Some Notes on the Life of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi

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Abstract: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was a profound Muslim thinker and revivalist, whose teachings (Risale-i Nur) and ideology are still being followed today. His life is full of enthusiasm and energy through his contribution to the maturation and development of Turkish society. He encountered problems similar to those faced by other Muslim thinkers in other parts of the Islamic world in the 19th century. Nursi was arrested several times and tried on charges of trying to organize an Islamic political party but he was always acquitted by the courts. He lived a life of struggle and harassment but never acted violently and never allowed his students to respond with violence unlike many other Muslim reformers and thinkers. He created a strong, but nonviolent, movement. The strong opposition of the government to religion as opposed to Nursi’s firm stand against any irreligiosity certainly made him a symbol of religious movement in Turkey.

Keywords: Islamic Studies, Said Nursi, Risale-i Nur, Ottoman Empire

I. Introduction

Nursi was born in 1876 in Nurs, a village in township of Isparit sub province of Hizan, the province of Bitlis in the Eastern part of the Ottoman Empire. He was born in a clerical family, belonged to Shafii Madhhab and traced his ancestry to the family of Prophet Mohammad. First, one has to remember that he was a very well-known scholar in the era of the Ottoman Empire. Secondly, he was imprisoned by the government of his time and was beleaguered. Bediuzzaman himself divided his life into two periods: Old Said (Eski Said), from 1876 to 1920; and New Said (Yeni Said), from 1920 to 1949. Some of his biographers study the period of 1949 until his death as a third period in his life, due to his restricted involvement in politics, at least at the level of voting. Each Said corresponded to different orientations and approaches that he employed at different times to raise Muslim consciousness. The Old period takes him from birth to the founding of the Republic. The Old Said period was one of political involvement. However, New Said entered a world where influencing modernity had destabilized and undermined old equilibria. And, finally the Third Said emerged as ‘The Master’.

II. Anomalous Education Begins

During the childhood of Nursi, there were no schools and no madrasas in Nurs. However, his elder brother, Molla Abdullah was the first who encouraged the young Said to start studying. Nursi set off with his brother for Molla Mehmed Emin Effendi’s madrasa in the village of Tag, near Isparit, some two hours from Nurs on foot. However, he fought with a student called Mehmed and did not stay there long for the young Said held himself in great esteem, he could not endure even the smallest word spoken to him in a commanding tone, or to be dictated in any way. So he returned to his own village, where he told his father that he would not attend any more madrasas until he was older because the other students were all elder than he was. So, Said’s lessons were then restricted to the one day a week that when his elder brother, Abdullah, returned. About a year going through this way, then once again Said set off to continue his studies on full-time basis. He first left for the village of Pirims and remained under the instruction of Sayyid Nur Mohammad Effendi and then to the summer pastures of the Hizan Shaiikh, the Naqshbendi Sayyid Nur Muhammad. Said remained there a while longer, and then went together with his elder brother Abdullah to the village of Nursin. From there he moved on to a village called Kugak. Said stayed a while in the madrasa at Kugak, then set off alone for a place called Siirt and the madrasa of Molla Fethullah, again showing his fierce independence and almost foolish courage, for travel was extremely dangerous due to the lawlessness of the times. Pursuing his studies for some two months under this well-known

1 Serif Mardin, Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 60.


teacher, he then departed for Geyda, a village near Hizan where Sayyid Sibgatullah, the Gawth of Hizan, lies buried. He returned to Ners to spend winters there.

Filled with enthusiasm, Said left Ners, going first to the village of Arvas in 1888 and from there to Shaikh Emin Effendi’s madrasa in Bitlis. This time he set off for the Mir Hasan Veli madrasa at Mukush (Bahcheseray), whose principal Molla Abdulkerim did not pay heed to the juniors. When he saw that the new, lower-grade students were given no importance, he ignored the first seven books, which should have been studied in sequence, and announced he would study the eighth. He remained there only a few days, then went to Vastan (Gevas) near Van. During this period, he attended briefly some ten madrasas in the region of his native village, but was unable to find what he was seeking. He came under the instruction of different Naqshbendi Ulama in the Kurdish region and at an early age he earned a reputation as an erudite religious scholar.

III. Real Education of Nursi Begins

Nursi proved himself to be both an intellectual prodigy and a rebel against the established curriculum. His travels around the madaris (plural of madrasa) continued for about five years but was unsatisfied with his experience. After a month in Gevas, he set off with a companion called Molla Mehmed for Dogubayazit, a small town near the foot of Mount Ararat, and it was here that his real studies commenced. Nursi was settled and pleased with the madrasa in Bayazit, in Erzurum. In 1891, he undertook intensive studies at the madrasa of Shaykh Muhammad Jalali therein Dogubayazit, where he is said to have completed in three months a course that normally took more than a decade. These three months were to provide him with the foundations of or key to the religious sciences on which his later thought and works would be based. At the end of three months, toward the springtime, Said obtained his diploma, an authorization diploma (Ijazah), earning the title of ‘Molla’ from Shaikh Jalali and was then known as Molla Said at the time when he was only fourteen or fifteen years old.

IV. Nursi Starts Rambling

After getting the Ijazah, Molla Said finally arrived in Bitlis, for two days where he attended the lectures of Shaikh Mehmed Emin Effendi. It was from this time that he started to teach the Arabic sciences and have his own students. From Bitlis, Molla Said traveled on to Sirvan, where his elder brother, Molla Abdullah, taught in a madrasa. Molla Said remained with his brother a while longer and then made his way to Siirt again. On his arrival in Siirt, he went to the madrasa of the famous Molla Fethullah Effendi, who was to experience the photographic memory Said Nursi was blessed with and the tremendous number of books Said had read and learned. On one occasion, Nursi read an entire page of a book from his memory after only a glance. Amazed with this sharp young mind, Molla Fethullah of Siirt gave him the title ‘Bediuzzaman’, nonpareil or wonder of the age. Whenever the opportunity arose, and especially in the long winter evenings, Said would make the trek to madrasas in the vicinity to listen to the discussions of the shaykhs, students, and teachers. These occasions and the culture they reflected clearly had a formative influence on his character and future activities. In this connection, Nursi went to Bitlis again and remained at the madrasa of Sheikh Emin where he was tested by Sheikh Emin and due to the jealousy harboured against Nursi there, he was forced to leave and then roamed to different places like Tilo, Jizre and Mardin.

V. Ottoman Governors invite Nursi

The young Said’s talents attracted attention, including that of several governors. Taken into their households, Said continued his religious studies, began to learn western subjects, acquired wider world wakefulness through reading the print media, and served the governors, one of whom relied on him to arbitrate tribal disputes. Firstly, Governor of Mardin sent Nursi to Bitlis in 1892 under guard. Then Governor of Bitlis, Omer Pasha invited Nursi to teach his children and a stay of two years with him. There, Nursi read classical texts and natural sciences. Thereon, Nursi moved to Van where Governor of Van Hasan pasha invited Nursi to reside with him. In Van, he got acquainted with modern secular sciences. Tahir pasha succeeded Hasan pasha and persuaded Nursi to reside with him and supported his talent until the latter’s death in 1913. He was hosted in Tahir Pasha’s

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Palace for about three years. There, Nursi memorized basic ninety Islamic books which according to Nursi helped him to reach to the sky of understanding of the Quran.9

VI. Nursi Vows to serve Quran
In 1898, Tahir pasha, the then governor of Van, shared with Nursi a quote in a newspaper from the British secretary for the colonies stating, “So long as the Muslims have the Quran, we shall be unable to dominate them. We must either take it from them, or make them lose their love of it.” Upon reading a newspaper account of a speech in which the British colonial secretary William Gladstone (1809-1898) denounced the Quran, Said went into a rage, roaring that he would prove to the world that the Quran was an “inextinguishable sun” of inspiration.10

VII. Educational Plans of Nursi
As mentioned above, a noteworthy development during Nursi’s stay in Van came from his access to Tahir Pasha’s library, where he studied sciences. He studied math, physics, astronomy, chemistry, biology and geology, and gained depth into history and philosophy. He wrote a book on math, which was destroyed by a fire in the governor’s residence prior to its publishing. He also wrote commentaries on logic.11 Nursi here founded his own madrasa where he put into practice his ideas for educational reform, based on the combined teaching of the traditional religious and modern sciences. The latter he taught himself at this time. He formulated his plans for a university, called the ‘Madrasa uz-Zehra’ that would bring together these different educational traditions because he often expressed his frustration toward traditional religious scholars, whose discussions could not supply solutions to the major problems of the time. For Nursi, religion did not consist solely of faith matters; instead, he argued that due to its comprehensive nature, religion was connected with sociology, politics, and economics. Even though he had a traditional education, Nursi was critical of traditional Islamic learning as insufficient and irrational. Nursi’s aim was to save the Ottoman State that is to say to build unity within the Empire. Nursi saw education as the most important means to accomplish this unity: “Unity cannot occur through ignorance. Unity is the fusion of ideas, and the fusion of ideas occurs through the electric rays of knowledge.”12

Due to the charismatic personality of Nursi and his liaison with the previous governor with whom he stayed, Yahya Nuzhet Pasha, advisor of Ottoman Porte, recommended Nursi for advisor post of the Ottoman Porte to Abdul Hamid’s II imperial bird keeper Kuschu Mustafa Bey. Attracting the attention of Sultan Abdul Hamid’s courtiers, he went to Istanbul in 1907 intention of which was to gain official support for ‘Madrasa uz-Zehra’ (Urfa) in eastern Anatolia to be a sister university to the Azhar University in Cairo and to ask permission from the Sultan for this. Also, to extend Ottoman secular education, he asserted, essential to produce an educated Kurdish speaking cadre to turn the Kurdish tribesmen into good Ottoman citizens.13 The embodiment of this rapprochement was to be the ‘Madrasa uz-Zehra’.14 Nursi wished for Islam to function like a consultative council, that is to say, through the mutual consultation (shura) of “the three divisions of the army of Islamic education” - those of the madrasas, the maktebs, and the tekkes - so that “each would complete the deficiencies of the other.”

Another intention he had to visit Istanbul was also to engage with a broader spectrum of scholars, intellectuals, and politicians there.15 Also, intention of visiting was to present a series of reform proposals to Sultan. On reaching to the Sultan Abdulhamid’s Court, he was sent to Topkapi mental asylum as a result of his pungent and bold language with the Sultan. Thus, Nursi could not attract support for his proposal of establishing a university.

VIII. Nursi’s involvement in politics
Since Nursi lived during the turbulent collapse of the Ottoman Muslim state and the emergence of the new Turkish Republic, he had to respond to the dominant debates of his time. He wanted the amendments in Ottoman state policies and was in favor of the subsistence of the Ottoman Empire.16 Traces of the two periods of

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Nursi’s complex life, Ottoman and Turkish, and establishes the different political, social, and religious dynamics that influenced his thought in both periods. Nursi was awakened to the wider issues facing the Muslim world. Nursi was very critical of the absolutism of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the way Islam was reduced to a state ideology. He struck up a friendship with Kuschu Mustafa Bey’s son Asrash Sanjar Kuschububashi, who later became a leading figure in the secret service (Teshkilat-i Mehsusa) of the Young Turks. Nursi also joined the Young Turks and became actively involved in constitutional reforms. He went to Salonika and stayed at the house of Manyasizade Refik Bey, chairman of Committee for Union and Progress (CUP). Meanwhile, Nursi delivered a speech in Salonika on freedom organized by CUP. For example, he embraced the Young Turk revolution of the CUP and its call for the establishment of a constitutional state. In the following months, he strove to put forward his ideas concerning this, educational reform, unity, and other matters in newspaper articles and involvement in public life. When constitutional revolution occurred in 1908, Said Nursi supported that with the intention to try to Islamize it as that propounded by Namik Kemal. Also, Said Nursi was to be a founder of the Muslim association known as the “Ittihad-i Muhammedi” (the Muslim Union). His articles were published in a famous newspaper ‘Volkan’, the mouthpiece of Ittihad-i Muhammedi. Between 1908 and 1910, he delivered a number of speeches and became a member of societies including “Tale-i ulum Jamiyeti” (Society for students of the sciences). The association (Ittihad-i Muhammedi) was established a week before the military rebellion in Istanbul which had acquired a notoriety in Turkish history as the incident of March 31st (1909). The rebellious group consisted of privates led by non-commissioned officers. Though, Nursi had supported the constitutional movement of July 1908 while in Istanbul, but later lost confidence in the CUP because of its anti-religious policies. It accused the latter of a policy intimidation based on terrorism and, at the same time, of attacking Islamic institutions. Because the incident was a reactionary, populist outbreak demanding a return to the Sharia, the association was inculpated in the rebellion. Its most popular writer, Dervish Vahdetti, was hanged. Nursi also was indicted of inciting the 31st of March incident in 1909 and put on trial by the military Court. However, Said Nursi disculpates himself of complicity in the outbreak. He states that he harangued the Eastern porters of Istanbul so that they would abandon any ideas they might have harbored of joining the rebellion. Believing Islam to be the middle way, Nursi advocated moderation and counseled abjuring limits, referring at all times to the Prophetic tradition which has it that, “Too much or too little of anything is not good: moderation is the middle way.” This is the reason why he also expounded the beliefs of the extremist Wahhab school and their origins and historical development and demolished convincingly the ideas on which they are based.

Said Nursi was brought to trial along with other members of the Ittihad-i Muhammedi, but the court found him innocent and he was acquitted after twenty four days in captivity. Nursi published his first work, a collection of his speeches and articles, entitled Natuk. He spent one and a half years in Istanbul and settled in the Shekerji Han (Centre of Muslim intelligentsia) where he hung an attractive sign at the door of his room declaring “here, all questions are answered and all problems are solved, but no questions are asked” resulting in his fame and gained respect even among the Ulama of Istanbul for his profound knowledge. Nursi did not stay long in Istanbul after the trial and set off for Van.

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17 M. Hakan Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity in Turkey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 153
IX. The Damascus Sermon

From Van, Nursi visited through the eastern provinces of Turkey in between 1910 and 1913 and also visited Damascus delivering a sermon at Umayyad mosque. Nursi travelled among the tribes of the Eastern Provinces, persuading them of the benefits of constitutionalism, and explaining how it could be made the basis of the progress and unity of the Islamic world. His exchanges with those he encountered he subsequently put into book form, firstly in Arabic, and then in Turkish. These were published in two works, one addressing the Ulama, entitled Mahakemat (Reasonings), published in 1911, and the other addressing the people at large, entitled Munazarat (Debates), published in 1913.

In Damascus, Nursi presented a more elaborate picture of the Muslim world and condition in relation to the west. He identified six severe ailments that tarnished this condition and offered six remedies for their healing. The sicknesses are these:

“FIRSTLY: The rising to life of despair and hopelessness in social life. SECONDLY: The death of truthfulness in social and political life. THIRDLY: Love of enmity. FOURTHLY: Not knowing the luminous bonds that bind the believers to one another. FIFTHLY: Despotism, which spreads, becoming widespread as though it was various contagious diseases. SIXTHLY: Restricting endeavour to what is personally beneficial.”

In the form of “Six Words,” Bediuzzaman describes a number of those positive truths of Islam, which form the cure for the grievous sicknesses besetting the Muslim community;

“Hope, courage, honesty, love and brotherhood, self-sacrifice, awareness of the luminous bonds uniting the believers, mutual consultation.”

The sermon was well received and immediately published as The Damascus Sermon. After Damascus he set off for Istanbul in pursuit of his dream of founding the Madrasa uz-Zehra, a university, Sultan Mehmed Reshad approved his proposal and was granted 19000 gold liras but the project was impeded by eruption of the Balkan wars. This time, Nursi did not stay long in Istanbul. He returned to Van after his journey to Rumeli with Sultan Mehmed Reshad. While in Van, he continued teaching in his old madrasa.

X. World War First and After

With the support of Enver Pasha (d.1922) the then Minister of War his magnum opus Isharaat al-Ijaz (Signs of Miraculousness) was published. On the outbreak of war, Minister of War Enver Pasha involved Nursi to muster the militia. Nursi along with his students fought against the Russian army on the Caucasian front in 1916. The Russians captured him after the fall of Bitlis and held him as a war prisoner in Siberia until he escaped in 1917 during Russian Revolution. Escaped to Istanbul in 1918 where he was given a medal for his bravery. Nursi’s return to Istanbul was met with a “hero’s welcome” that echoed in the Empire’s capital and districts.

After arriving in the then capital, Nursi was appointed as a member of the ‘Dar al-Hikmah al-Islamiyya’ (Islamic House of Wisdom) which was the highest religious institution in the Ottoman Empire. In this institution Nursi’s specific duty was to answer questions posed by foreigners.

Returning to Istanbul, he was on arriving in Van, Nursi stayed with his younger brother, Abdul Majid, a teacher of Arabic, in the Toprakkale district of the town. But we learn from Abdul Majid’s wife, Rabia that his well-wishers and visitors were so numerous that he was obliged to move to Nursin Mosque. He had gone from war captivity to a potentially comfortable professional life. Starting in Siberia, however, a spiritual crisis had begun to turn him into the “New Said”. He was getting older, and politics and western “philosophical sciences” had not given him satisfaction. He could find this contentment only by returning to religious studies. He came to believe that Ahmad Sirhindi was transmitting him a message from the beyond:

“Unify your Qibla,” essentially, “face in only one direction to pray.”

He must find a single master, and that could only be the Quran. Besides, Said Nursi mentions both Imam Sirhindi and Mevlana Khalid as persons who deeply influenced him.

Appointed as Sheikh al-Islam in 1920 by Sultan Vaheduddin at the recommendation of Sheikh al-Islam Musa Kazim Bey, he promoted the foundation of organisations and groups like ‘Yeshilay’ (Green Crescent Society) in 1920 and the ‘Jamiyet-i muderrisin’ (the Madrasa Teachers Association) in January 1920. He wrote on the causes of Ottoman decline in small couplets like Sunuhat (1920), Hakikat Chekirdekleri (1920), Nokta (1921), Rumuz (1922).

XI. Nursi’s Resistance against foreign encroachments

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was deeply troubled by the British occupation of Istanbul, as he witnessed the reoccupation in March, 1920. He invited the people of Istanbul to unite and resist against the occupation. He also became a strong supporter of the independence movements in Anatolia known as ‘Kuvayi Milliye’. He published a pamphlet entitled Khatutav-i Sitte against British occupation aiming to inform people of its dangers not only in regard to Ottoman provinces, but also towards the unity of Islam. However, Nursi later on developed his opinion on Europe that “In this time of modern civilization, the Europeans are civilized and powerful, and harmful hostility and bigotry have therefore disappeared. For in respect of religion, the civilized are to be conquered through persuasion, not through force, and through showing by conforming to its commands in actions and conduct that Islam is elevated and lovable. Force and enmity are only to combat the barbarity of savages.”

He opposed the Sheikh al-Islam’s (Durruzade) fatwa, legislation justifying the occupation and issued a statement against it calling for resistance. Sheikh al-Islam held the official highest rank of opinion in the Sunni world, akin to the archbishop in the Anglican Church; Nursi’s attitude posed a significant challenge.

XII. Nursi in Ankara and his Transition to New Said

Since, Said Nursi supported the War of Independence; it was not surprising that the newly instituted parliament in Ankara started taking an interest in Nursi. He was invited to Ankara in 1922 where he spent eight months which was going to be the emergence of an incredible transformation in his life. Mustafa Kemal himself invited Said Nursi to take up membership in the Grand National Assembly (GNA). At the invitation of Ataturk, Nursi reached Ankara on the 4th of August 1922 but deeply disappointed by their policies of secularization. He called Mustafa Kemal as the Anti-Christ for Muslims.

Seeing the conditions in Ankara, Nursi realized that the Old Said’s method did not work to defend the basic tenets of Islam against atheism and materialism. Seeing dangers surrounding this new formation, he issued 10 articles as a warning to members of parliament in 1923, reminding them of the causes that had required the nation to enter into wars and the sacrifices that people made. And after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1924, he fulminated against the irreligious policies of the government, which, he believed, served to turn people not into secularists but into atheists.

He understood that more innovative method were necessary for the New Period. Thus, he left Ankara for Van in April 1923. In Van, at this time, Nursi was not involved in politics. He gave up the Old Said’s method. He devoted most of his time to contemplation. Despite having supported the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in its formative years, he leveled harsh criticisms against those members of the CUP who advocated violence as a means of realizing their political aims. He preached on essentials of belief rather than on political and social events and developments. Nursi no longer envisioned politics as the means to revive Islam and society, rather he coined a very famous statement which became a principle for his students also; Nursi stated, “I seek refuge in God from Satan and Politics.”

After denying to be allied with the politics of the time, he declined the positions he was offered, such as being a member of the parliament, the chief religious official of eastern provinces (Sharq umumi vaziligi), and membership in the religious affairs department of the government. Leaving the “Old Said” behind, he retired to a cave near Van to study the Quran. Nursi turned back to Van, to his madrasa with an intention to teach. However, his life was about to face a dramatic shift that would change everything. The newly founded government was disappointed in Nursi’s decision not to support the new regime; and the government feared Nursi’s charisma and influence. Keeping him suppressed and under tight control seemed a safe and legitimate solution.

XIII. Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925

It is important to note that at this time the Eastern province was not very stable. Some of the Kurdish chiefs and sheikhs were not satisfied with the government of CUP or with some of its members, who were known as blasphemous and secularist among the people of the region. Receiving foreign support, several revolts occurred as a result including the uprising of Sheikh Said in 1925. Nursi refused to partake in any of these uprisings. He did not want to draw his sword against his Muslim brothers. Nursi replied as follows:

37 Yildiz Atasoy, Turkey, Islamists and Democracy: Transition and Globalization in a Muslim State (London: IB Tauris, 2005), 44.
“The struggle you are embarking on will cause brother to kill brother and will be fruitless. For the Kurds and Turks are brothers. The Turkish nation has acted as the standard-bearer of Islam for centuries. It has produced millions of saints and given millions of martyrs. The sword may not be drawn against the sons of Islam’s heroic defenders, and I shall not draw mine!”

Still, Nursi was accused of masterminding and tried of involvement in 31st March incident of Sheikh Said. He was taken to Istanbul and questioned about the revolt. Even though the court had no proof of his involvement, Nursi was taken to Antalya and sent to exile in Burdur, a small town in south-western Anatolia for next seven months. This was the beginning of thirty years of banishment and imprisonment in different parts of Turkey sanctioned by the new government but Nursi was able to kick start a silent struggle against the forces of irreligion.

XIV. Life in Exile

In Burdur, Nursi stayed in the Haji Abdullah Mosque in Degermenler district. Masses inevitably attracted to Nursi. He preached every day at afternoon and later collected his sermons into a book Nurun Ilk Kapisi (The first door of the Risale-i Nur). Because of his continued activity; his attractiveness again led to his shift to a secluded village Barla.

At Barla near Isparta, he began writing his major works, known collectively as the Risale-i Nur (Treatise of Light), largely dating from 1925 to 1944. When he was exiled and subjected to forced settlement in Barla he was first hosted by security people later by an Imam who was a migrant from Hungary, Muhajir Hafiz Ahmed. Nursi’s exile in Barla lasted for almost eight and a half years, during which he wrote almost ninety percent of the Risale-i Nur. Thereafter, he spent most of his life in forced residence at different places. His followers, “the students of light” (Talebe-i Nur), reproduced and circulated his writings, and his influence grew.

Official qualms that he trying to found a religious brotherhood, which had been forbidden, or to undermine the republic resulted in repeated trials on the same charges. Said defended himself against the brotherhood charge with the observation that many people that did not belong to orders had gone to heaven but that none who lacked faith had done so.

In 1934-35, taken back to Isparta where he spent next nine months finishing The Flashes Collection in Eskisehir prison and started to write The Rays. Again, he was arrested in 1935 along with his 120 students all over Turkey and sentenced to eleven month imprisonment. Nursi was released from Eskisehir Prison in March 1936 and was sent to Kastamonu in the Ilgaz Mountains to the south of the Black Sea for next seven years. He was now fifty-nine years of age. During his first three months in Kastamonu, Nursi stayed “as a guest” in the police station. He referred to the prison as Madrasa-i Yusufiya (The school of Joseph). There he wrote Ayat al-Kubra (The Supreme Sign) and also completed some other parts of The Rays.

On account of his writings, he was again allegedly tried and sentenced to nine months of harsh imprisonment in Denizli. Nursi said that if conditions had been bad in Eskisehir Prison, in Denizli they were worse. He was released from there in July 1944. After a two month stay in Denizli, Nursi was taken on official orders to Emirdag where he stayed for next seven years without any movement. He was again arrested and given an eleven-month jail sentence for pamphleteering. Later, he was again imprisoned in Afyon prison (which he called as Third school of Joseph) between January 1948 and October 1949 incarcerated for twenty months.

XV. Spreading of Risale

Nurjus (the followers of Said Nursi) in the meantime bought some printing machines which furthered the publication of Risale-i Nur both in Arabic-Ottoman script as well as newly introduced Latin alphabet. Nursi stayed in Afyon for two months before moving back to his former place Emirdag after which Nursi resorts to teaching and becomes ‘The Master’. Albeit, Nursi’s alleged prosecution remained unabated even after the victory of Democrats invariably suing by the pro-Kemalists. In January 1952, he visited Istanbul for a trial after twenty seven years which attracted a huge gathering.

XVI. Last Days of Nursi

In 1958 some of Nursi’s close students, primarily Mustafa Sungur and Zubeyr Gunduzalp, prepared Nursi’s “official” biography. Wanting attention to be focused on the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi cut out most of the sections describing his personal life and exploits. There was dispute as to whether or not photographs should be included, and on Nursi’s decision a number of them were added. Nursi gave importance to translations during these years, both from Turkish into Arabic - to further spread the *Risale-i Nur* in the Islamic world - and of the Arabic parts into Turkish. A follower, Tahsin Tola, then obtained permission to publish Said’s works in Latin letters; Tola also edited a biography and Nursi’s authorized biography was written and published in 1958. Said’s third period proved brief. In late 1959 and before his death, Nursi embarked on a series of trips to Ankara, Konya and Istanbul. Said Nursi himself explained that he visited Ankara to demand that the Aya Sofya Mosque be re-opened to worship.48 When he died in 1960, Nursi was renowned as the founder of the most powerful text-faith based movement in Turkey with one and a half million of estimated followers. He was buried at Urfa, but not for long. His remains were taken away on a military plane and reburied at a secret location near Isparta.

XVII. Conclusions

Nursi ended up with a courageous ascetic preacher who wanted to combine religion with Western Science and Technology. He led an active, brave life, enduring hardships and striving to make Islam a way of life for himself and for everybody, based on Zuhd (asceticism) and Taqwa (meticulousness for the pleasure of Allah). In his early life, he concentrated his efforts on maintaining the unity of the Ottoman Empire and supported the Young Turks in their struggle for reform and the establishment of constitutional government. The mature Nursi of the Republican era saw his mission as safeguarding the Islamic religious and cultural underpinnings of Turkish identity.49 He also aimed to rejuvenate this identity by addressing some of the legitimate shortcomings that critics and intellectuals had pointed to in the late Ottoman period. He stressed the study of the Quran to adapt Islam to modern conditions. Such study had to be undertaken by educated Muslims, for he realized that the traditional Ulama, who claimed to possess a monopoly over the interpretation of religious texts, could not meet the challenges of a positivist age in which a new critical stance toward knowledge has developed.50

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49 For more details on Islamic Revival in Turkey, see my article by visiting http://iikv.org/academy/index.php/coonference/article/view/1884