

## Reasoned Arguments of the Life Hereafter: A Study of Said Nursi's *Hařır Bahsi*

*Ahiret Hayatının Akılcı Argümanları: Said Nursi'nin Hařır  
Bahsi Üzerine Bir İnceleme*

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Saba Irshad ANSARI

### Abstract

Islam makes Hereafter one of the six pillars of belief (*al- 'aqāid al-īmāniyyah*), and the Qur'an eventually declares a life after death as the actual life, while calling worldly life nothing more rather than deception (Q. 29:64). It describes the Day of Resurrection as the Hour and the Day when the trumpet shall be blown, and everyone shall be brought before their Lord (Q. 50:20-22). Besides, the concept of Hereafter is inextricably intertwined with the question of good and evil (Q. 98:7-8, 27:91, 31:2-3). Said Nursi (1876-1960) was one of the significant Muslim intellectuals of the twentieth century who explained the reasoned 'proofs' of Hereafter by answering two main questions: why is the existence of Hereafter necessary corollary to the existing world; and how can the possibility of an unseen, unimaginable world, i.e., heaven and hell be proved rationally? In other words, Nursi put an effort to strengthen the belief in Hereafter on rational grounds.

Hence, the paper deals with the concept of Hereafter from the standpoint of Said Nursi. Its main objective is to highlight the significance of the subject of Hereafter for a modern man in present times, who emphasizes the materialistic lifestyle and sees wealth and money as the only means to attain contentment. The idea of death and the existence of life after it, as Nursi explained, gives an account of the futility of a materialistic lifestyle for a believer. The relevance of Nursi's thought to contemporary realities is based on the fact that he used rational arguments to prove the reality of Hereafter. He lived during the times when the Muslim societies started to follow blindly the Western ideals that seemed "modern." Those who advocated Western ideas were eager to outlaw the Islamic fundamental principles that were impossible to explain rationally.

In the treatise titled *Haşir Bahsi* (On Resurrection and the Hereafter), Said Nursi intended to prove the actuality of the phenomenon of life after death that will happen at a certain time specified by God, as well as he highlighted that similar occurrence happens in worldly life at every moment. Moreover, Nursi does not discuss the torment in the grave in his treatise, rather, he argues why and how Hereafter should be a reality that cannot be ignored even by non-believers. Hence, this work of Nursi is a perfect reading piece for those Muslims who find it difficult to accept the realities related to the existence of another life after death. The discussion on the grave torment is also out of the scope of this paper. Rather, the paper emphasizes that the language and argumentations used by Nursi in this treatise and throughout the *Risale-i Nur* are convincing and rational to prove the existence of life after death.

The paper accordingly analyses *Haşir Bahsi*, the Tenth Word, by answering two focal questions. First, philosophically, how valid are Nursi's proofs of Hereafter? Second, are his proofs rational enough for non-believers and atheists? To answer these questions, the study employs the analytical method. A brief survey of several classical Muslim scholars' thoughts on Hereafter is also provided in the article. Besides, the views of modern Western philosophers who deny the possibility of Hereafter on rational grounds have been taken into account to verify how far Nursi has been successful in verifying the opposite on rational grounds.

**Keywords:** The Tenth Word, *Risale-i Nur*, Hereafter, Resurrection, *Haşir Bahsi*, Said Nursi, Reasoned proofs

## Ahret Hayatının Akılcı Argümanları: Said Nursi'nin *Haşir Bahsi* Üzerine Bir İnceleme

### Öz

İslam, ahireti imanın altı şartından biri (*el-akāidu'l-īmāniyye*) haline getirir ve Kur'an, neticede ölümden sonraki hayatı, dünya hayatını sadece bir aldatmacadan ibaret sayan hayat olarak ilan eder (K. 29:64). Kıyamet gününü, sūr'a üfürüleceği ve herkesin Rabbinin huzuruna çıkarılacağı saat ve gün olarak tanımlar (K. 50:20-22). Bunun yanında ahiret kavramı ayrılmaz bir şekilde hayır ve şer problemiyle iç içe geçmiştir (K. 98:7-8, 27:91, 31:2-3). Yirminci yüzyılın önemli Müslüman entelektüellerinden olan Said Nursi (1876-1960) iki ana soruyu cevaplayarak Haşir'in akli 'delillerini' açıklamıştır: Ahiret hayatının varlığı neden mevcut dünya için gerekli bir neticedir ve görünmeyen, hayal edilemeyen bir dünyanın, yani cennet ve ceheennem olasılığı nasıl akli olarak ispatlanabilir? Başka bir deyişle Nursi, ahiret inancını

rasyonel temeller üzerinde güçlendirmeye çalışmıştır.

Dolayısıyla bu makale, ahiret kavramını Said Nursi'nin bakış açısıyla ele almaktadır. Temel amacı, materyalist yaşam tarzına önem veren ve mutluluğa ulaşmanın tek yolu olarak zenginlik ve parayı gören günümüzdeki modern bir insan için Ahiret konusunun önemini vurgulamaktır. Nursi'nin açıkladığı gibi ölüm fikri ve ondan sonraki yaşamın varlığı, inanan biri için materyalist bir yaşam tarzının boşluğunu anlatır. Nursi'nin düşüncesinin çağdaş gerçeklerle alakasının nedeni, Ahiret'in gerçekliğini kanıtlamak için akli argümanlar kullandığı gerçeğine dayanmaktadır. O, Müslüman toplumların "modern" görünen Batılı ideallerini körü körüne takip etmeye başladığı dönemlerde yaşadı. Batılı fikirlerini savunanlar, akli olarak açıklanması imkansız olan İslami temel prensipleri yasaklamak istiyorlardı.

*Haşir Bahsi* (Diriliş ve Ahiret Üzerine) başlıklı risalede Said Nursi, Allah tarafından belirlenen bir zamanda gerçekleşecek ölümden sonra yaşam olgusunun gerçekliğini kanıtlamayı amaçladı; ayrıca dünyevi yaşamda benzer bir olgunun her an gerçekleştiğini vurguladı. Ayrıca Nursi risalesinde kabir azabını tartışmaz, bunun yerine, Ahiret'in neden ve nasıl inanmayanlar tarafından bile göz ardı edilemeyecek bir gerçek olması gerektiğini tartıştı. Bu nedenle, Nursi'nin bu eseri, ölümden sonra başka bir hayatın varlığı ile ilgili gerçekleri kabul etmekte zorlanan Müslümanlar için mükemmel bir okuma parçasıdır. Kabir azabıyla ilgili tartışma da bu makalenin kapsamı dışındadır. Bunun yerine, makale, Nursi'nin bu risalede ve *Risale-i Nur* boyunca kullandığı dil ve argümanların, ölümden sonra yaşamın varlığını kanıtlamak için ikna edici ve akli olduğunu vurgular.

Makale, bu doğrultuda *Haşir Bahsi*, Onuncu Söz'ü analiz ederek iki odak soruya cevap verir. İlk olarak, felsefi olarak, Nursi'nin Ahiret için kanıtları ne kadar geçerlidir? İkinci olarak, kanıtları inanmayanlar ve ateistler için yeterince akli midir? Bu soruları yanıtlamak için çalışma analitik yöntemi kullanır. Makalede ayrıca çeşitli klasik Müslüman alimlerin Ahiret konusundaki düşüncelerinin kısa bir değerlendirmesi de yapılmıştır. Bunun yanı sıra, akli gerekçelerle Ahiret olasılığını reddeden modern Batılı filozofların görüşleri, Nursi'nin akli gerekçelerle bunun aksini kanıtlama başarısını ne kadar doğruladığını kontrol etmek için dikkate alınmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Onuncu Söz, *Risale-i Nur*, Ahiret, Kıyamet, *Haşir Bahsi*, Said Nursi, Akli Deliller

## 1. Introduction

The fact that a considerable portion of the Qur'an is dedicated to the Day of Judgement and the life Hereafter indicates how critical the issue is in Islam. The Qur'anic chapters that deal mainly with the subject of Hereafter are *Al-Wāqī'ah*, *Al-Ḥaṣhr*, *Al-Qiyāmah*, *Al-Takweer*, *Al-Infīṭār*, *Al-Inshiqāq*, and *Al-Zalzalah* among others. The Qur'an connects the belief in the resurrection to the reason/intellect (عقل) in the surah *Al-An'ām* (Q. 6: 32). The verse ends with the question, "Will you not then understand?" (أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ). Here, the Qur'an is invoking the reasoning ability. Also, sleep in the Qur'an is seen as death and as a sign for those who reflect (بِتَفَكُّرُونَ), thereby summoning critical thinking since the word *al-fikr* in Arabic means "to contemplate" and "to reflect".<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an asks people to ponder upon sleep as a sign, thus proposing the idea that we die when we sleep and get resurrected when we wake up. One of the most popular translators of the Qur'an into English, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, calls sleep a "twin-brother to death".<sup>2</sup>

Since earlier times, philosophers and theologians have had difficulty proving the tenets of belief rationally in general and the issue of life after death in particular since it is far more unfathomable to the human intellect than believing in an unseen God. While some philosophers denied the bodily resurrection in the afterlife, others believed it to be the physical re-make-up of the body.<sup>3</sup> Even classical Muslim philosophers such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina failed to defend the belief logically on rational grounds. Their explanation of the Last Day and the

<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an, *Al-Zumar* 39: 42.

<sup>2</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali (tr.), *The Holy Qur'an* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1937), 1250. This translation of the Qur'an into English is used for further translations of the verses in the article.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 313.

Resurrection is allegorical and non-physical.<sup>4</sup> They were influenced by the Hellenistic traditions on body and spirit and discussions about material and immaterial existence for their understanding of theological concepts in Islam. In his reference to the verses from 78 to 82 of the surah *Yāsīn* (Q. 36), Al-Kindi explains the term “be” metaphorically.<sup>5</sup> Not only does it prove his inclination towards reason, but it also gives an idea of his understanding of the resurrection, although it is not explicitly stated. He mentions the soul and intellect in a short treatise but seems to be reluctant on the issue of the resurrection of the body.

In his *Kitāb al-Najāt* (The Book of Salvation), Ibn Sina denies the bodily resurrection on rational grounds, stating that it can only be established by pure faith.<sup>6</sup> It hints at Ibn Sina’s reverence for reason over revelation. Quite interestingly, it may indicate the other way around, too. It can also be hypothesized that Ibn Sina emphasizes this issue as validated by revelation alone, not by reason. However, due to the noted influence of Hellenistic culture on Ibn Sina found in his works, the former hypothesis seems more plausible since a submitter of an Islamic faith ought to accept the tenet even if it cannot be proved rationally. Fazlur Rahman notes that in another treatise titled *Risālah al-Aḍhawīyyah fī amr al-ma’ād* (Epistle on the Return for the Feast of the Sacrifice), Ibn Sina rejects the rationality of the belief vehemently.<sup>7</sup> Not only did Ibn Sina deny the bodily resurrection, but he also considered the world, like Aristotle, to be eternal.

Al-Farabi holds a similar view. He also explains the Last Day and bodily resurrection metaphorically. More than discussing the Day of Resurrection as a reality, the early Muslim philosophers have focused on the resurrection of the body, which they seemingly would have found difficult to understand rationally. Due to this, Al-Ghazali did not hesitate to call both of them infidels on the basis that their claims would lead to infidelity.<sup>8</sup> Al-Ash’ari defends the rationality of the tenet by citing the Qur’anic verses (Q. 36:79, 30:27, 7:29), which brings him to the same platform of argumentation as Nursi.<sup>9</sup> While putting his arguments for the Divine Speech, Al-Shahrastani highlights that God speaks of resurrection in the Qur’an as a past event, indicating his acceptance of the subject that can only be found with the acceptance of God.<sup>10</sup> Both Al-Shahrastani and N. Al-Tusi explain the bodily resurrection as an “intellectual revival” as opposed to the physical resurrection. Daryoush quotes both scholars and notes that their writings indicate a “narrative opposed to the concept of physical resurrection”.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See footnotes, Damien Janos, *Method, Structure, and Development in al-Fārābī’s Cosmology* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 276.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred L. Ivry, *Al-Kindi’s Metaphysics: A Translation of Yaḳūb ibn Ishāq Al-Kindi’s Treatise “On First Philosophy”* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur J. Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology* (Connecticut: Hyperion Press, Inc, 1979), 64-76.

<sup>7</sup> Fazlur Rahman, “Ibn Sina,” *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif (Germany: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963), 1:480-505.

<sup>8</sup> Majid Fakhry, *Al-Fārābī Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism.: His Life, Works, and Influence* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 128-139.

<sup>9</sup> Richard J. McCarthy, *The Theology of Al-Ash’arī* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), 124.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Guillaume, *The Summa Philosophiae of Al-Shahrastānī Kitāb Nihāyahatu’l-Iqdām fī ‘Ilmi’l-Kalām* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 100.

<sup>11</sup> A translation of Al-Shahrastani’s *Al-Majlis-i Maktūb* (The Transcribed Sermon) by Daryoush suggests the point as he writes, “These references and the parallels reinforce the argument that Al-Shahrastani was a critical example for the later Nizārīs in the articulation of their esoteric doctrines, distanced from the typical Neoplatonic style and language of Fatimid times. The idea that this resurrection is an intellectual revival and the resurrected will reach the life of knowledge is the common thread here (in Al-Shahrastani’s words: *tuhyi al-nufūs ‘an mawt al-jahl*). Both of these texts suggest a contrasting narrative opposed to the concept of physical resurrection, and they highlight the role of the

Albeit apologetic, the rational and modern *kalām* (Islamic scholasticism) of Syed Ahmad Khan is silent on the Hereafter. He does not go beyond merely describing its reality as something that lies outside human comprehension.<sup>12</sup> Some modern philosophers opined that there are different domains for science and religion, arguing that the two cannot be linked. Their failure to prove the tenets logically led them to put religion in a domain separate from science. Here, science means scientific knowledge that is derived from observations and experiments. This, however, cannot be true for a religion that urges its followers to base their ontological thinking on the use of intellect (Q. 16:44, 47:24, 12:109).

Nursi begins his “rational defense” of Hereafter by stating that the truths of Islam are “rational, appropriate, well-founded, and coherent”.<sup>13</sup> But the idea of life after death is difficult for a man to digest, particularly for those who do not subscribe to any belief system or consider human reason to be the sole criteria for judgment and dismiss the belief in an afterlife on rational grounds. Apparently, the concept of Hereafter does not fall into the category of a rational proposition.

Talking of rationality here, let us see what British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell (d. 1970), a contemporary of Nursi who denied resurrection on rational grounds, has to say about it. Russell does not find arguments about the existence of God sufficient for him to believe, and therefore, he defies the idea of life after death. He connects belief in the Hereafter to emotions. He argues that those who believe in an afterlife do so for two main reasons. One is the difficulty for them to overcome the fear of death. Second, Russell quotes Bishop Barnes, is the futility of the ‘intelligent purpose’ for creating human beings with such extreme perfection that it is absurd to imagine the end of a creation crafted with so much finesse that the excellent creational makeup of man demands an everlasting life.<sup>14</sup> The latter reason resonates roughly with Nursi’s way of argumentation for the immortality of the human soul but with a completely different perspective. Even though Nursi considers man’s excellent creational makeup to be one of the reasons for his soul to be immortal, but gives God’s will, power, and command precedence over it. For him, the soul is immortal only because God has made it so.<sup>15</sup> Still, unlike Russell, who completely dismisses the idea of the Hereafter on rational grounds, Turner prefers to call life after death a non-rational proposition rather than irrational.<sup>16</sup> If the concept of the Hereafter is considered a non-rational entity, then it can be deduced as being an experiential reality rather than experimental. This is exactly what Nursi seems to be doing while explaining the concept.

## 2. A Brief Background to the Treatise

Before analyzing the treatise, it is important to have an abbreviated background of the time during which it was written. The treatise titled *Haşir Bahsi* (Resurrection and the Hereafter),

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Imam/qā’im in this spiritual and intellectual revival.” See Daryoush Mohammad Poor (ed. & tr.), *Command and Creation: A Shi’i Cosmological Treatise* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021), 39-42.

<sup>12</sup> Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1978), 215.

<sup>13</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words* (New Delhi: Barla Publications, 2015), 57.

<sup>14</sup> For Russell’s understanding of life after death, see Bertrand Russell, *Why I am not a Christian?* (London: Routledge Classics, 2004), 45.

<sup>15</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 537.

<sup>16</sup> Colin Turner, *The Qur’an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi’s Epistles of Light* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2013), 247. See also, Russell, *Why I am not a Christian?*, 44-45.

which forms The Tenth Word of the volume *The Words* (Sözler), was the first piece written by Said Nursi right after his unjust exile to Barla in 1925.<sup>17</sup> This was just after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the new pro-enlightenment secular Republic of Turkey. Mustafa Kemal's ban on religious symbols and his focus on westernizing Turkey proved successful as it began influencing the masses, especially the youth, to abandon their belief in those tenets that were alien to reason. The appearance of the Tenth Word, according to Nursi, at a time when the Council of Education refused to accept the bodily resurrection of the dead was coincidental and unplanned. In other words, he did not intend to write it as a response but simply as a reflection of verse 50 from the surah *Al-Rūm* (Q. 30) of the Qur'an. It is God, Nursi claims, who inspired him to write it at such a crucial time.<sup>18</sup> But it seems from the introduction of his Tenth Word, where he mentions his intention to write down treatises on Islam, that Nursi was aware of the widespread propaganda emerging against the truths of Islam that he decided to show "how rational, appropriate, well-founded and coherent"<sup>19</sup> is the belief in hereafter is. The treatise contains Nursi's arguments on life after death as a reality. In this treatise, Nursi tries to prove that the Hereafter can be understood rationally.

### 3. An Analysis of Nursi's Views on *Al-Ākhirah*

Said Nursi begins the treatise by citing the Qur'anic verse from the surah *Al-Rūm* (Q. 30:50). His choice of the verse lays the foundation of his arguments that are aimed to prove the rationality of the Hereafter since it begins with the verb "so observe" (فانظر), thereby summoning the reasoning ability. The word *nazar* in Arabic also means "to speculate" and "to look into." He answers the question of Hereafter as being a necessary corollary to the existing world in a manner peculiar to him alone, that is, by using a metaphorical story of two men visiting a beautiful place ruled by an invisible king who renders various bounties to his subjects. He tries to prove the existence of heaven and hell rationally, as he claims, in the Tenth Word and in a treatise on the Hereafter titled *Lâsiyyamalar* (In Particular), from *Mesnevî-i Nuriye* here he has proved and demonstrated clearly the existence of heaven.<sup>20</sup> Unlike heaven, he does not put much effort into proving the existence of hell and considers unbelief as a reason enough for its existence.<sup>21</sup>

#### 3.1. An Overview of the "Ten Aspects"

Said Nursi narrates a story of two men, one foolish and stubborn and the other faithful friend, passing through the world, which is described as a beautiful place full of precious items scattered everywhere and ruled by an invisible king. The foolish man here can be interpreted as a greedy materialist who exploits the environment to meet its ends because he complied with his beliefs that since there is no apparent owner of the environment, it is free to be used. Lured by the wealth, the foolish man begins to steal and retorts that since he cannot see the owner of this wealth, there is none. The faithful friend is depicted by Nursi as a warner, cautioning him of its aftermath.

<sup>17</sup> Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (New York: The State University of New York Press, 2005), 194.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-195.

<sup>19</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 59.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 513. In the Introduction of the Twenty-Eighth Word, Nursi writes that he has proved the existence of paradise in the Tenth Word and his Arabic treatise. The Arabic treatise that he is talking about must be none other than *Lâ Siyyamā* (In Particular), a small treatise compiled along with others in a volume titled *Al-Mathnawī Al-Nuriye*.

<sup>21</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 520. See the Tenth Word, Twenty-Eighth Word, and Twenty-Ninth Word for a detailed explanation.

He argues that since a tiny needle has a manufacturer, how can such a wonderful world be without an owner? Nursi alludes to the spring season as a train full of “artful gifts” to present the idea of a “gift-giver,” and by further stating the “arrival of the spring season from the unseen realm,” he is perhaps hinting that the “gift-giver” belongs to the realm of unseen. To this, when the foolish man retorts that he cannot see any prison or punishment for the crime, the faithful friend replies by calling this world a “flimsy temporal hospice” (*muvakkat temelsiz misafirhane*), where birth and death happen every day and everyone will depart to an eternal realm. When the foolish man refuses to comply with the idea of the eternal realm, his friend goes on to demonstrate its reality with twelve “proofs” (*delail*). The conversation between the two is followed by Ten Aspects, which highlights certain key points. The first aspect describes the existence of a Judgement where no one escapes it because evil people escape punishment and good people go unrewarded. In the second and third aspects, Nursi draws attention to perfect organization, wisdom, and justice. The fourth aspect speaks of an infinite generosity that is displayed in the world. In the fifth aspect, Nursi discusses that if the peerless Being fulfills the need of his lowliest subject, how can he not fulfill the noble commander’s aim?

Nursi discusses in the sixth aspect that everything exhibited in the place indicates a veiled monarch. Everything exhibited in the place keeps on changing. The change in exhibition implies birth and death as Nursi further states that “now this situation and circumstance conclusively shows that beyond the hospice, the testing ground, the exhibition, there are permanent palaces.” The seventh aspect discusses All-Wise and All-Preserving Being – everything is being recorded, and the judgement is being postponed to the Supreme Court. In the eighth aspect, Nursi discusses promise and dire threat, and in the ninth, he discusses heads of offices. “Heads of offices” stands for the “prophets and saints.” In the tenth aspect, he discusses the perfect order in the setting of the spring season. He presents the argument that everything is recorded here, and it is upon this that the judgement will be based, and those rewarded for good deeds shall be admitted to a place of supreme happiness and exalted aims that is unexperienced and unknown to human beings. The eleventh aspect speaks of the marvels that the land exhibits. If the everlasting realm is to be denied, then it is like denying the light of the sun. In the twelfth aspect, he brings up a crucial point. The high officials and officers in the story have been assigned duties, the reward of which is due on an unknown date.

Moreover, Nursi claims to give a proof more convincing than the twelve aspects. He says that it is impossible for the subjects to deny the command of such a noble chief, as described in the story when he issues a decree to his subjects to prepare themselves to enter a permanent realm:

“Is it at all possible that the teaching of transfer from one realm to another, challengingly conveyed by that noble commander in the supreme edict he has received, should at all be open to objection? No, it is not possible, unless we deny all that we have seen.”<sup>22</sup>

The above quote testifies Nursi’s conviction that his proofs are valid and can work. He explains what both characters of his story represent:

“The foolish man in the previous story and his trustworthy companion correspond to three other pairs:

- The instinctual soul and the heart;

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<sup>22</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 69.

- The students of philosophy and the pupils of the All-Wise Qur'an;
- The people of unbelief and the community of Islam.

The worst error and misguidance of the students of philosophy, the people of unbelief and the instinctual soul, lies in not recognizing God.<sup>23</sup>

Overall, through the story and its twelve aspects, Nursi is trying to establish that this transient world necessitates an everlasting permanent realm. He further discusses four indications of the Supreme Being that point to His existence and unity. Then, he discusses Twelve Truths as gates in which he explains the attributes of the Most Powerful Ruler.

### 3.2. A Brief Survey of the “Twelve Truths”

Nursi approaches the first truth through the gate of dominicality and sovereignty that exhibits the Name of the Sustainer. The second gate is of generosity and mercy that manifests the Names of the Generous and the Merciful. The third is the gate of wisdom and justice that manifests the Names of the Wise and the Just. The fourth gate is that of generosity and beauty that manifests the Names of the Generous and the Beautiful. The fifth is the gate of compassion and the Muhammadan worship that manifests the Names of the Answerer of the Prayer and the Compassionate. The sixth is the gate of splendor and eternity that manifests the Names of the Glorious and the Eternal. The seventh gate is the gate of protection and perseverance that manifests the Names of the Preserver and Guardian. The eighth gate is the gate of promise and threat that manifests the Names of the Beautiful and the Glorious. The ninth is the gate of God's bestowal of life and death that manifests the Names of the Eternally Living and Self-Subsistent, and the Giver of life and the Giver of death. The tenth gate is the gate of wisdom, grace, mercy, and justice that manifests the Names of the All-Wise, the Generous, the Just, and the Merciful. The discussion in the eleventh gate is slightly different from the rest. It is the gate of humanity and the manifestation of the Name of Truth. The twelfth truth is the gate of Messengerhood and revelation that manifests the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

The conclusion of the Tenth Word holds equal weightage as the rest of it. Nursi cites several Qur'anic verses that discuss the Hereafter in his conclusion. Since Nursi bases the rationality of the Hereafter on the Qur'anic style of argumentation, he condemns belief in it by way of imitation and proposes belief through investigation. Thereby, the Nursian style of expounding the truths of Islam is based on investigation rather than blind imitation. This is how he convinces the modern rational man to believe in revelation rationally.

Nursi claims that the “Twelve Truths” mentioned in the Tenth Word are for both believer and unbeliever as they “prove” three things – the existence of the Necessarily Existent One, His Names and Attributes, and the resurrection constructed (upon the first two).<sup>24</sup> It is apparent through the ‘twelve aspects’ in the Tenth Word that he knew that a concept like Hereafter could only be established when the presence of God is established. Through this allegory, he first tries

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>24</sup> “Herbir Hakikat, üç şeyi birden ispat ediyor: Hem Vâcibü'l-Vücudun vücudunu, hem esmâ ve sıfâtını; sonra haşri onlara bina edip, ispat ediyor. En muannid münkirden, tâ en hâlis bir mü'mine kadar herkes, her Hakikatten hissesini alabilir...” [English translation: “Each reality proves three things at once: both the existence of the Necessary Existent One, and His Names and Attributes, then it builds the resurrection of the dead on them and proves it. Everyone, from the most obstinate denier to the most sincere believer, can receive his share of every Truth.” Said Nursi, *Barla Lâhikası* (Istanbul: Sözlere Neşriyat Tic. Ve Sa. A.Ş., 2015), 160.

to establish the existence of an unseen king, followed by the ‘ten truths’ speaking of God’s attributes, thereby further strengthening his arguments. He derives these truths from certain Divine attributes, and by deriving it from Divine Justice as he did in the third truth, in a certain way, he has come closer to an argument that Hume calls a ‘moral argument.’<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Nursi’s argument in this truth may serve as a befitting reply to Hume’s questions that he raised in his critique of the immortality of the soul.<sup>26</sup> Nursi raises questions like “Do you wish for a proof?”, “Can intelligence at all accept?”, and “Is it at all possible?”<sup>27</sup> several times in the treatise depicting not only his firm faith in the Hereafter but also his emulation of the Qur’an’s style of argumentation. The Qur’an invokes critical thinking in several places by asking questions like – do you not understand? (Q. 2:76, 3:65, 6:32, 7:169, etc.).

Therefore, by raising such questions, Nursi seems to be convincing believers through reason to believe in the existence of an everlasting realm where creatures can live forever. His explanation of the subject aligns with the traditional scholars who derive their arguments from the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH).<sup>28</sup> He defines the physical resurrection rationally, along with revelation. It can, therefore, be said that his explanation of life after death is literal and tangible rather than metaphorical. Moreover, for him, it is the resurrection of the body that will happen in the life hereafter.<sup>29</sup> He cites seven verses of the Qur’an that reveal information regarding the Hereafter and calls them ‘proofs,’ which confirms that his proofs are actually Qur’anic proofs derived from the Qur’an.<sup>30</sup> Nursi firmly believes that the Qur’anic proofs are tangible, visible, and demonstratively experienced by the senses and, therefore, are sound and valid. Albeit his explanation of the deductive arguments is not strictly syllogistic in nature, it can still be considered one because his arguments are sound and valid.

Richardson prefers to call these proofs “reasonable steps” for a “believer” and rejects them as proofs since the arguments for God’s existence and resurrection are based on faith rather than “inference from natural knowledge.”<sup>31</sup> But Richardson’s conclusion seems to be slightly erroneous because, given the definition of “inference,” if we consider his opinion of knowing things from nature, then he is wrong because Nursi is using the Qur’anic argument of pondering upon the spring season as an example of the resurrection.<sup>32</sup>

So, Nursi’s arguments can be called evident-based. It can be called an inference derived from natural knowledge and is, therefore, reasonable. Furthermore, as already mentioned at the outset, the faith, here Islam, itself is inquiry-based. The true purpose of Nursi’s treatise is to

<sup>25</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2007), 147.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 75, 96 and 100.

<sup>28</sup> Mohd Safri Ali *et al.*, “Said Nursi’s Theological Thoughts in the Light of Sunni Doctrine,” *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 25/S (March 2017): 75.

<sup>29</sup> Ian S. Markham - Suendam Birinci Pirim, *An Introduction to Said Nursi, Life, Thought, and Writings* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 161.

<sup>30</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 112.

<sup>31</sup> W. Mark Richardson, “Resurrection in the Writings of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: Comparative Reflections with Christian Theology,” *Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought: The Case of Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 85.

<sup>32</sup> According to the Oxford definition, inference means “a conclusion reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning.” Merriam-Webster defines it as “an opinion arrived at through a process of reasoning.” “Inference,” <https://g.co/kgs/DPQ7FG>; and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/inference>, both accessed 01 April 2023.

present evidential and experimental inferences about the tenets of belief using the verses of the universe and the Qur'an. Nursi calls the universe a book that should be read in the name of its Author.

Towards the end of the treatise, in the fifth part of the Addendum, he mentions a compelling point – a desire innately found in all human beings to live forever. The yearning to have a long life and to possibly attain immortality is an indication, Nursi says, that the Creator must have prepared an abode where all humans can reside eternally. Turner highlights that wealth is seen as a symptom of man's longing for eternal life in the Qur'an.<sup>33</sup> So, this is one of the strongest arguments Nursi has used in his treatise to defend life after death as a reality.

#### 4. Conclusion

Unlike many interpretations in the classical and modern age, Nursi uses the philosophy of the Qur'an to defend the tenet. He bases his argument of the Hereafter on experiential knowledge by citing those verses from the Qur'an that invoke man to ponder on the coming of the spring. His choice of the Qur'anic verses, the metaphorical stories, and his arguments speak of his desperate desire to present it rationally to the modern man who is highly inclined towards reason and gets awestruck at scientific advancement, which in turn leads him to consider religion as a private affair; as something that hinders the material growth and progress. It is apparent through Nursi's style of argumentation and the affirming tone of his "reasoned proofs" he has used throughout the Tenth Word and elsewhere in the *Risale-i Nur* that he was deeply concerned about the fading away of the Islamic fundamentals in the blinding light of Western scientific ideals that were imposed on the people of the country as part of a deliberate attempt to outlaw them and establish a secular state. Hence, he tried to present Islamic beliefs rationally to those dismissing them on rational grounds, and through his proofs, he worked his way to strengthen the lost faith among the believers. But these proofs cannot be as effective on the non-believers and atheists as they themselves are founded on proving the existence of God first, as he did in the story he narrates at the very outset of the treatise. Even though Nursi's proofs cannot be considered proofs in the literal sense of the term, it may be inferred that they might prove effective in establishing and strengthening the concept of life Hereafter among the believers as they are somewhat posited on reason.

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<sup>33</sup> Colin Turner, "Wealth as an Immortality Symbol in the Qur'an: A Reconsideration of the *mal amwal* Verses," *The Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8/2 (2006): 58-83. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2006.8.2.58>.

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