

Bediüzzaman Nursi on Prophethood

Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi*

Bediüzzaman Nursi was one of the popular Islamic scholars of 19th century Turkey. He has made good discourse on the essential themes of Islam. Prophethood figures one among these discourses. He gives the evidences of the Prophethood of Muhammad (SAAS) briefly in a Turkish treatise called *Suaât-i Mârifeti'n-Nebi* in the Nineteenth Letter (The Miracles of Muhammad). He describes “the All-Wise Qur’an’s miraculousness” in most convincing manner. Moreover, in *Lemeât* and in the Twenty-Fifth Word (The Miraculousness of the Qur’an); explains concisely forty ways in which the Qur’an is a miracle, and indicates forty aspects of its miraculousness.¹ Not only at the level of sublimity of spiritual aesthetic but also its normative truths espouses that the Qur’an is a miracle, Nursi says:

According to the testimony of thousands of brilliant scholars of rhetoric and the science of rhetorical style like Zamakhshari, Sakkaki, and ‘Abd al-Qadir Jurjani, the Qur’an is miraculous exposition as a whole, a pleasant fluency, a superior correctness, a firm mutual solidarity, and compact proportionateness, powerful co-operation between the sentences and parts, and an elevated harmony between the verses and their aims.²

Furthermore, the revelation has the wherewithal to take humanity to its lofty destiny in a very little time and spiritual journey becomes smooth in light of the revelation according to Said Nursi. Who says: The conversation of the Prophet was such an elixir that someone who experienced it for one minute received lights of reality equivalent to years of spiritual journeying.... It is well-known that through reflection and following and imitating, and through the sublime light of Prophethood, a truly exalted level may be reached; -like through allegiance to his sovereign and following him, a sultan’s servant may rise to a position

* Professor, S.H. Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagr-190006.

so high a king cannot rise to it. It is due to this mystery that the greatest saints cannot reach the level of the Companions. Even saints like Jalaluddin Suyuti, who conversed many times with God's noble Messenger (SAAS) while awake, even if they do this and are honoured in this world with his company, they still cannot reach the Companions.³

Nursi like Ghazali makes distinction between the revelation of the Prophet and the intuition of a saint:

Through the light of Muhammad's (SAAS) Prophethood, the Companions' conversation was with him as Prophet. While the saints saw him (SAAS) after his death and conversed with him (SAAS) through the light of his sainthood. That is to say, the personification and appearance of God's Noble Messenger (SAAS) is in respect of his sainthood, not in regard to his Prophethood. Since that is so, however much higher the level of Prophethood is to that of sainthood, one should differentiate between the two conversations to that degree.

It has been demonstrated decisively in the *Risale-i Nur* with many proofs and indications that through giving the highest position to the person of Muhammad in the Qur'an and including him in four pillars of belief and holding that the Muhammad is the Messenger of God equal to the pillar of there is no god but God, that the Messengership of Muhammad (SAAS) is the greatest truth in the universe, and that the person of Muhammad is the most noble of creatures, and his universal collective personality and sacred rank, known as the Muhammadan Truth, is the most radiant Sun of the two worlds. His worthiness for this extraordinary position has also been proved. One of these proofs is this: According to the principle of 'the cause is like the doer,' with the equivalent of all the good works performed by all his community at all times entering his book of good works; and the light which he brought illuminating all the truths of the cosmos; and his gratifying not only the jinn, mankind, and animate beings, but also the universe and the heavens and earth; and the supplications of plants, offered through the tongue of disposition,

and the supplications of animals offered through the tongue of their innate need, and the righteous of his community every day.⁴”

Talking about the human inability to develop its own resources for guidance is quite evident in light of the statement of Nursi: “that the struggle for livelihood together with lack of reliance on God has bewildered man’s spirit, and Naturalist and Materialist philosophies have blinded his intellect, just as the social environment does not strengthen a person’s mind and capacity in the matter of interpreting the Divine law, so it confuses and scatters them.⁵” The Twelfth Word has brought to fore the superiority of revelation and its wisdom in comparison to “the wisdom of philosophy and science”, apart from showing the impact of revelation on the sacred life of the Prophet and his social life is built under its directions. Nursi says:

If you have understood the valuable mystery of this Fourth Principle, you have understood that revelation mostly comes to the prophets by means of an angel, and inspiration is mostly without means. You will have also understood the reason why the greatest saint cannot attain to the level of a prophet. And you will have understood the Qur’an’s sublimity and its sacred grandeur and the mystery of its elevated Miraculousness. So too you will have understood the mystery of the necessity of the Prophet Muhammad’s ascension, that is, that he went to the heavens, to the furthest Lote-tree, to the distance of two bow-lengths, offered supplications to the All-Glorious One, Who is closer to him than his jugular vein, and in the twinkling of an eye returned whence he came. Indeed, just as the Splitting of the Moon was a miracle of his messenger-ship whereby he demonstrated his Prophethood to the jinn and mankind, so the Ascension was a miracle of his worship and servitude to God whereby he demonstrated to the spirits and angels that he was God’s Beloved. O God, grant blessings and peace to him and to his Family as befits your mercy, and in veneration of him, *Aamin*.⁶

While, according to Nursi, revelation gives a unified view about the universe and man, but philosophers and scientists look to multiplicity, causes, and nature, and see things in accordance with them. Their points of view are extremely distant from one another.

Talking about the genuineness of revelation vis a vis philosophy, Kalam, and even science, Nursi thinks that certain fact of science can touch the sacred truths of the Qur'an. Like the arrogant Mu'tazilites, who made the reason dominant, do they imagine themselves to be rivals to and inspectors of the Creator's works, and want to hold the All-Glorious Creator responsible? One should not lose heart! Nothing can come of the denials of self-centred people.

Nursi further elaborates:

Since Prophethood, the affirmation of Divine unity, and belief all look to unity, the hereafter, and Divinity, they see truth and reality in accordance with those. While philosophers and scientists look to multiplicity, causes, and nature, and see in accordance with them. Their points of view are extremely distant from one another. The greatest aim of the people of philosophy is so small and insignificant as to be imperceptible among the aims of the scholars of religion and theology. Moreover, Science cannot reach up to the "pure sublimity", that the Qur'anic revelation endows us.⁷

Furthermore, if philosophy is not governed by revelation and does not obey the line of religion. It will, according to Nursi, take the form of a tree of Zaqqum, which scatters the darkness of ascribing partners to God and misguidance on all sides and will lead to atheism, materialism and naturalism. The branch of the power of intellect produces the fruit of atheism, materialism, and naturalism for the consumption of the human intellect. And in the realm of the power of passion, it pours the tyrannies of Nimrod, Pharaoh, and Shaddad on mankind. And in the realm of the power of animal appetites, it nurtures and bears the fruit of goddesses, idols, and those who claim divinity.

The origin of the tree of Zaqqum together with that of the line of Prophethood, which is like the Tuba-tree of worship, are in the two faces of the 'I'. The blessed branches of the line of Prophethood in the garden of the globe of the earth are the following: in the branch of the power of intellect, it has nurtured the fruits of the prophets, the messengers, and the saints. In the branch of the power of repulsion, it has resulted in angelic kings and just rulers. And in the branch of the power of attraction, it has resulted in people of good character and

modest and beautiful manner, both generous and gracious. So, the line of Prophethood has shown how mankind is the most perfect fruit of the universe. The two faces of the 'I' is the root and pivot and as a principal seed of those two trees. That is to say, Prophethood takes hold of one face of the 'I', and philosophy takes hold of the other, causing them to diverge.⁸

Adding a new dimension to the Ascension of the Prophet (SAAS) Nursi explains the importance of miracles: "As the splitting of the Moon was a miracle of Muhammad (SAAS) for men in the manifest world, so the Ascension was his supreme miracle of him before the angels in the world of the inner dimensions of things. Through this clear wonder, the sainthood of Prophethood was proved, and like lightening or the moon, that shining being scattered light through those inner worlds.

Nursi discusses revelation at three levels. The level of spiritual sublimity of the topics and elevated impact of revelation on human destiny. Secondly, the miraculousness of revelation of the Qur'an from the point of view of eloquence, fluency rhetoric and communication, as it excels all human forms of these categories. Thirdly, he brings to fore the genuineness and lofty standard of accuracy and unified perspective enshrined in revelation in contrast to the piecemeal and fragmented approach of philosophy and science to unity and structure of the universe and human relations.

Prophethood is thought by Nursi as gift from the Undying All-Beauteous One, the Enduring All-Glorious One, the blessed salutations and benedictions of all creatures. And through greeting God's most noble Messenger, one renews his allegiance to him and proclaims his obedience to his commands. In order to renew and illuminate ones faith, one observes the wise order in this palace of the universe and testifies to the unity of the All-Glorious Maker. And one testify to the Messengership of Muhammad who is the herald of the sovereignty of God and the proclaimer of those things pleasing to Him, and the interpreter of the signs and verses of the book of the universe.⁹ God's dominicality is supported and made evident by this linkage and makes us to interpret the signs found in this universe scattered in the copious pages of it, in form of stars, galaxies and

milky ways and spacious heavenly bodies. There are numerous other functions of Prophethood, according to Nursi, each of which is a decisive proof that Divinity necessarily implies messengership. All purity, affinity to God and leadership of all divinely inspired souls belong to the last Prophet (SAAS): Nursi says:

Did anyone ever appear in the world more worthy and more in possession of the above mentioned qualities and functions than Muhammad, the Arabian Prophet, may peace and blessings be upon him? Has time ever shown us one more fitting and suited to the rank of messengerhood and the task of conveying God's message? No, by no means! He is the master of all messengers, the foremost of all prophets, the leader of all pure ones, the closest to God of all those who have drawn nigh unto Him, the most perfect of all creatures, the monarch of all guides to righteousness.¹⁰

Prophethood is also a testimony to *Tawhid* and Resurrection of the people on the Day of Judgment. The Resurrection being third basic tenet of Islam preached all along by all the prophets (SAAS) preceding Muhammad (SAAS) apart from Tauhid and Prophethood.¹¹

Showing the close link between the office of Prophethood and Resurrection; Nursi establishes its credentials succinctly. To him, it is the All-Wise Qur'an, the treasury of miracles and supreme miracle, proves the Prophethood of Muhammad (SAAS) together with Divine unity so decisively that it leaves no need for further proof.

In the same way that the consensus of the prophets is a strong proof for the existence and unity of God, so too it is a firm testimony to the truthfulness and messengerhood of this being. For all the sacred attributes, miracles and functions that indicate the truthfulness and messengerhood of the prophets (Peace be upon them) existed in full measure in that being according to the testimony of history. The prophets have verbally predicted the coming of that being and given good tidings thereof in the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms, and the pages; more than twenty of the most conclusive examples of these glad tidings, drawn from the scriptures, have been set forth and proven in the Nineteenth Letter. Similarly, through all the deeds and miracles associated with their Prophethood they have affirmed and,

as it were, put their signature to the mission of that being which is the foremost and most perfect in the tasks and functions of Prophethood. Just as through verbal consensus they indicate the Divine unity, through the unanimity of their deeds they bear witness to the truthfulness of that being. This too was understood by our traveller.¹²

To Nursi, the millions of purified, sincere, and punctilious scholars and faithful sages, who have reached the highest station of learning through the teaching and instruction contained in the sacred truths brought by that being, despite his unlettered nature, the exalted sciences he invented and Divine knowledge he discovered - they not only prove and affirm, unanimously and with the strongest proofs, the Divine unity which is the foundation of his mission, but also bear unanimous witness to the truthfulness of this supreme teacher and great master, and to the veracity of his words. This is a proof as clear as daylight. *The Risale-i Nur* itself in some ways with its one hundred parts is but a single proof of his truthfulness.

Nursi explains that just as the Qur'an, with all its miracles and truths indicating its veracity is a miracle of Muhammad so too, Muhammad with all his miracles, proofs of Prophethood and perfections of knowledge, is a miracle of the Qur'an and a decisive proof of the Qur'an's being the Word of God. "All the miracles indicating the Messengership of Muhammad (SAAS) and the evidences for his Prophethood, and all the proofs of his veracity, together testify to the occurrence of the resurrection, and prove it. For after Divine unity, everything he claimed throughout his life was centred on the resurrection of the dead. Also, all his miracles and proofs affirming, and making affirmed, all the previous prophets attest to the same truth. Also, the testimony of the phrase "and in His Scriptures," which makes completely clear the testimony of the phrase "and in His Prophets," testifies to the same truth¹³".

Nursi illustrates that all the miracles, truths, and proofs proving foremost the veracity of the Qur'an of miraculous exposition, testify to and prove the realization and occurrence of resurrection. For almost one third of the Qur'an is about resurrection, and at the beginning of the most of its short *suras* are powerful verses about it. It expresses the same truth explicitly and implicitly with thousands of

its verses¹⁴. Precisely Nursi explains prophethood as the fundamental truth of Islam profoundly. Its philosophy is well elaborated in the earlier Divine scriptures. To Muhammad (SAAS) the same is testified in the Qur'an and it is an all embracing truthfulness of the prophethood doctrine. Nursi's arguments are Qur'anically sounded and he, as such vitiates the validity of pure philosophical speculations about the truth of life.

References and Notes

- 1 The Words / Nineteenth Word - p.250.
- 2 The Words / Twenty-Fifth Word - Second Light - First Beam - p.427.
- 3 The Words / Twenty-Seventh Word - Addendum - p.506-508.
- 4 The Words / A Flower of Emirdag - p.474.
- 5 The Words / Twenty-Seventh Word - Addendum - p.509.
- 6 The Words / Thirteenth Word - p.150, *The Words / Nineteenth Word.* - p.249.
- 7 The Words / Twenty-Fourth Word - Fourth Branch - p.361.
- 8 The Words / Thirtieth Word - First Aim - p.562.
- 9 The Words / Ninth Word - p.56.
- 10 The Words / Tenth Word - First Truth - p.74.
- 11 The Words / Nineteenth Word - p.251.
- 12 The Rays / the Supreme Sign - First Chapter - p.154.
- 13 The Rays / the Supreme Sign - First Chapter - p.154.
- 14 The Words / Tenth Word - First Part of the Addendum - p.112.

