



## Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Methodology for Da'wah: An Overview of Certain Principles

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### Abstract

This study presents approaches to *da'wah* as adopted and taught by Said Nursi to advance his restoration efforts. It also sheds light on the importance of their application in the present era. The paper reviews two distinct issues: [1] approaches Said Nursi used to confront and resolve social complexities, and [2] *da'wah* praxis in the modern age. The author also discusses complexities and challenges as presented by modern life styles. Special *da'wah* features are described including educational and political efforts as well as the nurturing of Islamic virtue with Nursi's emphasis on those specific characteristics that inspire Muslim scholars to excel in *da'wah* activities. Nonetheless, it is impossible to thoroughly deliberate Nursi's approaches and strategies in such a limited space.

**Keywords:** Methodology, Da'wah, Nursi.



# منهجية بديع الزمان سعيد نورسي للدعوة: نظرة عامة على بعض المبادئ

## المستخلص

إن هذه الدراسة تقدم الطرق التي تتبعها في الدعوة وقام بتعليمها وذلك بغرض المضي قدماً في مساعيهِ وجهوده للإصلاح، وتلقي هذه الدراسة الضوء كذلك على أهمية تطبيق ذلك على الحقبة الحاضرة، قامت الورقة باستعراض قضيتين مختلفتين (1) الوسائل التي استخدمها الإمام سعيد النورسي لمواجهة التعقيدات الاجتماعية ومن ثم يجد لها الحلول و (2) تطبيقات الدعوة وتنزيلها في الواقع المعاصر، قام كاتب المقال أيضاً بمناقشة التعقيدات والتحديات التي تتمثل من خلال أساليب الحياة المعاصرة، قامت الورقة بوصف مميزات وخصائص خاصة بالدعوة متضمنة الجهود التربوية والتعليمية والسياسية إلى جانب تنشيط الفضائل الإسلامية مع تركيز النورسي على هذه المميزات المحددة التي تلهم العلماء المسلمين لترقية الأنشطة الدعوية، وبالرغم من هذا فإنه من المستحيل أن يتتبع الباحث بصورة موسعة وسائل النورسي واستراتيجياته في مثل هذه المساحة المحدودة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: منهجية، الدعوة، النورسي

## Introduction

Hailing from a respectable family whose parents were characterized by piety and steadfast God-consciousness, Said Nursi, a descendent of the Prophet, was born in 1877 in the village of Nursi, an eastern province in Turkey. (Nursi,1998:35) His father's name was Mirza and his mother was called Nuriyah. His lineage is traced to Hasan on his father's side and to Husayn on his mother's. His birth name was Said and Nursi was adopted from the town of his birth. He was also called Bediuzzaman, meaning "The Unique One of the Age". His mentor, Fathullah, gave him this title due to Nursi's brilliance and titanic bank of commendable knowledge, and because he always gave precise answers to the most difficult questions and held forth with expertise in different sciences, abilities and arts, especially when compared to his contemporaries. (Nursi,1998:65)

He was granted his *ijazah ilmiyyah* (scholarly certificate) on completing *madrassa* studies, which was the traditional religious college of the Ottoman state. Being a genius with a photographic memory, he memorized the entire Qur'an in fifteen days and continued to memorize another ninety works on the Islamic sciences, including highly technical subjects. He also became an expert and competent scholar in the natural sciences owing to personal effort. It is no exaggeration to say he eventually became recognized as one of the most influential scholars and thinkers of the twentieth century.

A universal thinker, Nursi's works were written in prison, in exile and even on horseback and have since attained prominent positions in world literature. They substantially



impact readers even from other religions due to his moderate approach to exegetical presentations and religious exhortation. He is regarded as a *peace-making hero* who advocated unity and solidarity for the Muslim *ummah*, as have other writers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Hasan al-Banna. His life was characterized by genuine sincerity, piety, steadfast God-consciousness and a deep commitment to the Islamic value of *ikhlas*, as emphasised in his epistles. Nursi's redoubtable courage never allowed any compromise of firmly held principles, policies and strategies in spite of persecution, constraints, assassination attempts (including poison), and tortuous abuse inflicted by secular state authorities. He upheld Islamic principles without concession and was determined to live in conformity with *shari'ah* while conveying Islam's gestalt message to all of mankind.

A remarkable event occurred during WWI when Nursi volunteered as commander of a battalion that he formed with his owned students. He showed extraordinary heroism and was taken captive to Russia where he spent two and half years. He managed to escape and finally reached Istanbul to continue his activities.

### Nursi's Methodology for *Da'wah*

Popularly known as a great reformer with unparalleled spiritual authority, Nursi's discourses on various issues infer three modalities for the performance of *da'wah*, specifically in Turkey. He called these (i) *da'wah bi al-ḥall*, (ii) *da'wah bi al-lisān*, and (iii) *da'wah bi al-kitābāh*. The first engaged community and religious services in which he personally dedicated himself to solving problems faced by the Turkish *ummah*. These several activities included remediation services for religion, culture, politics, education and communication. This period of Nursi's *da'wah* activities occurred during what is called the 'Old Said' era.

Said Nursi could not fully utilise the second modality, *da'wah bi al-lisān*, because he was imprisoned for several years and even forced into exile due to his Islamization efforts. He sustained strong opposition from nationalist secularists that were actually controlled by trans-national groups that antagonized Islamic traditions and civilization. Incarceration neither demotivated nor frustrated Nursi but rather inspired further commitment and sacrifice. He visited rural villages, towns and cities to convey his messages despite serious threats and conspiracies against his life. An example was his historical visit to the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus in 1911 to deliver the sermon on Friday (his *Damascus Sermon*; *al-khutbah al-Shamiyyah*). Ten thousand people attended, including one hundred Syrian scholars of Islamic Revealed Knowledge. Some years later he published a booklet entitled *Khutbe-i Shamiye*, which deliberated the true situation of contemporary Muslims. He identified six diseases of the *ummah* and offered practical steps for remediation.

This same approach continued throughout his life in addition to *da'wah* for students who visited him in prison and/or during his exile in Barla<sup>[1]</sup>, which is a remote village forty kilometres from Isparta where he began writing epistles on numerous issues that faced



both nation and *ummah*.<sup>[2]</sup> There were no proper roads at the time so students made difficult pilgrimages through hills and forests from Isparta to Barla. Said Nursi dictated expositions on the Qur'an to students who faithfully recorded them. Despite the severe punishments meted out by security forces for meeting with Nursi for Qur'anic discourses, these students remained unafraid of the consequences. Their definitive motto was to seek the pleasure of Allah as students of *Risale-i Nur* who constantly encouraged each other with this in mind.

Thus, Said Nursi also performed *da'wah bi al-kitābah* for the Muslim community. He authored 130 epistles and produced his masterpiece, *Risale-i Nur*, which has since been used by his students as their main reference and motivational source for reform efforts. Muslim researchers and writers on Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* agree it is a monumental Qur'ānic oriented instrument for the delivery of Islam's message. Its methods have been categorized as follows: (i) the method for *al-hikmah*, which emphasizes gentleness in delivering the message; (ii) the method of *al-maw'idah al-ḥasanah*, which emphasizes the giving of advice as *tawsiyah* (message), *irshād* (guidance) and *tadhkirah* (reminder); and (iii) the method of *al-mujādalah*, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue and debate.

### Nursi's *Da'wah* Techniques

This section reviews the cited techniques/methods of *da'wah* as revealed in *Risale-i Nur*. Students of Nursi's articulations reveal that he personally employed these techniques/methods as directly inspired by the Qur'ān.

#### [1] *Da'wah bi al-Hikmah*

Said Nursi's intellectual religious discourse on the Qur'ān reveals that he invited the cooperation of all readers and students with respect, gentleness and politeness to work along with him. This strategic appeal was accompanied by deeply appealing sentiments of compassion, brotherhood and unity. He always considered psychological aspects when soliciting cooperation with calm reserve. When presenting the message of Islam he often compared it with Western civilization to enable the realization of consequences when one accepts or endorses the replacement of Islamic values and principles with Western culture. Indeed, he invited people to read the Qur'ān and derive these lessons directly because he firmly believed its scripture clearly and comprehensively presented knowledge of creation's nature and purpose. Without doubt, he fostered Qur'ānic studies for purposes of receiving light, instruction and guidelines that cultivate a culture of regular reading and listening. His goal was to mould a Qur'ānic worldview:

“Otherwise, be silent! The Qur'an reads the universe in the vast mosque of creation. Let us listen to it. Let us be illuminated with that light. Let us act according to its guidance. And let us recite it constantly. Yes, the Qur'an is the word. That is what they say of it. It





the Qur'an which is the truth and comes from the Truth and says the truth and shows the truth and spreads luminous wisdom..." (Nursi, 2008:44)

This exemplifies Nursi's all-inclusive invitation by his use of the phrase, "Let us", and further shows that he invited people to learn from the Qur'an together with him. This method motivates people to willingly listen-to, constantly read the Qur'an, and then follow its message and guidance. Another example of his approach to *hikmah* is noted in the following passage:

"Come, friend! Let us turn to the mutual interrelations of this amazing palace with its all-embracing components. Look! Universal things are being done and general revolutions are taking place with such perfect orderliness, as if all rocks, soil and trees in this palace of the world obey general rules but are otherwise free to do whatever they will. Things that appear most distant come to each other in aid. Look at that strange caravan approaching from the unseen on high resembling trees, plants and mountains. Each member carries trays of food on their heads, bringing them to creatures waiting on this side. Look at this mighty lamp attached to a string by an unseen hand and held up before all. See the impotent, weak and defenceless little animals. Over each head is a small, spring-like pump full of delicate sustenance. They need only press their mouths and suckle to be fed." (Nursi, 2008:33)

This quote contains "Come Friend", which draws readers closer to the writer. We also note the word "Look", which implies that Nursi called his readers to see, observe, ponder, contemplate, reflect and consider the universe and nature without duress. Readers were thus guided by kindness and analogy. The word "See" inspires readers to observe defenceless animals in the world, which motivates people to travel extensively and which underscores our Creator's Omnipotence. His writing style offers a serious invitation to reflect on the benefits of Allah's creation and thus realize how nature contributes to mankind's greater understanding of our Creator while dynamically strengthening faith.

## [2] *Da'wah bi al-Maw'idah al-Hasanah*

Said Nursi believed in performing *da'wah* by giving the best advisement. Such advice consistently pursued *tawsiyah*, *tadhkirah*, and *irshād*, as cited earlier; i.e., message, reminder and guidance, respectively, which according to Nursi are basic components of wise counsel for the ministry of *da'wah*. Those who are most successful in *da'wah* activities possess all three as praiseworthy traits that still today characterize students of *Risale-i Nur*.<sup>[3]</sup>

First, let a *da'i* of Islam (presenter of the divine message) diagnose the disease (s) of a target group and offer cure(s) without any worldly reward. Second, the approach is made with *hikmah* (wisdom) so as not to negatively affect unity between Muslims. Nursi was very concerned with the ummah's unity and advised his students not to engage in



criticism, which he considered unhealthy. Hence, 'no criticism of others' is a Nursi principle. Third, *da'wah* must be performed with eloquence; i.e., by someone who knows what should be said as well as when and how to express it. This means the presenter should also understand important dimensions of human psychology.

Thus, an Islamic presenter should be socially and intellectually clear, conscious, considerate, competent, capable, courteous, courageous and serene in their performance of *da'wah*. The paramount objective is to seek the pleasure of Allah to the exclusion of all else, especially the seeking of publicity or praise from an audience, be they students, colleagues or the contemporary public. Also forbidden is the exhibition of pride via manifestations of arrogance, ostentation or condescension due to one's knowledge, recognition, degrees or awards. Hence, Nursi clearly applied a moderate and humble approach to the presentation of Islam's precious messages. Neither is there any sign of radical extremism in his discourse, methodology and objectives. His deeds, as per *Risale-i Nur* and confirmed history, strictly conformed to Qur'anic modalities

Said Nursi also remarked on ineffective methods of *da'wah* after hearing some people give unproductive guidance. He cited reasons for this futility as follows: (i) they assumed that the present was no different from previous eras and thus provided archaic solutions to contemporary problems because their thought processes were out-dated; (ii) they resorted to *targhib* (i.e., the following of a desire or wish, which incites covetousness) and to *tarhib* (intimidation) without following basic *shari'ah* requirements; (iii) they lacked eloquence and used unsuitable language that lacked proper, fitting and adequate words and expressions. Therefore, everyone aspiring the role of *du'at* should remember these observations and thus provide Islamic counsel by selflessly using contemporary knowledge in the most appropriate manner.

*Da'wah* through *tawsiyah* means delivering the Islamic message to family members, friends, neighbours and community. Here the message must be delivered with the utmost patience, mercy and compassion when providing advice or making requests and giving instructions. His approach to 'advice' utilized words and phrases such as *beware*, *come on*, *adhere to*, *step forward*, *do not follow*, *you may rise* and *you may look*, as drawn from the following example:

"Come on, step forward, adhere to all My Names, and rise! But your forefather was once deceived by Satan and temporarily fell to the earth from a position like Paradise. Beware! In your progress, do not follow Satan and from the heavens of Divine wisdom thus fall into the misguidance of 'nature.' Continuously raise your head and study carefully My Most Beautiful Names, make your sciences and your progress steps by which to ascend to those heavens. Then you may rise to My dominical Names, which are the realities and sources of your sciences and attainments, and you may look to your Sustainer with your hearts through the telescope of the Names." (Nursi, 2008:270)



We also note Nursi's approach to *da'wah tadhkirah* (a reminder or endless warning), which uses phrases such as 'do not remain', 'it will bring you calamities and suffering', 'you spend the bounty' and 'it will produce pains, sorrows and grief'. Nursi considered it obligatory to warn and remind others for their own protection from consequences of committing evil deeds and causing trouble for others. It is a duty to remind one another of these consequences, both individually and collectively to prevent embarrassments and difficulties. Therefore, choices in life should produce benefit and light for spirit and soul and a young person's choices are extremely important because they determine future consequences for better or worse, especially in the Hereafter. An example of such a warning and reminder to a group of unhappy youth now follows:

"One day a number of bright youths came to me, seeking an effective deterrent in order to guard themselves against the dangers arising from life, youth, and the lusts of the soul. I said to these youths as I had to those who had previously sought help from the *Risale-i Nur* :"( Nursi, 2008:158)

"Your youth will definitely leave you and if you do not remain within the bounds of the licit, it will be lost and rather than its pleasures it will bring you calamities and suffering in this world, as well as in the grave and in the hereafter. But if, through Islamic training, you spend the bounty of your youth with honourable gratitude in uprightness and obedience, its effects remain perpetually and will be the cause of gaining eternal youth." (Nursi, 2008:158)

"As for life, if it is without belief or lived in rebelliousness, belief becomes ineffective and life will produce pains, sorrows and grief far exceeding the superficial fleeting enjoyment youth brings. Contrary to animals, man possesses a mind, he thinks and is therefore connected to present, past and future and can obtain both pain and pleasure from and for each period. Whereas, since animals do not think, sorrows arising from the past and fears and anxieties arising from the future do not spoil their pleasure of the present. Therefore and especially if the pleasure is illicit, it is like poisonous honey." (Nursi, 2008:158)

*Da'wah irshād* means to guide someone to the true path and thereby lead Muslims to live respectable and noble lives, which prevents people from going astray. An example is given below:

"Any one not wholly blind to the truth understands that our best option is to submit to God, to worship, believe and have confidence in Him. A safe road is preferable to a dangerous one, even one with a very low probability of safe passage. The way of belief leads one safely to endless bliss with certainty; the way of unbelief and transgression is not profitable and has a near certainty of endless loss. Even its pilgrims agree this is true, as do countless experts and people of insight and observation. In conclusion, just as in the other world, bliss and happiness in this world depend upon our submitting to God and thus becoming His devoted servants. So always praise Him saying: Praise be to God



for obedience and success in His way and thank Him that we are Muslims.” (Nursi, 1998:170)

### [3] *Da'wah via al-Mujadalah al-Husnah*

*Da'wah* through dialogue or discussion concerns the process of information exchange via thoughts and opinions between two or more people who seek to solve emerging problems in Muslim societies. An exchange of opinions clarifies issues and is ideally followed by reconciliation and the avoidance of future complexity and controversy. A dialogue occurred between Said Nursi and a group of youngsters concerned about challenges that weakened their faith. They asked him to show them the safest path to the Hereafter. In response, Nursi mentioned three things: First, a believer is convinced that the grave is but a door that leads to eternal happiness out of this world; second, whosoever has faith in the Hereafter but chooses wrong paths to the afterlife imprisons themselves and becomes separated from the Beloved; third, for unbelievers and those who are misguided, the afterlife is like a death sentence for which there is no appeal. An example of *al-Mujadalah al-Husnah* from this discourse now follows:

“Some young people, seeking to counter modern amusements and fancies and thus save themselves from punishment in the Hereafter, sought help from the *Risale-i Nur*. In its name I told them what follows:”

“The grave is there, no one can deny it. Whether they want it or not, everyone will enter it. It is represented in three ways; there is no fourth. For believers it is the door to a more beautiful world. For those who admit the next life but live a misguided, dissipated life it is the door to solitary imprisonment that will separate them from loved ones. Since they believe and confirm but do not live according to their belief, this is exactly how they will be punished. For unbelievers and misguided persons who do not believe in the Hereafter, it is the door to external execution. Since they believe death to be an execution without resurrection, they will be punished eternally.”

“Death may come at any time without differentiating young and old: its appointed hour is unknown. Such an awesomely threatening reality makes it our greatest and most urgent matter; that is, to search out a way to avoid eternal punishment by finding the way to change the grave into a door that opens to a permanent world of light and eternal happiness.” (Nursi, 2008:175)

Another *da'wah* skill is debate, which is to dispute opinions on a particular topic face-to-face with rivals and attempt to drive opposing viewpoints towards cogent reasoning. The *Risale-i Nur* demonstrates this skill with the record of Nursi's defence against government accusations before a Court of Appeals as follows:





“This is part of my court defence, which supplemented the Appeals Court and which silenced the court and is an appropriate footnote for this section. I told the court: ‘Surely if there is any justice on the face of the earth it would reject and quash an unjust decision that convicted someone of an offense solely for expounding a most sacred and just Divine rule that has governed the social life of three hundred and fifty million people and in every country by relying on confirmations and consensuses of three hundred and fifty thousand Qur’anic commentaries on the beliefs of our forefathers for 1350 years.’”

And here is yet another example:

“Modern civilization criticizes the Qur’an for giving a woman one third of the inheritance (half of her brother’s share) while giving a man two thirds. However, general circumstances are considered when establishing general rules and laws. In this case, a woman usually finds a man to maintain her, whereas a man usually has to live with a woman in the home for whom he must provide and maintain. Given this, a woman’s father is to make a difference between her share of inheritance and that of her brother. Her brother, on the other hand, will spend half of his inheritance on his wife [and children], thus equalling his sister’s share. This is true justice.”(Nursi, 2010:175)

### **The *Da'wah* of Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur***

Said Nursi opined that the crucial problem confronting Muslims was their lack of a true understanding of the Qur’ān. Hence, he immersed himself in the Qur’ānic Ocean to produce an intellectual exegesis even laymen can use. His *Risale-i Nur* (The Book of Light) was written primarily for Turkish Muslims who had been forcibly isolated from the rest of the Muslim world. These exegetic epistles are now being translated into major world languages including Arabic, English and French. Led by Shaykh Said Nuri,<sup>[4]</sup> the Hayrat Foundation in Isparta.

### **The Significance of Said Nursi's Approaches to *Da'wah***

*Da'wah* generally refers to the presentation or propagation of Islam to non-believers and the purification of sinful believers so they return to the path of righteousness. Although scholars explain *da'wah* in a variety of terms and ways, we primarily hold that *da'wah* is any attempt to approach both Muslims and non-Muslims.

*Da'wah* is also mandatory for Muslims and certain scholars are especially assigned and prepared for the task. Historically, thousands of Prophets (pbt) have been raised all over the world to call people to the Divine religion and accordingly reform their behaviour and worldviews. This prophetic continuum was sealed by the perfection (completion) of Muhammad’s life (pbh) as the final messenger of Allah. Hence, the duty of propagation now lies with Muslim scholars as his legatees. The Prophet (pbh) said, “*Surely the ‘ulamā’ (Islamic scholars) are heirs of the Prophets.*” Another hadith states (although weakly



authenticated), that the “*ulamā of my ummah resemble the prophets of Bani Isrā’il*”. Thus, *daʿwah* and reform activities are obligatory for the *ummah* and particularly for the ‘*ulamā*’. If they abandon this duty, the entire Muslim society will be held accountable.

### ***Significance of Imān***

Imparting *imān* (faith) to the hearts of believers accompanied by the firm establishment of Qur’ānic miracles are two realms in which Said Nursi’s dynamism differed from the traditional *Ilm al-kalām* of the past. Said Nursi posited that knowing and/or understanding God through arguments presented by *Ilm al-kalām* were inadequate and did little to satisfy the mind. He also owned that Sufi mysticism failed to comprehensively introduce the truth as irrefutably contextualized by the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s contributions (pbh). Here it is where Said Nursi and Sayyid Qutb agreed that Muslims should not rely solely on theological or mystical approaches to strengthen *imān*.

In the arenas of *daʿwah*, Nursi emphasized strengthening *imān*’s foundation. He considered this the basis of the entire edifice of Islamic civilization. Arguably, if the foundation is weak building on it is futile. In his *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi explained that strengthening the basis of *imān* in an era of globalization and post-modern propaganda bears the utmost significance:

*“The foremost and preferable duty is to kindle the light of faith and strengthen it, and help the faith of others to flourish accordingly. Be aware of selfishness and deception and move away from all elements that lead to these diseases. This is the foremost and expected duty. All other problems and diseases are caused by these key ailments. Reasonably, true Muslim scholars should cultivate amiability and humbleness in their life.”*

We hold that Said Nursi developed a unique method of presenting arguments to establish the significance of *imān* in the hearts of men. By advancing textual documents and reasonable opinions, he explained the particulars of *imān* and Islamic conviction to all Muslims. Nursi soundly dealt with belief in Allah, Angels, Scriptures, God’s Messengers, divine destiny and eschatology.

### ***Considering Time and Space in Daʿwah***

Allah says “*Call thou (all mankind) unto thy Sustainer’s path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner.*” (Al-Qur’an, 16:125) This Qur’ānic statement sheds light on the pattern of *daʿwah* and holds the wisdom that requires timely compliance with circumstances. With the dynamic changing of phases and situations, one particular method might be insufficient. Hence, *daʿwah* approaches and applications should be planned and reviewed with careful considerations for time and place, especially in the present era of information technology where knowledge transmission is instantaneous. Therefore, it is not the medium but rather the goal that



becomes paramount, implying that the means can be modified as needed to meet contemporary milieus.

An *hādith* of the Prophet (pbh) notes the dynamic application of *da'wah* propagation. The Prophet (pbh) said, “*Anyone who throws an arrow in the way of Allah and the same reaches the enemy whether correctly hit or not, he will be rewarded as a person who frees a slave*” (Al-Nasa’i:660) reported by Amr ibn Abasah). Here, the term ‘*rami*’ means ‘throwing’ and represents a dynamic that encompasses instruments of warfare. Hence, this is a *hadith* that always applies no matter how much time has passed goes from the days of our beloved Prophet (pbh).

### **Contemporary Challenges to *Da'wah***

In the present era of scientific and technological advances the world constantly changes and reshapes cultural, social and political realms. As a result, the Muslim world confronts unprecedented complexity. To accommodate and survive numerous challenges, contemporary Muslim scholars must develop new *da'wah* approaches and modalities that defend against the materialism that causes Muslims to fall from God’s many graces. The enemies of Islam have fashioned multi-dimensional swords to attack its fundamentals. Of these, materialistic humanism is the foremost ideology that serves to erode basic Islamic values. Orientalism is another challenge that strengthens the Western hold on the Muslim zeitgeist.

### ***Anti-Islamic Forces***

Currently, Islam faces numerous challenges specifically designed by hostile enemies. Some elements of this enduring antagonism are clear and open while others are secret and hidden. Cadres of cultural subversion aim to weaken Muslim faith (*iman*) by generating doubt and confusion over Islam’s worldview and civilization. They painted the holy wars of Islam such as the battles of *Badr* and *Uhud* as manifestations of violence and extremism to portray Islam as a religion of bloodshed. Zionism, Orientalism and Freemasonry are particularly fierce opponents—hidden and not—that have historically hastened the assault. Hence, the challenge presented by Orientalists is extremely serious and difficult to counteract.

### ***Utilization of Modern Technology***

Numerous scientific developments are presently used for entertainment and recreation. The West has most definitely succeeded in getting Muslims to sit in front of televisions and computers for the sole purpose of recreation for hours on end. Deeply submerged in useless pursuits, they cannot escape these media. Said Nursi anticipated the problem but unlike contemporary scholars, he emphasized the use of such modern instruments for purposes of *da'wah* and even stated that the Prophet (pbh) encouraged his *ummah* to



utilize mass media to advance *da'wah*. Said Nursi claimed that every *believer* was on assignment to uplift the word of Allah. Moreover, the utilization of modern technology for this purpose is very much in order; otherwise, Islam's enemies would continue to place Muslims at the back of the post-modern Orientalized buses while they rode express trains.

### ***Nursi's Attribution of Courage***

Courage or bravery is a must for every Muslim *da'i*. History records that whenever anyone invites people to the truth, the regime of the day offers hostile opposition, which requires a fearless *da'i* and is also why all Prophets (pbt) were brave, straightforward and uncompromising. For example, Prophet Sulayman wrote to the ruler of Saba' saying "*Exalt not yourselves against me but come to me in submission*". (Al-Qur'an, 27:31.) Said Nursi feared no one and he showed exemplary courage throughout his life, especially in the face of rulers and governors. An incident that occurred on 13 April 1909 bears evidence. He was arrested with others on the charge of being a 'destructive element' and threat to national security. He addressed army officials several times and eloquently defended himself in a court of martial law.

"I am a student of *Sharī'ah*. Hence, I assess everything in light of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Islam is my religion. Reasonably, I evaluate everything in light of Islamic values ... Thus I am addressing not only you but also all human beings of our time. Realities will unfold and it is worth mentioning this here (with regards to the day when all hidden things shall be made manifest). (Al Qur'an, 86: 9) Therefore, I am preparing with all my strength for the life of the Hereafter. If we are thousands of souls ready to be sacrificed for the sake of Allah and His Religion, it is therefore because *Sharī'ah* is nothing but a great fortune for us. I advocate true *Sharī'ah*, not that which hypocrites claim." (Nursi, 2010:105)

When the court witnessed his sincere bravery and courage, it released him, although many others who were arrested with him were convicted and even sentenced to death.

### ***Concern and Caring***

Muslim scholars should responsibly care, train and nurture people at all societal levels. Their duties are not only confined to non-Muslims but also include the purification of non-practicing Muslims. Nursi's contemporary era was filled with corrupting influences and people who ignored the Islamic pillars of faith and which devastated the development of individual righteous characteristics and communal respectability, many of who resorted to drunkenness and shameful moral decadence. Hence, Muslim scholars are burdened with the substantial responsibility of cleansing and reforming members of such a dissipating *ummah*. Said Nursi was prompt to respond to this obligation by adopting three graduated forums that nurtured of a more forthright community: for individuals, families and society, respectively.



## ***The Significance of Sincerity***

Sincerity(*ikhlas*) is the backbone of any deed (*amal*) but its absence renders a believer's efforts fruitless. A *da'ī* should especially conduct him/herself with sincerity because artificial efforts have no impact in this world and neither do they bring benefits in the next. This great virtue was not absent in the life of Said Nursi, who said:

“O my brothers, who are involved in serving the Holy Qur'ān, be informed that sincerity is the soul of a deed and the foundation of all efforts and renders the shortest way to the desired goal. It is the great virtue that adorns the attributes of a believer (Nursi, 2010:173)when handling worldly life and its necessities. We have striven wholeheartedly to succeed and we must cultivate the sense of sincerity in all of our efforts so that we can benefit from the mercy of Allah. If we fail to practice sincerity we are doomed. As Allah says “*Nor sell My Signs for a small price; and fear Me, and Me alone.*” (Al Qur'an, 2: 41)

“O brothers of mine in the Hereafter! And O my companions in service of the Qur'an! You know and you should know—and you do know—that the most important basis, the greatest strength, the most acceptable intercessor, the mightiest tower of strength, the shortest way to the truth, the spiritual supplication most likely to be accepted, the most wondrous means to all aims, the loftiest character trait and the purest worship in this world and especially in services related to the Hereafter, is sincerity.” (Nursi, 2016:83)

Thus, according to Said Nursi, *sincerity* is the soul of a deed and the foundation of all efforts. It is the shortest way to reach the expected goal. It is the great virtue that adorns the attributions of a believer when handling worldly life and necessity. Muslims must cultivate this sense of *sincerity* to benefit from the mercy of Allah. If they fail to practice *sincerity* they will be doomed. Therefore, it is manifest from his words that he paid much attention to the value of *sincerity*.

## **Nursi's Methodology of Learning**

The above discussion conveys that due to the Western materialistic revolution, educational sector has undergone drastic changes over the last few decades. The Islamic academia was the main victim of this revolution. Particularly, the primary source of instruction got oblivious. Muslims forgot to read the Qur'ān from the direct Arabic text. English translation of the Qur'ān was destined to their fate. Furthermore, they engaged in entertainments and spent their time in playing and turned themselves into the coach potato.

At this juncture, it was hardly possible to revert to their strata of Islamic knowledge and Qur'ānic education without introducing a unique method of da'wah that could create an appeal to Muslims. They would feel attracted and consequently turned to the Islamic knowledge and Qur'ānic education. This is Said Nursi who was successful to have



originated such effective dimensions of da'wah. Allah facilitated him to have designed epoch making agenda that greatly influenced the Muslim ummah.

The foremost cause of decadence in the area of education was the defective ways of teaching that stood out to be dogmatic in response to the needs of time. Scholars of Said Nursi's time and that of earlier ones were satisfied with what they had, and they never agreed to turn their eyes to the development that took place in various strands of educational history. At the same time, the West grew rapidly standing on the foundations that our forefathers left behind. They were away from history, chemistry geography and so on.

At this stage, Said Nursi held the grounds and raised his voice against the obsolete methods of learning. First of all, he rejected the old unproductive ways of learning and teaching that required a long time, while to have been spent in studying commentaries and notes. In a short time, he could read many books. He read only main books and did not turn to commentaries and notes. Muslims started believing that the West was the undefeatable master and that we cannot compete with. This happened when they became weak and got destitute of Islamic knowledge in the modern context, whereas, our forefathers left precious wealth of knowledge and science that might help us to recover the glorious past. This is the important aspect to which Said Nursi tried to lead people.

Said Nursi was profoundly concerned about the stereotype of Muslims regarding the Qur'ānic language. So, he tried to encourage people to read the Qur'ān in Arabic and not translations. Hasan Abdur Rahim Bukair rightly says, "The inclusive perspective was the very key feature of Said Nursi. He always preferred to gather knowledge from the very fundamental source. In this way, Said Nursi started to move towards the challenged goal. And that was to remove doubts and rebut the confusion that badly discoloured the Islamic edifice. My life is the witness of this approach." So, Said Nursi relied only on the Qur'ān and Sunnah for decorating, training and developing himself with divine knowledge in a way that fit him to survive the modern challenges.

Said Nursi holds the Qur'ān was enough to understand religious knowledge. He expressly opined his view that the Qur'ān includes everything and leaves nothing untouched that are essential for sustainable survival. That is the reason while writing Risale-i Nur; he even sought no help from Arabic commentaries of the Qur'ān. Across his life, Said Nursi endeavoured so that Muslims comprehend the very basic foundation of the Islamic way of life.

### ***Significance of the Sunnah***

The *Sunnah* is far too important for a brief description, especially in an era where innovation and deviation have come to dominate the hearts and minds of people. However, know that the *Sunnah* contains a panacea of cures for common social diseases





Hence, Said Nursi profoundly acknowledged its importance for the Muslim community. He said, “*Our beloved Prophet (pbh) says, ‘he who grips my Sunnah while deviation spreads out, get a great reward that equals that of hundred martyrs.’*” (Al-Bayhaqi, 1987:118)

Certainly, following the sacred *Sunnah* strengthens us, particularly in a time when deviation rules every Muslim sect. Directly following of *Sunnah* reminds Muslims that the Prophet (pbh) is the ultimate example of the right path by facilitating correct behaviours that transform daily living into pure Islamic etiquette. (Nursi, 2010:53)

### ***Eliminating Doubts***

The preceding discourse discloses that enemies of Islam make constant efforts to destroy Islamic understanding of human philosophy; they create suspicion and generate confusion against the religion with a view to prevent people from knowing, understanding, appreciating and developing positive and unbiased attitude towards it. Among the many, movements of Orientalism and Freemasons were some of the pioneers in accelerating the process of demonization. Many Muslims became victims of their conspiracies and false propositions. These anti-Islamic intellectual or academic movements managed to create multi-dimensional doubts and confusion about Islam and Muslims. They raised questions against the miracles of the Qur’ān, particularly in relation to *mutashābihāt* and *mushkilāt*. Said Nursi rebutted them that the Qur’ān guides the entire humanity.

The majority of the people could sense the divine action in a way a worldly king behaves in operating and controlling his kingdom. May be this is the cause that the Throne of Allah is alluded. The Qur’ān says, “The Most Gracious, established on the throne of His almightiness.” This is the level of understanding of the majority. So, the Qur’ānic approach that considers such understanding of people is called “divine expression ascending towards human intellect.” This is the way the literatures use a multitude of figurative expressions to conceptualize the subtle meanings. The *mutashābihāt* can be considered from that perspective. In any literature, some sentences are found to pose purportedly very impenetrable figures, because, they are highly rich with profound thought and subtle ideas. So, the abstruseness of the verses of the Qur’ān offer to the readers would be considered from such a standpoint. Therefore, plausibly oscillating courses of sentence construction buttresses the argument for the Qur’ān to be rich with *balāḡah* (rhetoric) and *fasāhah* (eloquence). Justifiably, the Qur’ān eloquently stands out to be an unimaginable literary miracle and masterpiece beyond human proposition, projection and imagination. These are some of the examples of Said Nursi about the dimensions of how he endeavoured to answer and rebut the misconceptions that enemies raised against the miracles of the Qur’ān, issues related to jihad and female rights and others. No doubt, in the field of da’wah such questions are raised and eliminating the misconceptions is extremely crucial and important.

### **Conclusion**



This study presented approaches to *da'wah* as adopted and taught by Said Nursi to advance his restoration efforts. It also shed light on the importance of their application in the present era. The paper reviewed two distinct issues: [1] approaches Said Nursi used to confront and resolve social complexities, and [2] *da'wah* praxis in the modern age. The author also discussed complexities and challenges as presented by modern life styles. Special *da'wah* features were described including educational and political efforts as well as the nurturing of Islamic virtue with Nursi's emphasis on those specific characteristics that inspire Muslim scholars to excel in *da'wah* activities. Nonetheless, it is impossible to thoroughly deliberate Nursi's approaches and strategies in such a limited space.

The introduction summarized Said Nursi's works, which have since been translated into several different languages. This was followed by his biography with special reference to his remarkable academic life and mastering of different disciplines. The author endorses Said Nursi's approaches as instrumentally vital to the reformation and purification of the *ummah*, the *ulamā'* and *du'āt* (Muslim scholars and inviters). Nursi undoubtedly faced a multitude of modern challenges, most of which derived from a secularized Muslim society vis-à-vis Western impositions. He successfully survived well enough to devise monumental methods for *da'wah* that attracted and maintained the attention of Turkish youth. His vigilant uncompromising tenor with respect to *Sharī'ah* even caused Muslim rulers and leaders to halt their waning objections. Nursi's ultimate aim was to establish Islam and engrain its tenets in the hearts of Muslims across the globe.

The present work also established that Said Nursi made strenuous efforts to change traditional *da'wah* because of the decadence he observed in the Ottoman Islamic Empire. He prudently came forward with *da'wah* activities and initially sided with democrats. But, on realizing that Mustafa Kamal was committed to destroying Islamic systems, institutions, culture, signs and symbols, he reviewed his *da'wah* facilities and emphatically altered his strategies to apply more scientific approaches that would successfully work for the betterment of the Turkish *ummah*.

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[1] Barla is a village where Said Nursi was kept in detention by Turkish authorities for nearly eight years. It is where he began to write his *Risale-i Nur*. On 26 October 2016, the present writer visited the place of Nursi's incarceration in Barla, prayed ʿAsr and observed many things, particularly the very tree Nursi use to climb from the house. It is said that Nursi sat on a saddle near the tree top every night praying, meditating, contemplating, reflecting and observing nature. He wrote his epistles during the day while encircled by security forces. This good man tolerated all sorts of persecution but courageously continued in service to the *ummah*.

[2] The present author met scholars and students of *Risale-i Nur* and interviewed them on many issues related to Said Nursi and *Risale-i Nur*. Hence, this paper incorporates information based on these interviews and presentations in a workshop held in Barla, Turkey (23–27 Oct. 2016).

[3] During my visit to Turkey in October of 2016, I met several students of *Risale-i Nur* who were affiliated with the Hayrat Foundation (Service of Risale-i Nur). They were trained by the Foundation to cultivate all praiseworthy traits endorsed by Said Nursi as emphasized in his *Risale-i Nur*. Their dedication to the cause of Islam was marvellous to behold.

[4] Shaykh Said Nuri is the president of Hayrat Foundation. He is Imam Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's student and successor after Imam Ahmed Husrev in the Service of Risale-i Nur.

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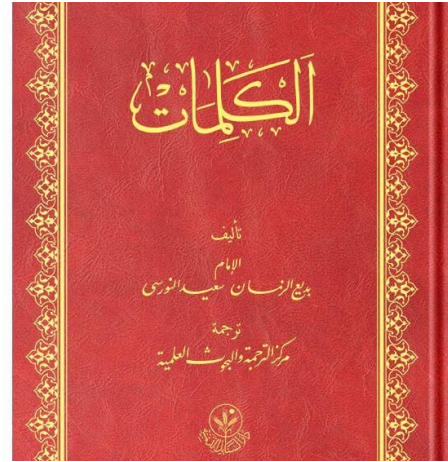


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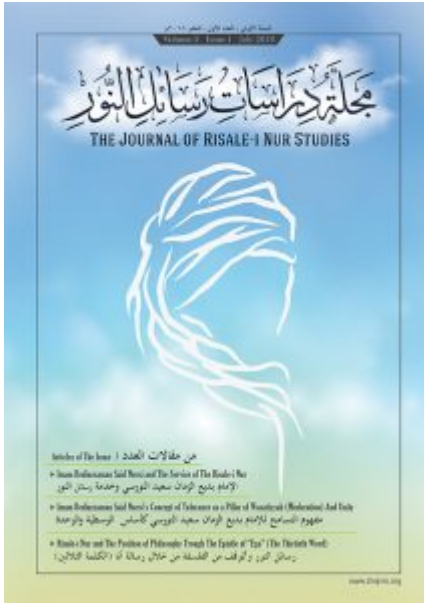
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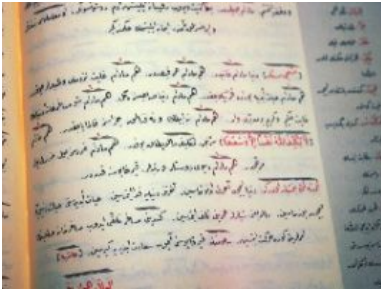
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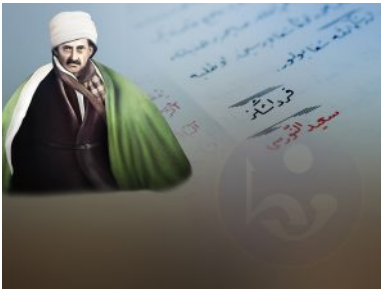
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