that superficially seem to be incompatible with the infallible nature of the Prophet, either based on the three points he underlined above, as preference of the good option over the better one, mistakes of *muqarrabin* or errors of judgement, or via sound consideration of the development of the events based on authentic and reliable sources and rational arguments, made through linguistic interpretation of the verses. As a result, in all these events there is no mistake or sin

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<sup>696</sup> Qur'an 8:67-69.

<sup>697</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/532-542. For detailed examination of this verse, see Rume Ahmad, "The Ethics of Prophetic Disobedience: Qur'an 8:67 At the Crossroads of Islamic Sciences," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 39, 3 (2011): 440-457.

<sup>698</sup> Qur'an 9:43.

<sup>699</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/542-547.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid*, I/547-555.

<sup>701</sup> Qur'an 17:73-75.

<sup>702</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/555-560.

<sup>703</sup> Qur'an 6:52; 18:28.

<sup>704</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/560-565.

<sup>705</sup> Qur'an 33:37.

<sup>706</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/565-572. For more and detailed analysis of these kinds of events or criticised issues in relation to the Prophet's life or other prophets' infallibility and additional incidents, see: Yener Ozturk, *Bir Peygamber Sifati: Ismet*. For events about the infallibility of Prophet Muhammad, see chapter 2, 82-159.

that can be attributed to the Prophet. Rather, in most of these verses there are compliments to him and his judgments. In this regard, those seemingly admonishing phrases in the pertinent verses either compliment the Prophet (*tasliyatun li al-Rasul*) or indicate the Prophet's utmost and exhaustive effort, made for the salvation of humanity.<sup>707</sup>

Another important matter Gülen covers in this section on *ismah* is the infallibility of people rather than prophets. This aspect is not generally discussed in *kalāmīc* sources, thus Gülen's comments are noteworthy because of his original evaluations. In addition, it is significant since he links this notion to the present day and expands this concept through his own insights to leave such attributes or characteristics as relevant to historical figures and incidents in *sīrah* sources. This dynamic evaluation of the incidents and their links to current times is in line with his general approach to *sīrah* readings. Moreover, his appraisal of the notion "*ismet gayreti*" (exertion and endeavour for infallibility) is striking because he discusses it as an ultimate goal for his readers/listeners to attain based on the model of prophets' pure and immaculate lives. Gülen first clearly underlines that people, other than prophets, are not infallible; every human being can commit sin or be mistaken, as mentioned in the prophetic tradition.<sup>708</sup> Gülen argues that, apart from the prophets, there might be people whom God, with His grace, protected from committing sins, like His intimate friends, saints (*awliyā Allah*) and religious guides. To support this idea, Gülen adduces evidence from the Qur'an and prophetic tradition that directly or indirectly alludes, implicates and states that God will protect people who strive on His path, and not allow them to contaminate themselves or indulge in anything wrong, even if they are not a prophet.<sup>709</sup> Gülen underlines that this has nothing to do with the assertion of the "infallibility of the *imam*" in Shiite tradition. This is because, according to him, there is no absolute assurance or guarantee about those people, such as is given to the prophets. Rather, it has some prerequisites and conditions, such as incessant effort to keep oneself on the straight path, live an ascetic life and stay in the circle of piety. After he underlines these conditions and the precise differences from Shiite understanding, he points out several lives of the most celebrated mystic masters in Islamic tradition, such as Abd al-Qadir al-Jīlanī (d.1166) and Imam Rabbanī (d.1624). He argues that although there is no assurance and absolute protection regarding these figures, as prophets

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<sup>707</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/531-532, 539, 542-543. For a special article of Gülen's on similar verses' evaluation and how they should be interpreted in his opinion, see "Verses of Divine Compliment for the Prophet in the Form of Admonition," Gülen, *Kalb Ibresi*, 33-43.

<sup>708</sup> Tirmidhi, *qiyama* 49; Ibn Maja, *zuhd* 30.

<sup>709</sup> Qur'an 8:29; 6:12; 2:40; 47:7.

have, according to the abovementioned understanding of the notion of infallibility, it is not possible to show or adduce evidence that such saints have ever committed sin.<sup>710</sup>

Additionally, Gülen talks about infallibility that is based on experience and observation, which is an idea unique to him. He argues that it is well-observed by almost everyone that God protects His highly esteemed friends/saints, and that in almost every ordinary person's life, although they have ample opportunity to sin and all the required conditions and circumstances are prepared for wrongdoing, they also have the opportunity to be saved from committing such sins. Dealing with the notion in such an unusual way, Gülen narrows the picture more, links it with his interlocutors and states: Such devoted souls who sought to follow the path of the companions, their previous good deeds (obligatory and supererogatory worship, charity and benevolence, etc.) performed in the past, would be like a barricade established for their future mistakes, and would play a role in preserving them from committing a transgression. Ultimately, Gülen encourages his followers, as discussed earlier, to strive to their utmost to achieve as great a degree of infallibility as it is possible for ordinary people. He tries to persuade them that, if they truly use their free will in the correct way and for sacred causes, these virtuous acts will close the doors that lead to wrongdoing. Gülen supports his ideas with the following *hadith al-qudsī* (a saying of God narrated by His Messenger, but not included in the Qur'an) and then states that there are hundreds of righteous people (not prophets) who have attained Divine protection in the history of Islam:

My servant does not draw near to Me with anything I love more than what I have made obligatory for him. My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory worship until I love him. When I love him, I become the ears with which he hears, his eyes with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. If he were to ask Me for something, I would give it to him. If he were to ask Me for refuge, I would give him refuge.<sup>711</sup>

Gülen's comment on and interpretation of this *hadith* are quite insightful, as they clarify this saying, as well as what he has argued since the beginning. So, according to Gülen, one possible meaning of the *hadith* is:

I (God) always show him what is good, decent and right, and unceasingly protect him from bad, evil and wicked acts. I become his eyes, so that whatever he sees becomes good. Wisdom and gnosis fall into his soul and conscience and he constantly feels sober-minded

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<sup>710</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/467-470.

<sup>711</sup> Bukhārī, *riqaq*, 38; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, VI/256.



and becomes prudent. This thought emerges in his self and he incessantly thinks of God. Thus, he always hears goodness and righteousness and his will always seeks praiseworthy and upright deeds. I make it easy for all barriers in front of him to disappear, so that he may perform good deeds and I make it easy for him to remove those barricades. In short, he is a close and intimate friend of Mine, so I do not let his heart, other faculties and feelings become damaged through sin and become polluted.<sup>712</sup>

Finally, Gülen combines several interesting topics under infallibility, though they do not appear to be relevant to this notion. These are the Prophet's asceticism, piety, modesty, servanthood, worship, prayers and supplications.<sup>713</sup> He analyses these aspects of the Prophet in the sense that they set a stage for infallibility. Examples that Gülen cites and examines in detail in this regard include: although it was not obligatory, he performed the supererogatory prayer until dawn (*fajr*) prayer until his feet were swollen;<sup>714</sup> his supererogatory fasting upon the prescribed days, and even most of the time as continuous fasting (*sawm al-wisal*);<sup>715</sup> his preference to maintain a humble life, so that most of the time he was not able to find anything to eat or had only simple sustenance;<sup>716</sup> and his insomnia till morning after eating a single date, because he feared it might be part of the charity given to him, which the Prophet is not allowed to benefit from.<sup>717</sup> When examining these examples and different dimensions of the Prophet that Gülen frequently revisits, we are presented with someone who is so concerned and sensitive about the issues that are not obligatory for him, and who lives in utmost asceticism and profound piety, that when it comes to performing absolute obligatory worship or Divine commandments and abstaining from definite prohibitions, he will without doubt not falter. In almost every single example he reiterates the fact that such a character, who is at pains not to benefit from things that are lawful for him, will definitely not seek after things that are objectionable or forbidden to him. Gülen highlights that such a delicate and profound life becomes a means for his protection from wrongdoing.

In addition to the God-given attribute of infallibility due to his prophethood, his usage and employment of his effort, endeavour, diligence and free will on the straight path, ultimately and undeniably lead him to maintain a praiseworthy and admirable life that is not tainted by immorality and indecency. As a result, in my opinion, Gülen's thoughts, examinations and linkages of seemingly irrelevant topics with the notion of infallibility are worth noting, in

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<sup>712</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, I/470-475.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid*, I/572-617.

<sup>714</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr*, I/441-442; Qurtubi, *al-Jami'*, IV/310.

<sup>715</sup> Bukhārī, *sawm*, 53; Muslim, *siyam*, 178; Abū Dawud, *sawm*, 53; Tirmidhi, *sawm*, 43; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, II/91.

<sup>716</sup> Bukhārī, *riqaq*, 17; Muslim, *zuhd*, 20-36; Abū Nuaym, *Hilyat al-Awliya*, VII/109.

<sup>717</sup> Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, II/193; Hakim, *Mustadrak*, II/17.

order to understand some of the early classical *kalām* scholars' discussions, such as *ismah* is lacking the ability to commit sin, or using willpower in the correct way to avoid sin, though a prophet is able and has the power to commit wrongdoings.<sup>718</sup>

## 5.7 Freedom from Physical or Mental Defects

In *kalām* sources, the abovementioned five characteristics have received acceptance as the essential and necessary (*wājib/asliyya*) attributes of prophets by almost all scholars. Alongside this are other characteristics under headings such as the non-essential permissible attributes (*jāiz*) of prophets, and characteristics that are not appropriate for prophets. For example: being male; being past the age of puberty; having ancestry composed of noble individuals who have steered clear of adultery, immorality and the like; having avoided occupations and/or characteristics that are considered base and demeaning; and not having an uncompromising or rude attitude. In classical sources, generally as part of this second category of attributes or as linked to the attribute of infallibility, there is also an emphasis on prophets being perfect in their outward appearance, alongside their inward character, attractive conduct and being free from physical shortcomings and infectious/disturbing diseases like leprosy.<sup>719</sup> They were perfect in terms of physical structure, very handsome and well-built. Gülen's approach to this attribute is quite different from the classical understanding, though inspired by those detailed discussions. Although he does not allocate a separate section for this topic in *Sonsuz Nur*,<sup>720</sup> he considers this attribute among the essential and necessary ones, and dwells on it in depth in his other written works and public talks.<sup>721</sup>

As a reflection of their mission, prophets are constantly engaging with people in society. For individuals who are in a position of taking on such a mission and conveying an important message to be listened to and not shied away from, it is essential for them to be protected and free from physical shortcomings or defects that may drive people away, as well as having an extraordinary character and being protected in terms of their inner and moral faculties. This is because it is difficult, if not impossible, for hearts to grow warm and accept the righteous calls of people who have a physical deficiency that may be disturbing. In this regard, prophets are

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<sup>718</sup> Rāzī, *Muhassal*, 221; Hasan, "The Concept of Infallibility," 5-6. According to Imam Māturidī's view "*ismah* does not remove the responsibility of Divine commandment, obligations, prohibitions or abolish tribulations (*mihna*) but rather increases and intensifies them" see Māturidī, *Ta'wilatu Ahl al-Sunna* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2005), IV/75; Sabūni, *Bidaya*, 53.

<sup>719</sup> Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqasid*, V/61; Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, VIII/265; Sabūni, *Peygamberlik ve Peygamberler*, trans. Suat Cebeci (Istanbul: Kultur Yayinlari, n.d.), 48-59.

<sup>720</sup> In the sixth of the original sermons that formed the basis for the book, Gülen mentions and lists the topics he will cover during an introduction to a series on Prophets' attributes, as is his custom as part of his sermon methodology. He also lists and briefly comments on this attribute, saying he will cover it in depth in future sermons. But when he starts covering the attributes, he does not specifically cover this in later sermons.

<sup>721</sup> Such as Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 132; Gülen, *Yol Mulahazalari*, 178, 184.

selected individuals who remind people of God and inspire goodness in them with their character, conduct, personality and message as well as their outward appearance.

Gülen's approach in considering this attribute among the essential characteristics of prophets in Islamic exegesis and the literature of *isrā'iliyyāt*, makes reference to stuttering and speech impediments in the case of Prophet Moses, and visually disturbing diseases and afflictions in the case of Prophet Job. He rejects unequivocally these allegations, which are not in line with the understanding of prophethood in Islam, and explains their real nature. Gülen, who claims prophets would not even have a birthmark that would attract people's attention, emphasises that prophets were "handsome men of beauty." In this regard, he points out they would not have a chronic illness or physical condition. He draws attention to the fact that the sickening disease and afflictions attributed to Prophet Job in *isrā'iliyyāt* sources are not mentioned in the Qur'an or authentic narrations of the Prophet, and states that Prophet Job had to endure a temporary affliction, certainly not a chronic and visually disturbing disease that would drive people away.<sup>722</sup>

As part of his discussions on this topic, Gülen considers the speech impediment attributed to Prophet Moses. He states there is no reliable piece of evidence in the Qur'an or authentic *hadith* regarding Prophet Moses having an impediment. According to him, such narrations, which are used by some exegetes on grounds that they are harmless, are all from *isrā'iliyyāt* sources.<sup>723</sup> Moreover, attempts are made to use some verses in the Qur'an as proof to support these allegations. When God commands Prophet Moses to convey the Divine Message to Pharaoh, Moses begs: "My Lord! Expand for me my breast, make my task easy for me and loosen a knot (*uqdatan*) from my tongue (to make my speaking more fluent), so that they (Pharaoh and his ensemble) may understand my speech/message clearly."<sup>724</sup> Following these verses, another request of Prophet Moses is mentioned: "(My Lord!) And appoint my brother Aaron from my family as a minister (helper) for me. Consolidate my strength with him and let him share my task."<sup>725</sup> In a complementary verse used for this topic's discussion, Prophet

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<sup>722</sup> Gülen, *Prizma* IV/24.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid; Gülen, *İkindi Yagmurları*, 252; Oztürk, *Bir Peygamber Sifati*, 22. As an example, in the Encyclopedia of Islam, it is stated that some of the Qur'anic stories about prophets were 'completed' using elements borrowed from the Old Testament and *haggadah*. Afterwards, the following origin of the story of Prophet Moses' alleged stutter is mentioned as being found in 'sources': When Moses was still a breastfeeding baby, one day he pulls on the Pharaoh's chin or beard. The Pharaoh becomes furious and wishes him killed. But, upon the request of his wife, he first subjects the baby Moses to a test to see if the pulling was intentional! He places gold and jewels on one side and burning embers on the other side of the baby. Even though he wants to reach for the gold and jewels, Archangel Gabriel makes baby Moses reach for the burning embers. Moses then places his burnt hand onto his tongue and starts to stutter from that point on (Bernard Heller, "Musa," in *Islam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: MEB, 1971), VIII/659).

<sup>724</sup> Quran 20:24.

<sup>725</sup> Quran 20:24-29. Also see 25:35.

Moses begs: “My brother Aaron is more eloquent in speech than I, so (appointing him also as a Messenger) send him with me as a helper to vouch for my truthfulness, for indeed I fear that they will deny me.”<sup>726</sup> Now, Prophet Moses’ request, mentioned in these verses as loosening a knot from the tongue, has been interpreted as asking for the removal of an impediment. Additionally, Prophet Moses asking for Aaron’s appointment as a helper (Messenger) and mentioning Aaron’s superior eloquence in speech, have been interpreted as supplementary evidence of a speech impediment.

Gülen states these allegations about Prophet Moses are most certainly not true because they contradict the protection or freedom from all physical shortcomings attributed to prophets. As a result, he considers the alleged ‘ember in mouth’ story to be derived from *isrā’iliyyāt* sources and not a genuine incident.<sup>727</sup> Gülen focuses attention on the fact that the Qur’an mentions that the Prophet Moses does not have a stutter or speech impediment but, on the contrary, is an individual who had the privilege of conversing with God,<sup>728</sup> and he interprets the above verses in light of this as follows.

First, there are three requests in his supplication and the request for loosening a knot from his tongue is a natural, general request like the other two, not necessarily a specific one based on an impediment. For example, thousands of preachers and orators, who do not have speech impediments, pray like this before delivering their sermons and ask for Divine help to more comfortably and eloquently state their cause.

A second interpretation that Gülen brings to the verses consists of very interesting and original considerations. This interpretation is founded on the fact Prophet Moses had grown up in Pharaoh’s palace, which was governed by a sort of caste system, observing the arrogance of Pharaoh and his ensemble. Accordingly, Prophet Moses may have thought this may psychologically lead him to be more cautious in his discourse and uneasy about conveying the message, thus he asked for help. This concern and uneasiness is not in the sense of being afraid of Pharaoh’s threats. On the contrary, it is concern and uneasiness about being unable to articulate his words as eloquently as possible, being unable to convey his message clearly, and, as a result, being immediately turned away by Pharaoh without even being listened to. This has been stated clearly in the verses of chapter Qasas: “...for indeed I fear that they will reject me.”<sup>729</sup> Aaron, however, did not have that sort of psychological

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<sup>726</sup> Qur’an 28:34.

<sup>727</sup> Gülen, *İkindi Yagmurları*, 252-253; Gülen, *Prizma*, IV/24.

<sup>728</sup> Qur’an 7:143. This event is mentioned in the Qur’an and Prophet Moses has the title *kalim Allah* (The One Who Spoke to God) as a result of it.

<sup>729</sup> Qur’an 28:34.

burden, had never been directly subject to Pharaoh's arrogance or attitude, yet nonetheless had suffered as an Israelite under his rule, had eloquence in speech, so Prophet Moses' request that he be appointed as a helper Messenger is befitting and wise. Gülen also highlights that Prophet Aaron was a few years older than Prophet Moses and suggests this request may have been a token of prophetic respect on Moses' behalf. Moreover, he also emphasises that these verses may be showing believers, through Prophet Moses' example, the increased benefit in performing some tasks collectively. The verses advise collective action to those who will convey the message of truth, specifically highlighting the importance of togetherness for mental support and release of preachers from false feelings of loneliness against those, like Pharaoh, who claim greatness.

In addition, Gülen stresses that Prophet Moses, like all other prophets, paid attention to speaking what was revealed to him and suggests this care and caution may have led him to speak more slowly than normal when not speaking from revelation. He likens this attitude to the *ummīyya* (unletteredness) of Prophet Muhammad, states that it adds another layer of depth to his character and mission, and interprets it as a miracle of Prophet Moses.<sup>730</sup>

As a last point of discussion, it is fitting to briefly address the words of Pharaoh to his people, which are also presented as proof of Prophet Moses' alleged stutter. In Chapter Zukhruf, Pharaoh is quoted as having said: "And, am I not better than this man, who is despicable and can scarcely express himself clearly?"<sup>731</sup> According to Ozturk, who approaches the topic using Gülen's analysis, these words also cannot be used as proof of a speech impediment because they are simply insults aimed at belittling, malicious provocation and character assassination of the Prophet Moses in front of the people. Just as the Qur'an mentions the ridiculous allegations against the Prophet Muhammad by Meccan polytheists (being crazy, a madman, a magician, etc.) cannot serve as proof for the truth of such claims, so too can the words of Pharaoh not be taken as proof of a speech impediment in Prophet Moses.<sup>732</sup>

On the one hand, Gülen's analysis and emphasis on this topic serves as an answer to the entry of Israelite narrations into Islamic sources. On the other hand, in terms of the life of Prophet Muhammad, they portray an effort to summarise in a distinct manner the various narrations regarding the physical appearance of the Prophet, found in sources about his appearance (*shamā'il*) and signs of prophethood (*dalā'il*). In these sources, there is detailed emphasis on

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<sup>730</sup> Gülen, *İkindi Yagmurları*, 252-254; Gülen, *Prizma*, IV/23-25.

<sup>731</sup> Qur'an 43:52.

<sup>732</sup> For detailed information about the allegations against Prophet Moses and their analysis, see Ozturk, *Bir Peygamber Sifati*, 22-28.

how the physical appearance and body structure of the Prophet was perfect, like his character. An example of this is the narration by the companion Jabir ibn Samura: “One day we were sitting inside the mosque. It was the 14<sup>th</sup> day (full moon) of the lunar month. The moon was shining brilliantly above our heads. And then the Prophet walked in. I looked at the moon and then at him; I swear by God, the face of God’s Messenger was brighter than the full moon.”<sup>733</sup> The famous companion Abū Hurayra makes a similar narration.<sup>734</sup> Abdullah ibn Rawaha goes further and declares: “Even if he did not come with clear miracles to prove his prophethood, his appearance and conduct would have been sufficient to convince you.”<sup>735</sup> These narrations are commonly cited in discussions on this topic and Gülen often uses them.

It must be stressed that some narrations regarding the Prophet’s perfect physical appearance have been misinterpreted, due to over-interpretation, and some unrealistic narrations have found their way into sources about the Prophet’s appearance, *shamā’il*. Gülen has a critical approach to such interpretations and narrations and, as such, rejects them. For example, in one narration, the Prophet is quoted as saying: “I see behind me just as I see in front of me.”<sup>736</sup> In the interpretation of this *hadith*, some have made the bizarre claim that he had eyes on the back of his head, just like the eyes on his face.<sup>737</sup> Gülen sees this interpretation as ridiculous, completely wrong and ignorant. He states that the Prophet was not some sort of “strange creation,” but a perfect human being inside and out, morally and physically.<sup>738</sup> According to Gülen, interpretations such as the above actually imply imperfections.

In a similar way, Gülen sees as faulty those interpretations that try to glorify the Prophet by claiming things like him being born circumcised,<sup>739</sup> since being born as such would be a physical imperfection and pathological defect. Another interpretation Gülen criticises is the one that claims the Prophet never woke up “wet.”<sup>740</sup> He answers this misinterpretation using narrations from the Prophet’s wife, Aisha,<sup>741</sup> and points out that this claim does not imply

<sup>733</sup> Darimi, *Muqaddima*, 10; Tabarani, *Mu’jam al-Kabir*, II/206; Hakim, *Mustadrak*, IV/207.

<sup>734</sup> Tirmidhi, *Shamā’il* (trans. Ali Yardim, *Peygamberimiz’in Semaili*), 186.

<sup>735</sup> Qādī ‘Iyad, *Shifa*, I/249.

<sup>736</sup> Bukhārī, *adhan* 71, 72; Muslim, *salat* 111, 112, 125.

<sup>737</sup> Aynī, *Umdat al-Qārī*, IV/157, V/254; Suyutī, *Tanwīr al-Khawāliq*, I/139; Al al-Qari, *Mirqātu al-Mafātīh*, II/488, 545.

<sup>738</sup> Gülen interprets this narration in two ways: Firstly, seeing is a function of the brain rather than the eye. We metaphorically say the eye sees because the brain sees mainly via images transported from the eye. But, it is not always necessary for the eye to send images to the brain for the brain to be able to see. As a result, the Prophet does not need eyes on the back of his head to be able to see what is behind him. Secondly, just as God allowed him to see vignettes of Heaven and Hell, just as He allowed him to at times see things from the near and far past and future, it can be said that He allowed him to see things behind him in a similar way, either as images or directly. Coming to other interpretations, they are most certainly not true. (Gülen, *Fasildan Fasila*, II/276)

<sup>739</sup> Hakim, *Mustadrak*, II/657; Zahabī, *Mizān al-I’tidāl*, II/141, VI/216.

<sup>740</sup> Tabarānī, *Mu’jam al-Kabir*, XI/225; Zahabī, *Mizān al-I’tidāl*, 3/9.

<sup>741</sup> Tabarānī, *Mu’jam al-Kabir*, VIII/288; Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, XI/99.

perfection, but actually imperfection. As a result, according to Gülen, attributing these kinds of things to the Prophet actually leads to attributing defects to him without realising it.<sup>742</sup>

Lastly, I will finish this topic with the answer Nursi gives to a question regarding the wisdom behind the Prophet dying at the age of 63, since Gülen shows this answer as proof for the “freedom from physical defects” attribute of prophets. Nursi says:

Regarding his blessed life being 63 years long, one of the many pieces of wisdom behind it is as follows: Believers are religiously obliged to love and respect God’s Messenger to the utmost degree, and follow his every command without feeling any dislike for any aspect of him. For this reason, God did not allow him to live to the troublesome and often humiliating period of old age, and sent him to the “highest abode” when he was 63 years old. This was the average life span of the members of his community, thus making him the example in this respect also.<sup>743</sup>

Based on Gülen’s analysis of the attributes of prophets, *Sonsuz Nur* is an analytical reading of *sīrah* on a foundation of *kalām*. He has set these characteristics and essential attributes at the centre of his discussions in his *sīrah* evaluations, derived not only from *kalām*, but also from the foundation of teachings of Islamic ethics and mysticism. This is because these attributes are also pivotal for Islamic ethics and mysticism. Approaching the topics and foundation of the arguments from a *kalām* perspective in the context of prophethood and prophets’ attributes is a very logical decision. In fact, the Qur’an emphasises that the Prophet was the best example (33:21), had the highest sublime character, behaved with a sublime pattern of conduct (68:4), and according to Prophetic tradition he was “sent to complete good manners and character,”<sup>744</sup> which are important references for the above method of ethics and mysticism-based teachings, and for the place of *sīrah* alongside the *kalām* foundations.

Gülen’s constant emphasis on manners and character is observed in his sermons and talks. In this way, he sets the movement’s social and ethical dynamics on a foundation of prophetic life, essential characteristics and attributes. From this perspective, his naming of the service method based on these characteristics and attributes as *peygamber yolu*, “the prophetic way,” or *sahabe mesleği*, “the occupation and the way of the companions,” is quite important because it gives volunteers in the movement a vision and mission. As a result, when the topic of prophetic attributes is discussed in *Sonsuz Nur*, the strong emphasis on ethics strikes the

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<sup>742</sup> Gülen, *Fasildan Fasila*, I/275-276.

<sup>743</sup> Nursi, *Mektubat*, 319.

<sup>744</sup> Ibn Hanbal, II/381; *Muwatta’*, husn al-khuluq 8. For some other *hadith* that emphasise the importance of good conduct and ethics see Tirmidhi, *birr* 71, *rada* 11; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, IV/193; Abū Dawud, *sunnah* 15.

eye, alongside an orthodox and rightly-guided mainstream understanding of prophethood. This is because the attributes form an ideal foundation for the establishment of a society equipped with good character and virtue. Because he wants also to cover those topics for his audience, Gülen puts these characteristics at the foundation of his interpretation of *sīrah*. In this way, Gülen clears and purifies people's minds of misguided interpretations of prophethood and simultaneously decorates them with good character and virtues, using clear understandable language and an original approach to the accurate and precise context he discovered.



## CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY: THE NOTION OF *SĪRAH* PHILOSOPHY WITH REFERENCE TO GÜLEN’S ANALYSIS OF THE TREATY OF AL-HUDAYBIYA

### 6.1 Introduction

The Indian Muslim scholar, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, starts the sixth chapter of his book *The Prophet of Peace: Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad* with: “Historians have generally acknowledged that the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abd Allah, was extremely successful during his lifetime.” After quoting proofs and evidence for this statement from the British Historian, Edward Gibbon, the Indian Leader, M. N. Roy, and Dr Michael Hart, the author of the book entitled *The 100*, Khan, asks: “So, what was the secret of this great success achieved by the Prophet?” He then provides his personal response: “The secret lies in one word – peace. It would not be overstating the case to say that the Prophet Muhammad was the greatest peace activist in history.”<sup>745</sup> The topic of this chapter is not a discussion of the reasons or secrets of Prophet Muhammad’s extraordinary success. Rather, it will focus on the Treaty of al-Hudaybiya, which in Islamic history is most famously remembered by two words, peace and reconciliation.<sup>746</sup> When analysing the events that took place at al-Hudaybiya, I will take as a guide a particular perspective on *sīrah* philosophy expressed by Gülen. So, I will be able to understand the meaning of Khan’s statement in a more comprehensive manner, as well as deepen an understanding of Gülen’s *sīrah* philosophy.

Gülen’s analysis of the Treaty of al-Hudaybiya will be examined in two parts. The first part will look into the source of Gülen’s narration by comparing it with original sources to determine how he narrates the tradition from those sources; which books or works he uses, what parts of the account he emphasises and what parts he ignores (textual and source analysis). The second part is an analytic interpretation and evaluation of Gülen’s assessment of the subject. As a scholar who introduces *sīrah* as a necessary source for the contemporary age, Gülen frequently emphasises *sīrah*’s crucial importance as a benefit to all people throughout all time. From his perspective, *sīrah* is not neutral, but has a dynamic aspect that allows it to be renewed, reactivated and transferred into life. People who can read and understand *sīrah* and the era they live in will be able to find solutions, guided by the advice, directions or hints revealed in *sīrah*.<sup>747</sup> The second part of this chapter will examine, from the perspective of the Treaty of al-Hudaybiya, recommendations for today’s people and their

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<sup>745</sup> Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *The Prophet of Peace: Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009), 26-27.

<sup>746</sup> Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Ihsan Yilmaz, “Islamic Resources for Peacebuilding: Achievements and Challenges,” in *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gulen Movement Initiatives*, ed. John Esposito and Ihsan Yilmaz (NY: Blue Dome Press, 2010), 41.

<sup>747</sup> Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 132.

problems that Gülen has extracted, and how he has used and translated *sīrah* for today's world.

## 6.2 The Notion of *Sīrah* Philosophy Expressed by Gülen

When looking at studies concerning Gülen, particularly those works which will determine his place within the Islamic disciplines as a representative of the scholar–intellectual tradition, it can be seen that he emphasises and idealises *sīrah* together with the companions (in other words, the era of happiness). In his own words, he undertakes the “philosophy of *sīrah*,” and explains to contemporary people that there are many things they can obtain from them. Regarding the importance of *sīrah* and of the companions Gülen states:

*Sīrah* is an important source to be frequently referred to, as it represents a commentary which shows how the Qur'an should be understood. Our Prophet, with his life, words, deeds, and approvals, has shown how a life which is in keeping with the revelations should be lived. And the companions, each of whom are linguistic experts, have read these two sacred sources correctly, understood, interpreted, and stated them accurately, and left a route which should be followed by the generations after them.<sup>748</sup>

Gülen says that the signals of everything concerning what has happened and what will happen until the Day of Judgment have been experienced, if not in macro format, then in micro format, during the era of happiness (as he refers to the Prophet's life), and that solutions to many current problems can be found from that time. In one way, the Prophet has explained in detail everything that has happened with all of the prophets, and in another extracted everything to be carried out by the religious community – that is to say, even if there are differences between then and now, he states there are similarities.<sup>749</sup> Following his opinions on *sīrah* and the companions, Gülen makes the following statements:

Every event that has taken place in the past hints at how the problems which will be experienced in future periods can be solved. When we take into account the conditions of the period and the cultural levels of those who lived at that time, we may resolve the problems that appear during our own lifetime, guided by this advice. However, in order to be able to do this to our utmost ability, both *sīrah* and the era that is lived in is required to be read and understood well...During the 14 century history of Islam, the philosophy of *sīrah* has been taken into consideration at different periods of time and certain events from the era of happiness were interpreted in terms of social history. However, a fact which should be taken very seriously is that considerable changes have taken place between that era and now, in a

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<sup>748</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>749</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Fasıldan Fasıla 1* (İzmir: Nil Pub., 1995), 234; Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, 108.

sociological sense. In the past, some of the philosophical ideas which have been presented at different points in time have been shelved in time; some are no longer in fashion, and new ways of thinking have replaced them. From this perspective, even if we are to benefit from interpretations regarding *sīrah* from previous periods, we cannot say that they reflect today's world in full. Therefore, in terms of modern day conditions, the philosophy of *sīrah* can only be undertaken by those, namely children of this very era, who take into account the interpretation of the time and its commentary.<sup>750</sup>

In his work entitled *What is History?*, Carr argues that the fundamental requirement for a student of history is to study “the problems of the past as a key to those of the present.”<sup>751</sup> In his works, Gülen frequently emphasises that history repeats itself, and it needs to be learned from. However, he is voicing a more advanced and different opinion; that is, his presentation of a specific 23-year period, which needs to be studied in order to solve all the problems that will be encountered until the Day of Judgment.

### **6.3 Narration and Textual Analysis of the Reports Regarding the Incident of Hodaybiya**

Narrations about the Hodaybiya treaty do not come from only one narrator or source, as is the case for all *sīrah* traditions. Yet the Hodaybiya incident is the focal point, with accounts collected from different sources and narrators which are used to fill in any gap and complete the details of the story. This is a feature of the *sīrah* genre that differentiates it from the *hadith* discipline. It is the responsibility of the historian to portray as complete and truthful an account as possible, based on the most reliable sources. In this regard, due to the restrictions of the length of this study, critiques of the narrators in the chain of report, and questions to the effect of who narrated the story from whom and to what extent narrations were made, are outside the scope of this study.<sup>752</sup>

Gülen generally deals with *sīrah*-related topics, either in his sermons at the mosques or during private talks, to answer specific questions. As Gülen's works were not written for academic purposes, they are not written in an academic style bound by certain rules and regulations, as mentioned in Görke's study. To emphasise this point, Gülen has not used clear referencing. However, this does not mean Gülen's works are not worthy of academic study. It is possible

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<sup>750</sup> Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 132-133.

<sup>751</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1976), 27.

<sup>752</sup> For such study see for instance Andreas Görke, “The Historical Tradition about al-Hodaybiya: A Study of ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr’s Account,” in *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*, ed. H.Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 240-275.

to shed light on Gülen's sources via a personal interview conducted with Resit Haylamaz,<sup>753</sup> a contemporary Turkish *sīrah* scholar, who also heads the Kaynak Cultural Publishing Group, which publishes Gülen's works in more than 40 languages.<sup>754</sup> Haylamaz stated:

Due to the mission and position he held, he dealt with these issues either in his sermons at mosques or in a question-and-answer format during private talks. Based on the profound knowledge that he has gained and, in light of his intense and comprehensive reading, he systematically addressed some issues that he found more important and necessary for modern people. Later on these talks were collected into book form. When dealing with the life of the Prophet, it is seen that Gülen sometimes puts forward certain points and emphasises them, while not even touching some other points that occurred in the subject matter. Later on, a references search for these collected books was carried out by the publisher's staff, and they tried to reference the points that Gülen has expressed from the original *sīrah* and related sources.

Haylamaz emphasised an interesting point during the interview. He stated that during the reference searches for the first editions of these books, they could not find any source for some of Gülen's points or quotes. For later editions, when they searched a broader range of the sources, they came across points that he had made in some of these books that could be understood as detail material. That is why, in later editions of Gülen's book, for the sake of inclusivity, the publisher's committee decided to use "works that have been utilised to investigate sources" instead of using just "bibliography" or "references." For this study, I will use the references indicated in the later editions and sources obtained during my research. By reason of early original written sources for *sīrah*, I will first refer to works from the second and third centuries of *hijra*, such as Ibn Ishāq,<sup>755</sup> Ibn Hishām,<sup>756</sup> Wāqidī,<sup>757</sup> Ibn Sa'd<sup>758</sup> and al-Tabarī's<sup>759</sup> history and *sīrah*-related works. In addition to these, written in almost the same centuries, the works of Bukhārī<sup>760</sup> and Muslim<sup>761</sup> on *hadith* that have essential importance in

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<sup>753</sup> This interview took place on 16 May 2012. The discussion was mainly centred around Gülen's book on the Prophet, *Sonsuz Nur*, and its publication process.

<sup>754</sup> Nurullah Kaya Gaziantep, "Gülen'in eserleri Kürtçede," *Zaman*, May 3, 2012, accessed May 25, 2012, <http://www.zaman.com/haber.do?haberno=1282229&title=Gülenin-eserleri-kurtcede>

<sup>755</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat*. As this compilation of Ibn Ishāq is not complete, it does not contain accounts regarding al-Hudaybiya.

<sup>756</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, III, 229-245.

<sup>757</sup> Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II, 69-112.

<sup>758</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II, 91-100.

<sup>759</sup> al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II, 620-644.

<sup>760</sup> Bukhārī narrations concerning al-Hudaybiya occur in different places: *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, *kitāb al-sulh*, *kitāb al-shurūt*, *kitāb al-adhan*, *kitāb al-haj*, *kitāb al-umrah*, *kitāb al-muhsar*, *kitāb al-jihad wa al-siyar*, *kitāb al-jizyah wa al-muvadāah*, *kitāb al-manaqib* and *kitāb al-tafsīr*.

<sup>761</sup> In Muslim, the Treaty of al-Hudaybiya is narrated in chapters *kitāb al-jihad wa al-siyar*, *kitāb al-imarah* and *kitāb al-haj*.

all Islamic studies, as well as in the *sīrah* genre, will also be scrutinised. In this manner, the essential sources Gülen has benefitted from, and the accuracy and reliability of the material he used, will be examined. Where necessary, sources from later classical and modern *sīrah* works will be determined for comparing and contrasting Gülen's arguments.

It was not an appropriate method for this study to try to determine the chain of narration – e.g. who narrated the story from whom, sentence-by-sentence, or word-by-word – in a way similar to Andreas Gorke's method in his abovementioned article or other similar articles. Gorke's method of examination may constitute a better technique, by identifying one significant narrator's tradition or account as being close to the original but, for this study about Hdaybiya from the perspective of *sīrah* philosophy, differences relating to those taking part in the journey, the number of delegates and the changes of detail in the accounts, are of peripheral concern. Therefore, these differences do not have much effect on the general story that took place. Rather, my aim is to explore how the Hdaybiya treaty occurred in general and how Gülen has narrated the story, how his interpretation differs from other scholars, from which perspective he analyses the story and what new insights he has brought to events as a 20th/21st century scholar.

In the first part of this section, I will narrate the Treaty of Hdaybiya from Gülen's perspective<sup>762</sup> by reconstructing the story according to his works. Then, based on the abovementioned *sīrah* and related sources, textual and source analyses will be carried out, and the accuracy and credibility of the reports used by Gülen will also be questioned. In this regard, the basic sources for Gülen's narration of this event will be discovered, along with which parts of the story he has reported and, if any, which parts he ignored.

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<sup>762</sup> In his published collection, Gülen deals with Hdaybiya in different places. Although I scrutinised his collection from this angle, there are two key places in his works which are my primary concern, due to his detailed analysis of al-Hdaybiya. First, the chapter relating to Hdaybiya in his main work on *sīrah*, *Sonsuz Nur* (II/154-175; 323-330), and second, an article entitled “*Sīrah* Philosophy and the Treaty of al-Hdaybiya” in another book entitled *Yenilenme Cehdi* (131-137). Narration of the story has been reconstructed and abridged by me in the chapters mentioned previously, as well as relevant places from his collection are compared and contrasted. In *Sonsuz Nur*, Gülen deals with Hdaybiya in a detailed yet concise manner. Gülen starts the narration by referring to the narrator of the events, Ibn Ishāq. However, in an incomplete version of Ibn Ishāq's collection by Hamīdullah, events about Hdaybiya do not exist. It is probable that Gülen by this statement intended that Ibn Hishām, who is one of Ibn Ishāq's students as well as a narrator, has narrated and elaborated on the story in detail.

### 6.3.1 Gülen's Narration of the Hudaybiya Incident with Comparison to Classical Sources

Six years after the emigration to Medina, the Prophet promised to take his companions on the lesser pilgrimage, *umrah*, to Mecca.<sup>763</sup> As a result of this journey, the Prophet would have fulfilled the emigrants' longstanding yearning for their hometown, and also he would have shown the correct procedures and rituals to be followed for the pilgrimage. In addition, it would have reinvigorated the metaphysical strength of the companions. For this purpose, the Prophet, together with 1,400 companions, set out towards the Ka'bah in Mecca.<sup>764</sup>

After departing from Medina, the Prophet, as a precaution and for the purpose of intelligence gathering, sent out a Muslim scout from the tribe of Khuzaa, whose conversion to Islam was unknown to the Meccans.<sup>765</sup> The scout returned with the news that the Quraysh had assembled all the tribes and unanimously decided not to allow the Muslims to enter the Ka'bah at any cost. Although they were not expecting a war, they were worried about appearing weak in the eyes of other Arabs. The Quraysh were even willing to display armed resistance as they carried through the decision they had made. As a first step, they mobilised an army of 200 cavalry forces commanded by Khalid ibn Walid or Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl, and sent them to Qura' al-Ghamim.<sup>766</sup> When he was informed of their move, the Prophet consulted with his companions and they decided to take a different route which meant walking further.<sup>767</sup> When

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<sup>763</sup> For more information about the details of the event, such as the promise by the Prophet as he prepared for departure due to a dream, its timing and other preparations, like asking Muslim or non-Muslim neighbouring tribes to accompany him, and their donning the garb for animals, as demanded by the ritual of lesser pilgrimage, see Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II, 70; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III, 229-230; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II, 91; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II, 620-621, 632; Bukhārī, *maghāzī*, (64)35, 43, *sulh*, (53)6, *umrah*, (26)3. Only Wāqidī talks about the dream at the first stage, mentioned in selected written original sources. Others touch upon it only after the treaty has been signed, implying the companions' assumption for the pilgrimage was due to the dream. Such as Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III, 238. Also refer to al-Tabarī, *Jamī' al-Bayān*, XXVI, 107.

<sup>764</sup> There are different narrations about the exact number of travellers, varying from 700 to 1800. More generally accepted numbers are those around 1400. Gülen has mentioned three different numbers: 1400, 1500 and 1600. Gülen's usage of different numbers indicates he does not pay attention to details. Differences in the numbers, especially numbers above 1400, most likely occurred due to people from different tribes joining the journey on the way to Mecca. It should also be taken into consideration that approximate numbers were given by those who gave figures that excluded women, children and people who were not able to fight. Sālihī, *Subul al-Huda*, V/70-71; Zurkānī, *Sharhu Mawāhib*, II/180; Asim Koksal, *Hz. Muhammed ve Islamiyet*, V-VI, 251; Resit Haylamaz, *Efendimiz*, II, 340.

<sup>765</sup> Although Gülen emphasised that they departed without arms and were going only to fulfil religious duties, he did not narrate the place they entered in the state of ritual purity, the number of animals that accompanied them and their labelling for sacrifice, etc., which are discussed in detail in classical sources. Nevertheless, as an important characteristic of the leader, he did not ignore the infallibility of the Prophet and accentuated that. For this reason, although he did not disclose the name of the Prophet's scout, even though he was from a loyal tribe of Muslims, his unknown conversion to Islam is evidently underlined.

<sup>766</sup> For Quraysh's discovery of the departure and their reaction, refer to Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/75; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/230; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II/92; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/622; Bukhārī, *shurut* (54)15, *maghāzī*, (64)35, *haj* (25)106.

<sup>767</sup> They met with the scout Busr ibn Sufyan at Usfan, where he informed them about the Quraysh's preparation. Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/75; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/230; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II/92; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II, 621-622. His name is mentioned as Bishr ibn Sufyan in Ibn Hishām and al-Tabarī.

Khalid realised they were on the march, he went to Mecca and passed this information to the Quraysh.<sup>768</sup> Meanwhile, the Prophet and his companions reached and settled down at al-Hudaybiya, a place 50-60 kilometres<sup>769</sup> from Mecca. Although there was a well, this place was waterless. When the lack of water became critical and thirst became a serious issue, the Prophet offered a prayer and instructed a stick to be stuck into the bottom of the well. A miracle occurred and water sprang up.<sup>770</sup>

Shortly afterwards a delegate from a non-Muslim but allied tribe of Khuzaa, together with their leader Budayl ibn al-Warqa, arrived. The Prophet informed him they did not come to fight, but honour sanctuary and perform their pilgrimage.<sup>771</sup> When Budayl returned to the Quraysh, he conveyed the Prophet's message and among the audience was Urwah ibn Mas'ud al-Thaqafi. He found the message quite logical and proposed for them to negotiate with

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<sup>768</sup> *Sīrah* and *hadith* sources narrate in detail that, for the sake of not encountering Khalid and his forces, they took a different, but more troublesome, desolate and rocky outcrop road, and due to being chased by the Quraysh, they performed a fear prayer upon arrival at Hudaybiya, and the Prophet's she-camel Qaswa's stopped and knelt. This was also narrated in detail together with the conversation that took place between the Prophet and a companion in relation to the camel being stubborn or not. Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/76-80; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/230-231; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II/92; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/623-624; Bukhārī, *shurut*, (54)15, *maghāzī*, (64)35. It is narrated that verses about praying while in fear were revealed during this chase. Ibn Sad, *Tabaqāt*, II/92; Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/77-78.

<sup>769</sup> The distance between Mecca and Hudaybiya is much closer than Gülen says; in particular, the distance to Ka'bah is around 25km. Hamīdullah mentioned that Hudaybiya was 15 or 17km from Mecca, whereas Lammens says this distance is 17km. Hamīdullah, *Islam Peygamberi*, 215; Hamīdullah, "Hudeybiye," in *Türkiye DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Pub., 1998), XVIII, 297; H. Lammens, "Hudeybiye," in *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: MEB Basimevi, 1977), V/I, 578.

<sup>770</sup> There are different narrations about the occurrence of this miracle in the sources, such as an arrow plunged into the bottom of the well and water sprung up; the Prophet performed *wudu`* (ablution) from a leather water bag (*qirba*), dipped his hand into it and then from his fingers water flowed like a fountain; and the Prophet came and sat beside the well and asked for a bucketful of water and he put some of his saliva into the bucket, prayed and then poured this water back into the well, which suddenly caused the water to gush out and rise to the well's brim. Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/80-83; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/231-232; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II/92, 95; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/624-625; Bukhārī, *shurut* (54)15, *manāqib* (61)25, *maghāzī*, (64)35; Muslim, *imārah*, 18. Said Ramadan al-Buti uses the account of Bukhārī that says after he performed *wudu`* he put some of his saliva into the bucket, performed prayer, and then poured this water back into the well, and suddenly the water began to gush. Other versions of the *hadith* stating water flowing from his finger are also authentic (*sahih*), but these are different incidents, in his view. Buti, *Fiqh al-Sīrah* (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 1999), 231. It is also narrated that the miracle of the water occurred a couple of times at Hudaybiya, as well as other miracles relating to the increase in the amount of food. Gülen narrates this miracle on the basis of God's mercy, brought by his Prophet's hands, on those people desperately in need or suffering at certain times of affliction together with the account of the plunged arrow or stick. Among reliable authorities such as Bukhārī and Muslim, Islamic traditional narration of this event is based on the observance and witness of 1400-1500 companions where they all drank from it and filled their water bags. They indicated the water would have been enough for a greater number of people than just those present. It is not possible for the incident not to have occurred as it was narrated and witnessed by around 1400 people and not a single one of them rejected, objected or kept silent. Hence, in this case, *ma'nawi mutawatir* (a tradition with numerous chains of transmission by reliable authorities with respect to meaning) in *hadith* tradition occurred, and this clearly supports the strength of such reports. As an author who does not usually pay attention to details of events, Gülen, in this case, deals with this miracle in a detailed way. It seems he considered this nuance of the *hadith* tradition and did not want to ignore the fact it was narrated unanimously by almost all the original sources.

<sup>771</sup> Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/84-85; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/232; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II/92-93; Taberī, *Tarīkh*, II/625-626; Bukhārī, *shurut*, (54)15.

Muhammad on behalf of the Quraysh. The Meccans accepted this offer and sent him to fulfil this task.

Urwah went to Hudaibiya and spoke with the Prophet for some time. During this conversation, the companions' approach, respect and veneration of the Prophet attracted Urwah's attention. He returned to Mecca after being convinced the Muslims had not come to wage war, but rather to fulfil a divine imperative, and he delivered his favourable report, saying: "O Men of Quraysh, I have visited Chosroes, Caesar and Negus in their respective courts. By God, I have never seen a people as attached to their king as are his companions, who love him, honour him and revere him so much that they carefully lift every hair that falls off his body, and they save the water with which he performs his ablutions. Hear my words and let the man be."<sup>772</sup>

After this negotiation also remained inconclusive, the Prophet decided to send a delegate from his own companions to inform the Quraysh of the Muslims' stance, so he sent Khirash ibn Umayyah to Mecca. As soon as Khirash reached the city, they attacked him and killed his camel. They were about to kill him as well, but one of the tribes intervened and saved the Prophet's envoy's life.<sup>773</sup>

After this incident, at Umar ibn al-Khattab's invitation, the Prophet sent another companion, Uthman ibn Affan, as a second delegate to convey his message to the Quraysh.<sup>774</sup> Umar counselled Uthman ibn Affan, because he would be far more protected as he had credit among some of the Meccans. Uthman delivered the Prophet's message to the Quraysh. Negotiations

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<sup>772</sup> It is narrated in the classical sources that, although the chief of the Quraysh was impressed with what Urwah said, they insisted they would not allow them to enter the sanctuary this year. Thereupon, Urwah took his people and returned to his province, Taif. After Urwah, the Quraysh thought of sending the Ahabish tribe's leader Hulays ibn Alqama as another ambassador. When Hulays saw shaved and readied camels for sacrifice and their wretched position because they had been tied for a long time, he declared that whoever prevents them from entering the sanctuary should be afraid of perishing. When he saw animals being moved as display of Arab religiosity, he was also convinced the Quraysh were being unjust to the Prophet and his companions, who had come neither for war nor hostility. Without even bothering to go further to meet with Muhammad and negotiate, he returned to Mecca and stated what he observed and his opinion. It is also narrated that following Hulays, they decided to send Mikraz ibn Hafsa as another delegate. When Mikraz arrived, the Prophet repeated again that they came only to perform *umrah*, honour the sanctuary and for religious fulfilment. Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/88-89; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah* III/233; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II/93; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/627-628; Bukhārī, *shurut* (54)15. There are large amounts of details about the delegates. Narrations indicating the delegates from the Quraysh and their order include differences and transpositions. In this case, although Gülen mentioned Budayl and Urwah as delegates, he did not talk about other delegates of the Quraysh.

<sup>773</sup> It is narrated the Prophet sent him with his camel and the one who roughly treated, maimed and slew the camel was Ikrimah ibn Abū Jahl, and the tribe that intervened was Ahabish. Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/89-90; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/234-235; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II/93; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/631-632.

<sup>774</sup> The reason for sending Uthman as another delegate was to corroborate their view that they did not come to wage war, rather to perform pilgrimage. He also asked Uthman to invite them to Islam. Some sources narrate that Uthman was required to take another mission – to announce to Muslims who did not have the chance to migrate to Medina, or who converted to Islam after migration, to be patient and advise them of the upcoming victory. Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II, 90.



lasted a long time, forcing him to stay in Mecca, and he was eventually imprisoned.<sup>775</sup> Rumour spread among the Muslims that Uthman had been treacherously killed. When his return was delayed, the Muslims feared that their suspicions were true. Thereupon, the Prophet demanded a pledge of allegiance (*bay'at al-ridwan*) from the companions. He seated himself beneath a large tree and the companions one by one came enthusiastically and pledged to continue and, if the situation arose, even to fight to the last man. Except for “a half man,” whom Gülen refers to as a hypocrite, all the companions pledged their allegiance.<sup>776</sup> As though the Prophet had transcended space and time to grasp Uthman’s hand, he raised his left hand and said “This is my hand,” whereupon he raised his right hand and said “This is Uthman’s hand,” and added: “Witness that I am pledging the allegiance of Uthman on his behalf as well.” After all these events, the situation became very tense and reached a critical point. The companions had even begun to unsheathe their swords in anticipation of a struggle. Because the Prophet had promised they would circumambulate the Ka’bah, they had travelled 400 kilometres in the tough conditions of the Arabian Desert and had come quite close to Mecca, but faced the obstacle of the Quraysh.

During this ongoing tension, the Prophet saw Suhayl ibn Amr approaching, enveloped in a dust cloud and said: “This affair has become easier. The Quraysh do not have any option other than negotiation.” Linguistically, the name Suhayl means ease and convenience, and it was the optimistic outlook that the Prophet displayed. The Prophet knew and understood people, as he told the companions of the upcoming result, just by seeing Suhayl. In fact, when he had previously seen Urwah, he had also announced that the Quraysh were seeking negotiation, but in Suhayl’s case, this affair would be finalised. Likewise, events started to unfold in a positive manner and Suhayl explicitly uttered that he had come for reconciliation. After all, as a person

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<sup>775</sup> For more information about Uthman’s entrance to Mecca, under the protection of Aban ibn Sa’d., his stay and delivering the mission, and other developments in those three days, such as the Quraysh suggestion to him that he could circumambulate Ka’bah if he wished, and his rejection of this offer, see Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II, 89-90; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III, 235; Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqāt*, II, 93; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II, 630-632.

<sup>776</sup> It is narrated that the pledge was demanded by God through Archangel Gabriel. Sources mention all details about how the pledge was taken, the companions’ attitudes to what they pledged, the clothes the Prophet wore, his protectors, the pledge of the women, the Prophet’s covenant on Uthman’s behalf, the number of people attending, their virtues, the first person who covenanted, a hypocrite who escaped to do pledge, etc. (Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II, 91-92; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III, 235-236; Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqāt*, II, 93-96; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II, 632-633; Bukhārī, *shurut*, (54)1, *jihad wa al-siyar*, (56)110, *maghāzī*, (64)35; Muslim, *imarah*, 18). In terms of the pledge, Gülen narrates that the companions enthusiastically flocked upon the covenant, their pledge of alliance to the death, except for a half man, and finally the Prophet’s covenant on Uthman’s behalf. However, he omits other details. He also provides an account that was mentioned in Ibn Sa’d, where the tree where the pledge occurred was cut down during the second Caliph Umar’s time (Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqāt*, II, 96). He interprets this event as Umar’s fear of later generations’ input to sanctity and cause for innovation, which has no original basis in Islam. Gülen underlines that, in such a state of mind/mood or atmosphere, they could only pledge allegiance to death. Due to the fact that if they obey, in such a situation they will easily implement other orders of the Prophet. This could be the result of the Prophet’s support with *wahy gayr al-mathuw* (unrecited revelation) and his very nature of being honoured with *fatānah* (clarity of mind), or also it could be accepted as the Prophet’s act according to his nature.

of equanimity and vigilance, the Prophet was calculating all his acts and moves quite well and was acting accordingly. Hence, he was willing to negotiate with the Quraysh.

Suhayl was looking forward to coming to an agreement with the Muslims, on condition there would be fewer casualties and the Muslims would return without entering the Ka'bah that year. Hence, he was pushing for as much of an advantage for the Quraysh from the Prophet as possible and saw each one as a great success. Therefore, he did not hesitate to bring even small issues to the agenda. For instance, he objected to writing down *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* (in the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate) at the beginning of the agreement, on account of the fact that he did not know what *Rahmān* and *Rahīm* meant. Instead, he obstinately insisted *Bismikallahumme* (in your name, O God) be written. The Prophet accepted this suggestion charitably.

Suhayl's second objection was to the writing of the term *Rasul Allah*, the Messenger of God. "If we knew you to be the Messenger of God," he said, "we would not have barred you from the House, neither would we have fought you; but rather write Muhammad, the son of Abd Allah."<sup>777</sup> The Prophet instructed his clerk, Ali ibn Abi Talib, to strike out the term and write accordingly, but this suggestion weighed heavily on Ali. He paused for a while and said he could not do that. Thereupon, the Prophet struck out the words, or asked Ali to point with his finger to the words in question and erased them himself. Then, he told Ali to write what Suhayl recommended instead.<sup>778</sup>

All points of the treaty caused long discussions and arguments. Suhayl obstinately insisted that points were written as he wanted, otherwise he would refuse to sign the treaty. Despite the one-sided appearance of the treaty, the Prophet accepted the offers made by Suhayl, as he was viewing events from a long-term perspective. Although at first glance all points of the treaty seemed disadvantageous for the Muslims, the Qur'an declared the event an obvious victory, *fath al-mubīn*, from a long-term point of view.

The final agreed treaty comprised the following points:<sup>779</sup>

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<sup>777</sup> Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II, 92-94; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III, 236-237; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II, 93-94, 97-98; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II, 633-636.

<sup>778</sup> By using wording that could be understood in two ways, Gülen erases any doubts regarding the situation by answering the question "Is not this against the *ummīyyah* (illiteracy) of the Prophet?": "Perhaps due to frequent observation, his eyes got used to it and could have differentiated this phrase from other scripts" (Gülen, *Umit Burcu* (Istanbul: Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı Yay., 2005), 167).

<sup>779</sup> The contractual terms, in sources, generally include almost all the same points. Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II, 92-94; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III, 236-237; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II, 93-94, 97-98; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II, 633-636; Bukhārī, *shurut*, (54)1, *jizya wa al-muvādaa*, (58)19, *maghāzī*, (64)43, *sulh*, (53)6-7; Muslim, *al-jihad wa al-siyar*, 34. Furukh b. Ali, in his article entitled "al-Hudaybiya: An Alternative Version" in *The Muslim World*, 71, 1(1981):

1. There will be a ten-year armistice between both sides.
2. People will be safe and secure from any possible threat and not lay any hands upon the other.
3. The Muslims must return home without performing their pilgrimage this year, but may do so the following year. They will be restricted to stay for only three days to perform *umrah*. During this visit, they will carry no more than the sword of a traveller in their scabbard, which is the tradition in Arabia for protection from wild animals in the wilderness.
4. Any person from Mecca immigrating to Medina without consent from their guardian must be returned to Mecca, whereas any Muslim migrating from Medina to Mecca will not be returned.
5. Any tribe wishing to enter into a bond and pact with Muhammad was free to do so without incurring any guilt or censure from the Quraysh; likewise, whosoever wishes to enter a bond and pact with the Quraysh may do so without hindrance from the Muslims.

At first glance, the treaty seems to primarily disadvantage the Muslims, especially the point that stipulates a Muslim must be returned to the Quraysh, and had frightening implications for Muslims. This was more than they could endure and, as a result, this situation caused outbursts from the companions.

Even Umar ibn Khattab, who was unable to restrain himself in this situation, lost his patience and said to the Prophet:

‘Are not you the Messenger of God?’.

The Prophet did not lose his serenity and answered Umar’s questions with composure:

‘Yes, I am the Messenger of God.’

‘Are not we in the right path and our enemies in the wrong?’, Umar asked.

‘Yes we are in the right path’, the Prophet confirmed.

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47-62 mentions different terms for the Treaty. However, proofs for his argument are not clear enough. In addition, his acceptance of Bukhārī’s one particular account, while ignoring so many accounts and suggesting the others as fabricated reports, demonstrates a clear contradiction.

‘Then why should we accept such a lowly position against the honour of our religion?’ said Umar.

Whereupon the Prophet replied: ‘I am God’s Messenger and I will not disobey Him. He will give me the victory.’

‘But did you not tell us that we should go to the House and circumambulate around it?’ Umar asked persistently.

‘Even so’, said the Prophet, ‘but did I tell you we should go to it this year?’ Umar conceded that he had not.

But Umar was still seething with indignation, and went to Abū Bakr to work off his feelings still further. He put to him exactly the same questions he had put to the Prophet; but though Abū Bakr had not heard the answers, he gave him the same answer to each question in almost exactly the same words. Umar later said that he regretted acting in this way. In addition to his regret for challenging these points, the early sources<sup>780</sup> narrated that he emancipated slaves, gave charity and fasted for many days to earn forgiveness.

Soon after, Ebu Jandal, the son of Suhayl ibn Amr, who had recently converted to Islam, arrived with his feet in fetters, which caused great distress amongst the companions. Exhausted, he threw himself in front of the Prophet and called upon the Muslims to save him from the fate of being returned to the unbelievers, who would definitely persecute him for his faith. None of the companions could tolerate what they were witnessing and were distraught. The Prophet also could not stand anymore and wept. Suhayl declared that the agreement would not be validated until his son was first returned, because he arrived after the agreement was concluded.

The Muslims requested Suhayl to exclude Abū Jandal due to the fact they had not yet signed the agreement, but he did not receive this plea graciously and insisted on his demand. Then, the Prophet and companions returned Abū Jandal in tears. However, the Prophet gently gave him reason to hope, bidding him farewell with these words: ‘Be patient Abū Jandal. God will surely save you and those with you and show you a way out. We have agreed on the terms of a truce with these people, and have given them our solemn pledge, even as they have done to

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<sup>780</sup> Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/94; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/237; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/634; Bukhārī, *shurut* (54)1 (in this version Umar’s outburst was reported after Abū Jandal’s return), *tafsīr*, (65)48; Muslim, *al-jihad wa al-siyar*, 34. In some of the sources, it is narrated that he first went to Abū Bakr, followed by the Prophet. In comparison to his general attitude to the events that took place, Umar’s regret could be seen as a minor issue. It seems Gülen elaborated this fact to portray exemplary behaviour for those who seek forgiveness for their mistake.

us; we will not now break our word.” Soon after, the events he prophesied came to pass, one by one, and confirmed what he had promised.<sup>781</sup>

After the treaty was signed and the delegates of the Quraysh left, the Prophet ordered his companions to slaughter their sacrificial animals, shave their heads and take off their pilgrim attire. It is narrated that the Prophet reiterated this order three times, but the companions hesitated. They simply looked at him in dazed and bewildered silence.<sup>782</sup> Noticing the companions’ reluctance, the Prophet withdrew to his tent and reported the situation to his wife Umm Salama for her advice. She answered him: “O Messenger of God, do not repeat your order. They may resist and thereby perish. Slaughter your sacrificial animal and change out of your pilgrim attire. They will obey, willingly or not, when they see that your order is final.” The Prophet then immediately went out, sacrificed his animal, shaved his head and took off the pilgrim garment. Immediately, the companions leapt to their feet and raced to make their sacrifices and did the same, as if they were competing, falling over each other in their eagerness to obey the Prophet.<sup>783</sup>

Shortly after the Muslims returned to Medina, Utba ibn Asid, known as Abū Basir, became a Muslim and fled from Mecca to take refuge with the Prophet. The Quraysh sent two delegates to demand they return him, according to the terms of the truce. The Prophet sent him back, but on the way back to Mecca, Abū Basir killed one of the envoys and fled back to Medina.

When Abū Basir returned to Medina, the Prophet did not allow him to stay, and said they had an agreement with the Quraysh, and a Prophet must keep his promise. Thereupon, Abū Basir went to al-Is on the coast, close to Dhu al-Marwah, a strategic point on the Meccan caravan route to Syria, and camped there. Later on, when persecuted Muslims in Mecca found out about this shelter, one by one they ran away and joined Abū Basir. They started to cut off the Meccan’s trade routes and it was an enormous threat for their caravans.

Finally, after suffering a lot, the Quraysh sent a letter to the Prophet asking him to take these highwaymen into his community, and they promised they would not ask for them to be returned to Mecca. Thus, the bitterest term of the treaty for the Muslims was withdrawn by

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<sup>781</sup> Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/95-96; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/238; Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqāt*, II/94; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/635-636; Bukhārī, *shurut*, (54)1, *maghāzī*, (64)35.

<sup>782</sup> Gülen explained the companions’ hesitation by their hope that the Prophet would change his mind. This thought of Gülen, together with his other views that directly suggest a logical basis for similar cases, are clear indications of him reading *sīrah* and *kalām* together. It seems he is quite dogmatic in not accepting any suggestion of a defect in the Prophet or any negative talk against the Prophet and his companions.

<sup>783</sup> Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/99-101; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/238-239; Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqāt*, II/94; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/637-638; Bukhārī, *shurut*, (54)1, *maghāzī*, (64)35, *muhsar*, (27)1. His consultation with Umm Salama was not mentioned in Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa’d.

the people who persistently demanded it.<sup>784</sup> So, this was a clear victory. Likewise, on the way back from Hdaybiya, chapter 48 of the Qur'an, entitled surah al-Fath, was revealed and named this treaty a clear victory, *fathan mubīna*.<sup>785</sup>

The Messenger of God was pleased, because what he planned was coming to fruition. The Quraysh had voided the terms they placed in the agreement by violating the clan that had allegiance with the Prophet's pact. Therefore, they completely abrogated the treaty. Thus, the great *fath*, or victory, of Hdaybiya laid the foundation for the victory over Mecca.

### 6.3.2 Reflections on Gülen's Narration of Hdaybiya

When compared to early written *sīrah* and related sources, Gülen's approach and method of narrating the events regarding Hdaybiya resembles that of Ibn Hisham and Bukhārī. His preliminary sentence, "Ibn Ishāq narrates..." already referred to, supports my opinion. He also uses reports of other scholars (mainly Ibn Sa'd and Wāqidī) that he perceives to be constructive in providing evidence for his ideas.

Another remarkable point regarding Gülen's use of the information reported by early sources is that he refers to points of unanimous narration. In his opinion, sources that report events in such a way do not illustrate, as some scholars think, the predilection of the human mind for dramatic tale or hypnotic effect of continued repetition<sup>786</sup>, rather they illustrate a considerable number of witnesses to confirm the event. In other words, it strengthens and confirms that the matter referred to occurred as reported. This situation and Gülen's approach to the events appears to be directly related to *manawī mutawatir*, as explained above. In addition, one of

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<sup>784</sup> Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/106-110; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/241-243; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/638-639; Bukhārī, *maghāzī*, (64)35, *shurut*, (54) 15. There is great detail in the early sources about the two delegates of Quraysh that came to Medina to demand Abū Basir, how he killed one of the envoys, the conversation between Abū Basir and the Prophet in Medina, the number of companions that fled and joined him at al-Is, the arrival of Abū Sufyan regarding the withdrawal of some terms of the treaty and finally the serious illness and death of Abū Basir when the letter of the Prophet arrived to invite them to return to Medina. Some sources narrate that, following Hdaybiya, a female companion named Umm Kulthum ran away from Mecca to Medina. When envoys of the Quraysh came to demand her return to Mecca under terms of the treaty, the Prophet refused, judging that the treaty did not apply to women. The story of Umm Kulthum is also narrated in detail in the early sources. It is also reported that verse 10 of surah al-Mumtahina, chapter 60, was revealed upon this incident. Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/110-112; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/244-245; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/640; Bukhārī, *maghāzī*, (64)35, *shurut*, (54)1, 15.

<sup>785</sup> It is narrated that the whole journey took 1.5 months. Sources clearly indicate that, after staying 19 or 20 days at Hdaybiya, this chapter was revealed on the way back to Medina. There are some companions' declarations, such as Abū Bakr and Umar, that Hdaybiya was a clear victory and this chapter of the Qur'an was revealed about Hdaybiya. Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/101-106; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/239-241; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II/94, 99-100; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/638; Bukhārī, *maghāzī*, (64)35, *tafsīr*, (65)48; Muslim, *al-jihad wa al-siyar*, 34. Based on the Prophet's *hadīth* about Hdaybiya, Imam Zuhri states "In Islam there was no previous victory greater than Hdaybiya." Ibn Hisham, who narrates Zuhri's statement, provides evidence for that as follow: Whereas the Prophet set out for Hdaybiya with 1400 people, he was followed two years later, in the conquest of Mecca by ten thousand (Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III, 241; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II, 638).

<sup>786</sup> Furrukh b. Ali uses this method.

the most important sources of Islam, and the first most reliable source of the *hadith* literature, *Sahih al-Bukhārī*'s narration of the story several times in different places, provides another significant proof of Gülen's attention to detail in regard to the event.

Gülen generally prefers not to describe events in detail. In my opinion, Gülen's approach is one of the most significant aspects that distinguishes him from many other *sīrah* scholars. He portrays the essence of the matter in general terms and deduces essential disciplines from there, because he accepts *sīrah* as a necessary source for the Muslims' world of thoughts. Therefore, due to his acceptance of *sīrah* as a reference or guide to present to people, and as a source for solutions to their problems, putting this aspect of *sīrah* at the forefront displays his preference for a guiding axis of narration method. I will explain in the next section of this chapter what I mean by this statement.

Gülen does not attempt to write solely a biography of the Prophet. Therefore, his work does not deal with the Prophet's life in chronological order. As a consequence of this, Hudaibiya has been mentioned in two places, from different angles, in order to explain his *fatānah*. First, under the title, "The Prophet's Military Dimension," where he deals with the reasons for the journey to Hudaibiya, and secondly, under the title, "The Prophet's Uniqueness in Regard to Solving Problems," he narrates what happened during Hudaibiya and its outcomes.

From a source critical perspective, it is noteworthy that Gülen does not ignore some modern data. The location of Hudaibiya, being 50-60 kilometres from Mecca and 400 kilometres to Medina, could be used as an example. Although, in original sources, this type of information is mentioned in classical Arabian units or measurements, Gülen alludes to this information with modern day units or measurements. On the other hand, many *sīrah* scholars prefer to use the first approach, and this makes it a challenge for contemporary readers to interpret. Obviously, this brings some problems and causes a lack of proper understanding of the facts.

#### **6.4 Analytic Examination/Evaluation**

In this section, Gülen's comments concerning the Hudaibiya peace treaty will be examined under two main headings. In this way, I will attempt to establish what Gülen means by the philosophy of *sīrah*, and how he has used this. In the first part, the reasons for going to Hudaibiya according to Gülen will be looked at, while in the second part I will discuss what he believes Hudaibiya achieved. Gülen does not limit himself to just relaying the incidents, but he also takes into account the psychological and socio-economic circumstances and the conditions of the day. He has followed a different route from that of many *sīrah* writers by

reading the underlying reasons of topics, to understand the philosophy behind the actions of the Prophet by the way he behaved, and as a result adapt it to the present day.

#### **6.4.1 The Reasons for the Journey to Hudaibiya**

Even if the purpose of the journey to Hudaibiya was fundamentally stated as being *umrah*, scholars who have evaluated this, based on available information from different periods, have looked at it from different angles. Some have deemed it more appropriate to say the Muslims travelled for *umrah* since they could not battle against the more powerful Mecca. It is doubtful that such a trip would be undertaken due only to a dream and, therefore, the real purpose was political.<sup>787</sup> According to another view, the best way to eliminate the threat of attack from the south by the Quraysh, while faced with the threat of the Haybar from the north, was to reach an agreement with Mecca. For this reason the journey was undertaken with the purpose of *umrah*, and an agreement was sought with Mecca.<sup>788</sup> Hamīdullah further emphasises that the Prophet made a serious attempt to prevent lives being lost in vain as his military strength increased, and shows statistical evidence for this. The emphasis on this matter prior to Hudaibiya strengthens the argument that this trip was also for peace.<sup>789</sup>

As for Gülen, he believes there are many reasons for the Prophet's voyage to Hudaibiya. He lists and explains some of these as follows.

##### **6.4.1.1 To Allay the Longing for the Homeland**

Gülen's theory as to the main reason for undertaking the voyage to Mecca differs from that of many Western and Muslim writers. He believes the primary reason is to relieve the hope and longing of the exiled Meccan refugees who came to Medina, to visit the Ka'bah, which they could not forget. Despite the fact that six years had passed since their migration, Muslims had had not a single opportunity to go to Mecca. The Ka'bah was the first building built by Adam, and it was the Holy House, repaired and left to them by their ancestor Abraham. Despite the fact that it was an important place for all Arabs, and trips were made there every year at a certain time, the Muslims were forbidden from entering and worshipping there. The Ka'bah

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<sup>787</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 47.

<sup>788</sup> Hamīdullah, *Islam Peygamberi*, 212-213.

<sup>789</sup> *Ibid*, 211. Hamīdullah presents another proof for this opinion that Hudaibiya was a road to peace: As a result of the agreement, one year later after arriving for *umrah*, the Meccans left their homes and settled on the mountains. If the Prophet were unjust, an invader or a militant like a commander, he would not have given Mecca back and would have attacked them. Furthermore, when the Muslims arrived the following year, they were stronger and the Quraysh had left everything and went. However, the Prophet came to win hearts and change harmful customs and traditions (*ibid*, 221).



gained a new meaning with the coming of Islam and the changing of the direction of the *qiblah*.<sup>790</sup>

At first sight, Gülen's view may seem secondary among the other factors, but the longing for Mecca, which was increasingly being discussed among the companions of the Prophet, was an important influence. As also stated above, the Ka'bah has a very important role here, but is not the only reason. That is because many of the immigrants were also missing the arid climate of Mecca, in contrast to the humid and muggy climate of Medina, and even the closest friends of the Prophet were no longer hiding these desires. Two important examples of this are the remonstrations of Abū Bakr and Bilal.<sup>791</sup> Gülen's thoughts on this matter suggest he is not just a narrator of this subject, but a keen observer researching into the different dimensions of the events. Further, Gülen does not evaluate the anecdotes as a dogmatic text, but as data emphasising the importance of human factors. I believe many *sīrah* writers have ignored this approach, however, a similar approach can be seen in Shiblī.<sup>792</sup> That Gülen and Shiblī have undertaken psychological analyses from the accounts in the sources, and scripted events in ways that readers can recreate in their minds, is a product of modern era *sīrah* writings. As a result, through departing from a static narrative, carrying out analyses and presenting the historical and psychological background, they have prepared a basis for a better understanding of the Hdaybiya incident.

#### **6.4.1.2 Returning Worship (*Umrah*) to its Original Format**

Gülen outlines that another reason for undertaking the journey is to teach the correct form of the circumambulation of the Ka'bah and *umrah*. According to sources, the Ka'bah had been filled with idols, and bizarre behaviour that was difficult to understand had replaced the circumambulation. People of the age of ignorance (*jāhiliyya*) were whistling and clapping their hands instead of circumambulating the Ka'bah.<sup>793</sup> In particular at night, women removed all of their clothing because they believed the Ka'bah should not be circumambulated while wearing sinful clothes.<sup>794</sup> According to Gülen, it was during such a period, when men and women were enacting such an incomprehensible ceremony, that the Prophet went on a journey with the aim of showing how to correctly circumambulate the Ka'bah.

Despite the fact that this view corresponds with the argument in almost all studies, which state the purpose of the voyage as being *umrah*, the difference is clear between saying the sole

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<sup>790</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/323-325.

<sup>791</sup> Bukhārī, *manāqib al-ansār*, 46.

<sup>792</sup> Shiblī, *Sirat al-Nabi*, 283.

<sup>793</sup> Qur'an 8:35.

<sup>794</sup> Muslim, *tafsīr*, 25; Nasaī, *manāsīq*, 161.

purpose was *umrah* and pointing out that the purpose was to teach how *umrah* should be performed. In this respect, Gülen sees the matter not just as an Arab tradition, but as teaching the format of one of the most fundamental principles of religion and the message of the Prophet. At the same time, restoring worship that has been distorted back to its original format also corresponds with the missions of prophets. In highlighting this fact, Gülen is again different from other *sīrah* writers. With this emphasis, he claims that Islam was just a local Arab religion<sup>795</sup> were refuted, and it was underlined that *umrah* was not just an Arab tradition but, beyond that, it has a systematic form of worship with spiritual and divine origins based on Islamic principles.

#### **6.4.1.3 To show the Ka’bah is not the Monopoly of the Quraysh**

In this voyage embarked upon by the Prophet to undertake *umrah*, he wanted to show, at the same time, that it was not just the Meccans or Quraysh who had rights over the Ka’bah, but everyone had those rights. Gülen underlines the fact that the Prophet and his companions, who were returning the Ka’bah to its glory, had more rights than anyone else.<sup>796</sup> Muhammad Gazzali, who considered this journey to be a separate turning point in the history of the call to Islam, discusses this matter in a similar way. He considers this journey in the context of the rights of the Muslims to worship in this accepted and acknowledged place, and showing that the Masjid al-Haram (Ka’bah) does not just belong to the polytheists, so they could not bar anyone from it.<sup>797</sup> As can be seen, in these analyses it is more what is left unsaid that is brought to our attention than what has been said. Further, if the matter is evaluated in connection with the establishment of an identity for the first Muslims, who experienced the process of the creation of the religion, then it will be understood more clearly.

#### **6.4.1.4 To Present his Companions as those who have Achieved a Certain Consistency**

Gülen’s approach, where he states that one of the reasons the Prophet journeyed to Hudaibiya was to present his companions, is another novel argument, which I was unable to find in other sources. This was such a consistent and unified group of people, given the conditions of that era, that they did not even cause a nosebleed to anyone in the areas they passed through, nor did they trespass or pillage anyone’s land. According to Gülen this, at the same time, shows the ideology and faith they possessed, which is reflected in the following impression they

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<sup>795</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 47-48.

<sup>796</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/325.

<sup>797</sup> Ghazzālī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2006), 325.

gave to others: “We have not seen these types of people on earth until now. These can only be angels.”<sup>798</sup>

After having read and evaluated this topic thoroughly, and from a 21<sup>st</sup> century standpoint, this is, in fact, the conclusion reached. As well as conveying a message and presenting a purpose to modern day man, it is also a good example in terms of understanding events from the viewpoint of *sīrah* philosophy. The fact is that a community, which has reached a certain stability, and which is loyal to its own values, mixes with others and establishes a basis where it can meet with them and show them its true identity, presenting both sides with the opportunity to understand each other better, and expressing themselves better. Gülen emphasises the same approach in terms of the results of Hudaibiya and its reflections on the modern day.<sup>799</sup> People who present such confidence and security have come from Medina to Mecca, having passed through many residential areas, and met and spoken to various different communities. Their demeanour had had an important influence on the people they met, and within a short period (2-3 years) they had all come and joined the Muslims.<sup>800</sup>

Due to this argument, and his emphasis in a variety of different places, the “quality of representation,” *tamthīl*, is another factor that establishes the basis of Gülen’s commentary. That is to say, according to Gülen, demeanour, behaviour and actions, as well as words, have an important effect on presenting a message correctly. On the other hand, in Lammens’ view, the reason for the Prophet coming to Hudaibiya was that he believed himself to be in control of the situation, and “wanted to exhibit a military might/vanity.”<sup>801</sup> I believe Lammens’ view stems from being on the outside looking in, and attempting to read it as an observer. Thus, it is almost impossible to justify his comment in relation to this treaty. However, Gülen’s evaluation, by expressing the principle of *tamthīl* in Islam and the Prophet’s life, dispels the view that he desired to “show off,” as such actions were not in keeping with the behaviour or mission of the Prophet throughout his life.

As a result, Gülen believes the only thing considered by God’s Messenger at Hudaibiya, which was not achieved, was *umrah*, but this happened a year later.<sup>802</sup> In comparison to the other sources where the sole purpose of the journey was stated as *umrah*, Gülen states different reasons, claiming that the Prophet achieved all of his objectives, and he attributed this success to divine sanctions and inspiration.

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<sup>798</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/326.

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid*, II/166-167.

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid*, II/328-329.

<sup>801</sup> Lammens, “Hudeybiye,” 578.

<sup>802</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/328.

## 6.4.2 Results of Hudaibiya and its Relevance Today

The results of the Treaty of Hudaibiya, according to Gülen, and in particular its application to the modern era, is the ultimate and most important part of this study. As previously stated, Gülen presents *sīrah* as a discipline that possesses clues to the solutions of the problems of all mankind until the Day of Judgment, and is an indispensable resource for believers. I will discuss in this section how Gülen saw *sīrah* and the conclusions he drew from it concerning modern day man and his problems. In this way, I will attempt to understand what he means by the philosophy of *sīrah* from the example of Hudaibiya.

### 6.4.2.1 Results of Hudaibiya

Gülen states, before beginning to explain the results of Hudaibiya and its effects, that he has described the incident in detail. He gives the reason for this as being to introduce his explanations concerning the results of Hudaibiya and its consequences. As has been discussed in detail above, Gülen states he has described the matter at length, despite having apparently ignored many details in the process. This strengthens my opinion that he has undertaken a *sīrah* reading, which did not take any interest in the details of the first section. However, Gülen stresses that what needs to be acknowledged in particular at Hudaibiya is the outcome and its consequences. As a result, Gülen claims that the peace treaty that was agreed had the following repercussions:

#### 6.4.2.1.1 People Embraced Islam

In the process that initiated peace, among many others, several pioneer leaders of the Quraysh, such as Khalid ibn Walid, Amr Ibn As and Uthman Ibn Talha, became Muslims. All of these individuals were military and political masterminds.<sup>803</sup> Gülen says it would have been difficult for them to turn to Islam as a result of battle or to have been converted by force; their pride would have been hurt. They found the opportunity to think in the moderate and peaceful period at Hudaibiya and as a result chose to turn to Islam. The first impact was that the Muslims suffered and were aggrieved during the treaty of Hudaibiya, but then the following year they returned to undertake *umrah* in a sacrosanct and unprecedented way. In short, the demeanour and desire of the companions of the Prophet were significant factors in their decision.<sup>804</sup>

Even though in general the sources say that important individuals became Muslims in Mecca after Hudaibiya, Gülen offers an original explanation regarding this matter. His view is a sort

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<sup>803</sup> Shiblī, *Sīrat*, 291.

<sup>804</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/164-165.

of summarised evaluation of Nursi's insight that the dialogue between the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula after the Hudaibiya treaty gained strength, and swords were put back in their sheaths and replaced by the truths of the Qur'an reaching people, and conquering their hearts and minds. Further, Gülen's explanation recalls the question asked of Nursi about the reason for the defeat, which began at the beginning of the battle of Hunayn and at the end of the battle of Uhud, and his response of protecting the honour of the companions of the future and their victory over the companions of the present.<sup>805</sup> The protection of the honour of people is an important discipline in Islam and this was exercised in Hudaibiya. As a final point, Gülen also relates that the Prophet did not exclude anyone and followed a distinct policy of winning over the hearts of everyone.

#### **6.4.2.1.2 The Ka'bah Cannot be Monopolised**

Until that day, the Quraysh considered themselves superior and were saying the Ka'bah belonged only to them. They were collecting taxes from everyone before allowing them to enter the Ka'bah. However, there was no such condition put forward at the Treaty of Hudaibiya and it was officially acknowledged that the Ka'bah was not under the control solely of the Quraysh. Gülen states that this was a great mistake or oversight by the Quraysh and adds that, when the Muslims circumambulated the Ka'bah the following year without paying any taxes, the tribes woke up to this fact and the idea that the Quraysh were not the sole owners of the Ka'bah began to be established. As the incident occurred in this way, the other tribes also found the opportunity to visit the Ka'bah without having to pay any taxes.<sup>806</sup> Muhammad Gazzali and Huseyn Haykal express the same opinion.<sup>807</sup> It was thus acknowledged that it was not only the Quraysh that had rights over the Ka'bah, but all of mankind.

#### **6.4.2.1.3 Hizmet (Service to Humanity) can only be Provided in an Atmosphere of Peace**

With this peace there was a guarantee there would be no danger from the Quraysh for ten years. This period of time is very important, because during this period ambassadors and teams of religious guides/advisors were sent to various places. Gülen says this meant the message of Islam would reach the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. This is also the period when Muslims made great strides in terms of quantity and quality.<sup>808</sup> This fact shows that Gülen uses what sometimes seems like a small detail in sentences contained in the sources to

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<sup>805</sup> Nursi, *Lem'alar* (Istanbul: Sahdamar Pub., 2007), 37-38.

<sup>806</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/165-166.

<sup>807</sup> Ghazzālī, *Fiqh al-Sirah*, 325; Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *Hayat Muhammad* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Asriyya, 2009), 309.

<sup>808</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/166.

formulate an event, and therefore obtain a general principle and a discipline from the *sīrah*. Zuhri's view was that Hudaibiya was a real conquest or victory and within two years, with the winning over of their hearts, many more people had become Muslims.<sup>809</sup> However, Gülen has taken this detail and turned it into a practical discipline. In this way, he carries out the philosophy of *sīrah* and extends and applies it to today. I will discuss this in more detail in section 5.4.2.2.

#### 6.4.2.1.4 They Discovered Islam Through Peace

It was Gülen's belief that the Treaty of Hudaibiya provided the opportunity for two communities (Mecca and Medina), which previously had no contact with each other, to establish contact and communication. The only previous meetings between the sides had been on battlefields, and it is very difficult to explain your views to the other side, or to sit down and talk, whilst in the psychology of war. Until that day, there were people who did not know what was going on in Medina, and even more believed the lies and slurs that were being spoken, thus reinforcing division. After the agreement, they had the chance to find out about life in Medina, learning that, contrary to what they had heard, there was peace, harmony and unity. In this way, the Muslims found the opportunity to deliver their message to everyone, and the Quraysh and other tribes were able to discover their true identity.<sup>810</sup>

Shiblī also points out that the opportunity for people to meet freely led to them being able to convey their own thoughts and feelings to each other. However, he links this to the words of Zuhri, and is content to claim that, as a result, there was no man of sense or judgment among the idolaters who thereby joined Islam. He was content to state, in the two years that followed, as many people entered Islam as belonged to it altogether before, or an even greater number. According to him, the number of companions travelling to Hudaibiya was 1400 people, and this number increased to ten thousand in just two years with the conquest of Mecca.<sup>811</sup> Gülen also says the same thing, but he takes the matter even further and introduces the key role of dialogue. In this way, he addresses modern people using a clue obtained from *sīrah*, and creates another principle for them. The way the people from the Hizmet Movement, of which Gülen is a source of inspiration, behave towards people from different cultures and beliefs, by taking those people to Turkey or other supportive places around the globe, to show their real nature, is similar to the ideas obtained from *sīrah* and results of Hudaibiya. In this way, people have the opportunity to see the activities carried out on location and observe them in

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<sup>809</sup> Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, II/101-106; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, III/241; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, II/99-100; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, II/638.

<sup>810</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/166-167.

<sup>811</sup> Shiblī, *Sīrat*, 290-291, 394.

person rather than through hearsay, and understand and get to know Muslims' true identity by talking and having discussions. This method, which has been described as dialogue activities, is also discussed in more detail in the section on Hudaibiya's application to today.

#### **6.4.2.1.5 Islam and the State of Medina Moved Towards Official Recognition**

Due to this peace, all the people and tribes started to accept that the Prophet and the state he represented could be trusted to enter into contracts and agreements with others. Just as in current times, states that have just been formed or declared independent become legitimate when other states recognise them. Once the Quraysh recognised them by executing a contract with them, the Taif and the other tribes would also do so.<sup>812</sup> This fact that Gülen underlined as being one of the outcomes of Hudaibiya can be found in many sources.<sup>813</sup> According to Lammens, the stance of the Prophet during the discussions on peace forced the Quraysh oligarchy into treating him as an equal (under equal conditions with them), and this resulted in the Muslims being acknowledged as a great force in the whole of the Arab peninsula.<sup>814</sup>

#### **6.4.2.1.6 God was Behind the Prophet**

What separates Gülen from other *sīrah* writers, and in my opinion, distinguishes his interpretation of *sīrah* readings, is that he explains matters using the concept of *fatānah*, “the Prophets' clarity of mind and intellect” which is one of the attributes and characteristics of prophethood. While many Western and Muslim writers<sup>815</sup> acknowledge the success of the Prophet at Hudaibiya, they tie the outcome to his being a far-sighted statesman, and his pursuing policies in accordance with this governorship. Gülen also acknowledges the Prophet was far-sighted, but considers that to be a part of his nature, whilst associating the intellect (*fatānah*) with being supported by divine inspiration. Therefore, he chooses a method that is theological and explains the incident based on a fundamental principle against this theological background, rather than attempting to give any other explanation, such as rational explanations or connecting it with the experiences of the Prophet. Gülen perceives the *fatānah* as the logic of the Prophet, and, in any event, sees the decisions taken by the Prophet as absolutely correct, most ideal and incisive. While he perceives this as *wahy gayr matluw* (unrecited revelation), he also declares it to be a requirement of his nature and the outcome of

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<sup>812</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/167-168.

<sup>813</sup> Hamīdullah, “Hudeybiye,” 297; Haykal, *Hayat Muhammad*, 309.

<sup>814</sup> Lammens, “Hudeybiye,” 579.

<sup>815</sup> Watt, Lammens, Muhammad Hamīdullah, Husayn Haykal and Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan have this general approach.

his *fatānah*.<sup>816</sup> Therefore, Gülen shapes his explanations according to the wisest decisions of the Prophet and does not see the need to look for alternatives.

That is why there are no theories or assumptions of “if this had happened that would have happened” where Gülen is concerned. He reads incidents in a prophet-centric way, because there is a prophet who is in control of all aspects of the events. Gülen does not just share an anecdote with what he is relaying; he attempts to explain how the duties of prophethood are being carried out. He states that the instantaneous decision the Prophet made about peace in Hudaibiya, despite being subject to the toughest of conditions, with the expectations of so many companions and the coercion of polytheists, is a result of the characteristics I have listed above. That is to say, Gülen links the outcome to the fact the Prophet possessed *fatānah* at the ultimate level and with divine support. Thus, all of these provide separate proof that he is the Prophet of God. The following unequivocal statement by Gülen signals this opinion very clearly:

The Prophet of God was a remarkable person that could obtain such victories from the agreement which he signed under the heaviest of conditions, such as Hudaibiya. In an environment where he had been forced to make a decision without having any time to think, he was able to prepare the ground for such a victory. This is without doubt something that exceeds the limits of human thought, and something that we can in fact deem to be a miracle; and that is the most fundamental evidence that he is a Prophet. No human, no matter how much of a genius, can bring about such a victory from a situation that seems like such a heavy defeat. This is because this achievement needs a power that is beyond man; beyond any will and any knowledge. Yes, when we look at the problems he has solved, it is impossible not to see the Eternal Might which rules the whole of creation behind it...<sup>817</sup>

The fact that the Prophet of God could see the future as if it was today, or indeed even as if it was the palm of his hand, was something that was a quality of his. That is the great lesson we take from Hudaibiya. The Prophet of God has put forward such new codes and principles that, despite the aging and changing of time, these principles stay always fresh, and even get younger still.<sup>818</sup>

When from time to time Gülen is asked the reasons for the success of the movement he has led, he cites insistently the help of God, and that too is important from this angle.

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<sup>816</sup> Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 134; Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/168-169.

<sup>817</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/168.

<sup>818</sup> *Ibid*, II/173.



### 6.4.2.2 Hodaybiya's Influence or Reflection on Today

Gülen regarded *sīrah* as an essential source that must be used to obtain clues and solutions to the problems of humankind in every era. In this section I will present the messages he applies from the peace at Hodaybiya to the situations and problems that contemporary people face, and how, in practice, he implements these. I argue that Gülen's intention regarding the philosophy of *sīrah* was to begin with the incidents that occurred then and there, and to pass on the quintessence of the sweeping codes, incidents, motives, background and matters, for application in every era. Another important factor that separates Gülen from other *sīrah* writers and adds dynamism to *sīrah* is, I believe, hidden in the fact that he possesses such a unique approach to *sīrah*. As far as I can see, Gülen emphasises that the Treaty of Hodaybiya gives the following lessons to modern man, from the perspective of *sīrah* philosophy.

#### 6.4.2.2.1 Peace and Tolerance

As was previously mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, when peace is referred to in the history of Islam, one of the first things that springs to mind is the Hodaybiya treaty. I mentioned that Wahiduddin Khan also identifies that the secret behind the success of the Prophet is that he was in favour of peace and pursued a policy of peace. Gülen states that one of the biggest lessons to be learnt from Hodaybiya, with regard to *sīrah* philosophy, is that the Prophet showed himself to be in favour of peace and tolerance. He states that modern day man should, when faced with incidents that can make one irritated and angry, be calm just as the Prophet was at Hodaybiya, and deal with the matter resolutely. He reminds us that the real problem is not to obtain something by using weapons or force, but by winning over hearts and minds, and using *jihad* to instil faith and patience. He underlines the fact that *jihad* using a weapon is only *jihad* in the second or third degree, and it would be more appropriate to acknowledge the real *jihad* in the life of the Prophet in this way.<sup>819</sup> Gülen says Hodaybiya teaches this lesson to believers, and reminds them that this has been overlooked. This type of approach to *sīrah* separates Gülen from extremist and marginal groups. Gülen states the real objective of the Prophet from the beginning was to win over the hearts of people through peace, without spilling blood.<sup>820</sup> However, due to the aggression and force used by Mecca in earlier times, this was overlooked and he was forced to take a defensive position. However, once the Hodaybiya treaty was in place, the Prophet was able to achieve his objective of obtaining military and political power, resulting in the conquest of the Ka'bah in a way befitting its holiness, without using any military source or shedding blood.

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<sup>819</sup> Gülen, *Hitap Cicekleri* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Pub., 1974), 103.

<sup>820</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

Gülen considered the incidents from a broader perspective and aimed to understand the real objectives of the Prophet; he concluded these objectives were to circumambulate the Ka'bah, and, what he claims to be even more important than the conquest of Mecca, the conquest of hearts and minds with a peace-loving policy.<sup>821</sup> While the heart of the matter is included in original early sources on *sīrah* – such as the companions and individuals such as Zuhri, to whom I have referred several times above – and can be founded on certain verses,<sup>822</sup> Gülen maintains that peace and the winning over of hearts is a fundamental objective in Islam, and armed struggle is of secondary or even tertiary importance. His evaluation of Hdaybiya in this way is an important example of how he sees incidents from the point of view of the philosophy of *sīrah*, and how he carries that through to the modern day. In short, at the head of the lessons Gülen takes from Hdaybiya for modern-day believers is:

An atmosphere of peace and dialogue is essential in order to understand others better, to show them the true identity of Islam in an environment of peace, to promote the real Muslim identity rather than that which has been relayed by its enemies, and to promote the image of Islam in its true sense and character. War or fighting is a state where people are angry and where the mind and logic are replaced by emotions. It is not possible to talk and reach agreement while in such a state of mind. That is why, even if many misinterpret it, according to reports coming from the companions themselves, the Qur'an has referred to the Hdaybiya Treaty together with what it promised in terms of the future, as a *fathan mubīna* (true evolvment or clear victory).<sup>823</sup>

#### 6.4.2.2.2 Dialogue and Multi-Culturalism

An important lesson Gülen takes for modern-day people from the Treaty of Hdaybiya is to have dialogue with people from different religions and cultures, and how this would happen. Dialogue is the most well-known and one of the most important activities for Gülen, and the movement for which he is a source of inspiration. These activities, which became a global trend after Gülen's visit to Pope John Paul II, have been highly criticised within the Muslim world, especially in Turkey. In face of these criticisms, Gülen insistently emphasises this is not something that was invented by him, but these were activities practised by the Prophet during his lifetime, and he gives the Hdaybiya incident, as well as other events, as examples of this.

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<sup>821</sup> Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 135.

<sup>822</sup> Such as Qur'an 4:128; 8:61, 1; 49:9.

<sup>823</sup> Selcuk Camci and Kudret Unal, *Hoşgörü ve Diyalog İklimi* (İzmir: Merkür Pub., 1998), 52.

Gülen states that this world has become globalised, where means of transport and communication have made it very small, and where people of different religions and cultures live side by side. If there is to be a relationship formed with these people, they must share a common understanding of the world and every matter must be thought out in-depth before acting.<sup>824</sup> It is clear that nothing positive can be done through being enemies, by fighting and continually taking opposing sides. In this respect human beings, who are by nature civilised creatures living in a world where the values of civilisation are important, at least as an ideal, can only solve their problems by engaging in discussion or dialogue. At the moment, Islam and Christianity are the two religions in the world with the largest number of followers. Buddhism and Hinduism also possess a large number, while Judaism may seem small in terms of its number of followers, but it is influential. Therefore, peace through dialogue needs first of all to address shared aspects of belief. According to Gülen, the Qur'an invited the followers of other religions to partake in dialogue fourteen centuries ago. However, due to the conditions and requirements of the time, the centuries that have passed between then and now have mostly involved fighting. From now on, however, there will be centuries where hearts and minds are won, or at least where we can all come together with mutual respect and love.

On this matter, Gülen underlines that a comparison between the period before Hudaibiya and the two years between Hudaibiya and the conquest of Mecca provides the necessary clues. Gülen reminds us that the Qur'an does not use the term victory for the conquest of Mecca, but for the Treaty of Hudaibiya. He emphasises that with Hudaibiya the doors to fighting closed and the door to hearts opened. He believes that real victory is this, not the taking of lands. It is with these feelings that Gülen considers meeting with the Pope and followers of other religions as quite natural.<sup>825</sup> If people from different cultures and beliefs meet each other face to face, that is when they will find the opportunity to get to know each other better, and free themselves of preconceptions and prejudice.<sup>826</sup> This is what was achieved with the Treaty of Hudaibiya, and Gülen believes it is clear that if we follow the same path today, with dialogue and being open to multi-culturalism, the same results will be achieved.

#### **6.4.2.2.3 Human Dignity**

Another message Gülen takes from Hudaibiya for modern man is that whoever it may be, a person is a sacred being created by God and he emphasises that he or she must be valued as such. Here he refers to the point that has already been stated above – that the Prophet

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<sup>824</sup> Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 135-136.

<sup>825</sup> Camcı, *Hoşgörü ve Diyalog İklimi*, 323-324.

<sup>826</sup> Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 137.

presented his message to the Quraysh through dialogue and tolerance, rather than with force and in a way that would humiliate them. He says it does not matter who it is, no relationship can ever be formed with people by using an approach of force to overpower them. On the contrary, he states: “a warm relationship can be formed with them through dialogue, tolerance, respect and accepting them as the perfect pattern of creation and reflections of the Creator in terms of their quality and nature.”<sup>827</sup> This is the reason for the Prophet’s choice of peace at Hdaybiya and his signing of the peace treaty.

Gülen states that the Treaty of Hdaybiya pointed to the true character of man and his potential. As stated in the Qur’an, and also emphasised by Nursi, it is a part of nature that man is created kind and good, and his true nature is to pursue good things. However, he sometimes does wrong, either not through his own choice or without realising it, and denies his true nature. Gülen underlines that he believes and certainly hopes, that human beings will revert to their true being and attain the level that nature demands. He says he trusts in this goodness and beauty, which is contained in the creation of man in spite of everything, and connects his worldwide activities to this potential.<sup>828</sup> This view is the outcome of his correct understanding of the whole message of Islam, and his acceptance of the Qur’an and the Prophet as an example. In particular, it is clear that this tendency to innate goodness seen in man from his creation is noticeable due to the lesson learned from the actions of the Prophet in making peace at Hdaybiya.

#### **6.4.2.2.4 Multiple Viewpoints**

Gülen believes another lesson to be taken from the Treaty of Hdaybiya by modern man is that viewing matters solely from your own point of view is wrong. The Muslims who had come to Hdaybiya for *umrah* were treated unjustly. The four or five ambassadors sent by the Quraysh were left unharmed, but the camel of one of the Muslim ambassadors had been killed, another Muslim had been taken hostage, and there had been many acts of incitement. As a result, the matter ended with the signing of an agreement that seemed disadvantageous to the Muslims.

If the matter is only considered from one point of view, the Muslims should have continued to advance to Mecca, even if it meant fighting. However, the Prophet looked from a wider perspective; he considered the opposition, saw the polytheists as the companions of the future, and decided to resolve the matter in this way, while at the same time opening the door to his

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<sup>827</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>828</sup> Camci, *Hoşgörü ve Diyalog İklimi*, 322.

followers to follow such a principle at all times. From this perspective, he brings the matter to modern man and acknowledges that, in an era where every community is very sensitive on certain matters such as their own language and culture, the best route to follow is to understand and know the person you are addressing. Only then should you act, having taken into account their general feelings, rather than just considering your own point of view. He states that those who ignore this and treat matters only from their own point of view will be mistaken.

Gülen then presents the following example, which clarifies the matter: “A person who does not take into account others in traffic, and only concentrates on driving his own vehicle, cannot be a good driver. Instead he should take into account those who will come in from both left and right, those coming from the opposite direction, and those who will keep changing lanes in a confused way, and sit at the steering wheel accordingly.”<sup>829</sup> As in this example, people can make many mistakes without being aware of it when they speak without thinking, or do not consider what kind of disrespect will be perceived in the mind of their addressees. However, as with the actions of the Prophet in Hdaybiya, actions taken after thinking through the consequences will always result in the correct outcome.

#### **6.4.2.2.5 Establishing Platforms where People can Correctly Express Themselves**

Gülen suggests another lesson that can be learnt from Hdaybiya by modern man, namely, the establishment of platforms where people can express themselves. I have already emphasised that Hdaybiya was an important turning point in terms of peace and dialogue activities. Gülen advises those who follow him to bring to today what the Muslims brought to Hdaybiya yesterday, and seek the path of peace, irrespective of what religion they follow. As a step towards this, he says that non-governmental organisations can undertake agreements similar to the Treaty of Hdaybiya. In this way, they will be able to isolate the problems and preconceptions they are faced with, and find the opportunity to express themselves more correctly.

According to Gülen, for people to trust each other, they need to know the internal worlds of others, what is in their hearts, and develop a close understanding of each other. In this respect, it is important to create platforms to help people express themselves. As well as creating platforms to help better expression, Gülen also proposes that a comprehensive style be determined – or going further than that, he advises centres for discussion and dialogue could be established. He says in these centres people could be taught “how to establish dialogue and

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<sup>829</sup> Gülen, *Yenilenme Cehdi*, 136-137.

talk with people who possess a different culture and different belief, without causing a reaction and attracting criticism.”<sup>830</sup> According to Gülen, Muslims possess two expansive sources –the Qur’an and *sunnah* (words, deeds and tacit approval of the Prophet) – that can provide a solution to the problems of every era, but they need a shared language of expressing these to be able to present them to children from different cultures in the most appropriate way.

Gülen also states that one of the biggest problems faced by contemporary Muslims is their inability to explain the values they believe in correctly and in a comprehensive manner, thus demonstrating that he has used *sīrah* for the purposes of self-criticism. He addresses Muslims on behalf of the movement he leads in this way, touches upon problems which are valid and essential for every Muslim, and questions and criticises through *sīrah*. His emphasis on the error of viewing matters solely from one’s own point of view, can, in my opinion, be evaluated as self-criticism and self-examination.

#### **6.4.2.2.6 Consultation and Women’s Rights**

Another important point that Gülen discusses in relation to Hudaibiya, and its relevance to contemporary matters, is the particular case of consultation and the hotly debated topic of women’s rights. He does not deal with the issues of ending of the state of *ihrām* and the process of the Prophet’s consultation with his wife under the topic of Hudaibiya. Rather, he deals with these issues under the topic of the Prophet as an educator, husband and father in specific sub-headings. Gülen underlines the Prophet’s habit of discussing matters with his wives as friends, even though he did not need their advice, since he was directed by revelation.<sup>831</sup> On this matter, he adds:

However, he wanted to teach his nation that Muslim men were to give women every consideration. This was a quite radical idea in his time, as it is today in many parts of the world. He began teaching his people through his own relationship with his wives...Therefore, in doing this he was showing an important social lesson to humankind that there is nothing wrong with consulting women regarding important matters or on any matters at all.<sup>832</sup>

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<sup>830</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>831</sup> Gülen, who articulates this thought on a foundation of *kalām*, states that Umm Salama was also fully aware that the Prophet did not need her advice, since he was directed by revelation, but she gave her advice to fulfil the requirement for the consultation.

<sup>832</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, II/29.

One of Gülen's differences in *sīrah* writings is how he relates the events and the era of the Prophet to the present day. Gülen's following investigation and critique can be accepted as a clear example of this subject. He raises and develops this conversation as follows:

I cannot help but ask: How many of us are able to act as courteously as the Prophet towards women? How many rulers or governors consult their wives when they face critical decisions? How many people as homeowners give place to consultation on family issues with their wives? It is possible to extend these types of questions to all areas of our social life. It is important to direct and show this evidence to people who accuse Islam of imprisoning women! It should also be questioned how many feminists' intellectual capacity reached that level! So, counsel and consultation, like many good deeds, were practised by God's Messenger, first within his own family and then in the wider community. Even today, we understand so little about his relationships with his wives that it is as if we are wandering aimlessly around a plot of land, unaware of the vast treasure buried below our feet. Women are secondary beings in the minds of many, including those self-appointed defenders of women's rights, as well as many self-proclaimed Muslim men. For us, women are part of a whole, the part that renders the other half useful. We believe that when the two halves come together, the true unity of a human being appears. When this unity does not exist – nor can prophethood, sainthood, or even Islam.<sup>833</sup>

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the Treaty of Hudaibiya, which is referred to in the Qur'an as a *fath al-mubīn* (manifest victory) and *nasr al-azīz* (a glorious help), is analysed from the perspective of Gülen's "*sīrah* philosophy" together with events that took place before and after it. This treaty can be viewed as a crucial turning point in Islamic history and a concrete example, a clear manifestation and practice of the Prophet Muhammad, to demonstrate he was on the side of peace and reconciliation throughout his entire life.

The events that unfolded at Hudaibiya are solely sufficient to prove the notion "Peace is inherent within goodness and goodness is inherent within peace"<sup>834</sup> and is deeply entrenched in Islam. Resolving conflict through such means clearly validates Islam as a religion of peace, and war is only ever the second choice. If all narrations are taken into consideration, there are more than 20 occasions when the Prophet responded robustly, eased the companions' anxiety and either implied or declared verbally that he is on the side of peace,<sup>835</sup> despite all the

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<sup>833</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>834</sup> Gülen uses this based on the Qur'an 4:128.

<sup>835</sup> According to my approximation, the pledge to fight to the death took the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> rank out of these 20 occasions. It is logical in such circumstances to behave as such, since the situation had reached a stage where

negative, seditious, provocative and rebuffing attempts of the Quraysh. As a man of action and *fatānah*, and being supported by divine revelation, the Prophet took all necessary precautions, considered all probabilities and acted accordingly. Despite facing very tough conditions, one after another, he insisted on using the language of diplomacy as a tool. This enabled him to make immediate, peaceful decisions that opened the doors for the conquest of Mecca, which was a reward for the strategy of winning over the hearts, rather than resorting to military force. In this regard, it would more likely be true to regard Hudaibiya as a starting point for true progress or future indubitable victory, rather than just a 45-day expedition. So, according to Gülen, this is not merely a diplomatic achievement or victory for the far-sighted statesman, rather it is a triumph for the Prophet, who has divine support, in winning over the hearts of others. His aim in examining Hudaibiya and its results in this way, is an attempt to understand the motives and secrets behind the Prophet's great success (i.e. the conquest of Mecca without any bloodshed), and to identify and idealise the cornerstones of his main philosophy. As a result, on account of Hudaibiya, the following conclusions can be drawn: In Islam and the practice of the Prophet, solving problems through diplomacy with peace and reconciliation, and adopting positive attitudes instead of giving room for possible armed conflicts, is essential. Thus, winning over the hearts of people is the ultimate goal, so dialogue takes precedence over bloodshed and military power.

Another important conclusion that could be derived from Gülen's comments on Hudaibiya relates to the notion of *sīrah* philosophy. Every event that has taken place during the time of the Prophet has left hints as to how problems, which might be experienced in the future (until the Day of Judgment), can be solved. Based on this approach, Gülen does not read this incident as a historical anecdote, but rather perceives *sīrah* as a dynamic source that includes multiple messages and is one of the main clues to solving contemporary problems. As Gülen states, "both *sīrah* and the current era must be read and understood well" as a prerequisite to developing a *sīrah* philosophy. As a result of my examination, I have found evidence that he quite successfully implements this in the case of Hudaibiya. Gülen points out that during the incident of Hudaibiya many methods of engagement, such as dialogue, multi-culturalism, globalisation, diversity, human dignity, respect etc., were employed to achieve the establishment of an agreement, and that this contains a significant message for modern-day man. Gülen's understanding of the discipline of *sīrah* and its writing clearly shows his belief that "the *sīrah* philosophy should be practised." In examining Gülen's understanding of *sīrah* philosophy, and specifically at the case of Hudaibiya, this chapter hints at the *sīrah*

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tolerance could only be counter-productive. It was also a clear indication that the Quraysh had closed all doors for negotiation by treating the envoy in such a manner.



dynamism, as well as the solutions to the needs of each era. It also allows observations on how Gülen is able to reconcile and associate the ‘age of happiness’ and the contemporary era, providing an opportunity to observe the exhibited intellectual capacity, code and sources of Gülen, although from a narrow viewpoint.

Gülen makes an analysis of *sīrah* based on necessities. By first identifying the relevant example of *sīrah* from the age of the Prophet, and then by interpreting the contemporary issues of our time, Gülen is able to find solutions in a coherent manner, appropriate to the issues of the current time. In this way, he is able to deduce methods exclusive to himself, thus avoiding repetition of ongoing, centuries-old debates, and successfully pick the *sīrah* path required for the contemporary individual, to enlighten their path through its innate pragmatism. In one respect, this is deductive evaluation of *sīrah*. With regard to reaching the core of the matter and its central tenets, namely *sīrah* philosophy, he abstains from lingering on the peripheral details of *sīrah*. Instead, he endeavours to understand the wisdom behind the Prophet’s actions, attitudes and manners, identifying the key elements of the message. In this way, he takes away the general disciplines and principles and makes him something more than a historical resource, addressing a broader base relevant to every age. The fundamental basis for this approach may be that he was among the common people, evaluating the common folk with questions and answers, lectures and a sermon culture. Thus, he was able to diagnose the problems of people based on his social experiences and his own instinct of people’s. This led to him providing practical solutions to their problems, relying on one of the two sources of his strength, *sīrah*. This can be defined as something we have heard of in the *tafsīr* discipline “*al-tafsīr al-wāqī‘ī*” (which is fact/reality-based exegesis or conjectural exegesis), but something we have not delved into in the *sīrah*, namely, “*al-sīrah al-wāqī‘īyya*,” reading *sīrah* based on current issues and realities.



## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Concluding Remarks

Prophet Muhammad possesses a central place in Islam as the person who received the revelation of God (the Qur'an), and for being the best model for human beings through his sayings, actions and tacit approvals (*sunnah*). As a result, his teachings, way of living, deeds, sayings, approvals and all details in relation to him were carefully followed, recorded when he was alive and transmitted with due sensitivity to become the subject of scholarly studies throughout the following fourteen centuries. In this respect, the *sīrah* genre deals independently with the Prophet's biography, together with all details and incidents that took place in his life, with its own style and methodology. *Sīrah* works were initiated by the companions and emerged while the Prophet was still alive. It continued to develop as an Islamic discipline and by the second century of *hijra*, had begun to settle into its final format in terms of sources, content and methodology. As a developed Islamic discipline with a structure formed in the early centuries of Islam, hundreds of works and narrations based on this established format have been produced. Works on the *sīrah* also appeared in the Western world, starting from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, if not before. Early works in the non-Muslim world, increasing in quantity especially during the mediaeval ages until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were based on superstitions and tales and portrayed the Prophet of Islam in a very negative light. However, a trend emerged in the Western world towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century where scholarly academic works claimed to be objective and impartial regarding the *sīrah* discipline.

Despite these developments, the mentality change and scientific advancements in the West, together with the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods as well as secularism, had significant impact on the Islamic world. Certain trends, like positivism and materialism, also affected ordinary Muslims and academics; thus, criticisms emerged in the Islamic world towards the essential beliefs and values of religion. Hence, the prime concern of Muslim scholars was to provide appropriate responses to the criticisms and problems that surfaced due to these newly emerging concepts. Similarly, sceptical and critical approaches appeared in *sīrah* works produced at this time, and serious widespread doubts emerged, not only denying the existence of God, but also seriously criticising issues relevant to the life of the Prophet and his message. One could argue that most of these problems were due to inappropriate approaches that did not suit the notion of prophethood and the place of prophets in Islam, including a view of them as "ordinary people." Consequently, as discussed in this study, Muslim scholars who were responding to these problems in the modern period argued that it

was not possible to provide solutions with classical philosophical approaches and methodologies. Thus, new methodologies arose in most Islamic disciplines.

Although the first and most prominent pursuit to revitalise various Islamic disciplines was in the exegesis of the Qur'an, the *kalām* discipline played a leading role in these attempts at renewal. Thus, the new period that started was called new *ilm al-kalām*. Significant emphasis on prophethood was the salient discussion of the scholars, such as Shiblī and Izmirli Ismail Hakki, who were pioneering figures of the modern period. Great efforts were also made to respond to questions and suspicions about Islam in general, and the Prophet of Islam and his life in particular, in works about *sīrah*, written by Western scholars or within the Islamic world influenced by the West. Shiblī, having a reputation among new *ilm al-kalām* scholars and a good reputation among modern *sīrah* writers, emphasised topics relevant to *kalām* due to similar concerns, and particularly discussions on prophethood. This close association of two disciplines, especially *kalām*-centric topics in *sīrah*, which I call *kalāmisation* of *sīrah*, attempted to remove and respond to doubts and questions raised about the notion of prophethood and criticisms about the life of the Prophet. On the other hand, the discussion on *sīrah*-related topics in *kalām* sources could be seen as an outcome of the above mentioned mentality change and movements that affected the Islamic world.

Due to same reasons, a similar pursuit for renewal in the *sīrah* genre and writings could be seen in the modern period. At this juncture, having witnessed an increase in the rhetoric and search for renewal and revival, and the negative toll on a large number of people's faith and creedal beliefs, the influential scholar Fethullah Gülen emerged. He used *sīrah* and *sīrah*-related topics in almost all of his sermons, talks and writings.

In this thesis, I have attempted to identify Gülen's approach to *sīrah*, how he perceived *sīrah* and I have questioned whether he contributed to *sīrah* writings in terms of methodology, approach, style and content, based on all of his available works, but in particular *Sonsuz Nur*.

First of all, topics related to *sīrah* of the Prophet are essentially covered in the following ways in Gülen's works: either the work is directly about *sīrah*, such as *Sonsuz Nur*, but from different angles or, in the context of discussions on prophethood, he focuses on *sīrah* as part of the God, universe, human being and prophethood relationship. In almost all of his works (including sermons and private conversations), sometimes in addressing direct questions or regarding a specific topic, he generally explains subject matters in the light of *sīrah* and based on the teachings of the Prophet. Close examination of these explanations from a holistic perspective indicates they fall essentially into *kalāmīc* and especially prophethood-founded

discussions. Gülen endeavours to explain such topics in relation to the notion of prophethood and prophets, their mission and position in these contexts, and in the personality and life of Prophet Muhammad. This is a logical and theoretically correct method to use, as the notion of prophethood and issues related to prophets are discussed in Islamic tradition. This is first and foremost a matter of Islamic theology, being one of the essentials of the Islamic creed (*usul al-thalatha*). On the other hand, in the context Gülen talks about and the period he lived in, problematic approaches and criticisms were strongly vocalised about religious matters, such as prophethood, the place of prophets and issues related to *sīrah*.

It may not be correct to assume that Gülen is one of the new *ilm al-kalām* scholars or, as a person motivated and moved by the rhetoric used by such scholars, it may not be accurate to regard him as an academic who deals with these issues due to similar concerns. It is also not appropriate to assume that one of the most influential scholars of the age became insusceptible to the negative developments that affected the belief of masses and resulted in serious faith problems. Gülen, whom I discovered generally took action and based his methodology on addressing problems arising from his time, thought that people developed an ideology regarding the office of prophethood and prophets, which was not in line with the correct understanding of *nubuwwa*, according to Islamic belief. This shows they did not accurately understand their life and place in religion. Hence, he attempted to correct this situation using well-founded arguments. In this regard, in some of his works, like *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, he evaluated the topic in terms of the place of prophethood in Islamic thought (argued in relation to the holistic perspective of God, universe, human being and prophethood), where in some works, like *Sonsuz Nur*, he placed the notion of prophethood and prophetic attributes at the centre of his *sīrah* readings, as he insistently discussed the matter in detail when he found the opportunity.

Gülen's approach towards prophethood and *sīrah* readings, and their close evaluations in his works and talks, encouraged me to examine the notion of prophethood in Islamic thought, its development in terms of the *kalām* discipline, and certain schools' approach towards *nubuwwa*. Thus, I endeavoured to elucidate how he perceived the notion and his essential arguments on this topic. In this sense, in theoretical Islamic understanding, *kalām* constitutes the foundation of *sīrah* and there is a strong connection between the two. On the other hand, this perception corresponds to the conspicuous scholarly tendency that emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which involved combining the viewpoint of different disciplines to have a more holistic Islamic understanding. In other words, it is in line with the approaches of scholars like Nursi, who considered issues from the perspective of *usul al-din*. This approach

is rooted in Abu Hanifa's method of evaluating all topics from a holistic perspective, in which all topics relevant to Islam fall into *kalām* discussions, known as *al-fiqh al-akbar*.

Based on these thoughts and considerations, after reviewing *sīrah* literature in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 analysed the *kalām* discipline and *kalām* schools as a theological foundation concerned with *sīrah* and prophethood in Islamic thinking. Prophethood takes the central and most important theme in the new *ilm al-kalām* period and *sīrah* works. Special attention is paid to the modern period and detailed analysis undertaken due to the revitalisation of the *kalām* discipline and *kalām-sīrah* rapprochements. Thus, in this chapter, after the approach of classical schools of thought to the notion of prophethood provided in general, I specifically focused on the revival and renewal ideas that appeared in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarly discourse, and attempted to clarify where and how Gülen stands in this picture, with particular emphasis on his views regarding prophethood and *sīrah*.

The notion of prophethood is essentially the bedrock of discussions and crux of many scholars' arguments in terms of *sīrah* and *kalām*, as is the case for Gülen and Shiblī, as I observed. This is because, especially when Western scholars talk about Islam in general, and about the *sīrah* and life of the Prophet in particular, their arguments were essentially based on theology. Thus, the topics of these studies, particularly related to the Divine Being, prophethood and miracles, comprised the fundamental areas of *sīrah* works in addition to *kalām* sources. As a result of this interaction, to provide an Islamic approach to prophethood during this period, scholars generally compared the stance of Islam and other religions, focussing mainly on the nature of miracles, revelation and its reception from rationalist and positivist perspectives (this caused the rationalisation of revelation and the Prophet, which in some cases excluded Divine and unseen dimensions). They also significantly focused on the necessity and proofs of prophethood, rather than emphasising the nature of prophethood. Another approach during the modern period was to focus on the personality, practice and success of the Prophet Muhammad, as the most significant and accurate proofs for his prophethood.

In this regard, Gülen's evaluations update the mainstream Islamic understanding of prophethood, without harming the classical framework, in a way that modern people can easily understand. His thoughts also match with the new *ilm al-kalām* scholars' arguments in several aspects. Despite this, he uses very sensitive language and consciously avoids rhetoric that contradicts the perception of mainstream Islam and even implies misconceptions. For instance, it is not possible to find any indication or consideration that would lead to the

rationalisation of the revelation and its mediator (prophets), and thus deny the unseen aspect of the notion, as it is not conceivable to obtain any particular evidence or implication that he does not accept or deny physical miracles. However, he clearly states that miracles are not the primary concerns of prophets and prophethood; they are secondary issues. I think his perception restores and updates the mainstream view in a way that does not harm its classical framework, and in a form that his current addressees also are not neglected. In addition, there is significant emphasis on the proofs and evidences of prophethood in Gülen's *sīrah* and *nubuwwa* related works. As he uniquely endeavours to link many aspects of the Prophet to provide evidence of his prophethood, in a similar way to new *ilm al-kalām* scholars, he also points out the Prophet's personality, life and practical successes. In other words, he draws attention to the successful transformation of society and civilisation, established out of the age of ignorance, in a short period of time. This approach responds to contemporary people's suspicious and critical views that verge on a denial of prophethood and Divine intervention to humanity.

After analysing the notion of prophethood in Islamic thought, especially *kalām-sīrah* relations based on the prophethood being the centre of discussions and Gülen's stance in this context, in Chapter 3 I narrowed the discussion to prophethood in Gülen's thought; how he explained issues relevant to this notion, his essential arguments and discerning approach. This study covered his worldview as the essential and significant point in regard to *nubuwwa*, in what context he perceives prophethood and where he places prophets. In the discussion of prophethood in Gülen's works, priority is given in relation to one of the core essentials of the God, universe and human being a trilogy. According to Gülen, prophets are not only spiritual guides, they also show guidance in terms of scientific developments. Most importantly, the transcending dimension of the prophets that distinguishes them from other people is their ability to read existence and events quite successfully, their expertise in keeping balance well-established between human beings, the universe and Divine truths, and being a means by which humanity maintains a balance position in the world. Although Gülen's perspective resembles classical *kalāmīc* source explanations about the reason and wisdom of sending prophets, namely, to teach why they have been sent to this universe and what the responsibilities of human beings are, it is not an overstatement to say that his approach gives more depth and original insight to the notion and role of prophets.

According to Gülen, understanding the truth of the holistic relationship between God-universe-human, considering the human being as a whole with his inner and outer qualities and thus establishing the relationship between the trilogy, are the most important traits of

prophets. Gülen expands the topic beyond religious mentoring and guidance to the material world, to being mentors in every aspect of life. In this regard, his comments and thorough analysis of the miracles being the pinnacle of science and technology – a teaching of Nursi – provide significant responses to the claims of a clash of civilisations and a separatist approach to science and religion. On the other hand, regardless of science and technology advances, the lack of progress in coming to conclusions about the God-universe-human relationship, and the inability of humankind to find the absolute truth, are also important approaches.

According to him, while human beings should acknowledge science, they should act under the guidance of revelation and prophets in the areas of humanity, existence, creation and relationship with the creator. Although classic and modern Muslim scholars have commented on these topics, their views are limited. However, Gülen makes the relationship and balance between the trilogy the core of his works on prophethood. In my opinion, this encompasses a response to the modern world's establishment of science and rationality as benchmarks for everything, and denying everything else that does not conform. Furthermore, with such remarks, Gülen establishes the stance of Islam on the relationship between religion and science, and states that there is no clash between rationality and religion, but rather an opportunity to place things in context when viewed with the light of divine and prophetic guidance. Moreover, protecting rationality from misguidance and establishing it using its tools, can only be achieved in seeking refuge with the guidance of revelation and prophets. While these remarks form a significant reason as to why Gülen resorts to *sīrah* and the life of the Prophet in addressing every type of problem, they also clearly display one of the reasons for looking at *sīrah* on the basis of *kalām*.

Although Gülen has detailed overlapping commentary on the proofs of prophethood and the reasons they were sent with the classic *ahl al-sunnah* approach, a striking aspect in Gülen's *sīrah* works is his focus on prophethood as a God-given duty, and the mortal traits specific to prophets through certain inner dynamics and characteristic attributes. According to him, the people chosen as prophets by God are distinguished from other people by some common characteristics. The emphasis on these sublime qualities, which they all possess (the prophetic attributes of truthfulness, trustworthiness, prophetic intelligence, infallibility, sincerity, claiming the oneness of God, altruism and not expecting any worldly rewards) is important in correctly understanding the institution of prophets and prophethood. In the absence of correct understanding, comments such as “they are also human beings like us” are made and result in remarks that cannot be reconciled with prophethood. Moreover, Gülen's main purpose is to dispel misunderstandings and incorrect beliefs, and reverse the mistakes that have developed.



Another important aspect of Gülen's works is his making a link between the end of prophethood and his audience. According to him, although prophethood ended with Prophet Muhammad, the mission of conveying the truth and providing guidance will continue until the last day. Gülen gives this responsibility to his audience by using proofs from various *hadith* to establish that the people who would do this are the prophets' inheritors and the work is the inheritance of prophethood. Thus, while he motivates his followers through his works on *sīrah* by setting them a target, through giving them serious responsibilities he continuously nurtures and keeps them active. Gülen's remarks are quite significant and original in the fields of *sīrah* and *nubuwwa* works.

After analysing the theoretical framework of the topic and Gülen's approach to the notion of prophethood, I examined Gülen's holistic approach to *sīrah* with his two-volume publication *Sonsuz Nur* in Chapter 4. In this manner, I gained a better perception of Gülen's approach to *sīrah*. This work illustrates what kind of *sīrah* reading Gülen follows, his perspective on *sīrah* writings, determining if the work has any benefit to *sīrah* discipline, and provides his general understanding of the life of the Prophet, as it includes important contentions for essential arguments of Gülen on this subject matter. *Sonsuz Nur* is not in the mould of classical *sīrah* sources using chronological order, but specifically ordered in a systemic approach to *sīrah* reading on a foundation of *kalām*. This is because Gülen starts the work with an evaluation of the duties and reasons for prophets being sent and through the structure of the work assesses the characteristics of prophets with this new *sīrah* system. The events unfolding in *sīrah* are expertly and concisely discussed, and even though chronology is not followed, there is a comprehensive coverage of *sīrah* topics in an extremely successful work. This system is tied in with contemporary *kalām-sīrah* relations and because the essentials of the topic are founded on *kalāmīc* concepts, it can be named '*kalāmisation of sīrah*'. On the other hand, in my view, this unique systematic approach is a potential alternative to new approaches sought in *sīrah* writings.

Through his original approach to *sīrah*, based on the essential attributes of prophets, Gülen not only sets the groundwork for a unique and appealing discussion of *sīrah*, but also grasps the opportunity to give lessons in theology. Hence, the respect towards prophets, the institution of prophethood and modern-day individuals with problematic views on prophets, are all addressed through Gülen's explanations on how to respect prophets, their status and Islam's perspective on prophethood. In this way, without using complex terminology, he discusses *sīrah* as he delivers theological topics. When analysed carefully, especially in the first volume, there is a discussion of the theological frameworks, essential unchanging truths

towards prophets (especially Prophet Muhammad) and their different aspects, their main characteristics and attributes. It is as if the topics have been presented as a control mechanism related to the prophetic attributes and perception of prophethood in Islam, a presentation of *sīrah* unaccepting of anything outside these truths and essentials. Meanwhile, the prophetic attributes, in general Islamic perception, as well as Gülen's original evaluations, are discussed in detail. Significant evaluations are the prophetic attribute of *sidq* (truthfulness) in relation the topic of *ghayb* (the unseen) being discussed with regard to miracles, the explanatory commentary on the attribute of *ismah* (infallibility) and the specific protection of prophets from birth until death, as well as pointing out that no minor or major sin is committed by prophets.

Despite all these attributes, *fatānah* (intellect) is the central term in Gülen's *sīrah* works. Gülen centres his commentary about the Prophet, his receiving revelation, as well as his societal relations, including individual, family, social, economic and military successes, based on this attribute. Speaking from a theological foundation, Gülen outlines that, due to the fact that every move of the Prophet was inspired by divine revelation and based on his attribute of *fatānah*, all his actions were absolutely right, until the day of resurrection. The Prophet was bestowed with the most elevated rank in morals and is considered the greatest of role models.

With this central perspective in *sīrah*, every topic or attribute is related to the current addressee (or reader) and presents a constant reminder for them to possess the same attributes in a manner that develops their lives, as an understanding of *sīrah* and prophethood that designs their lives. Gülen's evaluation of *sīrah* is not in the form of a historical anecdote, but places a responsibility to relive the life of the Prophet in the present day and age. Thus, this approach differentiates his *sīrah* writing from those who study it as classical history. This approach is evidence as to where the Gülen Movement gathers its codes and motivation, as well as illustrating one of the reasons for Gülen's success. From this perspective, a child, parent, spouse, government leader, religious leader, businessman, teacher or whatever role or status possessed in public, will find Prophet Muhammad to be a guide and role model of the highest order. In this way, a work based on a theological framework enables one to discover the philosophy of *sīrah* at the same time, by showing the real purpose behind every action of the Prophet, illustrating lessons from the Prophet's life and outlining how to address contemporary people, as well as questioning how to practise the principles taught by the Prophet in one's daily life. From this perspective, a *sīrah* work based on attributes is a good choice. Alongside this, whatever their religion or race, Gülen's *sīrah* philosophy evaluates the Prophet's relations with people of other backgrounds (whether Muslim or non-Muslim).

Gülen clearly delineates that Prophet Muhammad was specifically a prophet of mercy and compassion, winning over the hearts and minds of people in his mission to spread his message, rather than a leader of force, power, coercion or invading armies.

Another important point in Gülen's *sīrah* works is bringing examples and anecdotes from *sīrah* and the companions' lives within the realm of oratory. From this point of view, I discussed the tradition of oratory in Islam, Gülen's oratory and his place in this culture. A majority of Gülen's work is prepared from his sermons or lectures. In these talks/sermons, the most frequently used point of reference is the *sīrah*. The use of *sīrah* in his sermons and lectures to his addressees or answering contemporary issues and problems through examples and teachings from *sīrah*, highlight his contribution to the area of *sīrah* through his analysis via oral culture. On the other hand, being the source of motivation for a movement's followers, nourishing them and keeping them active, are all a part of maintaining and evaluating *sīrah* within this culture. Thus, Gülen makes great effort to point out the best of society in his verbal sermons by exemplifying the life of the Prophet - what is called the people of happiness and the companions. In particular, the comparisons made between the two eras (the era of the Prophet and his companions, and the era of contemporary discourse) make Gülen's sermons effective and successful, as well as making him a source of inspiration and motivation. This successful and dynamic work of *sīrah* comes to the fore when, as discussed in Chapter 4, Gülen's pre-sermon/pre-lecture preparations take place. Gülen provides a successful alternative to the technical and academic works through his sermons (occasionally with tears), emotional attachment and feeling for the topic, conveying love for Prophet Muhammad to his addressees, and making them identify with his work and want to succeed in following his example.

I have attempted to illustrate how Gülen uses the *kalām* discipline as a theoretical foundation by discussing his approach to *nubuwwa* and his prophetic attribute-based *sīrah* work *Sonsuz Nur*. I also compared this work to two other notable *sīrah* scholars' works, those of Hamīdullah and Shiblī, to gain a clearer understanding of Gülen's approach to *sīrah*. Gülen's work corresponds to the systematic topic-centred or thematic work of Hamīdullah. On the other hand, due to being founded on a *kalāmīc* model, dealing with more problematic issues, making serious statements about controversial issues and giving insight in terms of *sīrah* philosophy, it also resembles Shiblī's work. However, *Sonsuz Nur*, with its system based clearly on prophetic attributes, as well as building a world of ideas for its addressees, giving them responsibility and purpose, is a more dynamic *sīrah* work than the other works.

To determine how Gülen narrates *sīrah* texts and how he used particular sources, as well as clearly identifying what he means by the notion of “*sīrah* philosophy,” in Chapter 5, I have specifically analysed an important turning point in *sīrah*, the incident of Hudaibiya and its treaty, using a textual and analytical approach. From this perspective, I examined Gülen’s works (which do not go into unnecessary detail), his use of authentic and reliable Islamic traditions and his explanation of the main aspects of key topics. When it comes to *sīrah* philosophy, Gülen emphasises this matter and outlines that the 23-year prophetic career of the Prophet provides innumerable solutions to all sorts of problems until the Day of Judgment. It is important to underline that this is not a literal approach; it has no intention of looking at the life of the Prophet and taking people there. Gülen approaches the issue with an interpretive manner and provides a successful process to the things he discusses. One of the noticeable prerequisites is an understanding of the current day and age. Lessons learnt from *sīrah* relevant to people in this day and age, with regard to dialogue, multiculturalism, human dignity and similar topics, are important clues for his understanding of *sīrah*. He takes important lessons learnt from his deeply rooted understanding of *sīrah* and uses them to reflect on current problems. These lessons, which he recommends to followers in his movement, are the *sīrah* ideals that can be successfully put into practice, and illustrate that not only is Gülen a great reader of *sīrah*, but also that *sīrah* is important in providing solutions for modern-day problems.

After all these considerations about the main chapters, the unique aspects of this study, its contribution to the world of knowledge and some conclusions have been summarised below:

1. First of all, this thesis is the first that examines Gülen’s understanding of *sīrah*. Even though there have been studies that mention Gülen’s extensive knowledge in this field, given that he generally refers to *sīrah* when explaining most matters, and others that have said he regards the companions of the Prophet as the ideal society and makes many links between his addressees and the companions, there has never been a distinct study analysing Gülen’s view on *sīrah*. For this reason, this thesis can be accepted as the first in its field. Even though there are many books regarding *sīrah* in English, the fact this is the first examining a particular scholar’s view on *sīrah*, this thesis can make a contribution to the discipline of *sīrah*, its methodology and *sīrah* writings.
2. As I have thoroughly examined in the study, one of the most significant sides of Gülen’s *sīrah* reading is that he has studied *sīrah* on a foundation of *kalām*. As this has contributed greatly to *sīrah* writings, in terms of system and methodology, it also provided an

alternative writing to the pursuit of renewal in *sīrah* discipline in the modern era. At the same time, this approach coincides with the prophethood approach of the new *ilm al-kalām*. Gülen's approach to *sīrah* can be evaluated as similar in relation to the *kalām-sīrah* rapprochements that regards all topics relevant to Islam and its Prophet as part of *kalām* discussions. In another way, it can be regarded as *kalāmisation* of *sīrah* and reading *sīrah* on a foundation of *kalām*, due to concerns similar to modern period scholars who approach Islamic disciplines collectively from broader perspectives.

3. The reason Gülen emphasises either prophethood and the position of prophets or his *sīrah* readings is not so much to do with academic concerns or discussion, as far as this study can detect, although some intellectual similarities can be seen; rather, it coincides with the perspective of the new *ilm al-kalām* scholars. Whether it is the prophetic works that form the basis for *sīrah* or *sīrah* works in general, the main source comprises incidents or problems in the community and the conditions of the era. In short, it can be called a necessity-oriented *sīrah* work. Gülen knows the problems of his community. Thus, the practical analysis he makes conforms to the discussions in the academic world. Furthermore, the language (although it may at times be technical and academic) and style he uses in his casual talks or sermons at the mosque, allow him to achieve more practical and effective results and attract attention and fellowship. This aspect of the issue was important in establishing the DNA of his movement and Gülen's effectiveness. The use of oratory is important for strengthening the appeal of the uniting factors embedded in the era of happiness and the lives of the companions, which Muslims would naturally follow. Additional factors such as effective oratory, good preparation and understanding the audience's state, naturally give positive and successful results. Gülen's use of extensive *sīrah* reports in this regard can be used as a tangible example of this understanding.
4. Another important aspect of Gülen's view on *sīrah* is that he frequently emphasises the philosophy of *sīrah* and successfully applies what he means by the practical application of this notion. With the idea that it is a fundamental resource and essential reference to generate solutions for all kinds of problems faced, the fundamental approach behind Gülen's readings of *sīrah* is an attempt to comprehend the spirit of *sīrah*, the true meaning behind the teachings, acts and behaviour of the Prophet, and how they can be practised today. Gülen appears to be remodelling *sīrah* to this time and age, or trying to restore the age of happiness and the spirit of the companions. In fact, Gülen's stance arises from a general understanding that the cycle of historical events repeats itself in similar ways over time, as well as taking into account the Islamic ideal that the Prophet and his companions

lived exemplary lives and are the best role models. It is because of this idea that Gülen thinks the 23 years of prophethood can provide solutions to all problems humanity will encounter until the Day of Judgment. Guided by this belief when dealing with almost any problem, question or topic, he refers to *sīrah* of the Prophet as a fundamental resource. This original perspective requires careful comprehension, examination and analysis of the life of the Prophet, his every word and action, as well as the age and conditions in which the people lived. Gülen does this by linking the topics he deals with to his addressees, by explaining that the Prophet had a sound understanding of those he spoke to and appointed promising and competent people that he did not need to replace. He gives examples of current day problems, giving the Prophet as the best example in all aspects and roles of social life. He explains how the Prophet transformed society in his lifetime and describes the contribution to humanity that he made through his teachings and novel concepts. This teaching and Gülen's approach can also be acknowledged as his important contribution to *sīrah* writings and its methodology.

5. Alongside these approaches, the notion of *fatānah* and the concept of compassion are two important foundations of Gülen's *sīrah* writings. Due to the fact that the Prophet constantly received divine revelation and carried the attribute of *fatānah*, Gülen regards his every action and word as definite, perfect and absolutely right. In the same way, the ability to be a role model for all aspects of life, answer any question, find a solution to every problem and be taken as an example in every area of life, are broadly discussed as different dimensions of *fatānah*. Theoretically, while Gülen's explanations regarding this concept remain central, the mercy and compassion of the Prophet in his practical life and one-on-one dealings with people are greatly accentuated. According to Gülen, the reason why he affected people and his message was accepted was not because of military strength, political or any other force, it was because he approached everyone with compassion and dealt with every living thing with mercy.
6. Finally, one of the themes used in Gülen's *sīrah* works is respect and love of prophets. Gülen believes this has been destroyed or there are attempts to do so, and thus he persistently emphasises this issue. He extensively covers the concept of prophets being chosen people with specific qualities from different angles. He draws attention to this when he lists the fundamental aims of *Sonsuz Nur*. While he covers the topics using strong rational arguments, he does not avoid their emotional and spiritual aspects. Hence, the effort to revive love for the Prophet, which he thinks may be lost, is noteworthy. It is possible to understand this emotional attachment in his talks through his expressions of

love for the Prophet, through his tone and his tears, and also find similar attachment in every page of his works. In this regard, Muhammad Imara, who wrote the introduction to the Arabic translation of *Sonsuz Nur*, stated, “The most original aspect of the work is it being the product of the combination of a heart filled with love for the Prophet and intelligence that is scholarly insightful.”

Gülen’s understanding of *sīrah* in theory is based on prophetic attributes centred around *kalām* and in practice is based on questioning and analysing the philosophy of *sīrah* in every incident. He contributes significantly to the field of *sīrah* by joining theory with practice through a different style, expression, system and methodology. Hence, although Gülen’s *sīrah* works, particularly *Sonsuz Nur*, are not written from an academic angle, the works driven by necessity that address current problems and also introduce important paradigms in the field of *sīrah*.

## 7.2 Further Recommendations

There were some matters that I found to be important during my work that either I could not cover completely, or partially, so I recommend these areas for further studies.

Even though in my work I concentrated on the relationship between *sīrah* and *kalām* in the modern era, and the coverage of the *kalām* discipline in *sīrah* works, this matter is very detailed, rich in resources and thus deserves to be studied in its own right. Research on content (subject) changes of *sīrah* works in the modern period has been limited to the Indian subcontinent studies and mainly covered in the Urdu language, while there are minimal works in other languages. In this regard, research could compare Gülen’s *Sonsuz Nur* with works from the subcontinent, similar to M. Cavit Ahter’s PhD work *Kalamiyat-i Siret*, which I mentioned previously.

In addition, although I covered in general Gülen’s approach to *sīrah* philosophy through different subject matters, its relationship with prophetic intelligence and application in Hidaybiya, it also deserves to be a discrete subject for research work. In this regard, the work could investigate what Gülen means by *sīrah* philosophy focusing on the concept, expressions and arguments he uses. There can be further comparisons focusing on different aspects with the works of Ramadan al-Buti, Muhammad Ghazzālī or Munir Gadban’s *fiqh al-sīrah*. In my opinion, while Gülen’s expression of *sīrah* philosophy has a strong connection with the *fiqh al-sīrah* tradition and can be partially perceived within this tradition, it has a deeper concept that comprises other aspects. It is important to note the work becomes an original piece with

its approach to the companions as an exemplary and miraculous community, in having a correct understanding of the Qur'an and when the connection Gülen establishes with his audience is considered. Thus, these aspects, as well as being a source of inspiration for his movement, form the basis for particular research on Gülen's concept of *sīrah* philosophy.

Gülen's use of *sīrah* sources, authenticity of the sources, his methodology, particularly in narrating events that took place, types of narrations he upholds and his *sīrah* expertise in using the transmission of chain, text and sources, could also form another research work. Moreover, while I have tried to cover Gülen's approach to *sīrah* and *sīrah* writing, valuable research could be done for a person who frequently uses *sīrah* in almost all of his works, focusing specifically on the concepts mentioned above.

Finally, Gülen's oratory alone could comprise a research work, as I only touched on the relative aspects. In my opinion, while my work draws attention to this aspect of Gülen, it does not cover all its aspects in detail. I have only encountered one article on this side of Gülen, who has spent most of his life successfully addressing and preaching to people. In my opinion, this matter is also worthy of a thorough and detailed piece of academic work.



## APPENDIX 1: THE OTHER ISLAMIC SECTS' APPROACHES TO PROPHETHOOD

Apart from the three schools of thought mentioned in Chapter 2, the approaches of Salafiyya, Sufiyya, Shia and Islamic philosophers have also been influential.

The views of **Salafiyya** scholars are extremely limited. As with other matters, they remain faithful to the Qur'an and *sunnah*, and have not provided any different explanations. Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) made important contributions to the Salafiyya becoming a school of thought, and having its views based on solid foundations. Ibn Taymiyya, who wrote *Kitāb al-Nubuwwāt* on the matter, put forward the miracles as evidence of prophethood and criticised the views of the *kalāmīc* and philosophical movements. For Ibn Taymiyya and his followers, prophethood is a necessary requirement for human life. However, this necessity is not for God, but is directed at His subjects.<sup>836</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, there are three fundamental matters that prophets convey to people: 1. Information concerning the attributes of God, His unity/oneness and destiny; 2. Religious commands and provisions that comprise divine orders and restrictions; and 3. Belief in the Day of Judgment, heaven, hell, good deeds and punishment.<sup>837</sup> The salvation of humanity is dependent upon the knowledge of these, and intellect alone will never be able to achieve these. These points are collected together under the *usūl al-thalātha* titles that I referred to earlier, and divided into theology (*ilāhiyyāt*), prophethood (*nubuwwāt*) and the afterlife (*akhirat* or *sam'īyyāt*). The views of the Salafis on this subject were established by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.855) (albeit only slightly), and later by Tahawī (d.933), Ibn Hazm<sup>838</sup> (d.1064), Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d.1350), and in the last period by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, who are known as modern Salafis. In general terms, the Salafiyya's views are that, while it is possible to understand certain things using the intellect, this is not sufficient, and there is a need for prophethood. Further, when dealing with the issue of prophethood, they explain the views of various schools of thought and sects (such as Sūfiyya), by way of objection and criticism.

When it comes to the **Shia** understanding of prophethood, as in many other matters, in general it coincides with the opinions of the Mu'tazila.<sup>839</sup> The difference is that the Shia interpretation

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<sup>836</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu Fatawa* (Riyad: Dar al-Alam al-Kutub, 1991), IX, 93-96; Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitab al-Nubuwwat* (Riyad: Maktabatu Adva al-Salaf, 2000), 22-28.

<sup>837</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu Fatawa*, IX/94-96.

<sup>838</sup> Even though he is not viewed as a Salafi scholar, his opinions on prophethood are evaluated within this doctrine.

<sup>839</sup> Tim Winter, *Classical Islamic Theology*, 9; Khalid Blankinship, "The Early Creed," in *Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 51; Sajjad Rizvi, "The Developed

evaluates the doctrine of prophethood together with the subject of the *imamate*. In the Shi'ite concept, the subject of prophethood takes shape around the *imamate*, and is dealt with as an integral component. They are of the opinion that prophethood, which they see as a good (*husn*) act of God due to its numerous benefits, as being necessary for God (*wājib*). In the Shia prophethood doctrine, Ali continued receiving knowledge on prophethood after Muhammad, and this duty was entrusted to him by God via Muhammad. Therefore, the attributes and characteristics of the prophets are valid in the same way as for imams.<sup>840</sup> The immunity of the prophets' (*ismah*) – and therefore of imams – is an example of this which holds an important place in the Shi'ite concept.<sup>841</sup>

The point of view held by the **Sūfiyya** on prophethood is similar to the relationship between the *nubuwwa* and *imamate* in Shia, and has been dealt with more in connection with sainthood (*walāya*). They give the impression that *walaya* is a continuation of prophethood. In the first period of Sufism, as the practical side of the matter was the focus, there is not a great deal of information on prophethood. However, in later periods, those who dealt with the philosophy of Sufism, such as Suhrawardi and Ibn al-Arabī, developed important opinions on the subject. The first name that comes to mind, when the subject of prophethood is considered from a mystical perspective, is Ibn al-Arabī (d.1240). Ibn al-Arabī's assessments, who also states the general concept of the Sūfis in connection with the subject, within the context of “the seal of prophethood” – the concept of the universal prophethood, specific prophethood and sainthood in particular (*khatm al-nubuwwa -nubuwwa al-āmma -nubuwwa al-khāssa*) – are addressed in section 3.7. However, according to Hākīm al-Tirmidhi (d. 932), who is acknowledged as being one of the first Sufi scholars, prior to Ibn al-Arabī, and whose views are said to constitute the basis for Ibn al-Arabī's views on prophethood, there are four stations that ensure people attain happiness: faith, prophethood, messengership and sainthood.<sup>842</sup>

A large section of the **Islamic philosophers** have endeavoured to base and establish religion on logic. The problem of knowledge/epistemology on which the endeavours to reconcile religion and philosophy were focused, and the fact that the fundamental source of knowledge in Islam is revelation, has caused various speculations and opinions. Attempts to place prophethood on a foundation of intellect are seen as a natural continuation of the endeavours

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Kalam, Part II,” in *Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 90, 92; Topaloglu, *Kelam İlmi*, 193-194.

<sup>840</sup> Gölçük, *Kelam*, 316.

<sup>841</sup> Ibn Babawayh, *Risālat al-I'tiqād at al-Imamiyya (Sii Imamiyye'nin Inanc Esaslari)*, trans. Ethem Ruhi Figlali (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1978), 113; Tusi, *al-Iqtisad fi ma Yataallaq bi al-I'tiqād* (Najaf: n.p., 1979), 260 (taken from Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 127).

<sup>842</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 131 (cited from Hakim al-Tirmidhi, *Khatm al-Awliya* (Beirut: Ma'had al-Adab al-Sharqiyya, 1965), 166).

to reconcile religion with logic. In general, Islamic philosophers – particularly Farabī (d.950) and Ibn Sina (d.1037) – have interpreted prophethood as:<sup>843</sup> one of the connecting vehicles between the metaphysical realm (*ālam al-ulwī* or *ālam al-sama'*), whose principles are beyond nature and earth (*ālam al-ard*) and whose psychological side is overly influential, and the divine state, the achievement of a human soul and human intellect to a level of maturity to acquire divine knowledge in connection with the *fa'al aql*<sup>844</sup> (active intellect). It is accepted that the theory on revelation developed by Islamic philosophers was influenced by Greek philosophy– and in particular Plato's "philosopher – king" concept.<sup>845</sup> While there are those – such as R. Walzer – who argue that the endeavours of Farabī to explain prophethood are based on Platonism, there are also those – such as Fazlur Rahman – who say the real origin of this theory is the Stoic philosophy.<sup>846</sup> As there is no religious basis in these philosophical views, Islamic philosophers have used and adapted Islamic elements, such as revelation and religious law, and attempted to have them accepted in the Islamic world in this way. They believe they have been successful in reconciling intellect with revelation in this way.<sup>847</sup> Farabī, Ibn Sina and Ibn Khaldun (d.1406) come to the fore with their views on prophethood among Islamic philosophers and their opinions are influential even today. The understanding of prophethood that is especially voiced by Farabī, the emphasis on intellect and the claim attributed to him that philosophers know some truths that prophets may not know, have resulted in accusations that he upholds philosophers over prophets.<sup>848</sup> On the other hand, according to Izmirli Ismail Hakki, the notion of active intellect used by Farabī, which became one of the cornerstones of *nubuwwa* theories of Islamic philosophers, was initially proposed by Aristo, introduced into the Muslim world through the Alexandria philosophy and is a result

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<sup>843</sup> Farabi, *Ara Ahl al-Medina al-Fadila* (Beirut: n.p., 1985), 124-125; Farabi, *Risala fi al-Akl* (Beirut: n.p., 1938), 5f; Ibn Sina, "al-Risala fi Haqiqat al-Tawhīd wa Ithbat al-Nubuwwa," in *Tis'u Rasail* (Cairo: n.p., 1908), 74-86; Michael M. Marmura, "Avicennas Psychological Proof of Prophecy," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22, 1 (1963), 49-56.

<sup>844</sup> This notion is one of the levels of intellect used by the Islamic philosopher Farabi as an entity separate from human beings. He determines active intellect to identify it with the lowest of the cosmological intelligences. He argues that the human intellect is able to conjoin with the active intellect. It is interpreted that the active intellect that Farabi perceives as an intermediary power between God and the material universe, is symbolised as the Archangel Gabriel in religious literature. It is said he developed this perception with the influence of the Neoplatonist and Sabians doctrines. For more information, see Farabi, *al-Siyasa al-Madaniyya*, trans. Mehmet Aydın-Abdulkadir Sener-M.Rami Ayas (Istanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1980), 24f; Mahmut Kaya, "Farabi," in *DIA* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfi Pub., 1995), XII/150; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Influence of Arabic and Islamic Philosophy on the Latin West," March 18, 2014, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-influence/#ActInt>.

<sup>845</sup> Seferta, "The Doctrine of Prophethood," 140; Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 128-129.

<sup>846</sup> Erwin Rosenthal, "Some Observations on the Philosophical Theory of Prophecy in Islam," in *Studia Semitica, Islamic Themes* (Cambridge: n.p., 1971), II/135; Fazlurrahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1958), 11.

<sup>847</sup> Seferta, "The Doctrine of Prophethood," 140.

<sup>848</sup> Ismail Hakki İzmirli, "İslam'da Felsefe Cereyanları" [Philosophical Movements within Islam], *Darulfunun İlahiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası* IV, 112 (1929): 25-26.

of attempts to satisfy religious thought or perhaps sensitivities.<sup>849</sup> Lastly, while it contains some differences in its details, Farabī's theory has had an impact in Islamic philosophy, such as the works of Ibn Sina<sup>850</sup>, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Tufayl, and also Western philosophy, especially in Spinoza.<sup>851</sup>

The 14<sup>th</sup> century historian **Ibn Khaldun** is acknowledged as having laid the foundations for the philosophy of history and sociology. He introduces prophets as “due to the congenital abilities in their nature they are able to unveil the secrets of the unseen” in his *Muqaddima*. According to Ibn Khaldun the symptoms of being a prophet are: 1. The prophets receiving revelation in ways which are undetermined and unknown; 2. Their possession of the attribute of *ismah* (immunity from sin/faultless); 3. Their calling people to religion, goodness, a specific way of life, forms of rituals and worship; 4. Their coming from and being protected by a noble lineage;<sup>852</sup> and 5. Their performing of miracles that prove their claims.<sup>853</sup> Ibn Khaldun deals with prophethood from the perspective of the hierarchic structure of beings. While using a rationalist manner, he endeavoured not to say anything contradictory to the *ahl al-sunnah*, mainstream Sunnī creed. Ibn Khaldun, who attempted to find a logical basis for prophethood, believed that, as physical matter rose, it became lighter. There is a hierarchic system between beings,<sup>854</sup> and man is at the very top of this. People can connect with angels, who are above them in this hierarchy. There are also three different groups among human souls that have the ability to communicate with the world of the angels. Prophets are congenitally ready and able to see or communicate with the unseen world, even without any nurture or formal education, as they are at the highest third rank of this hierarchy.<sup>855</sup> Farabī and Ibn Sina use a similar categorisation, but put forward certain preliminary conditions such as the purifying of the soul, reflection, contemplation and imagination. Ibn Khaldun has a similar approach to the Islamic philosophers, who were severely criticised by the *ahl al-sunnah* scholars on the matter of prophethood. Nevertheless, he has tried to avoid criticism and conform with the primary Islamic sources by expressing that prophets are born with special traits and prophethood cannot be attained with mere human effort.<sup>856</sup>

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<sup>849</sup> İzmirli, “İslam’da Felsefe Cereyanları,” IV/14 (1930), 35.

<sup>850</sup> The views of Ibn Sina are more in keeping with Islamic teachings than those of Farabi.

<sup>851</sup> Ibrahim Madkur, *Fi al-Falsafa al-Islamiyya*, Cairo: Dar al-Maarif, 1983, I/100-109.

<sup>852</sup> Most probably he meant they need to be supported for a particular amount of time.

<sup>853</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, I/146-152.

<sup>854</sup> The highest station of the materials forms the lowest station of the plants and the highest station of plants is the lowest of the animate beings. Human beings are at the top of this chain.

<sup>855</sup> For detailed information on the hierarchy referred to by Ibn Khaldun, see Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, I/152-158.

<sup>856</sup> Yavuz, *İslam Düşüncesinde Nübüvvet*, 158.

## APPENDIX 2: THE PROPHET SOLVED DISPUTES AMONG THE COMPANIONS AFTER THE BATTLE OF HUNAYN AND GÜLEN'S EVALUATIONS

The battle of Hunayn occurred a short time after the conquest of Mecca. The Prophet shared the war gains particularly between those who were recent converts or the *muallafa al-qulūb* (those whose hearts were to be reconciled with Islam). Most of these people were high profile figures in their respective clans and tribes. After the conquest of Mecca, it was necessary to win their hearts and minds not only for their full submission to Islam, but also for the continuity of conquests. However, this sharing made the Ansar's young people quite uncomfortable. They especially did not agree with the action, and thought it was unjust. These youngsters voiced their discomfort by using such words as, "Their blood is still on our swords and yet they get most of the war gains." Although it seems innocent enough to be ignored because they were very few in number and only consisted of young people, it obviously provides foundations to potential provocation and internal tumult (*fitnah*). Saad ibn Ubadah, from the Ansar, came to the Prophet and reported this incident. The Prophet asked his opinion and he replied, "I am one of them." Therefore, the Prophet realised the seriousness of the issue and worked towards solving this conflict immediately. As the conflict went far beyond its tolerable boundaries, the Messenger of God conducted a meeting that only the Ansar were allowed to attend. The Messenger of God commenced the meeting when every one of them was in attendance. He then delivered the following sermon (with Gülen's interpretation).<sup>857</sup>

"O people of Ansar! I have heard that you have a broken heart towards me..." This type of approach was very crucial at the beginning in regards to mass psychology. They were not expecting to hear such a strong expression and most of them were also unaware of the purpose of the meeting. It shook them back into their senses, therefore serving its purpose. The companions would not even think of disagreeing with the Prophet. There could not be much more than a temporary feeling of broken hearts and this could always be mended by the Prophet's caution. It was also seen that it would be mended through the expression coming from the bottom of the Prophet's heart. The first sentence of the sermon definitely influenced those whose hearts had been broken. Everyone regained consciousness and looked at him. It was obvious the speech following that introduction would be very important. Everyone was paying full attention and eagerly listening as to what he would say. The Messenger of God once again won their hearts, but he needed further attempts for their full conviction. If his

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<sup>857</sup> Gülen broadly discussed this matter under the attribute of "Intellect of the Prophet" on pages 281-288 in volume one and "Uniqueness of his Conflict Resolution" in volume two on pages 127-129 in *Sonsuz Nur*. Before the discussion, Gülen states he narrates from Ibn Ishāq, Bukhārī and Muslim. I have provided a summary of Gülen's analysis.

further attempts were not successful, the situation could end up with more loss than benefit, and have the opposite outcome of what he initially attempted. Therefore, the extent of his efforts and the delicacy of address were highly consequential. Here is his following discourse:

O people of Ansar! Were you not misguided, before I came? Did God not provide you with guidance through me? Had you not been writhing in poverty before me? Has God not given you wealth through me? Have you not been the enemy of each other before I came? Has God not reconciled your hearts towards each other through me?

As the Prophet finished each sentence, the responses given by the Ansar collectively were: “Yes, yes, thankfulness and gratefulness to God and His Messenger!” He made his point at the right time in the right place when he turned the discourse. As emotions were running high, he immediately talked on behalf of the Ansar. The Messenger was saying what they could have mentioned in the worst-case scenario. Besides, if a Muslim would utter such words towards their Prophet, they would be ruined. Prophet Muhammad continued:

O people of Ansar! Had you wished, you could have given me a different answer. You could say: The people of Mecca denied you, we accepted you; you were left alone, we looked after you; you were expelled from your hometown Mecca, we hosted you in our homes in Medina; you were in need, we provided whatever was needed. If you had said so, you would be right and no one would deny that.

O People of Ansar! I gave some worldly goods to some people whom I wanted to be Muslim. Your heart might have taken offence because of that. However, would not you like to return home with the Messenger of God while others return home with camels and sheep? By God, in Whose Hand of Power my soul is, I swear. If the people of Ansar came together in one valley and the rest of the world came together in another, without any doubt I would be with the Ansar. If there were no matter such as the *hijra* (migration), I would have wanted to be one of the people of Ansar. O God! Protect the Ansar, their children and their grandchildren!

Every one of them was crying after such a heartfelt speech. They were sobbing and saying, “God and His Messenger are enough for us. We do not want anything else.”

The style of the meeting and the speech had a superbly positive influence on the Ansar. The Messenger of God presented a short speech and avoided the possibility of a conflict. In return, he won their hearts over one more time. This incident can only be explained with the word “*fatānah*” of the Prophet. Gülen states when the sentences of that particular speech are

analysed one by one, and also when the timing is taken into consideration, when comparing the length and height created in the soul of the Ansar from the first sentence to the last sentence, an incredible change can be seen in their thoughts. In addition, this speech was impromptu, i.e. it was delivered suddenly without any preparation.

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