

The Qur'an Revealed:
A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's
Epistles of Light

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Chapter Eight

The Hereafter

Introduction

The fact that the Quran often juxtaposes ‘belief in God’ with ‘belief in the Last Day’ shows exactly how central the question of the ‘hereafter’ is to the Quranic worldview. The ‘Last Day’ also constitutes one of the six ‘articles of belief’, with almost a quarter of the Quran devoted to eschatology, and so its conceptual importance should not be underestimated.

For the Quran, the life of man on earth represents only a fraction of his overall existence. Man’s sojourn here is alluded to almost as a temporary break in the loop of existence, necessitated by the fact that it is only by venturing outside the loop that man is able to understand that he is inside a loop in the first place.

As far as his own existence is concerned, man’s life in this world is necessary because it enables him to understand the concept of eternity – the ultimate reason for his creation. But it also serves as a training ground in which he is prepared for the eventual transition, after death, to his permanent abode in the world to come, the realm of the ‘hereafter’. This preparation comes in the form of a life-long ‘examination’, in which man is ‘tested’ by God in order that his potential as God’s representative or ‘vicegerent’ be realised, and that the extent of his knowledge, love and worship of the Creator be made known. The world is thus like a metaphorical field, which man is encouraged to cultivate with knowledge, belief, submission and good deeds, in order to be able to reap the abundant harvest of eternal joy – proximity to God – in the hereafter.

Viewed as such, this world would appear to be every bit as important as the world to come, simply by virtue of the fact that one’s position vis-à-vis God in the hereafter depends very much on the nature of one’s relationship with Him in the here-and-now. Consequently, to claim that Islam is a ‘this-worldly’ religion is as misleading as to claim that it is ‘otherworldly’, for both stances disregard the fact that this world and the next are both parts of the same continuum of existence, albeit with very different terms of reference as far as their innate natures and external conditions are concerned.

The *locus classicus* for Said Nursi’s treatment of the afterlife is his treatise *Resurrection and the Hereafter*, also known as the *Tenth Word*. Written around 1924, the treatise appeared

at a time when the move towards secularisation in the new Turkish Republic was gaining momentum. The appearance of the treatise in print came at a time when the Council of Education was attempting to enshrine biological materialism as the default setting in the teaching of science throughout the country's educational establishment; one of the ideas they were keen on promoting was the denial of bodily resurrection. Nursi would later claim that, even though he was unaware of the Council's objectives at the time, the writing of the thesis was clearly 'bestowed' on him by God in order to provide a response to the machinations of those who would establish atheistic materialism as the cornerstone of all scientific enquiry and endeavour.

Nursi's methodology in *Resurrection and the Hereafter* is, like that in most of his work, taken from the Quran. The Quran appeals to human reason in its various attempts to demonstrate the reality and rationality of the hereafter, and the resurrection and judgement which precede it. The Quran insists that its followers deliberate upon God's 'signs' before assenting to the truths indicated by them. Indeed, nowhere is the idea of blind acceptance of these fundamental principles sanctioned or tolerated: while the final leap is indeed ultimately a leap of faith, the run-up, as it were, is solely a matter for the intellect and the faculty of reason.

How, then, does the Quran attempt to demonstrate the plausibility of the resurrection and the events which follow on from it?

The Quran uses the 'first creation' of man – the fact that every individual has been brought into the world – to show that what has happened once can happen again, especially if it happens according to the creative will of God, for Whom all things are possible:

*See they not how God originates creation, then repeats it: truly that is easy for God. Say: 'Travel through the earth and see how God did originate creation; so will God produce a later creation: for God has power over all things.'*¹

The Quran also alludes to the fact that the phenomenon of resurrection is prefigured in this world: 'mini resurrections' occur in the natural world all of the time, from the partial death of trees in winter and their resuscitation the following spring, to the constant 'death' and 'revivification' of the cells of the body. The Quran uses the example of the desert, whose parched dead earth springs to lush green life with each merciful drop of rain:

*It is He Who sendeth the winds like heralds of glad tidings, going before His mercy: when they have carried the heavy-laden clouds, We drive them to a land that is dead, make rain to descend thereon, and produce every kind of harvest therewith: thus shall We raise up the dead: perchance ye may remember.*²

Yet however compelling the allegories, parables and similitudes of the Quran may be, the fact remains that the 'proofs' it offers with regard to the existence of the hereafter are by definition scriptural proofs, acceptance of which depends for the most part – although not entirely – on one's having established for oneself the textual validity of the revelation and the authority of its evidence.

Despite the fact that neither can be established empirically, trying to prove the existence of a hereafter differs considerably from trying to prove that the cosmos has a creator; as far as the latter is concerned, we have at least a series of effects in front of us as a basis from which we may argue to a cause, or to causes, regardless of whether we conclude

that the creator is God. But in the case of the hereafter there are no effects visible, and thus to argue from effect to cause is impossible.

That the cosmos should have a cause is a rational proposition, but it is difficult to say the same thing about the hereafter. In this sense, the notion of the hereafter belongs, like many other propositions pertaining to the realm of belief, firmly in the domain of the non-rational. However, non-rational is not the same as irrational, which denotes something that cannot in any way, shape or form sit comfortably with reason. That which is non-rational may not be provable empirically, but it may be experienced and understood within its own frame of reference. Love, for example, is non-rational, but it is certainly not irrational – its tendency to provoke irrational behaviour at times notwithstanding. Similarly, the existence of angels is not something which can be demonstrated practically, but the notion is not a fundamentally irrational one. For a circle to be a square and remain a circle, however, is not non-rational: it is irrational, or what may be described as an aberration of the rational.³

Historically, the hereafter has been a theological and philosophical problematic for a number of scholars, including some of the most renowned. Ibn Sina's statements on the hereafter, for example, are notoriously ambiguous, for he seems to maintain on the one hand that bodily resurrection is possible and on the other that immortality is restricted to immaterial souls.⁴ The difficulty he had in accepting the notion of bodily resurrection has given rise to the popular – but completely false – assumption that he denies the existence of a hereafter altogether, although this is clearly not the case. What he does deny, however, is that the resurrection, the final judgement and the existence of an eternal heaven and eternal hell can be understood by rational criteria.

On this particular point, Nursi would appear to be in agreement with Ibn Sina. However, to say that the hereafter cannot be understood by rational criteria is one thing, and to say that it cannot be understood at all is another thing entirely. If it were completely inaccessible on any level at all to the human intellect, surely it would have been categorised, like the rulings of jurisprudence, as things in which one is justified in believing blindly, through imitation (*taqlīd*)? But the hereafter is one of the fundamentals of belief (*uṣūl al-īmān*), all of which require belief that is attained through investigation (*taḥqīq*), and not through imitation. The use of reason, then, must be indispensable to the Muslim's understanding of the hereafter.

So how does Nursi approach what seems to be, both ontologically and epistemologically, a rather intractable problem? Like the Quran, Nursi appeals to his readers' powers of reason by attempting, through the use of allegory and a number of theological arguments, to make what is clearly non-rational seem *reasonable*. For what seems devoid of reason at first glance can often be shown to possess a rational basis over time – a fact of which the Quranic narrative of Moses and Khidr provides ample evidence.⁵ Let us now turn to Nursi's treatise on the hereafter to see exactly how he fashions his arguments, and why.

Twelve indications of the hereafter: an allegory

Nursi begins his discourse on resurrection and the hereafter with an extended allegory, designed, as he himself puts it, to provide 'a discussion of resurrection and the hereafter in simple and common language, and in a straightforward style'.

Once two men were travelling through a land as beautiful as paradise. Looking around them, they saw that the people had left open the doors of their homes and shops, and were not paying attention to guarding them. Money and property were readily accessible, as though they had no owners. One of the two travellers – a most foolish and mindless individual – grasped hold of all that he fancied, taking that to which he had no right. Following his baser inclinations, he committed every kind of injustice and abomination. And none of the people of that land moved to stop him. His companion, however, said: “What on earth are you doing? You will be punished, and I will be dragged into misfortune along with you. All of what you have stolen belongs to the state. The people of this land, including even the children, are all soldiers or government servants. It is because they are at present civilians that they have not apprehended you. But the laws here are strict. The king has installed telephones everywhere and his agents are everywhere. Go quickly, and try to put things right.”

But the foolish man said in his obstinacy: “No, it is not state property; it belongs instead to some endowment, and has no clear or obvious owner. Anyone can make use of it as he sees fit. I see no reason to deny myself the use of these fine things. I will not believe that they have an owner unless I see him with my own eyes.” He continued to speak in this way, justifying his actions with much sophistry, and a heated debate ensued.

“Who is the king here?” said the foolish man. “I doubt there is one, because I can’t see him.”

“Listen,” said his companion, “every village must have its headman; everything down to even the tiniest needle must have its manufacturer and craftsman. And, as you know, every letter must be written by someone. How, then, can it be that a kingdom as well-ordered as this should have no ruler? And how can so much wealth have no owner, when it is obvious that every hour a train arrives filled with precious and artful gifts, as though sent from the realm of the unseen? And what about all the announcements and proclamations, all the seals and stamps found on all those goods, all the flags waving in every corner of the kingdom – can they all be ownerless? You know very little of the language here and so you’re unable to read the things which are written here; furthermore, you refuse to ask those who know the language to read them to you. So pay attention while I read to you the king’s supreme decree.”

The empty-headed man retorted: “Okay, so let’s suppose that there is a king. How is my taking a tiny amount of his wealth going to harm him? Will his treasury decrease as a result? Besides, I see nothing here in the way of prison or punishment.”

His companion replied: “This land is a place of exhibition for the wonderful royal arts of the ruler. But it is also a training ground and a temporary caravanserai, with no real foundations. Don’t you see that ever day a company of travellers arrives as another departs? This place is being constantly emptied and filled. Soon, however, the whole land will be transformed, and all of its inhabitants will depart for another, more lasting realm. And there they will all be given their due, rewarded or punished for their deeds here.”

The treacherous fool retorted rebelliously: “I don’t believe it. Is it at all possible that a whole land should be destroyed and transferred to another realm?”

His trustworthy friend replied: “Since you are so obstinate, let me show you, with twelve out of the innumerable proofs available, that there is indeed a ‘supreme tribunal’, a realm of reward and munificence and a realm of punishment and incarceration; let me

prove to you that just as this world is partially emptied every day, a time will come when it will be emptied completely and destroyed.”⁶

The paradisiacal land in the allegory is the world (*dunyā*), which Nursi portrays as a well-ordered kingdom whose ruler, though absent from the eyes of his subjects, has left his mark everywhere. All of the wealth of the kingdom belongs to him and his subjects are merely his stewards, tasked with services that they carry out in his name. The artistry and munificence of the king is exhibited everywhere in the form of countless wonderful artefacts and instances of generosity: every day, Nursi, says, a train arrives into the kingdom, filled with precious items for the use of the people there, as though from nowhere. This train, Nursi explains, indicates the cycle of the seasons, and in particular the spring, which brings with it numerous bounties, all produced in an amazingly short space of time, from sources invisible to the human eye. That this wealth should be without an owner – that a well-ordered kingdom such as this should be without a king – is thus unthinkable, Nursi says; only the foolish would close their eyes to such a self-evident reality.

Which brings us to the two companions in the story. The foolish man, Nursi explains, represents the instinctual soul (*nafs al-ammāra*), followers of the ‘line of philosophy’ and the people of unbelief; his level-headed, trustworthy companion represents the heart (*qalb*), followers of the Quran, and the community of Islam. The first traveller’s foolishness is seen to inhere in his unwillingness to countenance the existence of a ruler, despite obvious signs of order, governance and authority. A concomitant of this is that he believes that he may behave however he wishes, with no fear of admonishment, reprisal or retribution. His wantonness is exemplified in particular by his misappropriation of goods and riches which, he believes, have no obvious owner; even if there were an owner, he scoffs, prisons and punishment seem to be non-existent, and thus one may act however one wishes with apparent impunity. Inevitably, when his level-headed friend explains that punishment for such transgressions are deferred to a ‘supreme tribunal’ in a different, currently hidden realm, to which beings are despatched daily, and to which all of the subjects of the king will be sent in the end, the fool refuses to believe.

Nursi then uses the level-headed traveller to spell out, from twelve ‘aspects’, precisely why the notion of a ‘supreme tribunal’ and an enduring realm beyond the present one is in accord with reason and thus not to be rejected lightly.

The first aspect: Is it at all possible that in any kingdom, and particularly so splendid a kingdom as this, there should be no reward for those who serve obediently and no punishment for those who rebel? Reward and punishment are virtually non-existent here; there must therefore be a Supreme Tribunal somewhere else.⁷

Nursi’s contention here is that in a land that is clearly ruled as magnificently as this one is, surely those who serve their ruler faithfully should be rewarded and those who rebel punished accordingly? However, the fact is that despite the good governance of the king and the well-ordered way in which affairs are administered, reward and punishment are not always meted out proportionately, and in some cases are totally absent. For true justice to be done, then, Nursi says, there must be a ‘supreme tribunal’ (*maḥkama-i kubrā*) in another realm where all people receive exactly what they deserve. This is obviously an attempt – a

highly attenuated attempt, it must be said – at what may be termed an ‘argument from ultimate justice’. Had Nursi left it at this, it would arguably have been open to serious criticism, but the second and third ‘aspects’ serve to flesh out the first and provide much-needed clarification.

The second aspect: Look at the organization and administration of this kingdom! See how everyone, including the poorest and the weakest, is provided with perfect sustenance. The best care is taken of the sick. Delicious foods, jewel-encrusted decorations, embroidered garments, splendid feasts – all are to be found here. See how everyone pays due attention to his duties, with the exception of fools such as yourself. No one transgresses his bounds by as much as an inch. The greatest of all men is engaged in modest and obedient service, with an attitude of fear and awe. The ruler of this kingdom must possess, then, great generosity and compassion, as well as great dignity, exalted awesomeness and honour. Now generosity requires liberality; compassion cannot dispense with beneficence; and awesomeness and honour make it imperative that the discourteous be chastised. But not even a thousandth part of what that generosity and awesomeness require is to be seen here. The oppressor retains his power, and the oppressed, his humiliation, as they both depart from this realm. Their affairs are, then, left to the same Supreme Tribunal of which we speak.⁸

From Nursi’s second ‘aspect’, we see that in this allegorical kingdom, order is the general rule. The people’s needs for food, clothing and shelter are met more than adequately and, for the most part, the subjects of the king carry out their duties conscientiously, mindful of the laws of the land and careful not to step out of line. From the ample provision of sustenance, Nursi infers that the ruler must be someone who is both compassionate and merciful towards his subjects; from this, and from their respect for the rule of law and their concomitant acknowledgement of their ruler’s sovereignty, we are able to infer that most people in the land know the difference between right and wrong and thus may be said to have an innate sense of justice.

Nevertheless, perfect justice is conspicuous by its absence here: it often happens that the good leave this realm unrewarded while the rebellious depart unpunished. The fact that the king is, by virtue of his generosity and compassion, clearly a just ruler must, Nursi argues, mean that recompense and retribution are for some reason deferred to another realm and another time.

Having alluded to the sense of justice that is prevalent among the people of the realm, in his exposition of the ‘third aspect’, Nursi addresses explicitly not only the issue of the justice of the ruler but also that of his wisdom.

The third aspect: See with what lofty wisdom and order affairs are managed, and with what true justice and balance transactions are effected! Now a wise polity requires that those who seek the protection of the state should receive favour, and justice demands that the rights of subjects be preserved, so that the splendour of the state should not suffer. But here in this land, not a thousandth part of the requirements of such wisdom and justice is fulfilled; for example, fools such as yourself usually leave this realm unpunished. So again we say, matters are postponed for the consideration of a Supreme Tribunal.⁹

The 'third aspect' continues Nursi's elaboration of his 'argument from ultimate justice'. The focus here is largely on justice (*'adāla*) in the sense of equilibrium (*mīzān*): just as the cosmos epitomises balance through the harmonious interworking of its constituent parts, the allegorical kingdom is for the most part a microcosmic reflection of creation as a whole. Now both wisdom and justice demand that those who trample on the rights of others be upbraided for their transgressions, yet the fact still remains that many leave this realm as though immune from punishment. Again, Nursi concludes that since the requirement of justice is that people be rewarded or punished precisely in accordance with their acts and behaviours in this realm, their going unrewarded or unpunished must point inexorably to another realm in which all people receive their just deserts.

While this conclusion is no different to that of the 'second aspect', there is another variable involved here, and that is the attribute of wisdom. Although Nursi does not spell this out explicitly, the fact that the justice of the king points to the existence of another realm where reward and punishment are meted out as they should be, together with Nursi's depiction of the king as an inherently wise ruler, suggests that there is a wisdom behind the absence of perfect justice in this temporary realm. In other words, if the righteous go unrewarded and the rebellious go unpunished, it is for a reason. This reason may not be immediately evident to those whose rights are trampled on, but the fact that the ruler is possessed of wisdom suggests that there is a reasonable explanation. Indeed, it may be argued that without the variable of wisdom, the 'argument from ultimate justice' would have remained problematic. That is not to say, of course, that it is not still so; however, one must bear in mind here that Nursi appears to be predicating his belief in the existence of another realm not on any presupposition of the existence of God, but rather on the existence of a human moral instinct – an innate feel for justice, both on the part of the ruler and the ruled – which call for justice in the long-term, even if it be deferred to another place and time. We shall, of course, return to the 'argument from ultimate justice' in the second half of this chapter, when Nursi approaches the issue of the hereafter from a purely theistic perspective. Suffice to say that these first three 'aspects' lay the foundations of that argument and, as such, appear perfectly acceptable within their own limited frames of reference.

In the 'fourth aspect', Nursi changes direction and focuses on the perfections of the king himself, the manifestations of which cannot be fully appreciated in a limited realm by subjects who are themselves subject to finitude.

The fourth aspect: Look at these innumerable, peerless jewels that are displayed here, these unparalleled dishes laid out like a banquet! They demonstrate that the ruler of these lands possesses absolute generosity and an inexhaustible treasury. Now such generosity and such a treasury deserve and require a bounteous display that should be eternal and include all possible objects of desire. They further require that all who come as guests to partake of that display should be there eternally and not suffer the pain of death and separation. For just as the cessation of pain is pleasurable, so too is the cessation of pleasure painful!¹⁰

The existence of numberless wondrous bounties, cargoes of which arrive and depart daily, suggests that the ruler possesses a treasury so vast that its contents could not possibly be displayed to full effect in a limited realm or in the brief lifetimes of its people. A treasury

of bounties demands to be displayed, and an endless treasury requires a display that is also endless. Furthermore, Nursi argues, the compassion and generosity of the ruler, which are evidently absolute, require that those who are witness to the temporary display in this limited realm should also be witness to the eternal display in the permanent realm which must exist beyond this one. For to give these witnesses, whose desire for such bounties knows no limit, only a mere glimpse of the treasury before despatching them to non-existence would be inconsonant with the mercifulness of the ruler, the all-encompassing nature of which has already been established. The eternity of the treasury thus necessitates the eternity of all those whose gaze falls upon its manifestation in this present, limited realm. The fact that the beauty which imbues this treasury is hidden also requires this:

As for concealed and peerless beauty, it too requires to see and be seen, or rather to behold itself in two ways. The first consists of contemplating itself in different mirrors, and the second of contemplating itself by means of the contemplation of enraptured spectators and astounded admirers. Hidden beauty wishes, then, to see and be seen, to contemplate itself eternally and be contemplated without cease. It desires also permanent existence for those who gaze upon it in awe and rapture. For eternal beauty can never be content with a transient admirer; moreover, an admirer destined to perish without hope of return will find his love turning to enmity whenever he imagines his death, and his admiration and respect will turn to contempt. It is in man's nature to hate the unknown and the unaccustomed. Now everyone leaves this caravanserai very quickly and vanishes, having seen only a light or a shadow of the perfection and beauty for no more than a moment, without in any way being satiated. Hence, it is necessary that he should go towards an eternal realm where he will contemplate that beauty and perfection.¹¹

The bounties bestowed upon this perishable world are, Nursi has argued, an indication of the existence of a boundless treasure-trove of beauty that is hidden from view; indeed, they are in a sense a manifestation or reflection of it. For hidden beauty, Nursi argues, cannot remain hidden: it is in the very nature of beauty to want to display itself. And if that beauty is absolute, it will by its very nature display itself eternally, to – and through – countless eternal 'mirrors' which are created to reflect it.

If the allegory was not transparent before, it certainly becomes so now, for it is clear that Nursi is alluding here to the 'hidden treasure' Tradition – one which lies at the heart of his mystical-theological worldview:

I was a Treasure but was not known. So I loved to be known, and I created the creatures and made Myself known to them. Then they came to know Me.

Hidden beauty, Nursi says, contemplates itself in two ways: it regards itself in the 'mirrors' it creates, and in which it is reflected; and it gazes upon itself through the contemplation of those who hold that beauty in awe. Thus man and his countless fellow beings in the cosmos constitute numberless 'mirrors' in which all created beings – including man himself – may admire and make known that which is reflected there. Furthermore, it is also in those mirrors that God is able to observe His own beauty, together with all of His attributes of perfection. Now since God's attributes of perfection are absolute and eternal, His desire is also to be admired eternally. And thus just as the existence of God requires 'mirrors', the

eternal existence of Divine beauty requires eternal 'mirrors'. It is inconceivable, then, Nursi argues, that God should create 'mirrors' which do not extend beyond the confines of this limited realm. The existence of eternal 'mirrors' connotes the eternal existence of man, which in turn requires an eternal realm in which the display of God's absolute beauty, and man's everlasting contemplation of it, may take place.

In the 'fifth aspect', Nursi's line of argument again takes a different turn:

The fifth aspect: See, it is evident from all these matters that this peerless being is possessed of most great mercy. For he causes aid to be extended to every victim of misfortune, answers every question and petition; and mercifully fulfils with perfect benevolence the lowliest need of his lowliest subject.

Now pay attention, for a great meeting is taking place here. All of the nobles of the kingdom are assembled, and among them there is a most exalted commander, bearing numerous medals, who is delivering a discourse. In it he is requesting certain things from that compassionate monarch. All of those present are of one voice with him, saying: "Yes, we too desire the same!" Now listen to the words of that noble commander, favoured and decorated by his monarch:

"Your majesty, you are one who constantly nurtures us with his bounty! Reveal to us the source of these examples and shadows you have shown us! Draw us nigh to your seat of rule; do not let us perish in these deserts! Take us into your presence and have mercy on us! Feed us there on the delicious bounty you have allowed us to taste here! Do not torment us with desperation and banishment! Do not leave your yearning, thankful and obedient subjects to their own devices; do not cause them to be annihilated!"¹²

The king's most esteemed commander is petitioning his monarch to reveal the source of all the bounties that have been showered on mankind. He is asking for access to the hidden treasury which lies beyond the confines of this limited realm, for to be given only a glimpse of the reflection of that source and then to be despatched to nothingness would be unimaginably cruel, and completely at odds with the innate compassion and generosity of the king. In short, the commander, who clearly enjoys the king's confidence, is asking for nothing less than immortality.

Nursi's argument here is not difficult to discern. Given that the king meets the needs of his lowliest of subjects, is it at all likely that he would ignore the entreaties of his most trusted commander? Would it be in keeping with the king's beneficence if he were to respond to the trivial requests made by him of his ordinary subjects yet block his ears to the supplication of the noblest commoner in the land? Nursi's response is that it would clearly be at odds with the king's justice, which necessitates fulfilling the legitimate desires of his obedient subjects.

Moreover, the purpose of that commander is the purpose of all men, and its fulfilment is required by the pleasure, the compassion and the justice of the king. And it is a matter of ease for him, not difficulty, causing him less difficulty than the transient places of enjoyment contained in the caravanserai of the world. Having spent so much effort on these places of witnessing that will last only five or six days, and on the foundation of this kingdom, in order to demonstrate instances of his power, he will, without doubt, display at his seat of rule true treasures, perfections and skills in such a manner, and open before

us such spectacles that our intellects will be astonished. Those sent to this field of trial will not, then, be left to their own devices; palaces of bliss or dungeons await them.¹³

The desire for immortality, Nursi says, is part of mankind's creational make-up and thus common to all, from the lowliest subject in the realm to the most exalted. Furthermore, the provision of an eternal realm is no more difficult for the king than the provision of the temporary abode; indeed, it is necessitated not only by the absolute nature of his beauty, generosity and mercy, but also by the fact that he is solicitous to the needs and requests of all of his subjects.

In the 'sixth aspect', Nursi infers the existence of a permanent realm from the fact that the temporary abode is not just a caravanserai but also a training ground:

The sixth aspect: Come now, look! All these imposing railways, planes, machines, warehouses and exhibitions show that behind the veil an imposing monarch exists and governs. Such a monarch requires subjects worthy of himself. But now you see all his subjects gathered in a caravanserai for wayfarers, a caravanserai that is filled and emptied each day. It can also be said that his subjects are now gathered in a testing-ground for the sake of manoeuvres, and this ground also changes hourly. Again, we may say that all his subjects stay in an exhibition-hall for a few minutes to behold specimens of the monarch's beneficence, valuable products of his miraculous art. But the exhibition itself changes each moment. Now this situation shows conclusively that beyond the caravanserai, the testing-ground, the exhibition, there are permanent palaces, lasting abodes and treasuries full of the pure and elevated originals of the samples and shapes we see in this world. It is for the sake of these that we exert ourselves here. Here we labour and there we receive our reward. A form and degree of felicity suited to everyone's capacity awaits us there.¹⁴

Having already argued for the existence of a permanent realm beyond this perishable one, and for a source of all of the bounties which appear and disappear continuously during the brief life of this temporary abode, Nursi then likens the land in the allegory to a place of test and trial. Man is there not only to admire the ever-changing wonders which are displayed to him, but also to exert himself – to seek his livelihood through hard work and to earn his rewards by honest struggle. Yet livelihood and reward are also fleeting, Nursi argues, and thus it must be that man's effort is intended in fact not for the ephemeral goods of this perishable realm but for the enduring goods of the hidden, everlasting realm beyond. There, everyone will attain a station that befits the efforts expended in this realm, in accordance with his or her innate capacity. Man's future position – be it for good or for ill – depends, then, on how he approaches the 'testing ground' that is the limited realm of the present.

In his 'seventh aspect', Nursi continues the theme of man's test and trials:

The seventh aspect: Come, let us walk a little and see what is to be found among these civilized people. See, in every place, at every corner, photographers are sitting and taking pictures. Everywhere there are scribes, writing things down. Everything is being recorded. They are registering all deeds and events, however insignificant or commonplace. Now look up at the tall mountain; there you see a supreme photographer installed, devoted to the service of the king; he is taking pictures of all that happens in the area.¹⁵ The king must, then, have issued this order: "Record all the transactions made and deeds performed in the kingdom." In other words, that exalted personage is having a photographic record

made of all events. The precise record he is keeping must without doubt be for the sake of one day calling his subjects to account.

Now is it possible that an All-Wise, All-Preserving Being, who does not neglect the most banal doings of the lowest of his subjects, should not record the most significant deeds of the greatest among them, should not call them to account, should not reward and punish them? After all, it is those foremost among his subjects that perform deeds offensive to his glory, contrary to his pride and unacceptable to his compassion, and those deeds remain unpunished in this world. It must be, therefore, that their judgement is postponed to a Supreme Court.¹⁶

The fact that all things are being recorded photographically in this allegorical land must show, Nursi argues, that the king is keeping himself apprised of all of his subjects' deeds, however apparently small and inconsequential. Everything is being stored on film and committed to electronic memory. Unless this is to be played back later, what is the point of its being filmed or photographed? One tapes a TV show on DVD to play it back at some future point, while school registers are filled in and class test scores stored so that the students may receive a report at the end of the year and proceed to the next level. The very fact that facts, deeds and events are being recorded indicates that they will be used as evidence at the 'supreme tribunal' which will take place in the future, and at which those who leave the present realm unrewarded and unpunished will receive what they deserve.

At first glance, this particular 'aspect' is Nursi's least convincing. Allegories are, after all, supposed to embody truths that are discernible in the real world, and while it is true that we live increasingly in a surveillance society where everything is recorded for posterity, the notion that the ultimate objective is the establishment of a supreme court is not one that springs to mind immediately. It is possible, however, that Nursi's description of a land in which everything is photographed is somehow indicative of man's urge to record even the most trivial of events, and that this urge may be fuelled by an instinctive need on man's part to have evidence at hand should some future situation require it. In other words, the need to preserve events on film or in writing may stem ultimately from man's innate sense of justice: to *keep* a record now means that he would, if the need arose, be in a position to *set* the record straight if his version of events were ever questioned in the future.

The 'eighth aspect' sees Nursi invoking the constancy and scrupulousness of the monarch himself as proof of the existence of a hidden realm beyond this temporary abode. For while the monarch may not be seen in person, his words are there for everyone to deliberate upon, including his promises of reward and his threats of punishment.

The eighth aspect: Come, let me read to you the decrees issued by that monarch. See, he repeatedly makes the following promises and dire threats: "I will take you from your present abode and bring you to the seat of my rule. There I shall bestow happiness on the obedient and imprison the disobedient. Destroying that temporary abode, I shall found a different realm containing eternal palaces and dungeons."

He can easily fulfil the promises he makes and it is moreover incompatible with his pride and his power that he should break his promise. So look! You assent to the claims of your mendacious imagination, your distraught intellect, your deceptive soul, but deny the words of a being who cannot be compelled in any fashion to break his promise,

whose high stature does not admit any such faithlessness, and to whose truthfulness all visible deeds bear witness. Certainly you deserve a great punishment. You resemble a traveller who closes his eyes to the light of the sun and looks instead upon his own imagination. His fancy wishes to illuminate his awesomely dark path with the light of his brain, although it is no more than a glow-worm. Once that monarch makes a promise, he will most certainly fulfil it. Its fulfilment is most easy for him, and moreover most necessary for us and all things, as well as for him too and his kingdom. There is, therefore, a Supreme Court and a lofty felicity.¹⁷

If a person renowned for his trustworthiness and fidelity makes a promise, it is highly unlikely that he will break it. Given that the monarch of this allegorical land is not only compassionate and generous, but also possessed of numerous other attributes of perfection established in previous 'aspects', the notion that he might make futile promises and empty threats is, Nursi assures his readers, simply unthinkable. Those who would doubt an honest man, Nursi says, while trusting in the judgement of those who are more often than not wrong and deluded, is irrational. Moreover, the king neither loses nor gains by giving promises and issuing threats. For one who is beyond all need there can be no advantage to be had by making a promise and then breaking it, or by delivering dire warnings and not carrying them out.

Nursi continues the theme of the monarch's fidelity to promises in the 'ninth aspect', but from a slightly different angle:

The ninth aspect: Come now! Look at the heads of these offices and groups.¹⁸ Each has a private telephone to speak personally with the king. Sometimes too they go directly to his presence. See what they say and unanimously report, that the monarch has prepared a most magnificent and awesome place for reward and punishment. His promises are emphatic and his threats most stern. His pride and dignity are such that he would in no way stoop to the abjectness inherent in the breaking of a promise. The bearers of this report, who are so numerous as to be universally accepted, further report with the strong unanimity of consensus that "the seat and headquarters of the lofty monarchy, some of whose traces are visible here, is in another realm far from here. The buildings existing in this testing-ground are but temporary, and will later be exchanged for eternal palaces. These places will change. For this magnificent and unfading monarchy, the splendour of which is apparent from its works, can in no way be founded or based on such transient, impermanent, unstable, insignificant, changing, defective and imperfect matters. It is based rather on matters worthy of it, eternal, stable, permanent and glorious." There is, then, another realm, and of a certainty we shall go toward it.¹⁹

The 'heads of these offices and groups' are those intimates of the monarch who are in direct contact with the king, either by telephone or, on occasion, through personal presence at court. By virtue of the fact that these officials have been appointed by a king who is clearly wise and just, and whose confidence they enjoy, these officials also command the respect and trust of the people. Thus when they bring back reports from court which confirm the existence of a 'supreme tribunal' in the future, and of rewards and punishments which have been deferred to another realm, there is no reason why anyone should doubt them, particularly since they all appear to be in total agreement.

Nursi himself explains that the 'officials' in question are the prophets and saints, all of whom concur on the fact that the present, transient realm is but a trace or reflection of a realm elsewhere that will endure forever, and where change, instability, lack, deficiency and imperfection will have no place. The 'ninth aspect' is therefore an 'argument from authority', in which Nursi adduces the presential knowledge of those privy either to Divine revelation or Divine inspiration to substantiate the case for a 'supreme tribunal' and the existence of the hereafter.²⁰

In the 'tenth aspect', Nursi cites the numerous 'resurrections' which take place on a regular basis in this transient, ever-changing realm as an indication of the 'great resurrection' that will, it is claimed, take place once this temporary realm has been annihilated and transformed into a permanent abode.

The tenth aspect: Come, today is the vernal equinox. Certain changes will take place and wondrous things will occur. On this fine spring day, let us go for a walk on the green plain adorned with beautiful flowers. See, other people are also coming towards it. There must be some magic at work, for buildings that were mere ruins have suddenly sprung up again here, and this once empty plain has become like a populous city. See, every hour it shows a different scene, just like a cinema screen, and takes on a different shape. But notice, too, that among these complex, swiftly changing and multifarious scenes perfect order exists, so that all things are put in their proper places. The imaginary scenes presented to us on the cinema screen cannot be as well-ordered as this, and millions of skilled magicians would be incapable of this artistry. This monarch whom we cannot see must, then, have performed even greater miracles.²¹

The vernal equinox, marking the first day of spring, heralds what for Nursi is clearly one of the most compelling creational indications of the existence of resurrection and the hereafter, for in the apparently miraculous revivification of the dead earth of winter and its rebirth in the form of a myriad varieties of new life - represented in the allegory by the sudden and unexpected reconstruction of ruined buildings - he sees evidence of an even greater event: the eventual death of all beings and their subsequent rebirth in a world transformed from its limited, transient state into a boundless, everlasting abode. Nursi has the level-headed traveller in the story explain to his sceptical companion how such a transformation is possible.

O foolish one! You ask: "How can this vast kingdom be destroyed and re-established somewhere else?"

You see that every hour numerous changes and revolutions occur, just like the transfer from one realm to another that your mind will not accept. From this gathering in and scattering forth it can be deduced that a certain purpose is concealed within each visible and swift joining and separation, within every compounding and dissolving. Ten years of effort would not be devoted to a joining together destined to last no longer than an hour. So these circumstances we witness cannot be ends in themselves: they are a kind of parable of something beyond themselves, an imitation of it. That exalted being brings them about in miraculous fashion, so that they take shape and then merge, and the result is preserved and recorded, in just the same way that every aspect of a manoeuvre on the battleground is written down and recorded. This implies that proceedings at some great

concourse and meeting will be based on what happens here. Further, the results of all that occurs here will be permanently displayed at some supreme exposition. All the transient and fluctuating phenomena we see here will yield the fruit of eternal and immutable form.²²

Death and rebirth, decay and renewal, the separation of beings one from the other and their joining together and reconfiguration as new forms – all of these are part of the creational make-up of the cosmos, Nursi avers, and constitute countless examples of the principle of resurrection and rebirth. Since the cosmos is in flux, and change from one state to another is foundational, why, he asks, should it be so difficult for someone to accept that the whole of creation will one day be transformed into a realm where change and transience no longer hold sway, and where all that comes into existence and perishes here will be given a permanent form in a realm that is eternal? Indeed, what point is there in displaying beings – which are shadows or reflections of perfection – for an infinitesimally short period of time in this world, and tantalising those who witness them with the artistry involved, if that artistry is to be annihilated along with the world and not find permanence in a realm beyond? Nursi concludes by saying that all of the changes and variations that we see in this world are, then, “for the sake of a supreme happiness, a lofty tribunal, for the sake of exalted aims as yet unknown to us.”²³ The countless examples of change and regeneration in this world, therefore, are symbolic of the change and regeneration which will result in a world that is eternal, with eternal witnesses to the eternal beauty of its Creator.

In its opening passage, the penultimate ‘aspect’ reconfirms the belief that for a kingdom as well-ordered as this to exist, its ruler must possess wisdom, compassion, justice and mercy beyond comprehension.

The eleventh aspect: Come, my obstinate friend! Let us embark on a plane or a train travelling east or west, that is, to the past or the future. Let us see what miraculous works that being has accomplished in other places. Look, there are marvels on every hand like the dwellings, open spaces and exhibitions we see. But they all differ with respect to art and to form. Note well, however, what order betokening manifest wisdom, what indications of evident compassion, what signs of lofty justice, and what fruits of comprehensive mercy are to be seen in these transient dwellings, these impermanent open spaces, these fleeting exhibitions. Anyone not totally devoid of insight will understand with certainty that no wisdom can be imagined more perfect than his, no providence more beautiful than his, no compassion more comprehensive than his, and no justice more glorious than his.²⁴

However, the transient nature of the world – the impermanence of its structures and the ephemeral nature of its displays of artistry – means that those attributes of perfection are caught only in glimpses. Absolute and eternal attributes of perfection demand structures and displays of artistry that are everlasting.

If, for the sake of argument, as you imagine, no permanent abodes, lofty places, fixed stations, lasting residences or resident and contented population existed in the sphere of his kingdom; and if the truths of his wisdom, compassion, mercy and justice had no realm in which to manifest themselves fully (for this impermanent kingdom is no place for their

full manifestation) - then we would be obliged to deny the wisdom we see, to deny the compassion we observe, to deny the mercy that is in front of our eyes, and to deny the justice the signs of which are evident. This would be as idiotic as denying the sun, the light of which we clearly see at midday.²⁵

What Nursi is saying here is that wisdom, beauty and compassion cannot really be wisdom, beauty and compassion if they lead to annihilation and non-existence. If, as Nursi has been implying throughout his allegory, everything is imbued with purpose and looks to a future realm beyond this temporary abode, to cut everything short at death – both the individual deaths of sentient beings and the collective death of the cosmos – would turn that purposefulness to futility. To promise someone eternal life and then despatch them to eternal annihilation betokens not mercy and compassion but tyranny and cruelty of the most unimaginable kind.

In this case we would also have to regard the one from whom proceed all these wise measures we see, all these generous acts, all these merciful gifts, as a vile gambler or treacherous tyrant (God forbid!). This would be to turn truth on its head. And turning a truth into its opposite is impossible, according to the unanimous testimony of all rational beings, excepting only the idiotic sophists who deny everything.

There is, then, a realm apart from the present one. In it, there is a supreme tribunal, a lofty place of justice, an exalted place of reward, where all this compassion, wisdom, mercy and justice will be made fully manifest.²⁶

In short, if there is no hereafter, Nursi argues, the wisdom in this world is not wisdom but futility; the beauty in this world is not beauty but sheer ugliness; and the compassion in this world is nothing but abject cruelty.

Nursi continues the theme of purposefulness in his twelfth and final ‘aspect’:

The twelfth aspect: Come, let us return now. We will speak with the chiefs and officers of these various groups, and looking at their equipment will inquire whether that equipment has been given them only for the sake of subsisting for a brief period in this realm, or whether it has been given for the sake of obtaining a long life of bliss in another realm. For example, let us look at the identity card and register of this officer. On his card, his rank, salary, duty, supplies and instructions are recorded. See, this rank has not been awarded him for just a few days; it may be given for a prolonged period. It says on his card: “You will receive so much salary on such-and-such a day from the treasury.” But the date in question will not arrive for a long time to come, after this realm has been vacated. Similarly, the duty mentioned on his card has not been given for this temporary realm, but rather for the sake of earning a permanent felicity in the proximity of the king. Then, too, the supplies awarded him cannot be merely for the sake of subsisting in this caravanserai of a few days’ duration; they can only be for the sake of a long and happy life. The instructions make it quite clear that he is destined for a different place, and that he is working for another realm.

Now look at these registers. They contain instructions for the use and disposition of weapons and equipment. If there were no realm other than this, one exalted and eternal, that register and its categorical instructions and that identity card with its clear information would both be quite meaningless. Further, that respected officer, that noble

commander, that honoured chief, would fall to a degree lower than that of all men; he would be more wretched, luckless, abased, afflicted, indigent and weak than everyone. Apply the same principle to everything. Whatever you look upon bears witness that after this transient world, another, eternal world exists.

O friend! This temporary world is like a field. It is a place of instruction, a market. Without doubt a supreme tribunal and ultimate happiness will succeed it. If you deny this, you will be obliged also to deny the identity cards of all the officers, their equipment and their orders; in fact you will have to deny too all the order existing in the country, the existence of a government in it and all the measures that the government takes. Then you will no longer deserve the name of man or the appellation of conscious. You will be more of a fool than the sophists.²⁷

With his military analogy, which is at times rather more laboured than it need be, Nursi is articulating a principle which numerous Muslim thinkers and mystics have invoked as being indicative of the necessity of an eternal realm. In the same way that the abundant supplies given to the soldier in the story are clearly intended to last him a considerable length of time rather than just one or two days, the capacities and potentialities that man possesses are clearly superfluous to requirements if a brief life in this limited realm is all that he has. As Nursi points out on numerous occasions in the *Risale-i Nur*, man is a creature who, through intellect and imagination, is able to embrace the whole of the cosmos and, as such, is endowed with the innate desire for everlasting life. The desire to live forever, to exist without imperfection, deficiency, instability and pain, indicate for Nursi the existence of an everlasting realm; were this not the case, to what end has man been given this desire? The hands, feet, eyes, ears and other members and organs of a foetus growing in its mother's womb are superfluous to its requirements as far as life in the womb is concerned: they are clearly given not for use during those nine months of gestation but for use in another realm, the realm of the world outside the womb. In the same way, man possesses many faculties, capacities and abilities, the boundless extent of which far exceed his requirements in this fleeting temporal abode, clearly created as they are for a limitless, eternal realm where he will be able to give them full expression.

Conclusion to the 'twelve aspects'

Arguing from twelve different but interconnected perspectives, Nursi attempts to show in his extended allegory that a transient, limited realm is not enough to display the attributes of a king whose generosity, compassion, wisdom and justice are absolute and all-encompassing, and that there must be a boundless and permanent realm in which the splendour and majesty of his power and beauty may be witnessed eternally. In the same way, then, he argues, it is unthinkable that the eternal Creator of this transient world would not also create an eternal realm; it is inconceivable that He would not change this magnificent yet transient cosmos into one which is everlasting, with everlasting witnesses to its majesty. Moreover, a world that is a 'testing ground' demands a realm in which the results of that 'test' and the objectives of creation are made manifest. It is at this point that Nursi leaves his allegory behind and adopts a completely different line of argumentation.

Nursi's 'argument from the Divine Names': twelve 'truths' pointing to the existence of the hereafter

In the second section of his treatise *Resurrection and the Hereafter*, Nursi invokes the attributes and names of God directly as 'proofs' of the truths and realities of resurrection and the hereafter. This type of theological argument – the 'argument from God', for want of a better phrase – is obviously valid only within the frames of reference of someone who is already a believer, for the objective is to infer what are thought to be logical conclusions from a pre-established belief in God and His 'Most Beautiful Names'. As Nursi points out, the existence of the hereafter is 'difficult to comprehend rationally': as a non-rational concept it is certainly not something which can be rendered reasonable unless the existence of God is established first. After all, without God it would be difficult, if not impossible, to argue for the existence of a hereafter in any meaningful sense of the word, which is why Nursi's most vigorous arguments are ones which rest on purely theological assumptions.

The 'argument from theology' may of course be criticized by non-Muslim logicians, who would say that one cannot use God as an argument for the hereafter – or, indeed, for anything – unless one has established previously that there is a God.²⁸ Of course this criticism would not have perturbed Nursi in the least; indeed, he would have undoubtedly agreed that this is most certainly the case. However, his goal here is to demonstrate the rationality of the hereafter to believers, within their own frame of reference – namely their belief in God and the existence of His attributes of perfection. He does so through the exposition of the following twelve 'truths', which correspond approximately to the twelve 'aspects' in his extended allegory. It is to these 'truths' that we now turn.

The first 'truth' approaches the issue through the 'gate of Dominicality' (*rubūbiyya*) and sovereignty (*salṭana*), and through the manifestation of the Divine name 'the Sustainer' (*rabb*).

Is it at all possible that the glory of God's dominicality and His Divine sovereignty should create a cosmos such as this, in order to display His perfections, with such lofty aims and elevated purposes, without establishing a reward for those believers who through faith and worship respond to these aims and purposes? Or that He should not punish those misguided ones who treat His purposes with rejection and scorn?²⁹

Divine dominicality (*rubūbiyya*) denotes the provision of sustenance and the concomitant nurturing of creation in order that it may reach its optimum level of material and spiritual growth. Sovereignty (*salṭana*) denotes the authority to govern and to direct. The Lord of Dominicality (*rabb*) sustains and nurtures that over which He has sovereignty in order to perfect it and, by so doing, display His attributes of perfection. Nursi claims that it is inconceivable that the Creator would nurture and sustain the creation – and humankind in particular – without establishing some kind of requital for those who respond to His nurturing and sustaining, be it with reward or punishment. Like the first 'aspect' in the allegory, this first 'truth' is a nod towards the 'argument from ultimate justice', albeit through the invocation of two particular Divine attributes.

It is an argument that he continues in his second 'truth', but this time by referencing the attributes of generosity (*karam*) and mercy (*rahma*), together with the corresponding names 'the Generous' (*karim*) and 'the Merciful' (*rahim*).

The Lord of this world demonstrates in His works absolute generosity, mercy, splendour and glory. Is it possible, then, that he should not give reward in a manner befitting His generosity and mercy, or punish in a manner befitting His splendour and glory? Indeed, His absolute glory and splendour require the chastisement of the discourteous, while His absolute generosity and mercy require a bestowal of favour worthy of those attributes. Now in this transitory world and brief life, only a millionth part of all this – a mere drop from the ocean - establishes and manifests itself. There must therefore be a blessed realm that is appropriate to that generosity and worthy of that mercy. One would otherwise have to deny the existence of the mercy that *is* visible to us, and that would be like denying the existence of the sun that fills every day with its light. For irrevocable death would transform compassion into disaster, love into affliction, blessing into vengeance, intellect into a tool of misery, and pleasure into pain, so that the very essence of God's mercy would vanish.³⁰

That generosity and mercy are manifest in this world is evident, Nursi assures us, from the countless bounties which have been bestowed on created entities, and particularly on man himself. Nevertheless, the degree to which these attributes are reflected in this finite realm is limited. Nursi's assertion that only a 'millionth part' of mercy and generosity can be found in the world is another way of saying that these attributes are made known by their polar opposites. In other words, mercy and generosity are rendered visible and understandable in some situations only by other situations in which mercy and generosity are absent.

If mercy and the absence of mercy are vying for supremacy, as Nursi appears to intimate, which of the two is foundational? Nursi, of course, would argue that mercy is foundational and the absence of mercy is simply that – a lack and a privation that has an external reality but no external existence. From the Nursian perspective there can be no true duality; there can be no face-off between a real attribute known as mercy and a real attribute known as 'lack of mercy', 'cruelty', 'tyranny' or whatever name one wishes to give it. Divine attributes are manifested here not in their absoluteness but in degrees. What is foundational is mercy, not its absence, and because mercy is reflected here only to a limited degree, Nursi's argument is that there must be a realm where mercy is displayed without lack or deficiency. Were one to argue otherwise, and contend that the absence of mercy were foundational, this would mean that what is perceived as mercy is not mercy at all.

The theologian and novelist C. S. Lewis argues along the same lines with regard to justice. Lewis writes that his original argument against God had been that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But, he asks, how does one arrive at the notion of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of lines that are straight. Furthermore, he says, to what was he comparing the universe when he deemed it unjust? And if everything was cruel and meaningless, why did he, who was part of the universe, exhibit such a violent reaction against it?

But what if he had given up his idea of justice by saying that it was nothing more than emotivism – a private idea or preference of his own? Lewis's answer is that if he had done

this, his argument against God would have also collapsed, for that argument depended on claiming that the world was *really* unjust, and not simply that it did not happen to appeal to his personal whims or preferences. And so, he concludes, in the very act of trying to prove the non-existence of God and the concomitant senselessness of reality, he was actually compelled to assume that at least one part of reality – his sense of justice – was in fact full of sense.³¹ For if the universe were truly without meaning, how would one ever know? For something to be deemed meaningful, the notion of meaningfulness has to exist.

Similarly, if there were no mercy in the real sense of the word, there would be no notion of its opposite. Thus, Nursi asserts, mercy is real. And if mercy is real but of limited manifestation in this realm, there must be another realm where absolute mercy is displayed: mercy that is mercy for this temporary realm alone, and which disappears upon death, cannot be mercy at all. Given this, Nursi argues, that an endlessly merciful abode in a realm other than this should not exist is simply inconceivable. The same argument is also used to support the notion of an abode where those who reject mercy are punished.

Is it at all possible, then, that He should not prepare a realm of reward and eternal bliss for those believers who respond to the Merciful and Compassionate One's making Himself known by recognizing Him in faith; to His making Himself beloved by loving Him in worship; and to His mercy by offering thanks and veneration?

There must in addition be a realm of punishment appropriate to God's glory and dignity. For generally the oppressor leaves this world while still in possession of his might, and the oppressed while still subjected to humiliation. But these matters are not neglected; they are deferred for the attention of a supreme tribunal. It sometimes happens too that punishment is enacted in this world. The torments suffered by disobedient and rebellious peoples in previous centuries show that man is not left to his own devices, and that he is always subject to the blows that God's splendour and majesty may choose to inflict on him.

Man has the most important duty in all of creation, endowed as he is with the most important capacities. The Sustainer of all beings makes Himself known to man with all of His well-ordered works and makes Himself beloved of man through the numerous fruits of His love and mercy. If, then, man should fail to recognise Him in return by way of worship, is it conceivable that man should be left to his own devices and go unpunished, or that God should not prepare for him a realm of requital?³²

The third 'truth' is seen through from the perspective of Divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) and justice (*'adāla*), and the manifestation of the names 'the Wise' (*ḥakīm*) and 'the Just' (*'ādil*).

Do you wish for a proof that all things are done with justice and balance? The fact that all things are endowed with being, given shape and put in their appropriate place in accordance with precise equilibrium and in appropriate measure, shows that all matters are done in accordance with infinite justice and balance. Similarly, the fact that all things are given their rights in accordance with their disposition, that they receive all the necessities of their being and all the requirements of life in the most fitting form - this too is the sign left by a hand of infinite justice.

It is clear that the Being Who controls this world does so in accordance with absolute wisdom. If you require proof, look at the principle of preservation of benefit in

all things. Do you not see that numerous wise benefits are intended in all the limbs, bones and veins of man, in the cells of his brain and in every particle of his body? All of this shows that matters are accomplished in accordance with infinite wisdom. The existence of the utmost regularity in the creation of all things is a proof of the same truth.³³

Here, Nursi draws on support from the manifestation of two closely related attributes – justice (*‘adāla*) and wisdom (*ḥikma*) – in creation itself to conclude that all entities in the cosmos are given what they require in the most appropriate form and in precisely the exact proportion. Etymologically, *‘adāla* covers a wide range of meanings, including acting and dealing justly, equitably and with fairness and proportion; establishing justice; straightening and disposing aright; holding as equal; and adjusting properly as to relative magnitude.³⁴ That *‘adāla* is mentioned here together with *ḥikma* reflects the Nursian assertion that justice – in the sense of balance, equilibrium and the other meanings mentioned above – can be realised only by one with absolute wisdom, that is, one who has perfect knowledge of what is true, right and fit for the purpose in question. Having argued that the cosmos demonstrates both justice and wisdom, Nursi then concludes that One Who is both Just and Wise will never leave His purposes unfulfilled, His faithful servants unrewarded or His recalcitrant subjects unpunished.

God demonstrates his dominical sovereignty in the wisdom, order, justice and equilibrium that pervade all things, from the stars to the atoms. Given this, is it possible that He should not bestow favour on those who believe in His wisdom and justice and seek refuge under the protective wing of His dominicality? Is it possible that He should not reward those whose acts are for the purpose of worshipping Him? Similarly, is it possible that He should not chastise those who disbelieve in His wisdom and justice, and who rebel against Him in insolence? Now not even a thousandth part of that wisdom and justice is exercised with respect to man in this transient world; rather, it is deferred. Most of the people of misguidance leave this world unpunished, while most of the people of guidance leave it unrewarded. All things are, therefore, referred to a supreme tribunal in another, future realm.

The existence of a high degree of fine artistry in all things proves that there exists also the impress of an infinitely Wise Maker. Further, the inclusion within the minute body of man of an index of all being, of the keys to all the treasuries of mercy, and of the mirrors of all the Divine Names, demonstrates the existence of wisdom within that infinitely fine artistry. Now is it at all possible that the wisdom which thus permeates the workings of dominicality should not wish to favour eternally those who seek refuge beneath the wing of dominicality and who offer obedience in faith?³⁵

The centrality to the creational schema of man himself is highlighted here by Nursi. Man, he says, is the greatest of creatures, with the greatest of needs – the most salient being his ardent desire for immortality. Given that Divine justice and wisdom fulfil the needs of the most insignificant beings in creation, is it possible, Nursi asks, that they should fail to fulfil the legitimate needs of man? Man's desire for eternity, Nursi says, is an indication of the fact that he has been created for eternity, and for either the rewards or punishments that pertain to it. Given that neither man's requirements, nor the requirements of Divine justice and wisdom, can be met in this brief temporal abode, the existence of an everlasting realm

is not only necessary but inevitable. And that realm will, Nursi assures us, include an eternal paradise and an eternal hell, both logical concomitants of wisdom and justice.³⁶

Nursi's fourth 'truth' looks at the issue of the hereafter from the point of view of the Creator's generosity (*jūd*) and beauty (*jamāl*), and through the Divine names 'the Generous' (*jarwād*) and 'the Beautiful' (*jamīl*).

Adorning the earth with all of these objects of beauty, creating the sun and moon as lamps, filling the surface of the globe with the finest varieties of sustenance, all of which are renewed several times each season – all of this betokens the existence of absolute generosity and liberality. These attributes of perfection in turn require the existence of a realm that is everlasting, where they may be displayed for all eternity. They also require that those who appreciate these attributes should be taken to that abode and allowed to remain there eternally, without suffering the pain of cessation and separation. For just as the cessation of pain is a form of pleasure, so too the cessation of pleasure is a form of pain, which One Who possesses absolute generosity is unwilling to countenance. It requires, then, the existence both of an eternal paradise and of supplicants to abide in it eternally.

Absolute generosity and liberality desire to bestow endless bounties and everlasting kindness. The bestowal of these require in turn eternal gratitude. This necessitates the perpetual existence of those who receive such kindness so that they may show their gratitude for that perpetual bestowal and constant bounty. A trivial pleasure, lasting for only a brief time and made bitter by cessation, is not compatible with the requirements of generosity and liberality.³⁷

What applied to the attributes of mercy, justice and wisdom in the previous truths applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the attributes of beauty (*jamāl*) and generosity (*jūd*) in Nursi's fourth 'truth'. As Nursi tells us on countless occasions, the cosmos is a showcase for the signs of the beauty of its Maker – that 'Hidden Treasure', who has created creation in order to be known, loved and worshipped. Beauty, as he has also shown, cannot remain hidden, and is displayed for all to see – and given to others freely in the form of countless bounties – through an act of absolute generosity.

However, absolute beauty and generosity cannot be experienced in a limited world, and so there must of necessity be a boundless, eternal realm in which these attributes of perfection can be given full reign. However, that realm exists not only as an everlasting gallery of Divine bounties, but as a permanent abode in which those bounties may be witnessed eternally by those who appreciate them. It would make no sense from the point of view of Divine beauty and generosity, Nursi suggests, if that absolute beauty were to go unrecognised. Moreover, for man to be deprived of an eternity in which to appreciate that everlasting beauty and generosity would serve to render the very notions of beauty and generosity meaningless.

In short, beauty and fairness desire to see and be seen. Both of these require the existence of yearning witnesses and bewildered admirers. And since beauty and fairness are eternal and everlasting, their witnesses and admirers must have perpetual life. An eternal beauty can never be satisfied with transient admirers. An admirer condemned to irreversible separation will find his love turning to enmity once he conceives of separation. His

admiration will yield to ridicule, his respect to contempt. For just as obstinate man is an enemy to what is unknown to him, so too he is opposed to all that lies beyond his reach, and love that is not infinite will respond to a beauty that deserves unending admiration with implicit enmity, hatred and rejection. From this we understand the profound reason for the unbeliever's enmity to God.

So endless generosity and liberality, peerless fairness and beauty, flawless perfection - all these require the existence of eternally grateful and longing supplicants and admirers. But we see in this caravanserai of the world that everyone quickly leaves and vanishes, having had only a taste of that generosity, enough to whet his appetite but not to satiate him, and having seen only a dim light coming from the perfection, or rather a faint shadow of its light, without in any way being fully satisfied. It follows, then, that men are going toward a place of eternal joy where all will be bestowed on them in full measure.

In short, just as this world, with all its creatures, decisively demonstrates the existence of the Glorious Maker, so too do His sacred attributes and Names indicate, show and logically require the existence of the hereafter.³⁸

The fifth 'truth' considers the existence of the hereafter through the prism of Divine compassion (*shafaqa*) and what Nursi calls 'Muhammadan worship' (*'ubūdiyyat-i Muḥammadiyya*), together with the Divine names 'Answerer of prayer' (*muḥib*) and 'the Compassionate' (*raḥim*).

Nursi's main line of argument rests on the assumption that a compassionate God Who fulfils the most apparently insignificant need of his lowliest creatures in the most unexpected of fashions would never ignore the needs of the one described by Nursi as 'the foremost of His servants', the Prophet Muhammad. If God answers the voiced and unvoiced 'invocations' of the bee or the earthworm by providing them with the sustenance they have 'petitioned' Him for through the tongue of mute eloquence, is it reasonable to think that He would ignore the impassioned pleas of the Prophet and pay no attention to his invocations?

The kindness and ease manifested in the feeding and nurturing of weak and young animals show that the Monarch of the cosmos exercises his dominicality with absolute mercy. Would One Who is merciful to this degree reject the prayer of the most virtuous and beloved being in all creation?

Recall the allegory in which we described a meeting at which a most noble commander delivered an important discourse. In order to uncover the truth indicated in the comparison, let us depart from this age and travel with our imaginations to the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the Prophet, in order to visit and watch him while he is performing his duties and engaging in worship.

Look carefully. You will see that he is praying for eternal bliss with a supplication so sublime that it is as though the whole world were supplicating with him. For the worship he performs contains within itself not only the worship of the community that follows him, but also that of all the other prophets, by virtue of the correspondence existing between him and them. Moreover, he offers his supplications in such a vast congregation that it is as if all luminous and perfect men, from the time of Adam down to the present, were saying "Amen!" to his prayers! For he is praying for a need that is so universal - the need for immortality - that not only the people of this earth but also the inhabitants of

the heavens and the whole of creation are proclaiming along with him, "Yes, O Lord! Grant his prayer; we too desire what he desires."³⁹

The greatest of all human desires is, Nursi contends, the desire for immortality. And it is precisely that desire which the Prophet expresses in his supplications. The mission of the Prophet, the revelation of the Quran, the advent of Islam – the key purpose of all of these was to awaken man to the existence not only of an eternally subsisting Creator but also of his own potential eternity. Through his supplications, Muhammad embodies the hopes of the whole of humanity and, as Nursi says, releases all created beings from captivity in what the unregenerate soul believes to be a state of utter annihilation and futility, elevating them instead to the zenith of exaltedness and, eventually, to eternity itself.⁴⁰ Given that God takes pity on even the lowliest of creatures, Nursi argues, it is inconceivable that He would not take pity on the most esteemed being in creation.

The Prophet requests bliss and eternity from One Who is All-Hearing and All-Seeing, Generous and Powerful, Merciful and Omniscient – One Who sees, hears, accepts and takes pity upon the most secret desires of his lowliest creatures, even if their pleas are proffered in silence. God responds to appeals in a fashion so wise, percipient and merciful that no doubt remains that all that nurturing and regulating can derive only from One Who possesses all of these attributes of perfection. Would He then reject the appeal of the Prophet, the pride of all being, who is offering a supplication which in its reality contains the essence of the worship of all of mankind? For he is asking for eternal bliss for himself and for his community; he is asking for eternity and paradise. He is making his plea together with all the Divine Sacred Names that display their beauty in the mirrors of all created being. You can see, indeed, that he is seeking intercession from those Names.⁴¹

Much has been written, and sadly misunderstood, about the alleged ability of Muhammad to 'intercede' on behalf of his fellow believers at the 'supreme tribunal' which precedes the judgement of men. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to unpack the various arguments proffered for and against Prophetic intercession in the popularly accepted sense of the word, although there are a number of sources to which interested readers may refer if they wish to acquaint themselves with a variety of approaches to the issue.⁴² However, a short excursus into the Nursian notion of intercession is necessary here in order to contextualise his passages on 'Muhammadan worship' in the context of his 'proofs' of the reality of the hereafter.

While Nursi accepts the principle of Prophetic intercession, he articulates it for the most part in the terms of reference dictated by his 'theology of Divine names'. Here, for example, the Prophet's seeking of intercession from the Divine names may be understood in the context of his role as locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) and displayer (*muzhir*) *par excellence* of all of the Divine names, to the very highest level possible. For Nursi, Muhammad represents the most comprehensive mirror held up to the 'beautiful names of God' in creation. His 'seeking intercession from those Names', as Nursi puts it, may thus be understood as his making known those Names to others – be it through revelation or through his own personal behaviours as prophet and exemplar – and, by making them known, presenting them as means to human salvation. To make them truly known is to teach people that attributes of perfection, samples of which can be found in all of the entities which make up creation, belong not to creation itself but to its Creator, and that if salvation and the

promise of eternal bliss in an everlasting realm is to be attained, then it is imperative that those names be attributed to their rightful Owner. Attribution in this sense is more than just acknowledgment: it also involves a conscious 'handing back' of that which one imagines to be one's own to its true and proper Source. As we have seen in Chapter Five, this means a process of surrender (*taslimiyya*) to the will of God which is effected through the gradual 'purification' of the soul as man achieves self-knowledge and God-awareness. And to achieve self-knowledge and God-awareness is to understand that in and of himself, man is nothing and God is everything; to achieve 'purification' of the soul is to realise that the samples of the attributes of perfection that one finds within oneself are really just that: samples, or pale reflections of originals which exist in absolute form elsewhere. To seek intercession from the names, then, is to put one's trust not in the human self, which, while desirous of immortality on account of the taste it receives from the reflection of those attributes of perfection, is existentially impotent and therefore can attain what it desires only if it truly understands the Source of its desire. The Prophet's supplication to God in this passage both symbolises the desire of all men from Adam onwards to attain eternity and indicates the correct way in which attempts to satisfy that desire should be made. The centrality of Muhammad to the Divine purpose in this regard is highlighted by Nursi in startling terms:

If there were not countless reasons and causes for the existence of the hereafter, a single supplication offered by that exalted being would be enough for the creation of paradise, which is as easy for God as the creation of spring.⁴³

So just as the Prophet is the means for the attainment of eternal bliss through his messengerhood and guidance, he is the cause for the existence of that bliss and the means for the creation of paradise by means of his worship and supplication.⁴⁴

Not only is the supplication of Muhammad posited as one of the most compelling reasons for the existence of the hereafter, his prophethood is considered by Nursi to be one of the most compelling reasons for the existence of the 'here-and-now':

In just the same way that the messengerhood of the Prophet was the reason for the foundation of this realm of trial - the saying "Were it not for thee, were it not for thee, I would not have created the spheres" being an indication of this⁴⁵ - so too the worship he performed was the cause for the foundation of the abode of bliss. So just as the Prophet opened the gates of this world with his messengerhood, he opens the gates of the hereafter with his worship.⁴⁶

The Tradition quoted by Nursi, which has God telling Muhammad that "If it weren't for you, I would not have created the spheres" would seem to confirm for him the fundamentality of the Prophet and the Prophetic mission to the very existence not only of the temporal realm but also of the everlasting worlds beyond. Given the centrality of the Prophet to the cosmic scheme as posited by Nursi, then, it would appear to be in complete contradiction to the purpose of creation if the Prophet's supplication for immortality were to go unanswered.

The sixth 'truth' concerns Divine splendour (*hishma*) and eternity (*sarmadiyya*), and the manifestation of the Divine names 'the Glorious' (*jalil*) and 'the Everlasting' (*baqi*). As with the other 'truths', Nursi's objective here is to offer theological evidence of the existence not only of a hereafter, but of a hereafter that is witnessed by everlasting 'mirrors', namely

the created beings who witness His signs in this fleeting earthly realm. However, the line of reasoning differs slightly here in that the evidences he brings are adduced as much to support his argument for a hereafter which exists for the sake of the Divine Names as they are to support his contention that mankind will have everlasting life. In other words, the hereafter is, in a sense, as much a 'requirement' for God Himself as it is for man.

The splendour of dominicality commands and subdues all beings, from vast stars to minute particles. Given this, is it at all possible that it would concentrate all of its attention on the wretched transient beings that pass a brief life in the caravanserai of this world and not create an eternal realm where the unending manifestation of his most splendid dominicality may be displayed? From the alternation of the seasons, the motions of the celestial objects in the heavens and from the subjugation of the earth to man, it is clear that behind the veil a sublime dominicality exists, and that a monarch of great splendour is at work.

Now such a dominical kingdom requires subjects worthy of itself, as well as an appropriate mode of manifestation. But when you look at the caravanserai of the world, you will see that its most noble subjects, endowed with the most comprehensive of functions, are gathered together for a brief time only, and in the most wretched of states. The caravanserai fills and empties daily, its visitors staying only temporarily in this abode of trial in order that they be tested. The abode itself changes from hour to hour, the subjects of the monarch staying no more than a few brief minutes in order to behold samples of the Glorious Maker's bounties and to look on His miraculous works of art in the gallery of the world with a buyer's eye. Then they disappear. The exhibition in the gallery also changes by the minute, but whoever leaves it can never return, and whoever enters it will ultimately depart.⁴⁷

The continual filling and emptying of the 'caravanserai', together with the endless transformations that take place within it, betoken for Nursi a permanent source of all of the bounties and beauties which exist only as fleeting reflections and pale shadows in this temporary realm. That which is sampled by each caravan of beings during its brief sojourn in the caravanserai is changing by the moment, and thus can be only a sample of something much greater which lies beyond. Thus there must, Nursi argues, be permanent palaces and eternal abodes in which God's absolute and everlasting sovereignty are displayed, and where the original forms of the shadow, reflections and copies displayed in the caravanserai can be found. Those permanent palaces are in part a reward for those who have appreciated the bounties during their brief lives on earth:

If we strive here in this world, it is for the sake of what awaits us there. We work here and are rewarded there. Bliss awaits everyone there in accordance with his capacity, so long as he does not squander his share. Consequently it is impossible that such eternal kingship should concentrate exclusively on these wretched transient beings.⁴⁸

This final sentence is telling. By its very definition, eternal kingship cannot be contained within the confines of a limited realm such as this, and cannot, as Nursi puts it, 'concentrate exclusively on these wretched transient beings'. The existence of eternal 'palaces of abode', then, must be as much for the sake of eternal kingship as it is for the reward of the transient beings who acknowledge and appreciate it during their stay in the caravanserai of the world.

Now consider this. Millions are spent on the decoration of this caravanserai so that guests should enjoy their one night's stay there, and for their instruction. But the guests see very little of those decorations, look at them for a very short time; briefly tasting the joys of what is offered them, they go on their way without being satiated. But each guest takes a photograph of the objects in the caravanserai by means of his special camera. Also, the servants of that great personage record with great care the conduct of all the guests and preserve the record. You see, too, that he destroys every day most of the valuable decorations and replaces them with fresh decorations for the newly arriving guests. After seeing all this, will any doubt remain that the personage who has constructed this caravanserai on the road has permanent and exalted dwellings, inexhaustible and precious treasures, an uninterrupted flow of great generosity? By means of the generosity displayed in the caravanserai, he intends merely to whet the appetite of his guests for those things he keeps in his immediate presence; to awaken their desire for the gifts he has prepared for them.⁴⁹

An earlier contention was that God 'requires' the existence of the hereafter as much as man does. However, this passage helps us to understand that this 'requirement' is not a need, as it is in the case of man. To say that God 'requires' the hereafter is really to say that the hereafter is a logical concomitant of His being God. In fact, for God there *is* no hereafter, at least not in the way there is for created beings: all that He is, according to Muslim theology, He is timelessly, which means that for Him there is no past, present or future. Indeed, as Nursi says in the above passage, the existence of the caravanserai – i.e. the present, temporal world – is merely a means whereby He whets the appetite of His guests *for those things which he keeps in his immediate presence*. The 'hereafter', then, is hereafter for temporal beings alone; for God, there is neither before nor after. The realm which man will enter after his death is present with God now, and has always been present with him. Indeed, all realms are in God's immediate presence, for pre-eternal and post-eternal sovereignty 'require' boundless, absolute realms in which it may display itself. One may venture the proposition, then, that the 'hereafter', as a logical concomitant of God's absolute sovereignty, is arguably more about God than it is about that which is 'other-than-God'.

Nursi concludes the 'truth' by saying that if one looks upon the state of the caravanserai of this world, a number of principles will be revealed. The first is that the world, like a caravanserai, does not exist for its own sake: it is constructed in order to receive and host a never-ending stream of guests, who arrive and depart continuously. In short, it looks to objectives beyond that of existing for its own sake alone.

The second principle, Nursi says, is that those who stay in the caravanserai are guests, and are there by invitation. Their stay is a temporary one, and if they think otherwise, they will have nothing but regret upon leaving. The adornments of the caravanserai that is the world are not there simply for man's enjoyment, for his stay is not long enough for him to enjoy all that is there to the full. And the more he forms an attachment to the caravanserai, the more painful it will be when he is removed – forcefully – from its confines. Clearly, then, Nursi argues, the beauties and bounties of the world must, as far as man is concerned, be there as much for test and instruction as for mere enjoyment. The fleeting existence of these beauties and bounties must betoken a source in which the perpetual originals of these adornments can be found. The sojourn of man in the caravanserai must, then, be for the sake

of seeking that source. In other words, the bounties and beauties are not 'self-referential' but 'other-indicative': they point to meanings over and above their own selves.

Another principle, Nursi says, is that the ephemeral objects in the world have not been created merely to be annihilated, even though that is how it may appear.

All of these transient objects have not been created for the sake of annihilation, in order to appear briefly and then vanish. The purpose for their creation is rather briefly to be assembled in existence and acquire the desired form, so that these may be noted, their images preserved, their meanings known and their results recorded. This is so that, for example, everlasting spectacles might be wrought for the people of eternity, and that they might serve other purposes in the realm of eternity. You will understand that things have been created for eternity, not for annihilation; and as for apparent annihilation, it has the sense of a completion of duty and a release from service, for every transient thing advances to annihilation with one aspect, but remains eternally with numerous other aspects.

Look, for example, at the flower, a word of God's power; for a short time it smiles and looks at us, and then hides behind the veil of annihilation. It departs just like a word leaving your mouth. But it does so entrusting thousands of its fellows to men's ears. It leaves behind meanings in men's minds as numerous as those minds. The flower, too, expressing its meaning and thus fulfilling its function, goes and departs. But it goes leaving its apparent form in the memory of everything that sees it, its inner essence in every seed. It is as if each memory and seed were a camera to record the adornment of the flower, or a means for its perpetuation. If such be the case with an object at the simplest level of life, it can be readily understood how closely tied to eternity is man, the highest form of life and the possessor of an eternal soul. Again, from the fact that the laws - each resembling a spirit according to which large flowering and fruit-bearing plants are formed and the representations of their forms are preserved and perpetuated in most regular fashion in tiny seeds throughout tempestuous changes - from this fact it can be easily understood how closely tied and related to eternity is the spirit of man, which possesses an extremely exalted and comprehensive nature, and which although clothed in a body, is a conscious and luminous law issuing from the divine command.⁵⁰

The beings which arrive in the temporal world and then depart are created, then, to impart meaning: they have a purpose which transcends mere existence for its own sake. However, while man may be the 'fruit of creation', and while the hereafter may be a requirement of his creational make-up, man should not think that the purposes of Divine creativity are restricted to this world and to the understanding of human beings. Nursi says that all which exists does not exist solely for the sake of man, and that to imagine otherwise is to make the same mistake as the 'people of misguidance', whose utilitarian approach to the world rejects as futile anything which they cannot either understand or take personal benefit from. The purposes for the existence of beings, Nursi says, relate to three categories:

The first and the most exalted pertains to the Creator. It consists of presenting to the gaze of the Pre-Eternal Witness the bejewelled and miraculous wonders He has affixed to the object in question, as if in a military parade. To live for a fleeting second is enough to attain that glance. Indeed, the potentiality and intent for existence is enough, without ever

emerging into life. This purpose is fully realized, for example, by delicate creatures that vanish swiftly and by seeds and kernels, each a work of art, that never come to life, that is, never bear fruit or flower. They all remain untouched by vanity and purposelessness. Thus the first purpose of all things is to proclaim, by means of their life and existence, the miracles of power and the traces of artistry of the Maker and display them to the gaze of the Glorious Monarch.⁵¹

The primary purpose of existence, then, is to fulfil God's own desire to witness His own attributes of perfection. Unlike that which is 'other-than-God', Divine existence is of necessity 'self-referential': it cannot be 'other-indicative' because in fact there is no 'other' to indicate. The existence of 'other-than-God' – the 'mirrors' that are created beings – is there solely for God to observe His own perfections. There must be as many mirrors in existence as there are aspects of the Divine capable of being witnessed, and thus Divine artistry unfolds in an infinite number of ways and through an infinite number of realms, many of which are both physically and rationally inaccessible to man. In outlining this primary purpose of existence, Nursi provides an answer to those who question the relevance to man of objects of creation that he may never be able to witness personally, such as celestial phenomena which are thousands of light years away, or to those who criticise what they believe to be examples of creational superfluity, such as the production of millions of spores from a single mushroom, most of which will fail to germinate, or the release of around three million sperms into the womb to vie for the attention of a single egg. The fact that such acts appear wasteful and futile is, according to Nursi's argument, because their *primary* purpose is not taken into account. If man – and unregenerate man in particular – can see no purpose in certain phenomena, this does not mean that purpose is lacking.

The second purpose of all existence and the result of all being pertains to conscious creation. Everything is like a truth-displaying missive, an artistic poem or a wise word of the Glorious Maker, offered to the gaze of angels and jinn, of men and animals, and desiring to be read by them. It is an object for the contemplation and instruction of every conscious being that looks upon it.⁵²

The second purpose does not need much elaboration, for it is a constant theme in Nursi's cosmological discourse: all things which exist point to meanings beyond themselves and are there to be read as signs and indications of the One Who has created them.

The third purpose of existence, Nursi says, pertains to the soul of the thing itself, and consists of what he calls 'minor consequences such as the experience of pleasure and joy, and living with some degree of permanence and comfort'. There is, then, an aspect of all created beings which is in a sense 'self-referential', although clearly to 'read' an entity as being solely thus would be to misread it completely. He explains this by way of a brief allegory:

If we consider the purpose of a servant employed as a steersman on some royal ship, we see that only one hundredth of that purpose relates to the steersman himself - i.e., the wage he receives; ninety-nine hundredths of the purpose relate to the king who owns the ship.⁵³

A similar relation exists, says Nursi, between the purpose of thing insofar as it is related to its own self and the purpose insofar as it is related to its Maker.

In the light of this multiplicity of purposes we can now explain the ultimate compatibility between divine wisdom and economy on the one hand, and divine liberality and generosity - in fact, infinite generosity - on the other hand, even though they appear to be opposites and contradictory. In the individual purposes of things, liberality and generosity predominate, and the name of Most Generous is manifested. From the point of view of individual purpose, fruits and grains are indeed beyond computation, and they demonstrate infinite generosity. But in universal purposes, wisdom predominates, and the name of All-Wise is manifested. However many purposes a tree has, each of its fruits contains that many purposes, and these can be divided into the three categories we have established. Their universal purposes demonstrate an infinite wisdom and economy. Infinite wisdom and infinite generosity and liberality are thus combined, despite their apparent opposition. For example, one of the purposes for raising an army is the maintenance of order. Whatever troops are available for the purpose will suffice or be more than enough. But the whole army will be barely enough for other purposes such as protecting the national frontiers and repelling enemies; its size will be in perfect balance with utter wisdom. Thus the wisdom of the state will be joined to its splendour, and it can be said that there is no excess in the army.⁵⁴

Nursi's exposition of these different purposes is designed primarily to disabuse man of the notion that the creation and annihilation of countless beings, merely as a means of alerting man to the reality of the hereafter, admits of no wastefulness or excess, for there are reasons for the creation of beings which do not pertain to man alone.

In his seventh 'truth', Nursi conceptualises the hereafter with the help of the attributes of Divine protection (*ḥifẓ*) and preservation (*ḥafīẓiyya*), and through the manifestation of the Divine names of 'Preserver' (*ḥafīẓ*) and 'Guardian' (*raqīb*). He begins by juxtaposing 'preservation' with 'balance', and concluding that since God creates everything with the purpose of preserving its equilibrium, it is unthinkable that he would not extend his attribute of preservation to the deeds of men.

Through his attribute of 'Preserver', God protects all things with the utmost balance and order and keeps an account of every being in creation. Is it possible, then, that One Who preserves things in this way should permit the deeds of man, who is Divine vicegerent and bearer of the 'Trust', not to be recorded and weighed in the scales of justice? Is it possible that He would allow man's deeds to go unrewarded or unpunished? Such a thing is inconceivable.⁵⁵

That preservation and safeguarding are concomitants of God's dominical activity is reflected, Nursi argues, in the workings of the cosmos itself, and particularly in animate beings, each of which includes in its creational make-up records of its own past and future:

Do you not see that all the flowers and fruits of the vast spring, the records of their deeds in appropriate form, the laws of their formation, and the images of their forms are all inscribed into the finite space of a minute seed and are there preserved? The following spring, their record of deeds is set forth in a form of accounting appropriate to them, and another vast world of spring is brought forth with the utmost order and wisdom. This demonstrates the powerful comprehensiveness with which God's attribute of Preserver exercises itself. Given that the results of such transient and insignificant things are

preserved, is it at all possible that men's deeds, which yield important fruits in the world of the unseen, the world of the hereafter and the world of spirits should not be guarded and preserved, should not be recorded as a matter of importance? It is inconceivable.⁵⁶

What Nursi is asking is this: if each seed contains the information needed for every stage of the development of the flower or tree into which, scroll-like, it will eventually unfurl, does this not demonstrate that there are attributes of preservation and accounting at work in the dynamics of its development? A seed contains the record of what it will become in the future, and what it becomes in the future also contains within it a record of future seeds that will be produced as a result. Such acts of preservation and account keeping surely indicate, Nursi argues, that the deeds of men will be similarly preserved by God, and that the result of those deeds will be revealed to man at some point in the future.

Yes, the Being that administers this cosmos preserves all things in order and balance. Order and balance are manifestations of knowledge and wisdom, of will and power. For we see that the substance of every created object is fashioned in a well-ordered and symmetrical fashion. Not only is each of the forms it adopts throughout its life well-ordered, but the totality of these forms is also marked by the same orderliness. We see, too, that the Glorious Preserver preserves many forms of all things in the memory of man, long after those things have performed their function and departed from the manifest world. Man's memory thus resembles a kind of 'preserved tablet'. He also writes and inscribes a brief history of a tree, for example, in a seed, which is like the result and outcome of the whole. The memory of man, the fruit of the tree, the kernel of the fruit, the seed of the flower - all of these demonstrate the universality and comprehensiveness of the law of preservation.⁵⁷

The existence in man of the faculty of memory provides further evidence for Nursi that the attribute of preservation, which pervades all things, constitutes firm evidence of a realm beyond this world where all that has been preserved will be revealed. Moreover, this preservation will be precise: in the words of the Quran, neither an atom's weight of good nor an atom's weight of evil will go unrecorded or unrequited.

God pays great attention to the function of sovereignty and lavishes extreme care on the dominicality of kingship. Thus He records, or causes to be recorded, the pettiest of happenings, the smallest of services, and preserves in numerous things the form of everything that happens in His realm. This attribute of Preserver indicates that an important register of deeds will be subjected to a precise examination and weighing: the records of men's deeds will stand revealed.

Man has been ennobled by God with Divine vicegerency and the 'Trust', so that as a witness to the universality of God's dominicality he should proclaim Divine unity in the realm of multiplicity. Is it at all possible that he should be tasked with this and go to his grave to sleep peacefully without ever being awakened to give an account of his deeds? Is it possible that he will be allowed to slumber forever without being taken to the plain of resurrection and tried at the Supreme Tribunal? Such a thing is surely inconceivable.⁵⁸

The eighth 'truth' looks at the notion of Divine promise (*wa'ad*) and threat (*wa'id*), and the manifestation of the Divine names 'the Beautiful' (*jamil*) and 'the Glorious' (*jahlil*).

The promise of reward and the threat of punishment have been proclaimed unanimously by all the prophets and saints. Is it at all likely, then, that the One Who gave this promise and made this threat should prove unfaithful to His word and thus display both weakness and ignorance? For that which is implied by His promise and threat is not at all difficult for His power to fulfil; indeed, it is simple. It is as easy for Him as bringing back next spring the countless beings of last spring. Furthermore, it is our need, the need of all beings, His own need and the requirement of His dominical sovereignty that He should fulfil His promise. For Him to break His promise would be contrary to the dignity of His power and the comprehensiveness of His knowledge. For the breaking of a promise can arise only from ignorance or impotence.⁵⁹

Having established in previous 'truths' the compassion, mercy, justice, wisdom, generosity and beauty of the Creator, Nursi's assertion in the eight 'truth' is that the breaking of a promise or the failure to carry out a threat signify both mendacity and weakness, neither of which can be predicated of a God who is in possession of attributes of perfection such as those mentioned. Indeed, Nursi has no qualms at all about asserting the fact that fidelity to promise is actually *required* of God by virtue of His own glory (*jalāl*) and dominical sovereignty (*salṭanat-i rubūbiyya*). In other words, while God is not compelled by anything 'other-than-God' to keep His promise, He is in a sense compelled by the totality of His own attributes of perfection to act in a manner that is in keeping with His divinity.⁶⁰

Do those of you who deny the promise and the threat know how foolish a crime you are committing with your rejection and unbelief? Paying heed to your own duplicitous whims, your delirious intellect, your deceptive soul, you reject as a liar One Who in no way could ever break His promise and Whose truthfulness and veracity are attested by all visible matters and objects! Despite your infinite pettiness, you are committing a crime of infinitely great proportions. Without doubt you deserve great and eternal punishment. You are like a traveller who closes his eyes to the sunlight and looks instead at the fantasy in his own mind. His imagination wishes to illumine the awesome path in front of him with the light proceeding from the lamp of his mind, which in reality is no stronger than a glow-worm. Whatever has been promised by God Almighty, Whose veracious words are these beings we see and Whose truthful, eloquent signs are the workings of the cosmos, He will of a surety fulfil. He will establish a Supreme Tribunal and give people that which their actions have earned, be it bliss or punishment.⁶¹

To countenance the notion that God would break a promise and fail to carry out a threat is to doubt Divine dignity and truth, which amounts to unbelief and is deserving of eternal punishment. On numerous occasions throughout the *Risale*, Nursi condemns unbelief as a crime not against God but against the totality of beings in creation, whose purpose it is to reflect the Divine attributes and manifest the purpose of Divine creativity, which is the eternal display of those attributes in a permanent realm beyond the confines of this transient world. To deny God does not harm God, Nursi avers; rather, it harms the denier himself and it declares the existence of all other beings to be self-referential and thus ultimately meaningless. In short, the denier deems the whole of creation to be futile, and in so doing condemns his own soul to perdition.⁶²

The bestowal of life and death (*iḥyā wa imāta*) comprises Nursi's ninth 'truth', together with the Divine names 'Eternally Living' (*ḥayy*), 'Self-Subsistent' (*qayyūm*), 'Giver of life' (*muḥyi*) and 'Giver of death' (*mumīt*). In this truth, Nursi turns once more to the evidences of resurrection he believes are present in creation, particularly in the phenomenon of spring.

Every spring, God gives life to this vast dead and dry earth, demonstrating His power by deploying hundreds of thousands of different forms of creation, each of them no less remarkable than man. In this deployment He demonstrates His all-embracing knowledge by the numberless distinctions and differentiations He makes in the complex intermingling of all of those forms. He displays the splendor of His dominicality by causing all of the entities in the cosmos to collaborate with one another, to revolve within the circle of His command and will, to aid one another and be submitted to Him.

Thus in the gathering that takes place every spring we see that in the course of five or six days, hundreds of thousands of different kinds of animal and plant are first gathered together and then dispersed. The roots of all the trees and plants, as well as some animals, are revived and restored exactly as they were. The other animals are recreated in a form so similar as to be almost identical. The seeds which appear, in their outward form, to be so close to each other nonetheless in the course of six days or six weeks become distinct and differentiated from each other, and then with extreme speed, ease and facility are brought to life in the utmost order and equilibrium. Indeed, the Almighty Disposer of this world's affairs creates in every century, every year and every day, on the narrow and transient face of the globe, numerous signs, examples and indications of the Supreme Gathering and the Plain of Resurrection.⁶³

Given all of this, Nursi says, it is inconceivable that an omnipotent, omniscient, wise and compassionate Creator would or could not bring about a 'supreme resurrection' which would usher in the hereafter. Given that He gathers together hundreds of thousands of life forms each spring on the 'plain of resurrection' that is the surface of the earth, why would He be unable to bring back to life and gather together all of those who have sojourned on the earth and departed?

Invoking another analogy, Nursi asks his readers to imagine some incredibly gifted copyist who is able to write out in a single hour, on a single sheet of paper, the barely legible, half-obliterated letters of three hundred thousand books, but without any error, omission or defect and in a perfectly legible form. If someone were to claim that this copyist was able to write out again from memory a book that he had transcribed, but the ink of which had faded and become illegible owing to its having fallen in a river, would anyone seriously be able to doubt his ability to do so?

If you have understood this, now look further and see how the Pre-Eternal Designer turns over in front of our eyes the white page of winter and opens the green pages of spring and summer. Then He inscribes on the page of the earth's surface, with the pen of power and destiny, in the most beautiful form, more than three hundred thousand species of creation. Not one encroaches upon another. He writes them all together, but none blocks the path of another. In their formation and shape, each is kept separate from the other without any confusion. There is no error in the writing. That Wise and Preserving

One, Who preserves and inserts the spirit of a great tree in the smallest seed, no bigger than a dot - is it permissible even to ask how He preserves the spirits of those who die?⁶⁴

To 'write' man once - at his origination - and to 'rewrite' him after death in order to bring him back to life is not a problem for God, Nursi argues. Indeed, how could it be, given that He has been producing numerous examples of His power to resurrect since the beginning of time?

You can, moreover, behold with your own eyes, the numerous designs made by God as signs, similes and indications of resurrection, designs placed by Him in every age and epoch of the world, in the alternation of day and night, even in the appearance and disappearance of clouds in the sky. If you imagine yourself to have been living a thousand years ago, and then compare with each other the two wings of time that are the past and the future, then you will behold examples of the gathering and indications of resurrection as numerous as the centuries and days. If, then, after witnessing so many similes and indications, you regard corporeal resurrection as improbable and rationally unacceptable, know your behaviour to be pure lunacy.

See what the Supreme Decree says concerning the truth we are discussing: *Look upon the signs of God's mercy, and see how He restores life to the earth after its death. Verily He it is Who shall bring to life the dead, and He is powerful over all things.*^{65 66}

In his tenth 'truth', Nursi approaches the hereafter from the perspective of Divine wisdom (*ḥikma*), grace (*ināya*), mercy (*raḥma*) and justice (*ʿadl*), together with the Divine names of 'All-Wise' (*ḥakīm*), 'Generous' (*karīm*), 'Just' (*ʿādil*) and 'Merciful' (*raḥīm*). The opening argument for the existence of an everlasting realm hinges on the contention that absolute attributes of perfection need more than the limited abode of this world in order to display themselves.

Although this world is an impermanent caravanserai and a transient place of testing, it is also a gallery which displays manifest wisdom, evident grace, overwhelming justice and comprehensive mercy. Is it possible that, with the inevitable annihilation of this temporary realm, those attributes of perfection should disappear along with it and go to nothingness? Is it at all possible that in the realm of the Glorious Possessor of all Dominion, in the worlds of the seen and the unseen, that there should not exist permanent abodes with eternal inhabitants to witness the truths of wisdom, grace, mercy and justice in their eternal, absolute forms, and not just as fleeting shadows? Such a thing is inconceivable.⁶⁷

Nursi then shifts his focus to man, the locus of manifestation of the Divine names, whose eternal existence is required by virtue of his being the most comprehensive mirror of His creator's attributes.

The All-Wise Creator chooses man from among all of His creation to receive His direct and universal address. He makes man a comprehensive mirror held up to His attributes, permitting Him to weigh, taste and become acquainted with all the contents of His treasure trove of mercy. He makes Himself known to man with all of His names, loving him and making Himself beloved of him. Is it possible that He would do all of this and then fail to despatch man to an eternal realm, there to settle him in everlasting peace and felicity? Such a thing is inconceivable.

Is it at all reasonable that He should impose on every being, even the seed, a task as heavy as a tree, mount in it instances of His wisdom as numerous as the flowers, and beneficial aspects as numerous as the fruits, but assign to that task, to those instances of His wisdom and those beneficial aspects, a purpose pertaining only to this world, one as small as a seed? Is it reasonable to suppose that the only purpose of existence is the life of this world, which is less valuable than a grain of mustard-seed? Is it possible that He should not make of beings seeds for the world of meaning and a tillage for the realm of the hereafter, for them to yield therein their true and worthy results? Is it possible that He should permit such significant alternations to remain without purpose, to be empty and futile? Is it reasonable to think that He would not turn their faces towards the world of meaning and the hereafter, so that they might there reveal their true purposes and fitting results? No, all of this is inconceivable.⁶⁸

As a comprehensive mirror held up to all of the Divine names and vicegerent *in potentia* of God on earth, man is connected creationally to all other beings in the cosmos, and points to countless meanings beyond those which pertain solely to his own brief and fleeting earthly life. In other words, man is symbolic of something far greater than his own self. Since he is the locus of manifestation of the names of God, and is able to reflect them consciously, his existence is by default one which possesses 'other-indicativeness' (*ma'nā-i ḥarfī*): every aspect of his creational make-up indicates and exhibits the One who brought him into being. Given this, to cut short human existence at the point of earthly death and to deprive man of eternal life would be to tantamount to saying that he possesses only 'self-referentiality' (*ma'nā-i ismī*), and that his creational make-up points solely to his own self and nothing more. For Nursi, this is inconceivable:

For is it at all possible that by thus causing things to controvert their own nature He should present His own veracious Names - All-Wise, Generous, Just, Merciful - as being characterized by their opposites? Is it possible that He should deny the true essences of all those beings which indicate His wisdom and generosity, His justice and mercy, that He should reject the testimony of all creatures, and that He should negate the indications made by all things?

Again, is it at all possible that God Who proves and shows Himself to be a possessor of absolute wisdom, by attaching to every animate being, or even to every member like the tongue, indeed to every creature, instances of His wisdom and sources of benefit as numerous as the results and the fruits He has attached to a tree - is it at all possible that He should fail to bestow of Himself the greatest of all instances of His wisdom, the most significant of all sources of benefit, the most necessary of all results, that which makes His wisdom into wisdom, His blessings into blessings, His mercy into mercy, the source and aim of all of His wisdom, bounty, mercy and beneficence - eternity, the meeting with Him in the hereafter and everlasting bliss?⁶⁹

To create man as a being whose face is turned 'towards the world of meaning', but then to deny that meaning by obliterating him at the end of his earthly life and denying him eternal existence would, Nursi argues, render all Divine acts utterly futile. In this case, God would become like a master builder who constructs a fabulous palace, each stone of which contains thousands of intricate calligraphic inscriptions, and each room of which is home to

thousands of precious items and objects of inestimable value, but then fails to build a roof over it, so that when the rains come, everything in the palace is ruined. Such foolishness cannot be predicated of God, Nursi argues, for from absolute goodness, only absolute goodness can issue forth; One Who is possessed of absolute wisdom cannot effect things which are totally devoid of purpose.

If, to suppose the impossible, there were no permanent abodes, lofty mansions, everlasting stations and eternal worlds, with their eternal residents, God's joyous servants, in the realm of that Eternal Monarch Who disposes all affairs and Who constantly is changing the caravanserai and its inmates, then it would be necessary to reject the true essences of wisdom, justice, beneficence and compassion, those four powerful and universal spiritual elements that are like light, air, water and earth, and to deny their existence, even though they are as apparent as that of the external elements. For it is plain that this impermanent world and its contents cannot be a complete manifestation of their true essences. If there is no other place, somewhere else, where they can be manifested fully, it then becomes necessary, with a lunacy like that of the man who denies the existence of the sun even though he sees its light filling the day, to deny the wisdom that we can see in everything in front of our eyes; to deny the beneficence that we can observe in our own souls and in most other things; to deny the justice the signs of which appear so strongly; and to deny the compassion we see everywhere in operation. It follows in turn that we must regard as a foolish prankster, a treacherous tyrant, the one from whom proceed all the wise processes, the generous deeds and the merciful gifts we perceive in the universe. God forbid that this should be so; it is a totally impossible reversal of the truth. Even the foolish sophists, who denied the existence of everything and even that of their own selves, would not readily contemplate such a proposition.⁷⁰

Here Nursi is reiterating the point he made in his 'second truth' concerning mercy, but broadening it to include wisdom, justice, beneficence and compassion – all of which would lose their meaning completely if their existence were confined to this fleeting world alone. For to create man with the desire for immortality, only to deny him everlasting life when he leaves this world can in no way accord with any of these four attributes: it is indicative neither of wisdom nor of justice, and it is the antithesis of beneficence and compassion. If, then, there is no hereafter, Nursi argues, those attributes will be add up to nothing more than a sham – a sick joke without a punch line, executed by a tyrannical cosmic trickster. To countenance such a possibility, Nursi says, is clearly inconceivable.

Since the world exists, and within this world wisdom, beneficence, compassion and justice also exist, with their numerous evidences, of a certainty the hereafter also exists, just as surely as does this world. Since one aspect of everything in this world is turned to that world and is proceeding toward it, to deny that world would be denying this world with all it contains. Just as the allotted hour and the grave await man, so too do Paradise and Hell, anxiously watching for his arrival.⁷¹

The eleventh 'truth' concerns humanity (*insāniyya*) itself, together with the Divine name of 'Truth' (*ḥaqq*). Here, Nursi focuses explicitly on the status that humankind has as the choicest fruit of Divine creativity.

Man has been created as the most significant of God's servants and the most thoughtful recipient of His glorious address. Man is the most comprehensive mirror held up to the manifestation of the Divine names; he is the most beautiful miracle of Divine power, created in the fairest of forms. Man has been taught all of the Divine names in order that he may assess and perceive the contents of God's treasure troves of mercy. God has made man an investigator of secrets, equipped more than any other creature with instruments to measure and gauge. And yet He has also made man the most needy of creatures with respect to His endless bounties; He has made him the most desirous of immortality and the most fearful of annihilation. He has made him sublime in disposition, in the most elevated of forms and characters, yet He has also made him the most delicate, the poorest and neediest of animals, and the most wretched and subject to pain in this worldly life. Given that God has done all of this with man, is it conceivable that He would not send him to the eternal realm for which he is suited, and for which he longs more than anything else? Is it possible that He should thus negate the whole essence of humanity, act in a manner totally contrary to His own veracity, and perform an act of injustice that the eye of truth must deem ugly?⁷²

In one sense, man is what Kierkegaard termed a synthesis of beast and angel, but with the potential either to soar higher than the former or to sink lower than the latter.⁷³ The Quran states that

*We have indeed created man in the best of moulds, then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low, - except such as believe and do righteous deeds: For they shall have a reward unfailing.*⁷⁴

Although man is existentially impotent, he is, *in potentia*, vicegerent of God and therefore capable of manifesting consciously all of the Divine names. Given, then, that he is what Nursi calls a 'representation in miniature of His cosmic processes', why would God, Who has preferred man over the angels, bestow all of this on man and yet withhold from him eternity, which is the 'purpose, result and fruit' of man's duties on earth? The Quran asserts that only those who fail to believe and perform deeds of righteousness will be cast down to the 'lowest of the low'. Is it possible, then, Nursi asks, that God should make no distinction and abase all human souls without exception? This would be inconceivable, he argues, for it would transform the human intellect, which is a tool given by God in order for man to attain happiness, into a grotesque instrument of torture. For God to bestow on man the means whereby he is able to surpass the level of angels and concretise his desires for immortality, only to withhold eternity from him and consign him instead to nothingness would, Nursi argues, be to act in total contradiction to His absolute wisdom and mercy. Man's creation is such that he has capacities, drives, desires and potentialities that cannot possibly be realised to their full extent in one brief lifetime on earth:

The subtleties inscribed in the book of man's heart, the senses written down in the notebook of his intellect, the equipment contained in his essential character, are all turned towards Eternal Bliss; they have been given to man and fashioned in accordance with this ultimate goal.

For example, if one servant and illustrator of the intellect called "the imaginative power," is told that "you can have a million years of life and rule over the world, but in the end you shall become nothing," it will react with sorrow instead of pleasure, unless

deceived by vain fancy and the interference of the soul. The greatest of transient things cannot, then, satisfy even the smallest faculty of man.

It is, then, this disposition of man - his desires extending to eternity, his thoughts that embrace all of creation and his wishes that embrace the different varieties of eternal bliss-that demonstrates he has been created for eternity and will indeed proceed to eternity. This world is merely a temporary stopping place, a waiting-room for the hereafter.⁷⁵

Man is such, Nursi argues, that he is created specifically for eternal life. That he should not reach the everlasting realm is, therefore, inconceivable.

Nursi's twelfth and final 'truth' views the existence of the hereafter from the perspective of the Prophetic mission (*risāla*) and revelation (*tanzīl*), and is basically a form of the 'argument from authority':

Is it at all possible that errant doubts, no stronger than the wing of a fly, could close the path to the hereafter and the gate to Paradise that have been definitively opened by the Most Noble Messenger (PBWH), with all of his might, relying upon the power of his thousand certified miracles as well as the thousands of decisive verses of the All-Wise Quran, a book miraculous in forty different ways - that Messenger whose words are affirmed by all of the other prophets, relying upon their own miracles, whose claim is affirmed by all of the saints, relying upon their visionary and charismatic experiences, and to whose veracity all of the purified scholars bear witness, relying upon their investigations of truth?⁷⁶

Nursi has already expressed in an earlier 'truth' the idea that the very existence of Muhammad himself, for whom the whole of the cosmos was created, is enough to guarantee the existence of an eternal realm in the hereafter. Now, in his final 'truth', he adduces not only the evidentiary miracles of the Prophet and the teachings of the Quran but also the revelations vouchsafed to countless other prophets before him, together with their various miracles, as support for his argument that the existence of an eternal realm is not to be doubted.

Although Nursi discusses only twelve 'truths', he assures his readers that the 'proofs of resurrection' are not limited only to these. The Quran alone, he says, indicates thousands of other aspects of the issue as well, with each aspect being an indication that this present, transient realm will be transformed eventually into an eternal one. Nor, he says, should the reader imagine that the Divine names which necessitate the existence of resurrection and the hereafter are only those mentioned in his brief treatise, for in reality "all of the Divine names manifest in the ordering of the cosmos logically require the existence of resurrection, and indeed make it imperative."⁷⁷

Conclusion

Nursi's discourse on life after death, crystallised in his treatise *On Resurrection and the Hereafter*, uses extended allegory and a number of well-crafted theological arguments in what, I venture, is a sustained attempt to make the non-rational reasonable. The contours of his arguments follow those proffered by the Quran and his methodology is more or less identical. The Quran itself approaches the issue of the hereafter as one which is acceptable

to human reason but clearly not provable empirically, and Nursi does exactly the same. Ever the realist, Nursi consoles those of his readers for whom his arguments with regard to the hereafter may appear unfathomable at first:

Dear readers, do not say, "Why am I unable to understand immediately this subject in all its details?" and do not be saddened by your failure to grasp it completely. For even a master of philosophy such as Ibn Sina said that "Resurrection cannot be understood by rational criteria." His judgement was that we must believe in resurrection, but reason cannot aid our belief. Similarly, all the scholars of Islam unanimously have held that resurrection rests entirely on traditional proofs; it cannot be rationally examined. Naturally, so profound, and at the same time, so exalted a path cannot suddenly become a public highway for the exercise of the reason. But we would offer a thousand thanks that the Merciful Creator has bestowed upon us this much of the path, by means of the effulgence of the All-Wise Quran and His own mercy, in an age when belief by imitation is past and meek acceptance has disappeared. For the amount vouchsafed to each of us is enough for the salvation of our faith. Being content with the amount that we have been able to understand, we should reread the treatise and seek to increase our comprehension.⁷⁸