

# SAID NURSI'S UNDERSTANDING OF PROPHETHOOD: A STUDY IN THE *LIGHT OF RISLA-E NUR*

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## Abstract

*Due to the Enlightenment movement (1685-1815), rational thought and reason ('aql) were injected into the mind of the young generation of Europe. It encouraged the human psyche to think about politics, philosophy, science, and communications related issues based on reason only. Even though, it raised a voice against the authority of religious creeds and dogmas of Christianity. When Mustafa Kemal subscribed to the post-Enlightenment spirit blindly for Turkey, the theological concepts of Islam like Tawhid (oneness of Allah), Nubuwwah (prophethood) and Hashr (resurrection) were neglected and denied in the name of modernity and progress. Previously, traditional ulema addressed these theological issues based on tradition (naql); very few of them on reason ('aql). Nursi articulates these theological issues containing both 'aql and naql to address the demand of the age, but mostly referred to 'aql. He further argues the authority of divine revelation and the necessity of prophethood for human needs to introduce with Allah and for the guidance of humanity. On the other hand, the existing discipline and the order of the universe also necessitate prophets to preserve their solidarity and maintain its unity. This article investigates the views and methods of Said Nursi on the concept of prophethood and the necessity of divine revelation. This article also examines the position of Nursi where he blended metaphysics with the rational quest and satisfied the modern men's questions regarding Islamic theological issues like tawhid and prophethood. The paper concludes that the Risale destroys disbelief, atheistic currents and communist attacks on Islam, Oneness of God (tawhid), Prophethood (nubuwwah) and Day of Judgement (hashr) from the society and boosts the belief of the people of Turkey and all around the world. Thus, it eliminates atheism, disbelief and doubt from Turkey and revives the faith and importance of prophethood and defends prophethood, the important tenets of Islam. In this regard, this paper covers the following issues: (1) Nursi's Contribution to the discourse on prophethood; (2) the necessity of sending prophet; (3) humanity and*

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*prophethood; (4) The Signs of Prophethood; (5) Miracles (m'uzizat); (6) Prophet Muhammad's Unique Role in the Legacy of Prophethood; and (7) Finality of prophethood (Khatam al-nubuwwah).*

**Keywords:** *Prophethood (nubuwwah), Risale-i Nur, Said Nursi, Finality of prophethood (Khatam al-Nubuwwah), Prophethood (nubuwwah) and Oneness of Allah (Tawhid).*

## Introduction

Allah has conveyed his message through messengers and prophets to guide humankind as the sign of His Divine plan and favour. The messengers of Allah made awareness of the straightway (*Sirat al-Mustaqim*) and set examples of how to follow it. They have the prime duty of introducing Allah SWT to humankind. All human beings did not accept the preaching of the messengers. That was the common scenario from the first messenger to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It should be noted that from the very beginning to the last breath of Prophet Muhammad, the vested interested group negated him. This Qur'anic verse 25:7-10 points out the behaviour of the contemporary Arabs who undermined Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The *Qur'an* quotes, they say: "Why does this Messenger (Muhammad SAW) eat food, and walk about in the markets (like ourselves). Why is not an angel sent down to him to be a Warner with him?" However, Allah (SWT) intentionally sent many messengers to every nation, so that no nation can argue about not sending the guide from Him." (*al-Qur'an*, 25:7-10)

A group of philosophers from the North and the West, like Dr Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883) (Nursi, 2013b, pp. 302, 311, 391) did not accept the inevitability of revelation and prophethood for the guidance of humankind rather they depended on 'reason ('*aql*) of human being, not on the chain of messengers. They further claimed human intellect is sufficient for guiding all affairs of human life. Criticisms of prophethood are not raised by the Orientalists only, but also by the so-called Muslims of Turkey. However, when students were sent abroad for higher studies by the Ottoman Empire, they got some modern ideas and came to contact with French and some European atheistic ideas. As they now look differently towards their religion and religious practices. It was very sad while some non-Muslims admire and praise Prophet Muhammad in such a word. "It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel

entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history.” (Hart, 1992, p. 10)

Previously, ‘ulema of Islam had presented Islam from a classical point of view and that was sufficient at that age. But the questions of time were not addressed elaborately. Therefore, Nursi understood to addressing the prophethood and its related issues are more important for a modern technology-oriented youth with a scientific and philosophical explanation. All of their questions are answered and compiled in the *Risale-i Nur* (henceforth *Risale*). However, observing the emergence of the modern scientific and post-Enlightenment theological dilemma of Turkey, Nursi argues that in our worldly life we see leadership is everywhere, even in the ant and bees who lead the group to the destination. Nursi articulates, “Prophethood is Essential for Mankind. Divine power does not leave the ant without leader, or bees without a queen; it surely would not leave mankind without a prophet or code of laws. In any case, the order of the world demands this.” (Nursi, 2010, pp. 98–99, 2013c, p. 734, 2014, p. 543)

As Nursi attempted to revitalize and restore true discourse on prophethood addressed by so-called intellectual encounters of his time. This paper emphasizes the contribution of Nursi towards eradicating disbelief and atheistic ideas about prophethood from society. In addition, He articulated prophethood related argumentation, proofs and general discussion from the argued the ‘*wājib al-wujūd*’ (necessarily existent) perspective. His discourse on prophethood is very much significant not only during his time but also more significant in the present world today. This paper, therefore, will answer the following questions:

1. What is meant by prophethood in the *Risale*?
2. What are the contributions of Nursi towards the discourse of prophethood?
3. What are the proofs of prophethood?
4. Why is prophethood necessary?
5. What is the meaning of the finality of prophethood?

### **Objective of The Research**

This paper will consult the *Risale* to understand the views of Nursi on the concept of prophethood that constitute the essence of this paper. In this regard, this paper covers the following issues: (1) Nursi's contribution to

the discourse of prophethood; (2) the necessity of sending prophets; (3) humanity and prophethood; (4) The signs of prophethood; (5) Miracles (*m'uzizat*); (6) Prophet Muhammad's role in the tradition of prophethood; and (7) Finality of prophethood (*Khatam al-Nubuwwah*).

### **Methodology of The Research**

This qualitative research will be analyzed using the content analysis method of some books of the *Risale* by Said Nursi; *the Word, the Flashes, the Letters, the Rays, Rational Arguments: A Prescription for the 'Ulema, the Damascus Sermon, and the Staff of Moses*. The *Risale* will provide the primary source and other relevant research works will be the secondary source for this paper. The English translated version of *Risale* by Şukran Vahide from Sözlery publication, Istanbul, Turkey is accessed in this work.

### **Background of The Study**

Some historians and social scientists closely observed Turkish society. Hakan Yavuz mentions, "The Kemalist elite presented themselves as secular, progressive and in opposition to Islam." (Yavuz, 2000, p. 23) He continues, "The Westernization project was presented as emancipatory and anti-religious, without the critical post-Enlightenment thought on tolerance, liberalism and democracy." (Yavuz, 2000, pp. 23–24) Abdülhak Adnan Adıvar argues, "the Kemalist conception of secularism, similar to the positivism of the West, became the 'official dogma of irreligion' and was 'imposed on [Turkish society] just as Islamic dogma had been imposed in the past.'" (Adıvar, 1951, p. 128) Observing Kemalist reformation, Yavuz further continues, "After Islam was ripped out of Turkey's social fabric by the reforms of Mustafa Kemal in the 1920s, the rhythms of this religio-political activism have been modulated by the changing policies of the Turkish state." (Yavuz, 2000, p. 22) Şerif Mardin acknowledges Nursi's works and his fighting against unbelief. To him, "Nursi insisted that books, not people, 'have waged a battle against unbelief.'" (Mardin, 1989, p. 4)

The Kemalist era was the champion for negating revelation and prophethood by all means. Even they negated the authenticity of the *Qur'an*. Turkish society to some extent freed from the Islamic tradition, heritage and practices. Most of the writings of Nursi answer his students' questions, these were put forward to Nursi; especially the Letters consists

of criticisms against the slanderers who attacked Islam and Islamic beliefs and those hostile to religion and Islam. (Nursi, 2014, p. 577) Nursi continues, "This is a defence of the *Risale-i Nur* against atheism and absolute disbelief." (Nursi, 2011b, p. 11) Nursi articulates,

"The *Risale-i Nur* has for thirty years killed at the root absolute disbelief, which destroys eternal life, turns the life of this world into a ghastly poison, spoiling all its pleasures; it has successfully killed the atheistic ideas of the Naturalists; has proved brilliantly with wonderful arguments the principles that will bring happiness to this nation in both this life and the next; and is based on the *Qur'an's* reality, from the Divine Throne." (Nursi, 2013b, p. 377)

## Analysis and Findings

### Why Prophethood?

Humankind has given intellect and reasoning from the very beginning. Allah (SWT) created Adam (PBUH) as the first man and blessed him with knowledge, what did not give to the Angelic world. (*al-Qur'an*, 2:31) Besides, Allah also creates *Satan* (the Devil), an evil force that can deceive humankind. However, to guide humanity, Allah also sends hundreds of thousands of messengers and prophets to rescue and guide humanity from this terrible situation. (*al-Qur'an*, 2:38) Someone may think that may be prophetic line and prophethood is superfluous and meaningless while humankind has given intellect and reasoning. Moreover, because of prophethood, there were some bloodshed and warfare that happened in human history, and some of the nations are less favoured. (Fakhry, 1991, p. 34, Quoted from 2000, p. 32.)

### The Prophethood (*Nubuwwah*)

After Tawhid, prophethood is a must in Islamic tradition. *Al-Kalmia al-Tayyib* (the purest word) is the fundamental proclamation for being a Muslim. To Esack, "The Qur'anic focus of the early stages of Muhammad's prophethood was essentially threefold; the absolute unicity of God (*tawhid*); Muhammad's own prophethood (*risalah*); and the ultimate accountability (*hisab*) of all people to God on the Day of Resurrection." (Esack, 2005, p. 45) In Islam, after believing in *tawhid* (the Oneness of Allah) *nubuwwah* (prophethood) is the next strong pillar for anyone to be a Muslim. Without accepting Prophet Muhammad as the

Messenger and his leadership, nobody is considered a Muslim. (*al-Qur'an*, 3:31) Allah further says, "Say (O Muhammad to mankind) if you (really) love Allah then follow me (i.e. accept Islamic Monotheism, follow the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*), Allah will love you and forgive you of your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.") Therefore, believing in *tawhid* is considered as the spiritual ties with Allah and accepting Prophet Muhammad as His Messenger and Slave is the guide who and whose teachings should be followed in the earthly life for '*sirat al-Mustaqim*' (Guide us to the Straight Way )." (*al-Qur'an*, 1:6)

History has recorded that, throughout the Prophetic history from the very inception of human civilization, people refuted the messengers and denied their true messages. In this regard, the *Qur'an* has recorded the situation of the people of Arabia and they say, "what sort of a messenger is this who eats foods, and walks through the streets? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to give admonition with him? Or (why) has not a treasure been bestowed on him, or why has he (not) a garden for enjoyment? The wicked say, "Ye follow none other than a man bewildered." (*al-Qur'an*, 25: 7-8)

It should be noted that the prophet is none other than the chosen one who accepted the presence of Allah on this earth and conveyed His message, made people aware of Allah and guided them on what to do and not to do. (*al-Qur'an*, v. 21:2) But the fact that, whenever there was a messenger or messengers, people underestimated and humiliated them and declined to follow their divine instructions but rather, they remained on their forefather's paths although these were not on the true paths. (*al-Qur'an*, v. 53:23) Allah says, "They are but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority. They follow but a guess and that which they themselves desire, whereas there has surely come to them the Guidance from their Lord!")

During the Kemalist rule in Turkey, Nursi observed the atheistic waves coming from Russia. He understood the time and geopolitical mechanisms and for this, he went to complete seclusion and wrote different treaties to save the *Ummah* from the atheistic attacks on the foundation of *Tawhid*, *Nubuwwah*, and *Hashr* (resurrection) with philosophical, scientific and natural explanations followed by '*aqal* (reason) and *naql* (proof). In this regard, Said Nursi argued that "divine power does not leave the ant without a leader, or bees without a queen, it surely would not leave

mankind without a prophet or code of law.” (Nursi, 2013c, p. 734) Nursi emphasizes sending messengers to humankind as Allah created the universe beautifully. For this, there must be a messenger who will lead humankind to Allah who is the Creator of all of us. Nursi argues, “The sacred Creator of so ornamented a cosmos must of necessity have a Noble Messenger, just as the sun must of necessity have light. For the sun cannot exist without giving light, and Divinity cannot be without showing itself through the sending of prophets.” (Nursi, 2013c, p. 72)

### **Humanity and Prophethood**

Throughout history, Muslim theologians and philosophers have seriously embarked on the discourse of prophethood, its need, possibility, and implications. The discourse was necessary because of its application and importance on Muslim societies in getting pure and sound knowledge about God and humanity through the prophets. Said Nursi had brought together different aspects of prophethood (*nubuwwah*) in his discourse through the *Risale-i Nur*. He addressed all the possible issues connected to prophethood and the prophet.

Nursi's discourse had illustrated the concept of prophethood and provided examples, analogies, metaphors, and pieces of evidence from scientific, philosophical and natural phenomena. His discussion is not like other traditional *Kalamic* discourses about prophethood but rather, he imported natural and biological sciences into his discussion. Though he applied ontological and teleological argumentations, he did not follow the traditional system of reasoning.

As has been mentioned earlier, the prophethood related discussion would not be found in any specific treaties by Nursi because of his long exile from one place to another. Sometimes, alongside his argument over *tawhid*, Nursi had discussed the contents of prophethood in the same paragraph, sometimes on the same page under the same topic. His main target was to dignify and elevate the status and position of Prophet Muhammad before the people and fight against the materialist and secular philosophies. (Nursi, 2007, p. 37, 2013c, pp. 61–62, 120)

In his discourse, Nursi followed a very simple method to address prophethood and *Tawhid* in the same line and relate this with *tawhid* as both were correlated with each other. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 247) To attract the general audience, Nursi extracted ‘proofs’ (*dala'il*) of prophethood, relevant analogies and stories.

In the *letters*, a collection of questions and answers of Nursi, he put forward rational arguments and teleological arguments for proving the essentiality of prophethood for mankind by using the analogy of an ant. (Nursi, 2010, p. 98, 2013c, p. 755, 2014, p. 530) Nursi argues that "Divine power does not leave the ant without a leader, or bees without a queen, it surely would not leave mankind without a prophet or code of law." Given all these observations and arguments, the order of the world necessitates the existence of the prophets to preserve its solidity. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 755)

Through this analogy, Nursi expressed the 'essential need' for prophethood as the obvious leader for humanity. In the everyday world, we see many kinds of leaders, such as *maddi* (material) leaders, but for Muslims, their leaders must possess both *maddi* (material) and *manavei* (spiritual) qualities, and those leaders are none other but the Prophets. He articulated prophets as having both qualities for humanity. (Nursi, 2014, p. 530)

Generally, for a better understanding by a layman, he will follow 'the Qur'anic method' i.e. the simplest method to make anything clear. Without going deep into a philosophical discussion, he usually extracts natural and simple examples to explain. For example, there are many prophets and many prophetic laws that exist in the world, which look complex and with critical issues. But Nursi equated this issue with the change of seasons in our everyday examples and explained them in a very simple way. (Nursi, 2013a, pp. 31–32)

In every community and tribe, Allah has sent messengers who accordingly claimed themselves to be the Prophets of God, and then told the people about God. (Nursi, 2014, p. 377. "But thou art truly a warner, and to every people a guide." (*al-Qur'an*: v. 13:7, v. 10:47) For Nursi, after the coming of the prophets to humankind, it would be difficult to negate or reject the existence of God, because they have given every detail about God. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 574) People know about the real God and God's oneness. Fabricated beliefs about God could happen only when there exist no prophet. (Nursi, 2011b, p. 89, 2013b, pp. 290, 650)

Nursi's discourse on prophethood elaborately covers the scope of prophets, prophetic duties, and their functions. He also rationalized the need for prophethood for humankind based on logic (*mantiq*) and reason ('*aql*). God sent messengers to guide human beings, purify them from



superstitions and sins. For Nursi, human beings are created for the specific purpose of worshipping God (*ibadah*) and prophets have taught and demonstrated the right ways to do so. He continued, "we were not created only to eat, drink, and reproduce; these are natural facts of our life, and natural needs, our main purpose is to recognize and serve God." (Nursi, 2013c, pp. 87, 97, 98) He further explained, all prophets were sent to demonstrate the right ways to worship and praise Him for His uncountable bounties, and those who follow the prophets will achieved the 'Divine Plans' and succeed in the here and hereafter (*akhirah*). (Nursi, 2013c, p. 219)

### **Prophethood: Saviour of Humanity**

Before coming to Muhammad (PBUH) to this world, there was indiscipline, antagonistic and unfriendly humanity with one another. They were like enemies to one another. A single guide was not sufficient for them to guide. They were about to annihilate themselves and the beautiful world. Even, instead of following prophets, they killed some of them. In that situation, Allah (SWT) has sent Muhammad (PBUH) to them as the saviour of humanity. The new Era of Bliss has started on the foundation of the chaotic Era. People became brothers to one another. They became united and the world transformed for the first time the real global village for all. A single command and single guide are sufficient for them. He came with miracles and a unique Divine book in hand. (Nursi, 2014, p. 115) Not only that, the previous revealed book: the Torah, the Bible, and the Psalms testified and proved it. (Nursi, 2014, pp. 200–201) So, without sending prophets, this world could be Hell for humanity earlier. For Nursi,

"Before the Era of Bliss all the nations of the world of humanity were extremely distant from one another and hostile to each other, both physically and emotionally, and by instinct and upbringing. A single sort of education was insufficient for them and all could not be drawn to a single cause. Then, when humanity was awakened in the Era of Bliss and subsequently, and people felt a desire to come together due to the exchange of ideas and swapping of characters, and the intermingling of peoples, and some of them investigating the conditions of others, and time was churned up by the many means of communication and transportation; - then the globe of the earth became like a single country, or a province, or a town, and the people of the world came together; and then a single mission, a single prophethood was sufficient for all of them." (Nursi, 2013a, p. 59)

### **Prophets: the teachers and Guides to Humanity**

From the very beginning of humanity: Adam (PBUH) to till now, there are two lines of thought and way of life. One is the prophetic way of life and religion that is guided by Allah through messengers and prophets and the other one is the philosophy and different philosophical findings in the name of modernity, progress and so-called happiness. If the second one is being separated from the first one, there will be no good for humanity at all. There will be anarchy, idolatry, polytheism, and misery of life. But, if both of the lines are united in human society, there will be peace and tranquillity in a real sense. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 575) That is the hidden formula for progress and happiness in both of the worlds. A prophet usually helps humanity to guide not only in this world but also the life after death.

On the other hand, Prophets always show the best way of life and not only have they indicated the way, but they follow first and they inspire and guide to follow that way to humanity. This way is nothing from the prophets but the resemblance of Allah's order that is moulded by Allah-given ethics, good character and cherished way of life. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 577) It is also called the vicegerent of Allah (*Khalifa*). Humanity understands its real self and being. They willingly and devotedly surrender before Allah and follow the line of prophethood. Thus, this way of submission saves humanity from being a tyrant, dictator and unjust.

### **Benefits of Following The Line of Prophethood**

The great benefits of following the line of prophethood in comparison with another way that is not the way of Allah are as follows. To Nursi there are **some examples** to make this discourse clear:

#### **Human's Weaknesses**

Humanity is composed of blood and flesh, but behind these compositions, there are some moral weaknesses inbuilt in them. These are impotence, weakness, poverty, and need so that they may not think that they are omnipotent, powerful, self-sufficient, and without need. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 578) Only Allah Almighty possesses these qualities. Prophethood makes remember humanity about these basic deficiencies and also help them to be the obedient servant of Allah.

### **Prophets Help Humanity to Find Allah**

The Illuminist (*Ishraqiyyun*), the Materialist and Naturalist philosophers hold that “From one person, only one single thing can proceed. Everything else proceeds from him by means of intermediaries.” (Nursi, 2013c, p. 579) This kind of misleading philosophy helps humankind to make an association with partners of God whereas the prophetic line is the reverse. The prophetic line demonstrates the unity of God (*tawhid*) only. In this way, prophethood again saves humanity from making association with God.

### **Social Life in Prophetic Line, Examples for Others**

Humankind is a social being. They cannot leave this important field to the hands of the devil minded one (*satan*). That is why; the line of prophethood indicates people to be social and try to be the best example unto humanity. In this regard, the prophet follows the manners and etiquettes first and then encourages and orders his followers to do so. For a social life, mutual assistance, magnanimity, and generosity are a must for others, even they are not in a line of prophetic tradition. (Nursi, 2013c, pp. 578–579) Following these noble virtues, one can easily be safe from conflict, indiscipline and enmity in social life. As a result, all the prophetic lines admire all these qualities are the best and put them as the cardinal virtues in religions.

### ***Wājib Al-Wujūd* Argument on Prophethood**

Regarding the ontological point of view, Nursi as a revivalist theologian argued the ‘*wājib al-wujūd*’ (necessarily existent) factor (2011a, pp. 19, 139, 2011b, pp. 129, 134–135, 2013a, pp. 24, 80, 2013b, pp. 61–62, 7167–168, 2014, p. 117; Vahide, 2010, pp. 216, 219) and effectively used this argument throughout his *Risale*. He avoided all theological debates but searched on all the possibilities of prophethood through a strong connection between his argument of *wājib al-wujūd* and prophethood and stressed its necessity. (2011b, pp. 134–135, 162–164, 2013a, pp. 83, 169, 2013b, pp. 61–62, 167–168, 2013c, pp. 214, 312–313, 2014, pp. 37, 108–109, 296–297, 337, 2016a, p. 140, 2016b, pp. 349, 388, 2017, p. 117; Vahide, 2010, pp. 216, 219)

He believed the possibility of prophethood may be established through the correlation between Divinity (*Uluhiyat*) and prophethood. After belief

(*Imaan*), Muslims have to worship only one God and follow Him in all affairs of life. (Nursi, 2013b, p. 115) But for a practical reason, who will guide him to worship One God? There must be a messenger who will mediate between God and the human being and that is the Prophet. In this way, the Prophet can attest to the *tawhid*, the purpose of creation, God's perfection and the bondage between prophets and humans. (Nursi, 2013b, p. 115) Next, he continued the discussion on the names and attributes of God and put it as the central theme of his exegesis. For example, God has many names, among them perfection (*Kamal*) and beauty (*Jamal*). So, if there was no prophet sent down by Allah, we would not know the meaning of the divine names and attributes and humans' understanding of God could not be fulfilled. Therefore, to learn the true nature of God and His attributes and divine names, it was necessarily logical for the prophets to be sent down to earth by God.

### **Need for Prophethood for Social Justice and Order**

In Nursi's discourse on prophethood, he argued mainly through analogies, examples and teleological reasoning. For Nursi, the roles of prophets were in initiating moral culture, creating justice and harmony in the society. This was called Nursi's 'argument of the need for prophethood' and it was the focal point of his discourse. In Nursi's worldview, every creature in the world obeys (*iti'at*) a set of laws fixed by God. Usually, creatures follow the 'Divine Laws' for themselves. However, sometimes there are some exceptions in society. In Nursi's discourse, prophets were needed to re-establish ethical laws and cultivate ethical values to preserve law and order in ensuring a harmonious society. (Nursi, 2008, p. 127)

Although human beings are the best creations of God, they have the potential to commit evil, sins and other social misdeeds. Human beings are tempted to commit a bad or evil act not only by their desires but by the temptations of the devil (*satan*) (*al-Qur'an*, v. 12:53 This translation was taken from Yusuf Ali. Prophet Yusuf (PUBH) says, "Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His Mercy: but surely my Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful") and also because civilisations not only transport good morals and virtues but also leave behind their immoral evil records and sins. To Nursi, there were no solutions for composing laws according to new evil in society. Therefore, there was a burning needs (need) for prophets who

could warn people of evils and sins and convey divine messages and laws to human beings. (Nursi, 2008, p. 127) Human beings were also created to be dependent on one another. Observing this psychological aspect, Albert Bandura, a psychologist argued, "Observance of human behaviour, aptitudes, and capabilities demonstrate that humans are created in such a way that they are dependent upon social life and need to live a communal life." (Bandura, 1982, pp. 122–147) So, this human dependency necessitated the prophets and prophetic moral and legal systems to ensure social justice, peace, harmony, law and order (Nursi, 2008, p. 126, 2013a, p. 84) as human beings and their intellect alone cannot ensure justice in the world. They needed divine prescriptions for justice to be implemented into society. To Nursi, "Humans can't find the justice through their intellects, hence the establishment of justice between humans can happen with the laws that God informs humans of. To apply these laws and put them into actions, there is a need for prophets who are of a higher class than the rest of humanity to do so." (Nursi, 2008, p. 126)

Prophets were not only establishing moral and legal aspects to the society but also teaching good morality and culture to be a true servant to God Almighty. To Nursi, "Human being is created in a higher way than animals, that is why they have a variety of wants/desires and tendencies, and that is why they have a lot of needs and for every individual. It is impossible to meet those needs alone, and consequently everyone needs the help of the others, and by helping each other they meet their needs. Because the mind and the carnal feelings (*shahwi hisler*) are not limited, and because we have our own will power (*irāda*), (the reason for us to improve ourselves, that is why they are not limited,) if you leave these alone with no rules, there will be oppression *zulm*, abuses, (if no rules are applied). To prevent oppression (*zulm*) and tyranny (*tajawuz*) you need justice in society." (Nursi, 2013a, p. 32) Moreover, by highlighting the urgency of prophethood and the nature of the "Divine Acts" (Nursi, 2011b, p. 81, 2011a, pp. 324, 357, 394, 457–458, This term is frequently used in *Risale* and it referred to 'the Divine actions' as manifested in the universe as the physical or natural laws in Nursi's worldview. See: 2013c, pp. 52–53, 2013a, p. 168, 2013b, pp. 40, 78, 260, 2014, pp. 122, 393, 2016b, pp. 349, 376, 2017, pp. 55, 118; Vahide, 2010, p. 416) (*Sunnat Allah*) the needs of the prophets were highlighted. By responding to the prophethood issue in such a way, Nursi's status among the revivalist scholars was secured and became strong.

### About Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) and His Universality

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a unique character of history in the Arabian Peninsula. Most of the time, the adjacent civilizations left behind this land to conquer and did not even show interest. The people of Arabia were in a dark in a sense of political, social, religious and economic aspects of life that is why this age is called the age of ignorance (*Jahiliyyah*). (Bashier, 1991, p. 25) They were guerrilla fighters with one another (Grunebaum, 2009, p. 18), there was no state; blood for blood. (Rodinson, 1971, p. 12) Religiously Arab was pagan in (a) general sense. (Margoliouth, 2003, p. 207) This land was united by Muhammad and established a state where he introduced the Divine law. He was able to make them brothers from their worst enemies. (*al-Qur'an*, v. 3:103. Allah SWT mentions the day of ignorance's interpersonal relationship as a whole vivid scenario of Arab, "And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah (i.e. this Quran), and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allah's Favor on you, for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren (in Islamic Faith), and you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His *Ayat* (proofs, pieces of evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.,) clear to you, that you may be guided.") Nursi draws a picture of the Arabian Peninsula and narrates how Prophet Muhammad transformed this land as the blessed land. In addition, he articulates the universality of Prophet Muhammad and how he became the leader of mankind and jinn. Prophet's uniqueness is there that he successfully answered all questions of mankind and jinn. Nursi argues,

"If you wish, come! Let us go to the Arabian Peninsula, to the Era of Bliss! In our imaginations, we shall see him at his duties and visit him. Look! We see a person distinguished by his fine character and beautiful form. In his hand is a miraculous Book and on his tongue, a truthful address; he is delivering a pre-eternal sermon to all mankind, indeed, to man, the jinn, the angels, and to all beings. He solves and expounds the strange riddle of the mystery of the world's creation; he discovers and solves the abstruse talisman which is the mystery of the universe; and he provides convincing and satisfying answers to the three awesome and difficult questions that are asked of all beings and have always bewildered and occupied minds; Where do you come from? What are you doing here? Where are you going?" (Nursi, 2011b, p. 240, 2013c, p. 81, 2013a, p. 190, 2014, p. 237)

### **Prophet Muhammad's Role in The Tradition of Prophethood**

Nursi considered Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the perfect soul in terms of prophetic qualities, miracles and characteristics in the trajectory of prophethood. Nursi argued in his book "*Mathnawi al-Nuriye*" that God Himself manifested through His messengers. Nursi further illustrated Prophet Muhammad as a beautiful picture and reflection of God's Names and attributes. (Nursi, 2007, p. 52)

Nursi presented the Prophet as the 'truthful witness' of God and the 'verified proof'. (Nursi, 2007, p. 19) For him,

"He is the master of all prophets, messengers, saints, who holds the meaning of the confirmation of God's existence and unity. He is the consensus of all prophets, Messengers, leader of all its God-conscious scholars, who possess lofty and laudable virtues and perfect admirable morals, and is the centre upon which Divine revelation is focused. He is the traveler (traveller) to the unseen realm and the teacher, and guide of humanity and jinn." (Nursi, 2007, p. 69)

For Nursi, a Prophet is the reflection of truth, the servant and Messenger of God and the perfect expression of the light of Divine Unity. (Nursi, 2007, p. 69) For Nursi, Prophets had the prophetic lineage beginning with Prophet Abraham and ending with Prophet Muhammad. According to the Abrahamic Tradition, all Prophets were torchbearers of truth among misguidance and darkness. (Nursi, 2014, p. 377) Nursi considered Prophet Muhammad as the significant proof of God. (Nursi, 2008, pp. 119–121) Prophet Muhammad was the seed of all the creations. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 600) His light existed before all other creations. To Nursi, Prophet Muhammad is regarded as the main purpose of creation and held a meaningful position among other prophets. (Nursi, 2007, pp. 169–170) In all the prophetic chains, Prophet Muhammad is the luminous personality of the chain of prophethood.

In Nursi's view, "Prophet Muhammad stands for a particular and unique role amongst all the prophets and is affirmed by his account that, Just as the Prophet's mission of messengers caused the creation of this world for trial and worship, so the prayer he makes as a requirement and dimension of his servanthood would cause the construction of the other world for reward and punishment." (Nursi, 2007, p. 28, 2013c, p. 86) Nursi's other concept about the Prophet was "*shakhṣ al-ma'nawī*" (collective personality). This collective personality refers to the universality of the

Prophet's nature and his global mission. "Collective Personality" of Prophet Muhammad is unique among the whole mankind even among the prophetic traditions. His personality and mission are universal. Allah made the whole earth his mosque, Mekka as his place of worship, Medina as his pulpit.... the master of all saints and scholars; he guides and educates them via the light of his messengership. For more details, see Nursi, 2007, p. 20. He spread his mission within a very short time throughout the world. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 249)

In brief, there is only one human personality who came to the universe whose natural situations, everyday habits and practices, speeches, eating-drinking, sleeping, walking, even his public and private life have been well recorded as *Sunnah*. He is the cosmic model for humanity's "*uswatun hasanah*," ('Indeed, in the messenger of Allah a 'good example has been set for the one who seeks Allah and the Last Day and thinks constantly about Allah', See *al-Qur'an*, v. 33:21) and he acted accordingly. He always chose the middle way and avoided extreme methods. Thus, he became a role model for humanity. (This translation was taken from Yusuf Ali. Allah says, "Thus, have We made of you an *Ummat* justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the *Qibla* to which thou wast used, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (from the Faith). Indeed it was (a change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah Make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people Most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful." See *al-Qur'an*, v. 2:143)

### **Pieces of Evidence of Prophethood**

To believers, Muhammad (PBUH) is the last messenger and prophet from God to humankind. The proofs of the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) are of two kinds: The First is called *irhasat* that includes the paranormal events (that) happened at the time of his birth, or before his prophetic mission. (Nursi, 2013a, p.196, 2013b, p.596, 2014, p.157) The second one is all the remaining pieces of evidence of his prophethood. (Nursi, 2014, pp. 121–122)

### **Miracles (*M'uzizat*)**

Nursi developed his discourse based on reason (*'aql*) and logic (*mantiq*) rather than Revelation (*naql*). Likewise, for a miracle, he employed these arguments for rationalizing and proving the miracles of Prophet



Muhammad to refute the post-Enlightenment influence. Nursi addressed and defended the miracles of Muhammad in the *Risale*. He started to explain prophethood beginning with the Qur'ān. (*al-Qur'an*, v. 2:23-24.) Allah says, "And if ye are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, then produce a *Surah* like there unto; and call your witnesses or helpers (If there are any) besides Allah, if your (doubts) are true. But if ye cannot and of a surety, ye cannot then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones, which is prepared for those who reject Faith.") Allah says,

"And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed, step by step, to Our servant, then produce a *Surah* like there unto; and call your witnesses [and helpers if there are any] besides Allah, if what you say is true. But if you cannot, and of surety you cannot, then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones, which is prepared for those who reject Faith." (Nursi, 2013a, p. 181)

According to Nursi's discourse, Allah facilitated some of the prophets to demonstrate miracles (*m'uzizat*) to prove their prophethood, and this was overwhelming and amazing to the laymen in daily life. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 181) Nobody could perform these miracles without the permission of God. To Nursi, "Both miracles and wonders depend on the permission of God. Besides, 'if God does not enable them to produce miracles or wonders, a prophet cannot work out a miracle nor can a beloved, saintly servant of God do so'." (Nursi, 2014, p. 91) Prophet Muhammad was blessed with 'fifteen different types of miracles' (Nursi, 2014, p. 152) and thousands of miracles of Prophet Muhammad are found in the Prophetic biographic corpus. (Nursi, 2013c, p. 296) Nursi argued for the benefit of miracles as the miracles helped the believers to verify the authenticity of the prophets with their claims and increase their belief and become more luminous. (Nursi, 2014, p. 152)

Nursi's categorized miracles and miracle related discussion into three categories in the *Risale*: firstly, miracles as confirmation and verification for prophethood for example the miracle of the moon splitting into two; (Nursi, 2010, p. 99, 2011b, p. 118, 2013c, p. 73, 151, 2013b, pp. 151, 594, 2014, p. 118, 2017, p. 99) secondly, miracles helping believers to be firm to their conviction, for example, the 'moaning of the pole' to Prophet Muhammad; (Nursi, 2014, pp. 159–162) and lastly, miracles were for specific needs of prophet or his *ummah* (community) for example, food and water. (Nursi, 2014, pp. 159–162)

Nursi's explanation of miracles of the prophets, especially Prophet Muhammad these awarded him a very unique position among his contemporary scholars. He did not reject *naql*, but for a better understanding by the masses, he preferred to employ '*aql*'. However, by dedicating this method of discussion, Nursi contributed a new paradigm in theology that balanced the discourse on prophethood and the miracles from a logical and philosophical point of view to prove prophethood.

### **Finality of Prophethood (*Khatam Al-Nubuwwah*)**

According to Islam, Prophet Muhammad is the last in the line of prophetic chain and final messenger of Allah to humanity and it is discussed in the concept of "the finality of prophethood" (*Khātām al-Anbiyā*) (Allah says, "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allah, and the Seal of the Prophets: and Allah has full knowledge of all things." (*al-Qur'an*, v. 33:40). With this concept of the "seal or finality of prophets," it meant that prophethood and revelation have been ended with his revelations. (*al-Qur'an*, v. 5:3) The concept '*Khātām al-anbiyā*' was not discussed much more in the *Risale* because, the claiming prophethood in the modern age by an ordinary people was not familiar to Nursi, but in Pakistan and India, it was discussed in details because of claiming prophethood by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908), was the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement from Punjab in India. He is self-proclaimed to be a reviver, a *Mahdi*, a messiah and finally a prophet. See Kaushik, 1996, pp. 8, 19, 49; Maudoodi, 1979, pp. 5–6, 112; Valentine, 2008, p. 84).

Nursi's discourse regarding prophethood was mainly based on the necessity of prophethood, pieces of evidence for prophethood, *hikmah* of sending a prophet, collective personality of Prophet Muhammad, and arguments in terms of the philosophical point of view. However, Nursi addressed the finality of the prophethood issue in the *Risale* as the 'Seal of all prophets' (Nursi, 2010, p. 73, 2011a, p. 115, 2013c, p. 243, 2013b, p. 361, 2013a, p. 58, 2014, pp. 200, 236,) or 'seal of the prophet' (Nursi, 2010, p. 73, 2013c, pp. 271, 617, 2013a, pp. 7, 58, 2014, pp. 197, 251, 518).

### **Salvation outside of the fold of Prophet Muhammad?**

Islam believes in the chain of messengers and prophets. It is believed that the first man Adam (PBUH) was the first prophet. Throughout the ages,

Allah SWT sent many prophets to every nation and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the last messenger in this prophetic line. He is the heir of all prophets and messengers of Islam. He is sealed and the last prophet of Islam. In Islam, after believing in *tawhid*, the necessary obligation to believe in the other part of *kalima* is to believe in the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He was sent to all people; his Shariah has abrogated all preceding ones and contains their virtues. (Nursi, 2013a, p. 58) So, there will be no salvation outside the fold of Prophet Muhammad. (Nursi, 2014, pp. 394, 529) His *Shariah* is eternal. (Nursi, 2010, p. 73)

## Conclusion

The observation made in the above discussion suggests that Nursi's main concern was to invite the Muslims especially and the people of other faiths generally to enjoy the beauty of Islam. In the course of doing so, he had to explain among other issues, the rights of non-Muslims in the newly transformed Turkish Republic. This discourse led him to re-theorize some of the long-practised Islamic legal principles experienced by the pre-modern Muslim Administrations.

Through the content analysis of the writings of Nursi, this article addressed the post-Enlightenment theological dilemma of Turkey. He founded his whole place of thought on the premise of *tawhid*, the doctrine in '*wajibul wujud*', '*Nubuwwah*' and '*hashr*'. Nursi addressed the anti-Islamic propagation against prophethood and proved it in his *Risale*. Nursi highlighted the bliss era of Prophet Muhammad and his leadership. Likewise, he also argued the importance of prophethood and revelation to the solution to the modern world. Michel H. Hart also evaluates Prophet Muhammad in similar voices like Nursi. Hart argued, "My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels." (Hart, 1992, p. 3) To put it otherwise, Nursi processed his thought system based on the synthesized Islamic *Kalami* tradition. He relied on the *Quran-Sunnah* based understandings and responded to the challenges and the prospects of the transitional phase of the Ottoman rule and Kemalist era.

His thought system hence could be easily located in the greater Islamic knowledge arena. To sum up, his thought system was a dynamic method

that allowed him to re-theorize some Islamic principles in line with the demands of the transitional phase in a unique way whereby he accommodated positive factors and rejected the evil currents.

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