


Article

Sīrah Philosophy: A Modern Trajectory for *Sīrah* Studies

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Abstract: Prophet Muhammad is a central figure in Islam. Systematic exploration of his life and biography as a central discourse for *sīrah* studies remains timeless and relevant. This has made his life a focal point for study among Muslim and Western scholars for centuries, resulting in the emergence of fresh approaches in modern times. This paper delves into the concept of “*sīrah* philosophy,” which is vigorously advocated by Fethullah Gülen, a prominent Muslim scholar, as a novel and essential perspective for *sīrah* studies in modern times. Gülen’s amalgamation of the Prophet’s life and contemporary challenges underscores the enduring significance of *sīrah* in guiding modern discourse. *Sīrah* philosophy, at its core, provides a framework rooted in the Prophet’s life to draw inspiration for addressing contemporary issues. The article unpacks the practical application of *sīrah* philosophy through the Hudaibiya incident, a pivotal moment in the Prophet’s life during his time in Medina. From conflict resolution and peacebuilding to interfaith dialogue, Gülen’s approach leverages *sīrah* to propose solutions for complex contemporary problems, offering a dynamic way to engage with present-day predicaments. In essence, this article emphasises how *sīrah*, as envisioned by Muslim scholars like Gülen, transcends historical and contextual boundaries, enriching present-day discourse. As *sīrah* studies evolve, this pioneering exploration of a modern trajectory fosters a deeper appreciation of the Prophet’s legacy, facilitating comprehensive understanding for diverse audiences. This article argues that this approach is groundbreaking and innovative, paving the way for new perspectives to read and interpret *sīrah* in a contemporary world for a modern audience.

Keywords: *sīrah* philosophy; philosophy of *sīrah*; *fiqh al-sīrah*; prophet muhammad; muhammad ghazzali; said ramadan al-būṭī; islamic modernism; multiculturalism; peacebuilding; fethullah gülen; hudaibiya; the treaty of Hudaibiya



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1. Introduction

Sīrah, as an Islamic discipline that independently deals with the life of Prophet Muhammad (Sertkaya 2022), is a vital source and inspiration for Muslims in addressing the challenges they encounter. Throughout the history of Islamic tradition, Muslims have turned to the Qur’an and the life and teachings of the Prophet to seek solutions to a wide array of issues across social, political, ethical and judicial spheres. Fethullah Gülen, a prominent contemporary scholar, like many other Muslim scholars, regards *sīrah* as a foundational source, frequently referencing the Prophet’s life for various purposes. However, his approach is somewhat different and innovative as he employs novel terms and unique perspectives. First, he introduces *sīrah* as an indispensable necessary contemporary source, emphasising its timeless significance and relevance for all people. He boldly and radically articulates *sīrah*’s paramount importance in this regard. Second, he consistently and rigorously incorporates *sīrah* into his discourse (theory) and initiatives (practice/action), drawing practical inspiration from it. He calls this dynamic interpretation of the Prophet’s life “*sīrah* philosophy” or understanding of the philosophy of *sīrah*.

As a concrete case study, this article focuses on the Treaty of Hudaibiya, an event in Islamic history mostly remembered with peace and reconciliation due to the Prophet’s tenacious and unwavering pursuit of these ideals (Abu-Nimer and Yilmaz 2010, p. 41). In

analysing the incidents occurred at Hudaibiya, this article adopts the perspective of *sīrah* philosophy as expressed by Gülen, aiming to provide a clear demonstration of what he means by this notion. Further, it explores the implications and deductions one can draw for contemporary individuals through their engagement with *sīrah*, illustrating how it can be used to connect with the Prophet's teachings and message.

2. Fethullah Gülen

Fethullah Gülen is a prominent Turkish Muslim scholar renowned for his leadership in the global movement known as the Gülen or Hizmet Movement, which was inspired by his teachings. It is a transnational Islamic revivalist movement and civic organisation with a profound impact in domains such as education, interfaith dialogue, media, business and civil society. It is characterised as a reformist endeavour dedicated to harmonising Islamic tradition with modernity. One of its core values is the promotion of education and moral transformation as essential elements of its mission. Gülen formulated his and the movement's endeavours based on three solutions to major problems faced in modern times that are internal and external, as well as local and global: education as an antidote for ignorance, dialogue for overcoming fragmentation and conflict, and charitable activities for addressing poverty (Iner and Cufurovic 2022). Despite facing legal and political challenges in its home country, the Hizmet Movement has extended its reach by establishing a network of schools, universities, media outlets and humanitarian organisations worldwide, evolving into a transnational movement with a global footprint. Gülen's leadership underscores his commitment to fostering dialogue and mutual understanding between diverse cultures and faiths, with emphasis on dispelling misconceptions and promoting harmony and peace in the globalised world. He emphasises the importance of understanding Islam's message and the role of the Prophet's life in this context. Gülen explores the dynamics of an ideal society, drawing from the 23-year prophetic career of Prophet Muhammad, including his teachings, actions, lifestyle and philosophy.

3. *Sīrah*, *Fiqh al-Sīrah* and *Sīrah* Philosophy

The Islamic discipline that focuses exclusively on the life of the Prophet is known as the "*sīrah*" genre. The term *sīrah* (plural *siyar*) derives from the Arabic letters s-y-r, encompassing a wide range of meanings, including "route, approach, behaviour, lifestyle, state, conduct, tradition, and the morals, character, and life story of a person" (Ibn Manzūr 1990, vol. IV, pp. 389–90; Sertkaya 2022). This definition characterises a distinct branch of study with unique characteristics, which systematically explores, narrates and comprises works related to the life of Prophet Muhammad, typically presented in chronological order. The *sīrah* genre encompasses all facets of the Prophet's life, from biographical details and events in his life to his teachings and approvals, from his physical description to his moral conduct. It is dedicated to comprehensively understanding and documenting every aspect of the Prophet's life (Sertkaya 2016).

Sīrah philosophy, however, is a new term and it can be argued that it was first coined by the contemporary scholar Fethullah Gülen. Nevertheless, a concept similar to *sīrah* philosophy named *fiqh al-sīrah*, with comparable connotations, has been loosely used by classical scholars such as Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201). This concept was reinvigorated by the works of the Egyptian scholar Muhammad Ghazzali (d. 1996) and the late Syrian scholar Said Ramadan al-Būṭī (d. 2013) at the turn of the 20th century.

In terms of meaning, *fiqh al-sīrah* refers to the extraction of jurisprudential rules from the biographical accounts of the Prophet. However, in this context, the term "*fiqh*" is not solely confined to legal rules; rather, it extends to encompass lessons and teachings derived from *sīrah*. In this regard, *fiqh al-sīrah* represents a distinct branch of knowledge and a literary genre, especially prominent as a sub-discipline within contemporary *sīrah* studies. Its purpose is to extract religious rulings and jurisprudence directly from the practices and life of the Prophet and to reflect on the application of these rules as observed by him in his

life and among those around him. As the name implies, these works primarily serve as *sīrah* sources, narrating the life of the Prophet.

Ghazzali's *Fiqh al-Sīrah* (Ghazzālī 2006) serves as an interpretative and critical examination of *sīrah* in modern times. Its main objective is to address some of the criticisms directed at the life of the Prophet in general, as well as speculative narrations found in classical *sīrah* works. Similarly, Būṭī outlines the purpose of his *Fiqh al-Sīrah* and locates it within a similar intellectual discourse. His introduction makes it evident that he intends to respond to Orientalist works and Muslim modernists and their paradigms. Beyond this clear objective, he extensively reflects on the teachings of the Prophet as derived from various incidents and explores their jurisprudential implications.

In comparison to Ghazzali's work, Būṭī's position is notably clear and his work is much more systematic. As per his preface (Būṭī 1999), his primary methodology involves summarising the most significant events and providing their interpretation. It is a relatively concise history grounded in authentic sources, primarily *ṣaḥīḥ* hadith collections such as those of Bukhari and Muslim, as well as respected *sīrah* and *ṭabaqāt* (biographical accounts) books authored by scholars like Ibn Ishaq (d. 768), Ibn Hishām (d. 833), Ibn Sa'd (d. 845) and others. He strongly emphasises authentic hadith collections and aligns them closely with the Qur'anic accounts to avoid criticism aimed at early classical *sīrah* works. Consequently, when reaching interpretations, he relies on the most trustworthy *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegetical) works and the *ijtihād* (juridical reasoning) of esteemed scholars. The commentary section primarily covers, though not exclusively:

- Jurisprudential rulings derived from events and the practices of the Prophet;
- Extracting lessons and admonitions from *sīrah* accounts;
- Exploring ethical principles;
- Determining and guiding towards the correct course of action in a modern context.

From this perspective, *Fiqh al-Sīrah* works, particularly Būṭī's book, provide significant and original contributions to *sīrah* studies, as many other works often lack the relevance and other qualities required to shed light on contemporary issues.

Gülen's interpretation of *sīrah* and his concept of *sīrah* philosophy, while bearing some resemblance to the *fiqh al-sīrah* approach, exhibit notable distinctions and a novel perspective. At face value, they all employ *sīrah* to derive lessons and offer solutions to contemporary issues. However, Gülen's approach is characterised by its precision, directness and consistency. Moreover, Gülen does not primarily engage in confrontation with modernists or spend extensive time addressing criticisms. Instead, he squarely focuses on the dynamic aspects of *sīrah* and addresses real-world problems head-on. On occasion, he deviates from the *sīrah* narrative to illustrate his points (his interpretation of Hudaibiya, which I will discuss later, serves as a notable example). At other times, he diverges from the immediate problem to draw parallels between modern challenges and *sīrah* teachings. In most instances, he employs principles and methodological maxims that enable him to maintain a consistent approach. At this fundamental level, Gülen distinguishes himself from his contemporaries and other Muslim intellectuals.

So, what is *sīrah* philosophy and how does Gülen understand and interpret it? As a scholar who not only presents *sīrah* as an indispensable necessary source but also underscores its crucial importance in the modern era, how does he conceptualise it?

When examining Gülen's works, it becomes evident that he emphasises and idealises *sīrah* along with the companions, often referred to as the era of happiness (*asr al-saadah*) in Islamic tradition. He consistently highlights its universal benefits to all people and times. From his perspective, *sīrah* possesses a dynamic aspect that allows for its renewal, reactivation and application to various times and circumstances. To him, *sīrah* albeit being fixed (as it relates to the past) is not static; rather, it remains open to interpretation and capable of addressing different times and ages (Gülen 2012, p. 131). Gülen emphasises that individuals who comprehend *sīrah* and the context of their times can discover solutions guided by the hints, insights and signals embedded within *sīrah*. This is how he defines and what he means by *sīrah* philosophy—an active engagement with *sīrah*, reading it in

conjunction with modern times to derive guiding principles and insights for contemporary challenges. In his words (Gülen 2012, p. 131), Gülen undertakes the “philosophy of *sīrah*” and elucidates that contemporary individuals can glean numerous valuable lessons from it. In this context, Gülen highlights the pivotal importance of *sīrah* and the companions (Gülen 2012, p. 131):

Sīrah is an important source to be frequently referred to, as it provides a commentary on how the Qur’an should be understood. Our Prophet, with his life, words, deeds, and approvals, has shown how a life aligned with the revelation should be lived. And the companions, each of whom are linguistic experts, have read these two sacred sources correctly, understood, interpreted, and stated them accurately, and left a route which should be followed by the generations after them.

Gülen (1995, p. 234; 2008, p. 108) asserts that the signals of everything concerning what has happened and what will happen until the Day of Judgement have been experienced, if not in macro format, then in microformat, during the era of happiness. Solutions to many current problems can be found in the *sīrah* from that age. In his perception, in one way, the Prophet has explained in detail everything that has happened inclusive of the teachings of all previous prophets and in another he extracted everything to be carried out by the religious community. That is, even if there are differences between then and now, he states there are similarities. In other words, even though things do not occur in the same manner (*ayniyyet*), they occur and history repeats itself in similitudes (*misliyyet*). To provide further clarity on his views regarding *sīrah*, Gülen (2012, pp. 132–33) states:

Every historical event within the *sīrah* holds valuable insights and hints into potential solutions for challenges we may encounter in the future. By considering the contextual factors of the period and the cultural perspectives of its inhabitants, we can find guidance to address the issues of our own time. To maximise our ability to do this effectively, it is essential to thoroughly study and comprehend both the *sīrah* itself and the contemporary era. Throughout the 14 centuries of Islamic history, the philosophy of *sīrah* has been periodically examined, and events from the era of happiness have been analysed in terms of social history. However, it’s crucial to recognise that significant sociological and other changes have occurred between that era and the present day. Some of the philosophical ideas presented in the past have become obsolete and no longer relevant, while new modes of thought have emerged. Therefore, even though we can draw insights from interpretations of the *sīrah* from previous sources, we cannot assume that they fully align with today’s world. Hence, in the context of modern conditions, the task of interpreting the philosophy of *sīrah* falls upon the child of this era (*ibn al-zaman*¹), who must consider the prevailing interpretations and commentaries of their contemporary time.

In his work titled *What is History?* Carr (1976, p. 27) contends that a crucial mandate for a history student lies in the examination and study of “the problems of the past as a key to those of the present.” Similarly, Gülen consistently emphasises that history repeats itself and it is imperative to derive lessons from it. However, his perspective takes a more nuanced and distinctive stance when it comes to reading *sīrah*. That is, he advocates for the in-depth study of a 23-year period, positing that such an exploration is pivotal for resolving all the challenges that may arise until the Day of Judgement. In essence, Gülen’s perspective not only reaffirms but also defines the concept of *sīrah* philosophy and its underlying theoretical framework.

Before delving into the practical applications of *sīrah* philosophy, it is worth noting that non-Muslim scholarship on *sīrah* and their approach to Prophet Muhammad’s life have exhibited a similar transformation in contemporary periods. Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a discernable shift in the medieval polemical portrayal of the Prophet. Scholars from non-Muslim backgrounds have begun adopting a more positive and inclusive approach to understanding the life of the Prophet, examining it through

the lens of real-world application. Consequently, their focus has shifted towards different aspects of the Prophet's life, with emphasis on his contributions to establishing peaceful and pluralistic societies. Prominent examples of this shift include the works of Karen Armstrong, Juan Cole and Craig Considine. Armstrong, for instance, underscores the shared messages of religions and seeks to recount the "true story of the Prophet," acknowledging him as "one of the most remarkable human beings who ever lived" (Armstrong 1991, pp. 11–12). This perspective allows her to interpret the life of the Prophet from a different angle, drawing lessons and inspiration for contemporary challenges. In contrast, Juan Cole's work (Cole 2018) focuses on investigating the Prophet's peaceful attitude amid the clash of civilisations, highlighting Prophet Muhammad's consistent efforts and the central role of peace in his life. While this approach may seem singular in its theme, it aligns closely with the philosophy of *sīrah* approach, albeit with a concentrated focus on this aspect. Similarly, Craig Considine, in his book *The Humanity of Muhammad: A Christian View* (Considine 2020), portrays Prophet Muhammad as a champion of religious pluralism, emphasising his vision of a civic nation, advocacy for anti-racist behaviours, the promotion of knowledge and women's rights. Considine's work presents a completely different and humanistic depiction of Prophet Muhammad that resonates with contemporary audiences, offering a fresh perspective on reading *sīrah* and its practical applications in the real world. In his book titled *People of the Book* (Considine 2021), Considine conducts a meticulous sociological analysis of the Prophet's life, shedding light on his interactions with Christians of his time. He underlines the central theme of the Prophet's mission—the establishment of an *ummah* (Muslim nation) deeply rooted in encounters with people of different faiths, emphasising principles of freedom of religion, conscience, speech and interfaith initiatives. These and similar works, which explore the Prophet's life through the lens of modern challenges and their practical applications, constitute a significant body of literature in contemporary Western scholarship. While not the central focus of this article, they are also likely to shape the future trajectory of *sīrah* studies in non-Muslim scholarship.

4. Practical Application of *Sīrah* Philosophy: Case Study of the Hdaybiya Treaty

The Hdaybiya incident, which resulted in a peace treaty between the Prophet and Meccan polytheists, holds paramount significance in the history of Islam. It marks a pivotal turning point in the Prophet's life in Medina and plays a crucial role in the expansion of Islam across various regions of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond (Ghazzālī 2006, p. 325; Būṭī 1999; al-Zayid 1995). Because of its significance, it is referred to as "*umm mu'āhadāt al-salām*", meaning "the mother of peace treaties," in some sources (Farman and Yucel 2023; Farman 2021). This section of the article delves into the Treaty of Hdaybiya through the lens of *sīrah* philosophy, as elucidated by Gülen, offering a concrete example of how he practically applied this concept. It showcases how Gülen applied this notion, drew parallels between *sīrah* and the contemporary era, and extracted teachings, lessons and principles relevant to the modern era. Additionally, it will explicitly highlight the disparities between Gülen's approach and the conventional treatment of this incident in *sīrah* literature, classical and modern.

4.1. Historical Account of the Hdaybiya Treaty

Six years after the emigration to Medina (626 AH), the Prophet promised his companions they would go on the lesser pilgrimage, *umrah*, to Mecca, following a dream he had in which he saw them safely entering the holy sanctuary. The Prophet, together with 1400 companions, set out towards Mecca carrying no weapons, except swords in their sheaths—as Arab travellers usually did at that time—in the state of ritual purity, *iḥram* (Wāqidi 2004, II, pp. 70–71, 100; Ibn Hishām 2006, III, pp. 229–30). These were clear indications that the Prophet's mission was peaceful. Informed of their departure, the Quraysh armed themselves and all the neighbouring tribes, and then unanimously decided not to allow Muslims to enter the Ka'bah. They mobilised about 200 cavalry and headed for Qura' al-Ghamim. When informed of their move, the Prophet decided to take a different route

and commanded his companions to continue to al-Hudaybiya, about 15 km from Mecca (Ibn Hishām 2006, III/230).

After the Muslims camped at al-Hudaybiya, delegates were sent by the Quraysh, with the first being a non-Muslim ally from the Khuzaa tribe, Budayl ibn Warqa. The Prophet informed him they did not come to fight, but to honour the sanctuary and perform their pilgrimage. On his return, the Quraysh did not want to pay attention and received Budayl in sullen silence (Ibn Sa'd 2001, II/92–93). They then sent Urwah ibn Mas'ud as-Thaqafi, who found the Prophet's message logical and proposed the Quraysh negotiate with Muhammad. The companions' approach, respect and veneration of the Prophet attracted Urwah's attention. After being convinced the Muslims had not come to wage war, Urwah returned to Mecca and declared: "O men of Quraysh, I have visited Chosroes, Caesar, and the Negus in their respective courts. None of their subjects are so devoted to their rulers as his companions are to Muhammad. I advise you not to fight with him" (Ibn Sa'd 2001, II/93; Bukhārī 2008, *shurut* (54)15). Hulays ibn Alqama was then sent as an ambassador. When he saw animals being moved as a display of Arab religiosity, he became convinced their intention was purely to perform *umrah*. Following Hulays, the Quraysh sent Mikraz ibn Hafs as another delegate. When Mikraz arrived, the Prophet repeated that they came only to perform *umrah* and honour the sanctuary (Ibn Hishām 2006, III/233–235).

As negotiations remained inconclusive, the Prophet decided to send a delegate from his companions to inform the Quraysh of the Muslims' stance and Khirash ibn 'Umayyah was sent to Mecca. The Quraysh did not heed his advice or give a warm welcome. Khirash was followed by 'Uthman ibn Affan. When 'Uthman was delayed due to prolonged negotiations, a rumour spread that he had been killed. Thereupon, the Prophet, sitting beneath a large tree, took an oath (*bay'at al-ridwan*) from his companions that they would hold together and fight to the death (Ibn Hishām 2006, III/234–235; Ibn Sa'd 2001, II/93; Tabarī n.d., II/627–628). During this tension, a Meccan envoy arrived in the Muslim camp led by Suhayl ibn Amr. Suhayl began to utter calls for reconciliation and obstinately insisted on points to be written as he wanted; otherwise, he would refuse to sign the treaty. Eventually, they agreed to a truce and the Treaty of Hudaybiya was concluded on the following terms:

- The Prophet and his followers would make a pilgrimage the next year, at which time the Meccans would vacate the city for three days;
- There will be a ten-year armistice and people or tribes could join or ally themselves with whomever they wish;
- Any person from the Quraysh immigrating to Medina without consent from their guardian shall be returned, whereas any Muslim migrating from Medina to Mecca would not be required to return.

These conditions were opposed by the companions. Despite the one-sided appearance of the treaty, the Prophet accepted the offers given by Suhayl.

Soon after the treaty was signed, Abu Jandal, Suhayl's imprisoned son (due to his conversion to Islam), arrived with his feet in fetters and asked to join the Muslims. Suhayl declared his son's return as the first condition for the validity of the treaty. The Prophet and his companions had to return Abu Jandal. However, the Prophet whispered to him: "God will surely give you and those of your like a relief and a way out" (Wāqidī 2004, II/95–96; Ibn Hishām 2006, III/238; Ibn Sa'd 2001, II/94). After the treaty was signed and the delegates of the Quraysh left, the Prophet ordered his companions to slaughter their sacrificial animals, shave their heads and take off their pilgrim attire. The Prophet reiterated this order three times, but his companions hesitated and looked at him in bewildered silence. Noticing the companions' reluctance, the Prophet withdrew to his tent and reported the situation to his wife, Umm Salama. She provided her thoughts: "O Messenger of God, do not repeat your order. They may resist and thereby perish. Slaughter your sacrificial animal and change out of your pilgrim attire. They will obey, willingly or not, when they see that your order is final." The Prophet immediately went out and completed the tasks. Right

after seeing the Prophet, the companions raced to do the same (Wāqidī 2004, II/99–101; Bukhārī 2008, *shurut*, (54)1, *maghāzī*, (64)35, *muhsar*, (27)1).

After staying 19 or 20 days at al-Hudaybiya, the Muslims returned to Medina. Shortly after, a man from the Quraysh known as Abu Basir fled from Mecca to take refuge with the Prophet. The Quraysh sent two delegates to demand his return. The Prophet sent him back to Mecca, but on the way back Abu Basir killed one of the envoys and wounded the other. When Abu Basir returned to Medina, the Prophet did not allow him to stay and said they had an agreement with the Quraysh. Thereupon, Abu Basir settled at al-Iys, a strategic point on the Meccan caravan route to Syria. As this settlement grew, the Quraysh perceived a potential threat to their trade route. This forced them to ask the Prophet to void the relevant term and it was withdrawn from the treaty. Thus, the bitterest term of the treaty for the Muslims was withdrawn by the people who persistently demanded it (Ibn Hishām 2006, III/241–243; Tabarī n.d., II/638–639).

Chapter 48 of the Qur'an, *surah al-Fath*, was revealed on the way back from al-Hudaybiya and named the treaty a manifest victory (*fath al-mubin*). Based on this *surah* and accounts of the Prophet's *hadith* about al-Hudaybiya, Imam Zuhri states "In Islam there was no previous victory greater than Hudaybiya." Ibn Hisham, who narrates Zuhri's statement, provides evidence: While the Prophet went to Hudaybiya with 1400 people, he was followed two years later, in the conquest of Mecca, by 10,000 (Ibn Hishām 2006, III, 241; Tabarī n.d., II, 638). Likewise, the Prophet was pleased because his plans were coming to fruition. The Quraysh subsequently annulled the treaty terms by violating a clan that had allegiance with the Prophet's pact. Thus, Hudaybiya laid the foundation for the victory over Mecca.

4.2. Analytic Evaluation of the Hudaybiya

This section will delve into the interpretation and analysis of the Hudaybiya peace treaty, aiming to elucidate *sīrah* philosophy and its practical implications. The examination will begin by exploring Gülen's perspective on the reasons and primary motivations behind the journey to Hudaybiya, contrasting it with the general perception followed by an in-depth exploration of Gülen's insights into the outcomes of Hudaybiya. Gülen's approach transcends mere historical narration; he delves into the psychological, socio-economic context and contemporary conditions, seeking to reveal the underlying philosophy behind the Prophet's actions and how it can be adapted to the present day.

4.2.1. The Reasons for the Journey to Hudaybiya

Even if the purpose of the journey to Hudaybiya was fundamentally stated as being *umrah*, scholars have evaluated this from different angles based on available information at the time. Some have deemed it more appropriate to say the Muslims travelled for *umrah* since they could not battle against the more powerful Mecca. It is doubtful that such a trip would be undertaken due only to a dream and, therefore, the real purpose had political aims (Watt 1956, p. 47). Another view states (Hamidullah 2001, pp. 212–13) that the agreement was reached to prevent a Qurayshi attack from the south while they struggled with Khaybar to the north and to ensure Quraysh's neutrality. For this reason, the journey was undertaken with the purpose of *umrah* and an agreement was sought with Mecca. Hamidullah further emphasises that the Prophet made a serious attempt to prevent lives from being lost in vain as his military strength increased and he shows statistical evidence for this. Noting this matter prior to Hudaybiya strengthens the argument that this trip had peaceful intentions (Hamidullah 2001, p. 212).² As for Gülen, he believes there are many reasons for the Prophet's voyage to Hudaybiya. He lists and explains some of these as follows.

To Dispel the Longing for the Homeland

Gülen's theory as to the main reason for undertaking the voyage to Mecca differs from that of many Western and Muslim writers. He believes (Gülen 2007, pp. 323–25)

the primary reason is to relieve the hope and longing of the exiled Meccan refugees who came to Medina, to visit the Ka'bah, which they could not forget. Despite six years having passed since their migration, Muslims had not a single opportunity to go to Mecca. The Ka'bah was the first building built by Adam and it was the Holy House, repaired and left to them by their ancestor Abraham. Although the Ka'bah was an important place for all Arabs and trips were made there every year at a certain time, the Muslims were forbidden from entering and worshipping there. The Ka'bah gained new meaning with the coming of Islam and the changing of the direction of the *qiblah* a few years prior.

At first sight, Gülen's view may seem secondary among the other factors, but the longing for Mecca, which was increasingly being discussed among the companions of the Prophet, was an important influence. As also stated above, the Ka'bah had an important role, but it was not the only reason. That is because many of the immigrants were also missing the arid climate of Mecca, in contrast to the humid and muggy climate of Medina. Even the closest friends of the Prophet were no longer hiding these desires. Two important examples of this are the remonstrations of Abū Bakr and Bilal (Bukhārī 2008, *manāqib al-ansār*, 46). Gülen's thoughts on this matter suggest he is not just a narrator of this subject, but a keen observer researching the different dimensions of the events. Further, Gülen does not evaluate the anecdotes as dogmatic text, but as data emphasising the importance of human factors and their emotions. This dynamic reading of *sīrah* makes the anecdote relevant to contemporary people. Many *sīrah* writers have overlooked this aspect apart from the partial discussion that can be seen in Mawlana Shibli's work (Shibli 2010, p. 283). Gülen and Shibli have undertaken psychological analysis from the accounts in the sources and scripted events in ways that readers can recreate in their minds, which is a product of the modern lens of *sīrah* writings. As a result, by departing from a static narrative, carrying out analyses and presenting the historical and psychological background, they prepared a basis for better understanding and relevance of the Hudaibiya incident.

Returning Worship (Umrah) to Its Original Format

Gülen outlines that another reason for undertaking the journey is to teach the correct form of the circumambulation of the Ka'bah and *umrah*. According to sources, the Ka'bah had been filled with idols and bizarre behaviours that were difficult to understand had replaced the circumambulation. People of the age of ignorance (*jāhiliyya*) were whistling and clapping their hands instead of circumambulating the Ka'bah (Qur'an 8:35). Particularly at night, women removed all their clothing because they believed the Ka'bah should not be circumambulated while wearing sinful clothes (Muslim 2004, *tafsīr*, 25; Nasaī 2005, *manāsīq*, 161). According to Gülen, during this period when men and women were enacting such incomprehensible ceremonies, the Prophet went on a journey with the aim of showing how to correctly perform the religious rituals in the Ka'bah.

Even though this view corresponds with the argument in almost all studies, which state the purpose of the voyage as being *umrah*, the difference is clear between saying the sole purpose was *umrah* and pointing out that the purpose was to teach how *umrah* should be performed. In this respect, Gülen sees the matter not just as an Arab tradition, but as teaching the format of one of the most fundamental pillars of religion and the message of the Prophet. At the same time, restoring worship that has been distorted back to its original format also corresponds with the missions of prophets. In highlighting this fact, Gülen is again relatively different from many other *sīrah* writers. With this emphasis, the claims that Islam was just a local Arab religion (Watt 1971, pp. 47–48) were refuted and it was underlined that *umrah* was not just an Arab tradition. Rather, it has a systematic form of worship with its spiritual and divine origins based on Islamic principles.

To Show the Ka'bah Is Not the Monopoly of the Quraysh

In this journey, the Prophet wanted to show, at the same time, that it was not just the Meccans or Quraysh who had rights over the Ka'bah, but everyone had those rights. Gülen (2007, p. 325) underlines the fact that the Prophet and his companions, who were returning

the Ka'bah to its glory, had more rights than anyone else. Muhammad Ghazzālī (2006, p. 325), who considered this journey to be a separate turning point in the history of the call to Islam, discusses this matter in a similar way. He considers this journey in the context of the rights of the Muslims to worship in this accepted and acknowledged place and showing that the Masjid al-Haram (Ka'bah) does not just belong to the polytheists, so they could not bar anyone from it. As can be seen, in these analyses it is more what is left unsaid that is brought to our attention than what has been already discussed in other sources. Further, if the matter is evaluated in connection with the establishment of an identity formation for the first Muslims, who experienced the process of the creation of the religion, then it will be understood more clearly.

To Present His Companions Who Have Achieved a Certain Level of Morality and Religiosity

Gülen's approach, where he states that one of the reasons the Prophet journeyed to Hudaibiya was to present his companions, is yet another argument that cannot be found in other sources. They were such a consistent and unified group of people, given the conditions of that era, that they did not even cause a nosebleed to anyone in the areas they passed through nor did they trespass or pillage anyone's land. According to Gülen (2007, p. 326), this was revolutionary; it shows the philosophy they have adopted and the faith they possessed. Their journey would deliver an impression and message to others: "We have not seen these types of people on earth until now. These can only be angels!" (Gülen 2007, p. 326).

After thoroughly reading and evaluating this topic, and from a 21st-century standpoint, this is, in fact, the conclusion reached. As well as conveying a message and presenting a purpose to modern people, it is also a good example in terms of understanding events from the viewpoint of *sīrah* philosophy. The fact is that a community, that has reached a certain stability and is loyal to its own values, mixes with others and establishes a basis where it can meet with them and show them its true identity, presenting both sides with the opportunity to understand each other and express themselves better. Gülen emphasises the same approach (Gülen 2007, pp. 166–67) in terms of the results of Hudaibiya and its reflections on the modern day. People who reach such a level and confidence have come from Medina to Mecca, having passed through many residential areas, and met and spoken to various communities. Their demeanour had had an important influence on the people they met. Within a short period (2–3 years), enmity among them receded and they had all come and joined the Muslims as per *sīrah* sources (Gülen 2007, pp. 328–29).

Due to this argument, the "quality of representation" (*tamthīl*) is another factor that establishes the basis of Gülen's commentary. According to Gülen, demeanour, behaviour and actions, as well as words, have an important effect on presenting a message correctly. Contrary to this, in Lammens' view (Lammens 1977, p. 578), the reason for the Prophet coming to Hudaibiya was that he believed himself to be in control of the situation and "wanted to exhibit a military might/vanity." It looks like Lammens' view stems from being an outsider looking in and attempting to read the situation as an observer. Thus, it is almost impossible to justify his comment in relation to this treaty, whereas Gülen's evaluation, by expressing the principle of *tamthīl* in Islam and the Prophet's life, dispels the view that he desired to "show off," as such actions do not align with the behaviour, teachings and mission of the Prophet.

As a result, Gülen (2007, p. 328) believes the only thing considered by God's Messenger at Hudaibiya, which was not achieved, was *umrah*, but this happened a year later. In comparison to other sources where the sole purpose of the journey was stated as *umrah*, Gülen lists different reasons, claiming the Prophet achieved all his objectives due to divine guidance and inspiration.

4.2.2. Results of Hdaybiya and Its Relevance Today

The analysis, relevance and particular application of *sīrah* in the modern era constitute the focal point for the *sīrah* philosophy approach. As previously mentioned, Gülen regards *sīrah* as a discipline that provides essential clues for addressing the challenges confronting humanity until the Day of Judgement, serving as an indispensable resource for believers. This section will illustrate how Gülen applies this approach and derives conclusions from the Hdaybiya incident, relating it to contemporary times and the issues at hand. This emphasis on outcomes and their relevance holds paramount importance for contemporary readers, enabling them to gain a deeper comprehension of what the philosophy of *sīrah* signifies. According to Gülen, the Hdaybiya treaty resulted in several outcomes.

People Embraced Islam

In the process that initiated peace, among many others, several pioneering leaders of the Quraysh, such as Khalid ibn Walid, Amr Ibn As and Uthman Ibn Talha, became Muslims. All these individuals were military and political masterminds (Shibli 2010, p. 291). Gülen (2007, pp. 164–65) says it would have been difficult for them to turn to Islam as a result of battle or to have been converted by force; their pride would have been hurt. They found the opportunity to think in the moderate and peaceful period after Hdaybiya and as a result chose to turn to Islam. The first impact was that the Muslims suffered and were aggrieved during the Treaty of Hdaybiya, but then the following year they returned to undertake *umrah* in a sacrosanct and unprecedented way. In short, the demeanour and representation of the companions of the Prophet were significant factors in their decision.

Even though in general the sources say that important individuals from Mecca became Muslims after Hdaybiya, Gülen offers a slightly different explanation. His view is a sort of summarised evaluation of Nursi's insight that the dialogue between the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula after the Hdaybiya treaty gained strength, swords were put back in their sheaths and replaced by the truths of the Qur'an reaching people, and conquering their hearts and minds. Further, Gülen's explanation recalls the question asked to Nursi about the reason for the defeat, which began at the beginning of the battle of Hunayn and at the end of the battle of Uhud, and his response of protecting the honour of the companions of the future and their victory over the companions of the present (Nursi 2007a, pp. 37–38). The protection of the honour of people is an important discipline in Islam and this was exercised in Hdaybiya. Ultimately, Gülen underlines that the Prophet did not exclude anyone and followed a distinct policy of winning over the hearts of everyone.

The Ka'bah Cannot Be Monopolised

Until that day, the Quraysh considered themselves superior and were saying the Ka'bah belonged only to them. They were collecting taxes from everyone before allowing them to enter the Ka'bah. However, such a condition was not put forward at the Treaty of Hdaybiya. Thus, it was officially acknowledged that the Ka'bah was not solely under the control of the Quraysh. Gülen states this was a great mistake or oversight by the Quraysh. When the Muslims circumambulated the Ka'bah the following year without paying any taxes, the tribes woke up to this fact and the idea that the Quraysh were not the sole owners of the Ka'bah gained reputation. Consequently, the other tribes also found the opportunity to visit the Ka'bah without having to pay any taxes (Gülen 2007, pp. 165–66). Muhammad Ghazzālī and Husayn Haykal express the same opinion (Ghazzālī 2006, p. 325; Haykal 2009, p. 309). It was thus acknowledged it was not only the Quraysh that had rights over the Ka'bah, but all of mankind.

Hizmet (Service to Humanity) Can Only Be Provided in an Atmosphere of Peace

With this peace treaty, there was a guarantee there would be no danger from the Quraysh for ten years. This period is important because during this time ambassadors and teams of religious advisors were sent to various places. Gülen says this meant the message of Islam would reach the whole of the Arabian Peninsula (Gülen 2007, p. 166). This was

also the period when Muslims made great strides in terms of quantity and quality. This fact shows that Gülen uses what sometimes seems like a small detail in sentences contained in the sources to formulate an event and, therefore, obtain a general principle and a discipline from the *sīrah*. This reinforces Zuhri's previously mentioned view that Hudaibiya was a real conquest or victory and within two years, with the winning over their hearts, many more people became Muslims. However, Gülen has taken this detail and turned it into a practical principle. In this way, he exercises the philosophy of *sīrah* by extending, relating and applying it in contemporary times. This will be further expanded later in this article.

They Discovered Islam through Peace

It was Gülen's belief that the Treaty of Hudaibiya provided the opportunity for two communities (Mecca and Medina), which previously had no contact with each other, to establish contact and communication. The only previous meetings between the sides had been on battlefields. It is difficult to explain one's views to the other side, or to sit down and talk, while in the psychology of war. Until that day, there were people who did not know what was going on in Medina and many believed the fabricated news and slurs that were being disseminated, thus reinforcing division. After the agreement, they had the chance to find out about life in Medina. Many came to realise that, contrary to what they had heard, there was peace, harmony and unity. In this way, the Muslims found the opportunity to deliver their message to everyone. This enabled the Quraysh and other tribes to discover their true identity (Gülen 2007, pp. 166–67).

Likewise, Shibli (2010, pp. 290–91, 394) observes that the freedom for people to meet openly allowed them to freely express their thoughts and feelings to one another. However, he links this to the words of Zuhri, asserting that as a consequence, none of the idolaters with sound judgement hesitated to choose to join Islam. He further points out that, in the two years that followed, the number of people embracing Islam equalled or even exceeded the total number of its previous adherents. According to him, the number of companions travelling to Hudaibiya was 1400 and this number increased to 10,000 in just two years with the conquest of Mecca. Gülen also says the same thing, but he takes the matter even further and introduces the key role of dialogue. In this way, he addresses modern people using a clue obtained from *sīrah* and creates another principle for them. The way the people from the Hizmet Movement, of which Gülen is a source of inspiration, interact with people from different cultures and faith traditions, by taking those people to their institutions and supportive places around the globe, to show their real nature, is similar to the ideas obtained from *sīrah* and results of Hudaibiya. In this way, people can see the activities carried out on location and observe them in person rather than through hearsay. Thus, this interaction enables them to understand and get to know Muslims' true identity by directly talking and having discussions with them.

Islam and the State of Medina Moved towards Official Recognition

Due to this peace, all the people and tribes started to accept that the Prophet and the state he represented could be trusted to enter contracts and agreements with others. Just as in current times, states that have just been formed or declared independence become legitimate when other states recognise them. Once the Quraysh recognised them by executing a contract with them, the Taif and other tribes would also do so (Gülen 2007, pp. 167–68). This outcome of Hudaibiya has been underlined in many classical and modern sources (Hamidullah 1998, p. 297; Haykal 2009, p. 309). For instance, Lammens asserts that (Lammens 1977, p. 579) the stance of the Prophet during the discussions on peace forced the Quraysh oligarchy into treating him as an equal (under equal conditions with them) and this resulted in the Muslims being acknowledged as a great force in the whole of the Arab peninsula.

God Was behind the Prophet

What sets Gülen apart from other *sīrah* writers and, in my view characterises his main approach to *sīrah* writings, is his use of the concept of “*fatānah*” denoting “the Prophets’ distinct clarity of mind, insight and intellect,” which is among the attributes and characteristics of prophethood according to Islamic theology. While many Western and Muslim writers³ acknowledge the success of the Prophet at Hudaibiya, they attribute the outcome to his astute far-sighted statesmanship and the pursuit of policies in alignment with this governorship. Gülen also acknowledges the Prophet’s far-sightedness but regards it as an inherent aspect of his nature, while associating the intellect (*fatānah*) with divine inspiration as a source of support. Consequently, Gülen adopts a theological method to expound the incident, grounded in a fundamental principle within this theological framework, rather than seeking alternative explanations like rational justifications or connecting it solely with the Prophet’s experiences. Gülen perceives *fatānah* as the Prophet’s logic and considers the decisions made by the Prophet to be absolutely correct, ideal and incisive. His confidence in *sīrah* and *sīrah* philosophy as a source of solutions for the problems humanity faces, or will face, stems from his perspective. While he regards this as *wahy gayr matluw* (unrecited revelation), he also asserts it as an inherent necessity of his nature and an outcome of his *fatānah* (Gülen 2012, p. 134; 2007, pp. 168–69). Therefore, Gülen shapes his explanations based on the Prophet’s sagacious decisions and does not deem it necessary to explore alternative interpretations.

4.2.3. Reflections on Hudaibiya and Its Relevance to Contemporary Times

This final section delves into how Gülen derives and applies practical lessons and inspiration drawn from the Hudaibiya peace treaty to contemporary contexts. His *sīrah* philosophy approach revolves around extracting timeless principles from historical incidents, their underlying contexts and their relevance for universal application across different eras. His unique ability to infuse this dynamism into *sīrah* adds a distinctive dimension to *sīrah* studies. Looking through the lens of *sīrah* philosophy, the Treaty of Hudaibiya imparts crucial lessons for the modern era.

Peace and Tolerance

As previously mentioned, when referencing peace in the history of Islam, one of the foremost instances that comes to mind is the Hudaibiya treaty. Wahiduddin Khan argues (Khan 2009) that the key to the Prophet’s success lies in his advocacy for peace and pursuit of a peaceful policy. Gülen similarly emphasises that one of the most significant lessons that can be gleaned from Hudaibiya from the perspective of *sīrah* philosophy is the Prophet’s unwavering commitment to peace and tolerance. He goes on to assert that contemporary people, when confronted with circumstances that may provoke irritation and anger, should emulate the Prophet’s composure at Hudaibiya and resolutely address such matters. Gülen reminds us that the true challenge is not to attain objectives through weapons or force, but to win hearts and minds, employing “*jihad*” as a means to instill faith and patience. He underlines that armed *jihad* represents only a secondary or tertiary form of *jihad*, emphasising the paramount importance of acknowledging the Prophet’s true *jihad* in this manner (Gülen 1974, p. 103).

Hudaibiya imparts this crucial lesson to believers and serves as a reminder that this perspective has often been overlooked. In Gülen’s view, the Prophet’s ultimate goal and real objective from the outset was to win people’s hearts through peaceful means, without shedding blood (Gülen 1974, p. 103). Nevertheless, due to the aggression and force previously directed by the Meccans, this noble intention was overshadowed, compelling the Prophet to adopt a defensive stance. However, once the Hudaibiya treaty was established, the Prophet could pursue his objective after achieving stability through relative military and political power. This ultimately resulted in the conquest of the Ka’bah in a manner befitting its sanctity, all without resorting to military force or bloodshed (Sertkaya 2023).

Gülen often adopts a broader perspective when considering incidents in *sīrah* and aims to discern the true objectives of the Prophet. He concludes that these objectives encompassed not only the circumambulation of the Ka'bah but what he deems to be even more significant than the conquest of Mecca: the conquest of hearts and minds through a peace-loving policy (Gülen 2012, p. 135). While the essence of this perspective is present in early sources on *sīrah*, such as accounts from the companions and individuals like Zuhri, as referenced several times earlier, it also finds support in Qur'anic verses (such as 4:128, 8:61 and 49:9). Thus, Gülen is confident to assert that peace and winning over hearts are fundamental objectives in Islam, with armed struggle occupying a secondary or even tertiary position. His interpretation of Hdaybiya exemplifies his ability to view historical incidents through the lens of the philosophy of *sīrah* and to carry these insights into the modern day. In summary, one of the key lessons Gülen draws from Hdaybiya for contemporary believers can be encapsulated as follows (quoted in Camci and Unal 1998, p. 58):

An atmosphere of peace and dialogue is essential in order to better understand others, to present the true essence of Islam in a peaceful environment, to promote the authentic Muslim view as opposed to the distorted image propagated by its adversaries, and to project Islam in its true sense and character. War or conflict is a state where people become driven by anger, replacing their rationality and logic with emotions. It is nearly impossible to engage in meaningful conversation and reach agreements in such a state of mind. That's why, even though it is often misinterpreted, according to reports from the Prophet's companions themselves, the Quran has referred to the Hdaybiya Treaty, along with the promises it held for the future, as a 'clear evolvment and evident victory' (*fathan mubīna*).

Dialogue and Multiculturalism

Another important lesson Gülen draws for contemporary people from the Treaty of Hdaybiya is the importance of engaging in dialogue with individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds and how to facilitate such dialogues. Dialogue is one of the most well-known and vital activities for Gülen, and for the movement, he is a source of inspiration. These initiatives, which gained global prominence following Gülen's visit to Pope John Paul II, have faced significant criticism, particularly within the Muslim world and notably in Turkey. In response to these criticisms, Gülen consistently emphasised that this was not an innovation of his own making, but a practice that was carried out by the Prophet during his lifetime. He cites the Hdaybiya incident, among other events, as examples of this practice.

Gülen (2012, pp. 135–36) asserts that in this globalised world, where transportation and communication have made distances minuscule, people from various religions and cultures coexist. To build relationships with these individuals, it is essential to establish a shared understanding of the world and every action must be thoroughly considered. It is evident that positive outcomes cannot be achieved by enmity, conflict or consistently taking opposing stances. In this regard, human beings, who are inherently civilised creatures in a world where civilisational values hold significance, must resolve their problems through discussion and dialogue, at the least as an ideal.

At present, Islam and Christianity boast the largest number of followers among the world's religions. Buddhism and Hinduism also have sizable followings, while Judaism, though relatively small in terms of followers, wields considerable influence. Therefore, achieving peace through dialogue must primarily address shared aspects of belief. According to Gülen (as quoted in Camci and Unal 1998, p. 323), the Qur'an invited adherents of other religions to engage in dialogue fourteen centuries ago. However, the centuries that have elapsed since then have largely been marked by conflict due to the conditions and demands of the time. Going forward, there should be centuries dedicated to winning hearts and minds, or at the least, where all can come together with mutual respect and love.

Regarding this matter, Gülen emphasises the importance of comparing the period before Hudaibiya with the two years between Hudaibiya and the conquest of Mecca to find necessary insights. He reminds us that the Qur'an does not use the term "victory" for the conquest of Mecca, but for the Treaty of Hudaibiya. Hudaibiya marked the closure of doors to conflict and the opening of doors to hearts. Gülen believes that genuine victory lies in this transformation, not in territorial conquests. With these sentiments, Gülen views meetings with the Pope and followers of other religions as entirely natural and, in fact, essential (Camci and Unal 1998, p. 324). He argues that, when individuals from different cultures and belief systems meet face to face, they have the opportunity to better understand one another and liberate themselves from preconceptions and prejudices (Gülen 2012, p. 137). This, Gülen contends, mirrors the achievements of the Treaty of Hudaibiya and he firmly believes that, by following a similar path today, characterised by dialogue and openness to multiculturalism, we can attain similar results.

Human Dignity

Another message Gülen derives from Hudaibiya for contemporary individuals is the recognition that every person, regardless of who they may be, is a sacred being created by God. He emphasises the importance of valuing each person as such. In this context, he refers to the point made earlier—that the Prophet conveyed his message to the Quraysh through dialogue and tolerance rather than resorting to force or humiliation. Gülen argues that it is futile to attempt to establish any meaningful relationship with people through a forceful approach meant to overpower them. On the contrary, he asserts (Gülen 2012, p. 136): "A warm relationship can be formed with them through dialogue, tolerance, respect, and accepting them as the perfect pattern of creation and reflections of the Creator in terms of their quality and nature." This rationale underlies the Prophet's choice of peace at Hudaibiya and his signing of the peace treaty.

The Treaty of Hudaibiya highlighted the true essence of humanity and its potential. As stated in the Qur'an (17:70; 95:4) and emphasised by Nursi (2007b, p. 340; 2007c, p. 205), it is inherent in human nature to be kind and virtuous, and one's true nature inclines towards goodness. However, there are instances when individuals err, either unintentionally or without full awareness, and deviate from their true nature. Gülen underlines his belief and sincere hope that human beings will rediscover and revert to their authentic selves and attain the level demanded by their inherent nature. He places trust in the innate goodness and beauty present in human creation, despite all odds, and aligns his global endeavours with this potential (Camci and Unal 1998, p. 322). This perspective arises from his accurate comprehension of the complete message of Islam and his adherence to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet as exemplary. Notably, the inclination towards innate goodness evident in humanity since its creation is particularly evident in the lessons learned from the Prophet's actions in pursuing peace at Hudaibiya.

Multiple Viewpoints and Diversity

Gülen believes another lesson to be taken from the Treaty of Hudaibiya in modern times is that viewing matters solely from one's own perspective is misguided (Gülen 2012, p. 137). The Muslims who arrived at Hudaibiya for *umrah* had experienced unfair treatment. While the four or five envoys sent by the Quraysh were unharmed, one of the Muslim ambassadors had his camel killed, another was taken hostage and there were numerous acts of provocation. Consequently, the situation culminated in the signing of an agreement that appeared disadvantageous to the Muslims.

If the matter is considered solely from one perspective, the Muslims might have continued advancing towards Mecca, even if it meant resorting to fighting. However, the Prophet adopted a broader perspective. He considered the opposition, regarded the polytheists as potential allies in the future and chose to resolve the matter in this manner. Simultaneously, he opened the door and left a hint for his followers to always adhere to such a principle. Looking at it from a contemporary standpoint, Gülen acknowledges that,

in an era where every community is highly sensitive to matters such as their own language and culture, the most prudent approach is to understand and acquaint oneself with the person you are engaging. Only then should you act, considering their overall sentiments, feelings and worldview rather than exclusively focusing on your viewpoint. He asserts that those who disregard this and only consider matters from their own perspective will be mistaken (Gülen 2012, p. 136).

Gülen then provides an example (Gülen 2012, pp. 136–37) to illustrate his point further: “A person who fails to consider others in traffic and solely focuses on driving their own vehicle cannot be considered a good driver. Instead, they should take into account those entering from both the left and right, vehicles coming from the opposite direction, and those frequently changing lanes in a confused manner, and then operate the steering accordingly.” Much like this example, individuals can inadvertently make numerous errors when they speak without thoughtful consideration or fail to contemplate the potential disrespect that might register in the minds of their listeners. However, as demonstrated by the example of the Prophet at Hudaibiya, actions taken after careful consideration of their consequences typically yield the correct and desired outcomes.

Establishing Platforms Where People Can Correctly Express Themselves

Gülen suggests another lesson that can be learned from Hudaibiya by modern people: the establishment of platforms where people can freely express themselves. It has already been emphasised that Hudaibiya was a crucial turning point in terms of peace and dialogue activities. Gülen advises those who follow him to bring to today what the Muslims brought to Hudaibiya in the past and to pursue the path of peace, irrespective of their religious beliefs. As a step towards this goal, he suggests that non-government organisations can engage in agreements similar to the Treaty of Hudaibiya (Gülen 2012, p. 137). In doing so, they can effectively address the problems and preconceptions they face, thereby providing an opportunity to more accurately express themselves.

For people to trust each other, they must understand each other’s worldviews, internal worlds, and what lies in their hearts, and develop a deep understanding of one another. In this regard, creating platforms to facilitate self-expression is crucial. In addition to advocating for the establishment of platforms to enhance expression of worldviews, Gülen also suggests adoption of a comprehensive approach or even going further by recommending the establishment of discussion and dialogue centres (Gülen 2012, p. 136). He proposes that these centres could teach individuals “how to engage in dialogue and converse with people from different cultures and beliefs without eliciting adverse reactions or criticism” (Gülen 2012, p. 136). According to Gülen, Muslims possess two extensive sources—the Qur’an and *sunnah* (the words, deeds and tacit approval of the Prophet)—that can offer solutions to the challenges of every era. However, to effectively convey these to people from diverse cultures, there is a need for a shared language of expression that is suitable and appropriate.

Gülen also holds the opinion that one of the most significant challenges faced by contemporary Muslims is their inability to accurately and comprehensively explain the values in which they believe. This underscores his use of *sīrah* for the purpose of self-criticism. He addresses Muslims in this manner, delving into issues that hold relevance and importance for contemporary times. Through *sīrah*, he questions and critiques, touching on problems that are valid and essential. His emphasis on the fallacy of exclusively viewing matters from one’s own perspective can, in my opinion, be interpreted as an act of internal criticism and introspection.

Consultation and Women’s Rights

Another significant point that Gülen addresses concerning Hudaibiya and its relevance to contemporary issues pertains to the topic of consultation and the perennial debate on women’s rights. Interestingly, Gülen highlights the Prophet’s practice of discussing matters with his wives as friends, even though he did not require their advice, given he was guided by revelation. On this subject, he remarks (Gülen 2007, p. 29):

However, he aimed to convey to his nation that Muslim men should extend every consideration to women. This was a fairly radical concept in his era, as it remains in many parts of the world today. He initiated this teaching by exemplifying it in his own relationships with his wives. Therefore, through this action, he conveyed a significant social lesson to humanity: there is nothing wrong in consulting women regarding important matters or any matters at all.

Practicing the *sīrah* philosophy approach, Gülen again emphasises the importance of connecting the events and era of the Prophet to the present day. This approach is evident in his subsequent investigation and critique of the consultation process. He effectively relates the discussion to contemporary audiences and offers the following (Gülen 2007, p. 30):

I cannot help but ask: How many of us are capable of treating women as courteously as the Prophet did? How many rulers or governors consult their wives when facing critical decisions? How many homeowners engage in consultations with their wives on family matters? These questions can be extended to all aspects of our social life. It is crucial to present and highlight this evidence to those who accuse Islam of oppressing women! We should also question how many feminists have reached this level! Therefore, the practice of counsel and consultation, like many other virtuous acts, was exemplified by God's Messenger, first within his own family and then within the wider community. Even today, our understanding of his relationships with his wives remains limited, as if we are wandering aimlessly over a land unaware of the vast treasure buried beneath our feet. For many, including self-proclaimed defenders of women's rights and many self-proclaimed Muslim men, women are relegated to a secondary role. In our understanding, women are an integral part of the whole, the part that complements the other half. We believe that when these two halves unite, the true essence of a human being emerges. Without this unity, neither prophethood, nor sainthood, nor even Islam itself can exist.

5. Conclusions

Sīrah writings have undergone a subtle shift in recent decades. Traditional chronological biographical writings have started to be replaced by reflective *sīrah* works or partial discussions on various topics and incidents in the Prophet's life, coupled with their implications in modern times. Along this trajectory, a profound understanding of the teachings, legal principles and lessons derived from *sīrah* (*fiqh al-sīrah*) and beyond, and an understanding of the principles and core teachings of *sīrah* (philosophy of *sīrah*) have come to dominate contemporary approaches to *sīrah* scholarship. Contemporary Muslim intellectuals are increasingly recognising the value of reading *sīrah* reflectively as a dynamic source for today's audiences. This article discussed and unpacked this innovative modern approach by focusing on contemporary works and the terminology used in this space. It particularly focused on the Hudaibiya incident as a case study, examining and explaining the theoretical and practical implications of this new notion: *sīrah* philosophy.

Gülen's analysis of the Hudaibiya peace treaty provides profound insights into the concept of *sīrah* philosophy. It emphasises that the practices of the Prophet are dynamic and offer a potential source for resolving contemporary problems, provided parallels can be drawn and relevance for modern debates can be realised. This perspective capitalises on the concept of *sīrah* philosophy, interpreting historical events as dynamic sources for solving contemporary issues, while stressing the importance of a comprehensive understanding of *sīrah* and the present era.

In this context, Gülen demonstrates that an incident like Hudaibiya in the life of the Prophet carries multiple messages for modern society, addressing themes such as dialogue, multiculturalism, globalisation, diversity, human dignity and respect—an invaluable message for the contemporary world. The *sīrah* philosophy approach proves to be practical and comprehensive, deriving solutions by connecting historical examples with present-day issues, while avoiding unnecessary emphasis on peripheral details. As a

methodology, it is rooted in facing the challenges and experiences modern people deal with and emanates from the instinct for addressing people's real-life problems, offering practical solutions grounded in *sīrah*. Instead of solely focusing on the "what happened?" aspect of the *sīrah*, it consistently delves into the "why?" Why was a particular course of action taken, statement made, principle upheld, or methodology adopted? This is followed by an exploration of its relevance to our time. How does it offer solutions to modern problems and how does it address contemporary challenges? This approach can be described as interpreting *sīrah* through current issues and realities. In essence, the concept of *sīrah* philosophy provides a valuable framework for addressing modern problems and issues. It transcends traditional historical narratives, offering pertinent insights and guidance drawn from the life of Prophet Muhammad, and serves as a dynamic source of inspiration for contemporary society.

Akin to Gülen, many contemporary Muslim scholars draw inspiration from the Prophet's life, recognising its significant potential for finding peaceful solutions to modern problems. While not explicitly using the term "*sīrah* philosophy," they embrace a similar approach. The Marrakesh Declaration stands as a prime example of such initiatives, led by another contemporary Muslim scholar, Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah. It gained affirmation from 42 governments represented at the gathering (Hayward 2016, p. 392). This declaration is a call to action aimed at safeguarding the rights of minorities in Muslim-majority countries in today's world, emphasising that the rights of minorities were firmly protected during the Medinan period of the Prophet's life. The rights and treatment of minorities continue to be global concerns and similar initiatives provide the guidance needed to return to the Prophetic approach (Sertkaya and Keskin 2020). As can be seen, in this context, contemporary Muslim scholars employ principles from *sīrah* philosophy, even if not explicitly mentioned. Similarly, "A Common Word Between Us and You" (A Common Word 2020) is another significant initiative led by 138 prominent Muslim scholars in 2007. They issued an open letter to leaders of Christian churches and denominations worldwide, urging them to unite based on common traditions (El-Ansary and Linnan 2010). The initiative derives its name from verse 64 in chapter 3, revealed to Prophet Muhammad during the Medinan era. Its primary teaching and inspiration are the promotion of unity based on common grounds, a goal the Prophet pursued throughout his life, especially in the religiously diverse population of Medina and more vigorously after the Hudaibiya treaty. This and similar inspirations are frequently deduced from *sīrah* and resemble the application of *sīrah* philosophy in the modern context. Many other examples can be cited to illustrate how Muslim leaders worldwide, along with leaders of other faiths, mirror the example of Prophet Muhammad and his teachings, much like Fethullah Gülen. This is why this article argued that *sīrah* philosophy constitutes a significant and distinctive modern approach to *sīrah* studies.

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Notes

- ¹ *Ibn al-zaman* (child of their time) is a term used in Islamic spirituality to refer to those scholars who are equipped with the knowledge of their time and provide relevant guidance due to their expertise. Sometimes it is used as *sahib al-zaman* (person in charge of time or possessor of time).
- ² Hamidullah presents another proof for this opinion that Hudaibiya was a road to peace: As a result of the agreement, one year after arriving for *umrah*, the Meccans left their homes and settled on the mountains. If the Prophet was unjust, an invader or militant like a commander, he would not have given Mecca back and would have attacked them. Furthermore, when the Muslims arrived the following year, they were stronger and the Quraysh had left everything and went. However, the Prophet came to win hearts and change harmful customs and traditions (221).
- ³ Watt, Lammens, Muhammad Hamidullah, Husayn Haykal and Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan have this general approach.

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