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# Integrating Spiritual Resilience in Trauma Care: An Islamic Perspective Based on Said Nursi's Teachings

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# INTEGRATING SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE IN TRAUMA CARE: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE BASED ON SAID NURSI'S TEACHINGS

Erol Y. Dincer\*

**Abstract:** This article explores how Said Nursi's teachings on compassion, connection, and social support assist Muslims with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in cultivating safety and regulating physiological arousal. As trauma becomes more prevalent globally, Muslims have been significantly impacted. While Nursi's contributions to psychological treatments, particularly spiritual resilience, have been acknowledged, further investigation of their relevance to trauma care is warranted. This article analyses Nursi's interpretation of compassion, emphasising how belief in God's All-Compassionate nature promotes a healthier relationship with oneself and the world. It explores Nursi's concept of connection, viewing the universe as interconnected, fostering unity with God, humanity, and the universe, potentially alleviating loneliness. Lastly, it examines Nursi's perspective on social support, rooted in the Qur'anic principle of mutual assistance, which helps individuals build a sense of safety and regulate physiological arousal through communal aid. Using a grounded-theoretical qualitative methodology, drawing on the Qur'an, Sunnah, *Risale-i Nur*, and contemporary research, this article argues that Nursi's teachings enhance trauma care by addressing social, psychological, and spiritual needs and offering a more comprehensive approach to healing.

**Keywords:** *Said Nursi, trauma care, spiritual resilience, compassion and connection, social support, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

## INTRODUCTION

Within the human condition, trauma is a vast and complex experience.<sup>1</sup> The concept of psychological trauma has evolved throughout the modern era based on psychodynamics and

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan T. Reuther, "Philosophical and Existential Perspectives on Trauma," in *The APA Handbook of Trauma Psychology*, ed. Steven Gold, vol. 1 (American Psychological Association, 2017), 528.

behaviourism.<sup>2</sup> Currently, the American Psychological Association defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, crime, natural disaster, physical or emotional abuse, neglect, experiencing or witnessing violence, death of a loved one, war, and more.”<sup>3</sup> Psychological studies define trauma in two ways: as high-magnitude stressors,<sup>4</sup> involving horrific or life-threatening events causing significant distress, and as the cognitive, behavioural, and spiritual pathological effects that follow such events,<sup>5</sup> highlighting its global impact.

Trauma has become ubiquitous throughout the world. According to the WHO World Mental Health Survey, 70.4% of the global population has experienced a traumatic event.<sup>6</sup> Between 1989 and 2019, one-sixth of the world’s population experienced war in their place of residence.<sup>7</sup> As reported by the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, due to war, persecution, natural disasters, or any event that extremely disrupts public order, by the end of 2020, 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced.<sup>8</sup> In only ten years, the number of refugees has increased by almost 150% from 10 million in 2010 to 24.5 million in 2020.<sup>9</sup> This is not to take away from the numerous domestic violence issues, violent crimes, fraudulent crimes, health diagnoses, accidents, and other potentially traumatic events that are also a part of the growing pandemic of human psychological trauma. Unfortunately, the global Muslim community is not immune to this.

In the 15 years between 2001 and 2015, trauma being studied in Muslim mental health research has been a top priority.<sup>10</sup> Concerning the UNHCR report, Muslims constitute one of the largest growing displaced groups due to conflict.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, a 2016 survey by the National Women’s Life Experience Survey in Indonesia reported that 18.3% of Muslim married women experienced domestic violence.<sup>12</sup> In the USA, it is estimated that between

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<sup>2</sup> Constance J. Dalenberg, Elizabeth Straus, and Eve B. Carlson, “Defining Trauma,” in *The APA Handbook of Trauma Psychology*, ed. Steven Gold, vol. 1 (American Psychological Association, 2017), 15.

<sup>3</sup> “Trauma,” American Psychological Association, accessed May 25, 2024, <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma/>.

<sup>4</sup> Dalenberg, Straus, and Carlson, “Defining Trauma,” 22.

<sup>5</sup> Reuther, “Philosophical and Existential Perspectives on Trauma,” 527.

<sup>6</sup> K. C. Koenen et al., “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in the World Mental Health Surveys,” *Psychological Medicine* 47, no. 13 (2017): 2274, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0033291717000708>.

<sup>7</sup> Thole H. Hoppen et al., “Global Burden of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Major Depression in Countries Affected by War between 1989 and 2019: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *BMJ Global Health* 6, no. 7 (2021), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2021-006303>.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2020* (UNHCR, 2020), 4, <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unherstats/60b638e37/global-trends-forced-displacement-2020.html>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> H. H. Altalib et al., “Mapping Global Muslim Mental Health Research: Analysis of Trends in the English Literature from 2000 to 2015,” *Global Mental Health* 6 (2019), Table 1, <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2019.3>.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob A. Bentley et al., “Islamic Trauma Healing: Integrating Faith and Empirically Supported Principles in a Community-Based Program,” *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice* 28, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2020.10.005>, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Rina Antasari, “Islam and Domestic Violence between Husbands and Wives: Indonesian Social and Cultural Perceptions,” *Islamic Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2021): 304.

10% to 30% of Muslim spouses report domestic violence.<sup>13</sup> In natural disasters like the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, 48% of Muslim Indonesian children experienced high levels of PTSD.<sup>14</sup> The DSM-5 explains that PTSD includes anyone who develops adverse cognitive, behavioural, emotional, and physiological symptoms due to a traumatic event.<sup>15</sup> Typically, traumatic events overlap with multiple stressors like poverty, poor health services, and educational opportunities, exacerbating the situation.

Even though there are many studies on trauma in the Muslim world, trauma treatment care needs more research. Currently, there are no Islamically focused PTSD interventions.<sup>16</sup> One study, focusing on a Somalian Muslim community, integrated an ‘Islamic Trauma Healing’ model.<sup>17</sup> However, this was a short six-week community programme only implemented in one country. The programme’s brief timeframe may hinder clients from achieving full psychological and spiritual healing, as some may require longer-term care despite positive outcomes in short-term trauma treatment studies.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the programme is run by non-professionals with only two days of training, which facilitates easy transfer of knowledge but may limit support for PTSD clients needing specialised care. Lastly, the study’s applicability to other Muslim communities remains uncertain.<sup>19</sup> For these reasons, further research in Islamic trauma care is necessary.

This article analyses spiritual resilience according to Said Nursi’s work. It begins with a discussion of literature on trauma, Islamic psychology, and Nursi’s contributions. Then it briefly reviews the theoretical framework and methodology. Afterwards, it examines Nursi’s works, the *Risale-i Nur*, in relation to compassion, connection, and social support. In doing this, it explores how Nursi’s work integrates Islamic spirituality and reflects his life experiences. The article then analyses how his teachings can be applied in modern trauma care, concluding with recommendations for addressing limitations and directions for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

When examining trauma, it is important to define what we are addressing. Bessel van der Kolk explains that “trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also

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<sup>13</sup> Rafia M. Hamid, “Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities,” in *Religion and Men’s Violence Against Women*, ed. Andy Johnson (Springer, 2015), 319, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-2266-6\\_20](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-2266-6_20).

<sup>14</sup> Katie S. Dawson et al., “Predictors of Chronic Posttraumatic Response in Muslim Children Following Natural Disaster,” *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 6, no. 5 (2014): 581, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037140>.

<sup>15</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, 5th ed. (American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 274-76.

<sup>16</sup> Lori A. Zoellner et al., “Reaching the Unreached: Bridging Islam and Science to Treat the Mental Wounds of War,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 12 (2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.599293>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bentley et al., “Islamic Trauma Healing,” 188.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body.”<sup>20</sup> These imprints are not simply in the past but become a framework for how an individual continues to survive in the present. Building on van der Kolk, Maté and Maté claim that traumatic events cause a fundamental disconnect from oneself, the world around them, and one’s spirituality, resulting in an existential schism.<sup>21</sup> However, while Western frameworks of psychology focus mainly on the physiological, cognitive, and emotional aspects of trauma, they often overlook the spiritual and moral dimensions.

Islamic psychology bridges this gap by creating a more comprehensive paradigm integrating spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing. This aligns with Skinner’s<sup>22</sup> and Keshavarzi and Ali’s<sup>23</sup> portrayal of how mental wellbeing in Islam is based on a holistic approach, incorporating physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. Collectively, these studies support a framework of trauma care enhancing psychological resilience through the contribution of a spiritual and moral model. Building on this foundation, Said Nursi, a 20<sup>th</sup> century scholar, presented a holistic perspective on human life and society, viewing Islamic faith as a remedy for adversity. Although current research has outlined a framework for spiritual resilience based on the *Risale-i Nur*,<sup>24</sup> this study extends previous research by integrating Nursi’s insights with contemporary trauma theory and PTSD-focused clinical models. Nursi’s observations of global upheaval are compiled in the *Risale-i Nur*, which broadens Islamic perspectives to inform modern trauma care.

Modern trauma treatment focuses on two main concepts: establishing a sense of safety and regulating physiological arousal. Van der Kolk emphasises the importance of safety, as terror and safety are incompatible states.<sup>25</sup> For healing to occur, the trauma victim must regain ownership of their body from the traumatic imprint’s hold.<sup>26</sup> Taken together, recovery depends on achieving a sense of acceptance and security, which allows a person to let go of the trauma and fully engage in the present. Herman’s perspective resonates with van der Kolk, illustrating how the core factors of trauma recovery are empowerment of the survivor and restoration of connections.<sup>27</sup> Connecting with oneself begins with regulation of one’s physiological arousal. This involves restoring balance between the rational brain (prefrontal cortex) and emotional brain (reptilian brain and limbic system).<sup>28</sup> When both brains are in

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<sup>20</sup> Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (Penguin Books, 2015), 21.

<sup>21</sup> Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture* (Avery, 2022), 23.

<sup>22</sup> Rasjid Skinner, “An Islamic Approach to Psychology and Mental Health,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 13, no. 6 (2010): 549, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2010.488441>.

<sup>23</sup> Hooman Keshavarzi and Bilal Ali, “Islamic Perspectives on Psychological and Spiritual Well-Being and Treatment,” in *Islamophobia and Psychiatry: Recognition, Prevention, and Treatment*, ed. H. Steven Moffic et al. (Springer Nature, 2019), 43-44.

<sup>24</sup> Raudlotul Firdaus, “The Methodology of Risalah an-Nur in Shaping Spiritual Resilience for Mental Health Development,” *The Journal of Risale-i Nur Studies* 8, no. 2 (2025): 96.

<sup>25</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 212.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>27</sup> Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Basic Books, 2015), 133.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

harmony, an individual can attain self-confidence, feel safe in their body, and manage physiological arousal constructively. Furthermore, Neff explains how self-compassion, mindfulness, and interconnectedness to humanity are positively related to mental wellbeing and psychological healing, particularly through enhancing emotional regulation.<sup>29</sup> These findings highlight the vital role that safety and emotional regulation play in cultivating trauma care based on connection and a compassionate approach. While valuable, this approach risks eliminating the spiritual factor of the human experience or placing spirituality and religion as a secondary component. Islamic psychology, keeping faith and spirituality at the forefront can provide a more balanced approach to integrating religion and spirituality into trauma care.

The concepts of feeling safe and regulating physiological arousal are innate to the Islamic faith, where scholars have long addressed the human condition and how individuals relate to the world around them. For Rassool, achieving this balance in Islamic psychology requires an individual's soul, together with their body, to align with their *fitrah* (natural disposition).<sup>30</sup> To achieve this, one must harmonise with Divine guidance. Skinner adds that aligning one's *fitrah* with Divine guidance brings peace to the heart and mind, enabling people to perform daily obligations and become productive members of society.<sup>31</sup> Nursi, in *The Rays*, builds on the Islamic concept of human nature, expounding on the potential one can attain through a deep, intrinsic faith.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to Islamic psychologists, Nursi uses his personal experiences to draw the reader into an intimate level. By reflecting on his suffering, Nursi conveys how the human being, in essence, yearns for Divine support.<sup>33</sup> Extending this perspective, Mahshid Turner presents Nursi's views on illness, showing that, though initially seen as hardship, adversity, together with faith, can lead to spiritual growth and strengthen one's relationship with God.<sup>34</sup> Despite different emphases, these scholars converge on a consistent theme across Islamic scholarship that aligning a person's physical, cognitive, and spiritual self with Divine guidance is essential to cultivate an inner sense of safety and emotional regulation. Building on this holistic understanding of psychological wellbeing, the Islamic worldview emphasises compassion as a fundamental factor to foster resilience and trauma recovery.

Within the Islamic worldview, compassion is essential. The term derives from the Arabic root *RHM*, and compassion or mercy appears 298 times in the Qur'an.<sup>35</sup> Every chapter in the

<sup>29</sup> Kristin Neff, "Self-Compassion: An Alternative Conceptualization of a Healthy Attitude Toward Oneself," *Self and Identity* 2, no. 2 (2003): 92–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032>.

<sup>30</sup> G. Hussein Rassool, *Islamic Psychology: Human Behaviour and Experience from an Islamic Perspective* (Routledge, 2021), 17–18.

<sup>31</sup> Skinner, "An Islamic Approach to Psychology and Mental Health," 549.

<sup>32</sup> Said Nursi, *The Rays: Reflections on Islamic Belief, Thought, Worship, and Action*, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (Tughra Books, 2010), xviii.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–17.

<sup>34</sup> Mahshid Turner, "Can the Effects of Religion and Spirituality on Both Physical and Mental Health Be Scientifically Measured? An Overview of the Key Sources, with Particular Reference to the Teachings of Said Nursi," *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, no. 6 (2014): 2048–49, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-014-9894-3>.

<sup>35</sup> Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'an* (University of California Press, 1983), 1002–8.

Qur'an, except one, opens with "In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate."<sup>36</sup> Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)<sup>37</sup> taught, "The merciful are shown mercy by Ar-Rahman. Be merciful on the earth, and you will be shown mercy from Who is above the heavens."<sup>38</sup> Imam al-Ghazali (d. 1111) explains that *rahim* (compassion) is a kindness given by God to those seeking help or guidance, allowing them to achieve happiness and success.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) emphasises that, in helping alleviate others' suffering and guiding them toward a better life, humans emulate God as the All-Compassionate.<sup>40</sup> Central to Nursi's framework, compassion stemming from the All-Merciful, All-Compassionate is seen as interconnected throughout creation. Moreover, for Nursi, compassion is best seen in the kindness reflected in the human heart.<sup>41</sup> Nabil et al. present a therapeutic framework based on Nursi's teachings, showing how embracing compassion can aid with psychological wellness.<sup>42</sup>

Neff illustrates how compassion for oneself can be a healing factor for mental wellness. Building on this, Neff explains how self-compassion allows the individual to connect with themselves in a caring manner to alleviate their suffering.<sup>43</sup> These parallel van der Kolk's approach to modern trauma care, where self-compassion creates an internal safe space for the trauma survivor.<sup>44</sup> While Nursi's approach aligns with Neff and van der Kolk, Nursi goes further by including an external safe space through belief in an All-Merciful, All-Compassionate God. He presents the universe as a servant of God, ready to serve humanity's needs with grace.<sup>45</sup> Taken together, modern trauma care, the Islamic emphasis on compassion, and Nursi's approach portray how compassion operates as a psychological and spiritual mechanism supporting recovery, resilience, and connection.

The concept of connection in modern research has been a significant factor in relation to mental wellness and traumatic recovery. Matos et al. convey that humans have historically used social connections to cope with adversities and foster post-traumatic growth. Building on this point, they suggest that trauma care, which cultivates social connection based on

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<sup>36</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (Harperone, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Pbuh is the abbreviation of 'peace and blessings be upon him,' which Muslims traditionally say after mentioning Prophet Muhammad's name.

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad ibn Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Jami' at-Tirmidhi*, trans. M. Muhsin Khan, Sunnah.com, book 27, hadith 30 (hadith no. 1924), accessed April 12, 2026, <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:1924>.

<sup>39</sup> Abu Hamid al-Ghazzālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, trans. David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher (Islamic Texts Society, 1995), 52-55.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ranks of the Divine Seekers: A Parallel English-Arabic Text. Volume 1*, trans. Ovamir Anjum (Brill, 2020), 174.

<sup>41</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words: The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought*, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (The Light, 2013), 6.

<sup>42</sup> M. R. Ahmad Nabil et al., "Said Nursi's Psycho-Spiritual Therapy for Psychological Reactions of Patients with Physical Illnesses," *IJUM Medical Journal Malaysia* 18, no. 3 (2019): 182, <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijjm.v18i3.209>.

<sup>43</sup> Neff, "Self-Compassion," 86-87.

<sup>44</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 286.

<sup>45</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 7.

compassion and safety, can aid trauma recovery.<sup>46</sup> Nursi complements this notion, arguing that, if people can cultivate sincere social connections through faith, it can become a means for social and personal healing.<sup>47</sup> Rueger et al. argue that religion provides beliefs and structures that help individuals connect spiritually.<sup>48</sup> In combination with the insights of Matos et al. and Rueger et al., Nursi incorporates human connection on a deep spiritual level, perceiving everything in the universe as interconnected within itself and with God. By integrating this understanding of connection into trauma care, clinicians can facilitate social and spiritual connection in trauma victims.

Bronfenbrenner postulates that human development is shaped by continuous interactions within one's social environment,<sup>49</sup> highlighting social support as a fundamental construct.<sup>50</sup> Wang et al. define social support as "emotional, informational, or practical assistance from families, friends, or coworkers," associating it with higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression.<sup>51</sup> Research shows that social support fosters resilience, mitigating the adverse effects of trauma and enhancing subjective wellbeing.<sup>52</sup> Building on this, Thomas' analysis of Nursi's teachings on psychological wellbeing conveys that positive social interactions can promote positive psychological outcomes.<sup>53</sup> In *The Words*, Nursi explains that mutual assistance functions as a healing factor in times of adversity.<sup>54</sup> Collectively, these perspectives highlight social support as a key factor in trauma recovery. Nursi, however, extends this by incorporating a vertical dimension, connection with God as the All-Compassionate, transforming social support into a holistic spiritual mechanism for healing.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The *Risale-i Nur* emphasises the profound connection between humans and God, focusing on the concept of *tawhidic* belief, the understanding that God is Absolutely One and the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. This belief, deeply rooted in the Islamic worldview and human *fitrah*, forms the foundation for resilience and healing.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the *tawhidic* belief provides individuals experiencing trauma with grounding, offering them a greater sense

<sup>46</sup> Marcela Matos et al., "The Role of Social Connection on the Experience of COVID-19 Related Post-Traumatic Growth and Stress," *PLoS One* 16, no. 12 (2021): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261384>.

<sup>47</sup> Said Nursi, *The Gleams: Reflections on Qur'anic Wisdom and Spirituality*, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (The Light, 2013), xviii, 299–300.

<sup>48</sup> Mohammad Ghufuran, "Spirituality and Health in Relation to Religious Internalization and Collective Religious Practices," *International Journal of Islamic Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2020): 6.

<sup>49</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Harvard University Press, 1979), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Sandra Yu Rueger et al., "A Meta-Analytic Review of the Association between Perceived Social Support and Depression in Childhood and Adolescence," *Psychological Bulletin* 142, no. 10 (2016): 1017, <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000058>.

<sup>51</sup> Yabing Wang et al., "Social Support and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Studies," *Clinical Psychology Review* 85 (2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2021.101998>.

<sup>52</sup> Rueger et al., "A Meta-Analytic Review," 1017.

<sup>53</sup> Nur Sakinah Thomas, "The Role of Nursi's Risale-i Nur in Psychological Wellbeing," *Malaysian Journal of Medicine and Health Sciences* 15 (2019): 42.

<sup>54</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 560.

<sup>55</sup> Rassool, *Islamic Psychology*, 58–59.

of purpose and a deeper connection to God. Nursi asserts, “Belief is both life and power. Those who attain true belief can challenge the universe and, in proportion to their belief’s strength, be relieved of the pressures of events.”<sup>56</sup>

This research uses Charmaz’s grounded theoretical framework to explore how Nursi’s interpretation of the Islamic faith contributes to trauma care. Grounded theory provides flexible guidelines for constructing concepts, allowing for imaginative analysis.<sup>57</sup> Open codes such as ‘compassion from God,’ ‘self-reflection’ (*tafakkur*), ‘secure God-attachment,’ and ‘social support networks,’ along with codes like ‘resilience through faith’ and ‘communal worship,’ shape the framework. Axial coding groups these into themes like ‘spiritual resilience,’ demonstrating how Nursi’s insights nurture emotional regulation and social support. Selective coding synthesises these themes into the central idea of ‘spiritual resilience as a means for trauma healing,’ offering a model that bridges psychological and theological research to alleviate PTSD and foster resilience.

## METHODOLOGY

By interpreting and analysing texts, this article employs a textual analysis method to critically and systematically uncover meaning, context, and patterns. In identifying and coding overarching themes, the article adopts a thematic analysis approach, enabling themes to be categorised into clear frameworks. Through examination of Nursi’s life stories and experiences, it applies narrative analysis, which contextualises abstract concepts and enhances their impact on individuals seeking trauma care. Using this methodology, the article systematically identifies and categorises key concepts of compassion, connection, and social support.

Primary sources include the Qur’an, Sunnah, and Nursi’s *Risale-i Nur*, with academic research enriching the study. The Qur’an offers foundational verses on resilience and compassion, while the Sunnah demonstrates practical applications through the example of the Prophet (pbuh). Additionally, the *Risale-i Nur* provides insightful commentary that interprets these principles for trauma care. Key themes of compassion, connection, and social support will be analysed through conceptual, narrative, and comparative methods to contextualise Nursi’s contributions within modern trauma care approaches. Limitations include potential interpreter bias and the challenges of generalising findings across the diverse Muslim community. Given the cultural diversity within the global Muslim community, interpretations of resilience within the Islamic paradigm may vary. Therefore, this study acknowledges that Nursi’s approach may not fully reflect all Muslim experiences of trauma. Additionally, the highly philosophical and metaphorical language used by Nursi in the *Risale-i Nur* can pose challenges to non-specialist audiences in accessibility and comprehension. This complexity can thwart the practical application of his teachings in clinical settings with those not familiar

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<sup>56</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 330.

<sup>57</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (Sage Publications, 2006), 2.

with Islamic philosophy. Peer debriefing and expert reviews will enhance credibility, ensuring a systematic and comprehensive exploration of Nursi's trauma care paradigm.

## A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO COMPASSION

Webster's defines compassion as a "deep feeling for and understanding of misery or suffering and the concomitant desire to promote its alleviation."<sup>58</sup> In Arabic, *rahmah* encompasses mercy and compassion, tied to the Divine Names Al-Rahman (All-Merciful) and Al-Rahim (All-Compassionate).<sup>59</sup> Compassion (*rahim*), which is inherently linked to mercy (*rahma*), is considered the reason for creation,<sup>60</sup> as affirmed in the Qur'anic verse, "My mercy encompasses everything."<sup>61</sup> Islam teaches that humans, as God's representatives, are to connect with Him, the Source of compassion, and extend it to creation,<sup>62</sup> reflecting principles of care.<sup>63</sup> Compassion manifests socially through *zakat* (obligatory almsgiving), *sadaqah* (voluntary charity), and aiding others,<sup>64</sup> and personally through aligning one's will and character with the All-Compassionate Creator, beginning with self-awareness.<sup>65</sup>

Nursi, like earlier Sunni scholars, based his understanding of compassion on the Qur'an and Sunna. In *The Words*, Nursi highlights that Divine Oneness, Mercy, and Compassion form the cornerstone of the Qur'anic message, citing Imam ash-Shafi'i's (d. 820) observation that the *basmala* is revealed 114 times in the Qur'an.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, reflecting on the Qur'anic verse describing the Prophet (pbuh) as a mercy to all worlds,<sup>67</sup> Nursi concludes that Divine mercy and compassion are accessed by invoking blessings on the Prophet (pbuh).<sup>68</sup> This links believers to the Creator, the source of compassion, whose blessings are then shared with humanity.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, Nursi saw the created universe as a manifestation of Divine mercy and compassion, where light sparks within darkness and life is nurtured.<sup>70</sup> For Nursi, the mutual cooperation of all creatures reflects the seal of Divine compassion.

<sup>58</sup> Philip Babcock Cove, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged* (Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1993).

<sup>59</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (HarperOne, 2004), 204.

<sup>60</sup> William C Chittick, "The Anthropology of Compassion," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 48 (2010): 3.

<sup>61</sup> Qur'an 7:156.

<sup>62</sup> Chittick, "The Anthropology of Compassion," 11-12.

<sup>63</sup> G. Hussein Rassool, "The Crescent and Islam: Healing, Nursing and the Spiritual Dimension. Some Considerations towards an Understanding of the Islamic Perspectives on Caring," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 32, no. 6 (2000): 1481, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2000.01614.x>.

<sup>64</sup> Jalal Alharbi and Lourance Al Hadid, "Towards an Understanding of Compassion from an Islamic Perspective," *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 28, no. 7-8 (2019): 1356, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.14725>.

<sup>65</sup> Chittick, "The Anthropology of Compassion," 13-14.

<sup>66</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 9.

<sup>67</sup> Qur'an 21:107.

<sup>68</sup> Nursi, *The Gleams*, 139.

<sup>69</sup> Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqui, book 4, hadith 74 (hadith no. 408), Sunnah.com, accessed April 12, 2026, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:408>.

<sup>70</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 7.

According to Nursi, God as the All-Compassionate serves all creation, providing each creature with what it specifically needs to survive.<sup>71</sup> He gives the example of an eggplant and fish, both fleshy in their particular manner and unaware of how they attained their flesh.<sup>72</sup> He concludes it is with the All-Compassionate's care that creatures are sustained with their exact needs. Nursi highlights that God, being self-sufficient, does not need anything to exist, while everything in creation needs Him.<sup>73</sup> Through His mercy and compassion, God selflessly provides for all who are in need, even those who deny or curse Him.<sup>74</sup> This is seen through God providing the sun, rain, and oxygen, which everyone needs to survive. Nursi sees compassion reflected in the world as selfless acts toward others, such as a lioness going hungry to feed her young,<sup>75</sup> a fig tree content with mud while feeding milk to its fruit,<sup>76</sup> an elm tree becoming a womb for a fly's eggs,<sup>77</sup> or a mother sacrificing her wellbeing for her child's happiness.<sup>78</sup>

It is essential to transfer this theoretical understanding of compassion to a clinical approach to benefit trauma patients. Therapeutic interventions could incorporate *taffakur* exercises, guiding clients to reflect on God's Compassion in relation to the universe and their experiences. Together with this, clinicians can support developing a secure God-attachment, which provides a foundation to address negative schemas, reducing shame, improving safety, and enhancing emotional regulation. While rooted in Nursi's experiences in early-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey as a Sunni Muslim, these principles are adaptable across diverse Muslim cultural contexts. Clinicians can tailor *taffakur* exercises and God-attachment to reflect local worldviews and customs, making compassion-based interventions more relevant and culturally sensitive. These approaches align with existing research on compassion-focused interventions, highlighting the benefits of mindfulness, empathy, and emotional regulation in trauma care.

PTSD often involves persistent negative emotions, making the development of positive emotional responses crucial for resilience.<sup>79</sup> Compassion-based therapy emphasises healing through empathy and compassion, fostering a kinder internal perspective and promoting emotional regulation.<sup>80</sup> Studies, such as those by Beaumont et al., show that combining compassion-based therapy with evidence-based methods like Trauma-Focused Cognitive-

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 638.

<sup>72</sup> Said Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi al-Nuri: Seedbed of the Light* (Tughra Books, 2007), 115-6.

<sup>73</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 11.

<sup>74</sup> From this notion, Nursi also highlights how in nature the weakest and most needy creatures receive the best care from the All-Compassionate. For instance, infants are provided with what they need and are served gently and attentively, while a tiger or wolf will travel miles through rough terrain to find a meal.

<sup>75</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 343.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 81, deep note 22.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 297, deep note 96.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 638.

<sup>79</sup> Bridget Brinckman et al., "The Promise of Compassion-Based Therapy as a Novel Intervention for Adolescent PTSD," *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports* 15 (2024): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2023.100694>.

<sup>80</sup> Ariel J. Lang et al., "Compassion Meditation for Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): A Nonrandomized Study," *Mindfulness* 11, no. 1 (2017): 63, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0866-z>.

Behavioural Therapy<sup>81</sup> or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing<sup>82</sup> significantly reduces self-criticism and shame, enhancing trauma treatment outcomes. Compassion-focused interventions balance the human affect regulation systems, creating internal and external safety while supporting recovery.<sup>83</sup> Nursi's teachings illustrate how cultivating a compassionate relationship with God, alongside self-compassion, aligns with religious attachment theory,<sup>84</sup> which emphasises secure bonds for comfort and reduced anxiety.<sup>85</sup> While most studies reflect a Western Christian lens, Nursi's Islamic perspective on secure God-attachment offers similar mental health benefits.

For Nursi, God's compassionate name is stamped throughout creation. So, naturally, Nursi connects with God as the All-Compassionate when he is in distress. While he is in exile, Nursi reflects on his old age, illness, and youth, crying out:<sup>86</sup>

I had concluded no trade; the capital of life was all wasted away;  
I found the road only to find the caravan had moved on  
While I had been unaware.  
Lamenting, I too set off, all alone, a stranger  
With eyes weeping, heart in anguish, mind bewildered and unaware.<sup>87</sup>

In his poetic reflection, Nursi expresses his loneliness and suffering, regretting what he considers his past heedlessness. Aware that this traumatic experience could cast a person into despair, he engages in contemplative reflection. He states that God, speaking to him through the Qur'an as the All-Merciful, All-Compassionate, comes to his aid.<sup>88</sup> He explains, "It opened for me such a powerful door of hope and offered me such a light of true consolation that it could have removed any despair and darkness that was a hundred times more intense than mine."<sup>89</sup> Reflecting on his belief that God is the Lord of the universe, in charge of everything through His all-encompassing mercy, Nursi feels hope and comfort. By submitting to God, who is All-Wise and All-Just, he is comforted, knowing that God has reasons for everything and is never unjust.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, Nursi believes that, if he remains patient in adversity, God will grant him success in this life and the next. Nursi's connection to his base of safety, God, was achieved through *tafakkur*, or spiritual contemplation and reflection.

<sup>81</sup> Elaine Beaumont et al., "Using Compassion Focused Therapy as an Adjunct to Trauma-Focused CBT for Fire Service Personnel Suffering with Trauma-Related Symptoms," *The Cognitive Behaviour Therapist* 9 (2016): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1754470x16000209>.

<sup>82</sup> Elaine Beaumont and Caroline J. Hollins Martin, "Using Compassionate Mind Training as a Resource in EMDR: A Case Study," *Journal of EMDR Practice and Research* 7, no. 4 (2013): 195, <https://doi.org/10.1891/1933-3196.7.4.186>.

<sup>83</sup> Brinckman et al., "The Promise of Compassion-Based Therapy," 3.

<sup>84</sup> Lee Kirkpatrick, "An Attachment-Theory Approach Psychology of Religion," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2, no. 1 (1992): 9, [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr0201\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr0201_2).

<sup>85</sup> W. Matthew Henderson and Blake Victor Kent, "Attachment to God and Psychological Distress: Evidence of a Curvilinear Relationship," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 61, no. 1 (2022): 172–73, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12767>.

<sup>86</sup> The poem that Nursi reflects on was authored by Niyaz-i Misri.

<sup>87</sup> Nursi, *The Gleams*, 317.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 317–18.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>90</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 490.

In Islamic counseling, *tafakkur* can produce similar relaxing and comforting benefits found in meditation.<sup>91</sup> However, at its core, it is different from Eastern meditative practises since *tafakkur*'s main objective is cognitive and intellectual. The goal is for the client to obtain a deeper and more insightful understanding and relationship with God. This is achieved through exploring and reflecting on Qur'anic injunctions that are focused on treating the client's pathological issues. For this reason, it is usually incorporated after the client has a better understanding of their problem.<sup>92</sup> In one instance, Nursi used the Qur'anic verse, "God is sufficient for us; how excellent a Guardian He is!"<sup>93</sup> Again, in exile and suffering from old age and illnesses, Nursi reflects on his feelings:

I turned to my heart and spirit. I saw that as well as infinite impotence and boundless need, I was dominated by an extremely powerful desire for permanence, an intense attachment to existence, and a great yearning for life. Yet the awesome specter of mortality threatened to extinguish that permanence.<sup>94</sup>

Realising that his desire for control and yearning for permanence in old age were unrealistic and causing distress, Nursi reflected on the Qur'anic verse, "God is sufficient for us; how excellent a Guardian He is!" Reciting it 500 times a day, he deeply contemplated its meaning.<sup>95</sup> Nursi concluded that, instead of seeking permanence in this world, he should seek it with God, the All-Permanent One of Perfection.<sup>96</sup> This reflection deepened his connection with God as the Ruler of Absolute Power, creating a sense of safety and alleviating his fears about those plotting against him.<sup>97</sup> Understanding that the universe is under the Ruler's command, he sought refuge in the belief that God, as the All-Compassionate Provider, would protect and care for him. While he did not know how this care would manifest, his faith and relationship with God provided an inner haven of safety, strengthening his resilience.

Moreover, Nursi's belief and relationship with the Omnipresent Source of compassion allowed him to continuously replenish himself with compassion. Showing compassion towards oneself is a vital factor in mental health and overall wellbeing. Self-compassion is defined by Neff in three components: showing kindness towards one's suffering, seeing one's experience interconnected with humanity, and mindfulness.<sup>98</sup> This is mainly based on the Buddhist philosophical understanding that everyone, including oneself, deserves compassion. Gilbert takes an evolutionary approach based on attachment theory, arguing that self-compassion is affiliated with self-soothing.<sup>99</sup> This means that self-compassion creates opportunities for a person to deal with their internal issues empathetically. By approaching the 'angry self' or 'anxious self' with one's 'compassionate self,' one can be more accepting

<sup>91</sup> G Hussein Rassool, *Islamic Counseling: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2016), 213.

<sup>92</sup> Hooman Keshavarzi et al., eds., *Applying Islamic Principles to Clinical Mental Health Care: Introducing Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy* (Routledge, 2021), 30.

<sup>93</sup> Nursi, *The Rays*, 69.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 69–70.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 70–71.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–76.

<sup>98</sup> Neff, "Self-Compassion," 89.

<sup>99</sup> Paul Gilbert, "The Origins and Nature of Compassion Focused Therapy," *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 53, no. 1 (2014): 33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjc.12043>.

of their feelings and open to opportunities to resolve internal conflicts.<sup>100</sup> Both definitions of self-compassion produce a constructive attitude toward the 'self' and coping skills.<sup>101</sup> Through his understanding of human nature, Nursi takes a different approach to self-compassion.

For Nursi, self-compassion is attained through an accurate and humble self-assessment. Particularly, one's knowledge of who they are in relation to God and the universe. He sees humans within a paradox of being weak and noble. On the one hand, humans are innately and infinitely poor, helpless, and needy.<sup>102</sup> This is because humans need the whole universe to exist and survive. More specifically, humans are poor because, by themselves, they do not have the means to survive and prosper. Everything humans have in this respect is already provided: the sun, moon, earth, atmosphere, oxygen, water, food etc. Humans are helpless because, even if they wanted to produce these things by themselves, they could not. Consequently, humans need something that has the knowledge and power to provide everything for them to exist and thrive. Nursi argues that this is the One God who produced and sustains the whole universe. Conversely, he states, if humans with this realisation put their trust in God, they will become His protected friends. Through God's friendship, humans are transformed into honourable representatives of the universe.<sup>103</sup> For Nursi, accurately assessing who you truly are and living in accordance with this reality is the greatest act of self-compassion.

Worthington et al. define self-assessment as having an accurate understanding of oneself.<sup>104</sup> This includes perceiving oneself and one's abilities in line with reality. This is a fundamental factor of the virtue of humility, which research shows has a positive relationship with wellbeing.<sup>105</sup> Those who incorporate humility in their lives show higher life satisfaction, gratitude, positive relationships, more autonomy, and personal growth. At the same time, those with more humility are associated with less depression and anxiety. This supports Nursi's argument that his understanding of human nature increases one's quality of life. In this sense, if one takes on Nursi's approach towards themselves, they are acting compassionately. With his mind and heart submitted to the All-Compassionate, Nursi's perception of the world is shaped.

From his belief in a compassionate God and approach to self-compassion, Nursi extends compassion as a universal value. Since the universe was created out of God's mercy, Nursi sees everything as a reflection of God's mercy and compassion. From this interpretation, he

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>101</sup> Sarah-Jane Winders et al., "Self-compassion, Trauma, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review," *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy* 27, no. 3 (2020): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.2429>.

<sup>102</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 494.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>104</sup> Everett L. Worthington et al., "Humility: A Qualitative Review," *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 3rd ed., ed. C. R. Snyder et al. (Oxford Academic, 2019), 644, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199396511.013.39>.

<sup>105</sup> Lisa T. Ross and Jennifer C. Wright, "Humility, Personality, and Psychological Functioning," *Psychological Reports* 126, no. 2 (2021): 690, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941211062819>.

concludes that creation acts within a paradigm of ‘mutual cooperation.’<sup>106</sup> He explains how clouds work in the service of plants, which in turn aid animals. For example, trees and grass grow from rain, providing food for gazelles and zebras, who then reproduce, allowing lions and cheetahs to feed. These carnivorous animals also serve herbivores by regulating their populations. Lastly, Nursi mentions that creation serves humans, giving the example of cows producing milk and meat from grass. Humans, as God’s representatives, are then told to serve and protect creation. In this light, Nursi sees everything in the universe as one united body, each part completing the others’ functions.<sup>107</sup> This is reflected in his treatises on flies, written in 1935 in Eskişehir, Turkey.

During this time, Nursi and his students were taken from their homes and imprisoned.<sup>108</sup> Nursi was separated from his students and placed in solitary confinement. The condition of the jail was horrendous. The cells were infested with bugs, and holes were dug in the ground since they were not allowed to use the lavatories. In addition, they were left without food for 12 days. Nursi, who had previously spent long periods in exile and prison, knew how these situations could adversely affect human psychology. For this reason, he wanted to help his students who were suffering across from his cell. Here, Nursi expounds on his compassionate connection with flies, motivating him to write this treatise.

While imprisoned, he noticed people were becoming annoyed by the flies in their vicinity. To comfort them, Nursi illustrates the compassionate wisdom of God in creating flies.<sup>109</sup> He first explains how certain animals, like particular fish, carrion-eating birds, and carnivorous animals, act as Earth’s health officials. By consuming millions of dead animals every day, these health officials keep the earth clean, providing an important service for all living creatures. Otherwise, there would be a plethora of carcasses and rotten flesh, making the earth uninhabitable. Similarly, Nursi continues, flies act as health officials and chemists, sucking up harmful microbes and transforming them into different states. This, in effect, thwarts the spread of dangerous diseases. In addition, he highlights how flies keep his students’ company during exile and imprisonment and create opportunities for reflection.<sup>110</sup> Nursi consoles his students through his universal, compassionate view of creation, helping them reflect on flies’ beneficial aspects.

Within trauma healing, it is essential to reestablish a sense of safety and control in the individual. Incorporating Nursi’s understanding of compassion can provide multiple benefits for trauma patients. By building a relationship with the All-Compassionate through prayer, *tafakkur*, and Nursi’s approach to self-assessment, the client can strengthen their belief that God is always there to guide, support, and help them.<sup>111</sup> This creates an innate sense of

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<sup>106</sup> Nursi, *The Rays*, 162–63.

<sup>107</sup> Nursi, *The Gleams*, 446.

<sup>108</sup> İbrahim Özdemir, “A New Ethics of Compassion for Animals: Said Nursi on the Rights of Flies,” *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 6, no. 1 (2022): 69, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340083>.

<sup>109</sup> Nursi, *The Gleams*, 374–76.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 376.

<sup>111</sup> For Nursi, a believer should always respect and follow natural laws. This is supported by the famous hadith that one should first tie their camel then trust in God. This includes protecting oneself from

safety. Furthermore, those with a secure attachment to God have a positive relationship with self-esteem, fostering a sense of security.<sup>112</sup> Increasing mindfulness also promotes psychological safety.<sup>113</sup> Knowing that a compassionate God is always with you alleviates loneliness and provides safety when targeting traumatic memories and emotions. Compassion-focused therapy encourages the client to create an imaginary safe place within their mind, developing a calming state.<sup>114</sup> Nursi's view of universal compassion stemming from an All-Compassionate God brings this imaginary world into the client's concrete life, helping them redefine everything through compassion.

Humans are hardwired with the ability to show compassion.<sup>115</sup> Conversely, since a persistent negative emotional state is a distinct characteristic of PTSD,<sup>116</sup> regularly connecting with and using one's ability to show compassion can be challenging. Usually, these negative emotions are directed inward in the form of shame or anger. Consequently, this can spill into one's behaviour, having a negative effect on interpersonal relationships.<sup>117</sup>

However, if one can instil firm belief in an Omnipresent Source of compassion, then this can aid them in challenging their negative or irrational thoughts and, in turn, have better opportunities to show self-compassion. Taking on Nursi's approach to self-compassion provides the cognitive tools for acceptance of things outside one's locus of control. With practise, this will allow the person to hand over situations they cannot control to God, decreasing defensiveness and sensitivity.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, if one can instil the belief of universal compassion, then their perception of others' behaviour can be positively influenced. Seeing others as non-threatening will allow those with PTSD to be less defensive and hyper-vigilant, aiding in healthier interpersonal relations and regulating their emotions.<sup>119</sup>

Compassion-based approaches also promote social support and enhance connectedness in trauma treatment.<sup>120</sup> Trauma victims can isolate or withdraw from others because they believe that others see them in the same flawed way that they see themselves. By developing compassion-based coping skills like empathy and gratitude, trauma victims can feel more confident to engage in interpersonal relationships. Facilitating feelings of social connectedness increases empathy, reducing social bias towards those who are safe. As a

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dangerous situations. If one believes in an All-Compassionate Omnipresent God, this does not mean they can put themselves in a hazardous situation thinking they will be miraculously saved.

<sup>112</sup> David M. Njus and Alexandra Scharmer, "Evidence that God Attachment makes a Unique Contribution to Psychological Well-Being," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 30, no. 3 (2020): 190, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2020.1723296>.

<sup>113</sup> Mali Strand and Signe Hjelen Stige, "Combining Mindfulness and Compassion in the Treatment of Complex Trauma – A Theoretical Exploration," *European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 5, no. 3 (2021): 2–3, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejtd.2021.100217>.

<sup>114</sup> Beaumont et al., "Using Compassion Focused Therapy," 6.

<sup>115</sup> Christopher K. Germer and Kristin Neff, "Cultivating Self-Compassion in Trauma Survivors," in *Mindfulness-Oriented Interventions for Trauma: Integrating Contemplative Practices*, ed. Victoria M. Follette et al. (The Guilford Press, 2015), 43–44.

<sup>116</sup> Brinckman et al., "The Promise of Compassion-Based Therapy," 2.

<sup>117</sup> Lang et al., "Compassion Meditation for Veterans," 64.

<sup>118</sup> Strand and Stige, "Combining Mindfulness and Compassion," 7–8.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Brinckman et al., "The Promise of Compassion-Based Therapy," 3.

result, this opens more opportunities for trauma victims to benefit from social support and networks.

## HEALING THROUGH CONNECTEDNESS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

For Nursi, the whole universe is interconnected and works in solidarity through mutual cooperation and assistance. He concludes this is a manifestation of God as the Unique One of Absolute Oneness. Nursi gives numerous arguments and examples to support this claim, but in one instance, he expounds on the universal elements: hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon.<sup>121</sup> These, in turn, are the components of soil, water, air, and light from which plants and animals come forth. This shows how everything in its physical essence is unified. At the same time, Nursi argues that, for one thing to exist, it is dependent on the whole universe.<sup>122</sup> He gives the example of a flower that needs the earth, sun, Milky Way galaxy etc. to live.<sup>123</sup> Through these arguments, Nursi concludes that the interconnectedness of the universe working as one body is the manifestation of Divine Unity.

In the Qur'an, God says He created humans with the potential to reflect His Names better than any other creature. This is supported in the verse, "We have indeed honored the Children of Adam...and We have favored them above many We have created."<sup>124</sup> Nursi explains how humans are different from other creatures in terms of connectedness. He gives the analogy that nothing can encompass the totality of the sun's light; however, certain materials can better reflect those properties (i.e., a mirror or asphalt) than others.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, in creation, nothing can encompass the essence of God. However, the human heart and intellect have the potential to reflect the Divine Names more than other creatures. This allows humans to have a deeper and more intimate connection with the Divine. Moreover, Nursi states, "Each Divine Name related to creatures encompasses all creatures through Divine Unity."<sup>126</sup> It can be understood that through connecting with God as the Divine Unity, humans can connect with the whole universe.

In Islamic spirituality, connectedness starts with oneself and is accomplished through *muraqabah*. Generally translated as self-monitoring or self-supervision, *muraqabah* is a contemplative or deep meditation on Allah's attributes or presence.<sup>127</sup> Scholars define it as a conscious connection with God achieved through genuine awareness of oneself.<sup>128</sup> Beginning with *muraqabah an-nafs* (monitoring oneself), one can achieve internal-external congruency and align one's behaviour with what is pleasing to God. For example, being more compassionate and just, not shaming, eating healthily, exercising, and altruism, to name a few. In doing this (usually over time with practise and the help of a spiritual guide), one

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<sup>121</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 311–12.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 712.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

<sup>124</sup> Qur'an 17:70.

<sup>125</sup> Nursi, *The Gleams*, 133.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>127</sup> Keshavarzi et al., *Applying Islamic Principles to Clinical Mental Health Care*, 280.

<sup>128</sup> Rassool, *Islamic Counseling*, 218–19.

nourishes a deeper connection with God and, in turn, with His creation. While grounded in Nursi's Sunni Turkish context, the principles of *muraqabah* and connectedness can be adapted across diverse Muslim communities and applied in trauma-informed care in culturally sensitive ways. Clinicians can incorporate *muraqabah* exercises into trauma-informed care, fostering emotional regulation and awareness of one's strengths and vulnerabilities. In multiple sections of the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi discusses the concept of *muraqabah* and how practising it supported his mental health during distress.

In his article concerning the recitations during the seated sections of the prayer (*tashahhud*), Nursi expands on the meaning.<sup>129</sup> Through this prayer, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was connecting with every living creature in the universe. First, all origins of life (i.e., seeds, grains, eggs), then with all living beings with spirits (i.e., humans), and finally with perfected members of humanity and angels. Then, as their representative, the Prophet (pbuh) offered their praises to God. Muslims who recite this prayer during the five daily prayers have a chance to create that same connection, according to their level of belief. Nursi later explains how, during exile, he was reflecting on the dreadfulness of the universe. Then he decided to seek refuge in God through the prescribed prayer. While reciting the *tashahhud*, he experienced the whole universe come to life and transform into a brilliant mirror of the All-Living, Self-Subsisting One.<sup>130</sup> His lonely and dark state was altered by a perspective based on Divine Unity and the interconnectedness of the universe, comforting him.

In addition to the connectedness Nursi experienced through all of creation, he saw the shared values in religion as a means of human connectedness. He states that the number of things that can form a bond through faith is as numerous as the Divine names of God.<sup>131</sup> He begins with the bond built through belief in the One God who is the means of creation, provision, and worship of all believers. Building on this, Nursi highlights that the bond of believers is also strengthened through the common belief in the prophets, the qibla, and religious values like truthfulness. This deep spiritual connection between those of the same faith creates a global family of brotherhood and sisterhood.

Nursi explains an experience he had one day in Beyazid Mosque in Istanbul while performing the prescribed prayer.<sup>132</sup> When Nursi recited, "You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek help," he felt the entire congregation united in their plea for guidance. This experience led him into a spiritual state, feeling connected to all the mosques in Istanbul and, beyond that, to a vast global mosque, unified with the worldwide Muslim community seeking God's guidance together. He later expounds on this experience, highlighting the grammatical significance of the *nun* (we) in the words *na'budu* (we worship) and *nasta'in* (we seek help).<sup>133</sup> By the Qur'an making it an inclusive 'we' instead of a singular 'I', worshipers reciting this verse at the same time can experience a spiritual

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<sup>129</sup> Nursi, *The Rays*, 107.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Said Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, trans. Huseyin Akarsu (The Light, 2007), 238.

<sup>132</sup> Nursi, *The Rays*, 393.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 399.

connection with millions of Muslims. Furthermore, by saying ‘Amin’ at the end of the prayer, the person experiences connectedness through a collective congregation of support. These insights can help clinicians to cultivate a sense of shared purpose and community with their clients, reducing isolation and enhancing feelings of safety and belonging.

Nursi did not see himself as a Sufi but deeply regarded Sufism’s spiritual wisdom. In Sufism, *muraqabah* is practised through three main stages: *fana fi shaykh* (annihilation in the guide), *fana fir rasul* (annihilation in the Prophet), and *fana fillah* (annihilation in God). Embarking on this spiritual journey, a person will form a deep connection (by handing their will and ego over) first with their spiritual guide, then with the Prophet (pbuh), and finally with God. Focusing on brotherhood and sisterhood in Islam, Nursi promoted the principle of *fana fi ikhwan*, or annihilation in one’s brothers and sisters.<sup>134</sup> Through a profound spiritual connection, a Muslim can become interconnected with all Muslims worldwide. Citing the hadith comparing the Muslim community to one body,<sup>135</sup> Nursi urges mutual support among Muslims, reminding them to uplift and support rather than criticise one another.<sup>136</sup> He postulates that one’s right hand does not become jealous of one’s left hand, nor does one’s eye criticise the other. Rather, the different members of the body complete each other, covering their deficiencies. Through this approach, the Muslim community is interconnected via cooperation and mutual assistance, opening numerous opportunities for individuals to receive social support.

Sincere social relationships for Nursi are essential to human nature.<sup>137</sup> Understood as the cornerstone of social life, these relationships forge bonds between people within families, tribes, nations, religions, and humanity. By establishing his view of social life on the Qur’an, Nursi concludes that people should work together to support each other through mutual assistance.<sup>138</sup> More specifically, people should support and console those in physical, emotional, and spiritual distress, aiding them to achieve a higher quality of life.<sup>139</sup> He supports this view, claiming that one fundamental principle of social life in prophethood is mutual assistance.<sup>140</sup> Expounding on this virtue, Nursi tells others not to resemble a firefly, which is content with its tiny glow while others drown in darkness.<sup>141</sup> Instead, by connecting with the Eternally Beloved One, people can increase their quality of life by helping others and witnessing their happiness.

Nursi’s approach to social support is rooted in the Arabic terms *ta’awun*<sup>142</sup> (mutual assistance) and *tasānud*<sup>143</sup> (mutual support or ‘leaning on’). *Ta’awun* refers to helping each

<sup>134</sup> Nursi, *The Gleams*, 229.

<sup>135</sup> Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. M. Muhsin Khan, book 78, hadith 42 (hadith no. 6011), Sunnah.com, accessed April 12, 2026, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6011>.

<sup>136</sup> Nursi, *The Gleams*, 226-27

<sup>137</sup> Nursi, *The Rays*, 302.

<sup>138</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 148.

<sup>139</sup> Nursi, *The Rays*, 302.

<sup>140</sup> Nursi, *The Words*, 560.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

<sup>142</sup> Said Nursi, *Sözler* [Words] (Süreyya Yayınları, 2019), 170–71.

<sup>143</sup> Said Nursi, *Şualar* [Rays] (Süreyya Yayınları, 2019), 368.

other in virtue,<sup>144</sup> as stated in the Qur'an: "Help each other in righteousness and piety, and do not help each other in sin and aggression."<sup>145</sup> *Tasānüd*, though not a Qur'anic term, signifies community solidarity,<sup>146</sup> as echoed in verses like, "To work for the good [of orphans] is good."<sup>147</sup> Islamic scholars emphasise that brotherhood and sisterhood in Islam require positive support and shared difficulties.<sup>148</sup> In a hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) likens believers to bricks in a building, strengthening one another.<sup>149</sup> After migrating to Medina, he encouraged mutual assistance, urging his followers to build a community through peace, charity, and service.<sup>150</sup> Inspired by the Prophet (pbuh), Nursi wove these principles into his life. Since these principles are not limited to a time or place, they can be applied to Muslim communities worldwide, illustrating the universal relevance of mutual support and cooperation.

Between October 1943 and June 1944, Nursi endured the harsh conditions of Denizli Prison with his students.<sup>151</sup> He described his suffering there as equal to a month's pain in Eskişehir Prison, confined to a cramped, pitch-black, mouldy cell. His students, placed with death-row inmates, were at risk of execution. Despite this, Nursi continued writing the *Risale-i Nur*, using his teachings to guide his students in supporting and consoling fellow prisoners.<sup>152</sup> In *The Fruits of Belief*, the 11th chapter of *The Rays*, Nursi emphasises worship, belief in God and the afterlife, human potential, life's meaning, and hope rooted in faith. This transformed the prison into what he called "*Medrese-i Yusuf*"<sup>153</sup> (School of Joseph),<sup>154</sup> fostering an atmosphere of brotherhood and mutual support.<sup>155</sup> Within months, men who were killers began to show care even for the smallest creatures, such as bedbugs.<sup>156</sup> By helping others, Nursi and his students found purpose within the prison, building resilience and forming a supportive community from within. By integrating these perspectives, clinicians can use structured peer support and engagement in prosocial acts to strengthen connection, hope, and resilience in therapy.

<sup>144</sup> Rifka Fachrina et al., "Analysis of Understanding of Ta'awun Principles and Its Influence on the Interest of Online Ojek Drivers to Become Sharia Insurance Participants," *Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Sharia Economics* 6, no. 3 (2023): 1392.

<sup>145</sup> Qur'an 5:2.

<sup>146</sup> Osman Demir, "Tesânüd: Toplumda Bireylerin ve Grupların Birbiriyle Dayanışma Halinde Yapılabilecek İfade Eden Ahlâk Terimi," [Tesânüd: An Ethical Concept Denoting Mutual Solidarity Among Individuals and Groups in Society] in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2011), 526, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/tesanud>.

<sup>147</sup> Qur'an 2:220.

<sup>148</sup> Demir, "Tesânüd," 526.

<sup>149</sup> Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Riyad as-Salihin*, hadith no. 222, "The Book of Miscellany," Sunnah.com, accessed April 12, 2026, <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin>.

<sup>150</sup> Demir, "Tesânüd" 526.

<sup>151</sup> Fikret Kaplan, *Üç Said: Tarihi Hadiselerin Işığında Bediüzzaman'ın Hayatı* [Three Suids: Bediüzzaman's Life in the Light of Historical Events] (Süreyya yayinlari, 2022), 313.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>153</sup> Nursi, *The Rays*, 221.

<sup>154</sup> Medrese-i Yusuf, translated as the *School of Joseph*, is used by Said Nursi in reference to Prophet Joseph (peace be with him), who, according to Islamic tradition, was unjustly imprisoned in Egypt. During his incarceration, Prophet Joseph devoted himself to deepening his spiritual practice while conveying lessons of faith to his fellow prisoners. Nursi draws on Prophet Joseph's example when reflecting on his experiences of imprisonment.

<sup>155</sup> Kaplan, *Üç Said*, 313–14.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

The principles of mutual support that guided Nursi and his students in prison continued to help him outside the prison walls. In several places, Nursi spoke of the support and consolation his students and the larger community gave him throughout his life,<sup>157</sup> especially during his hardships.<sup>158</sup> He mentions one student, particularly Abdurrahman, who was his nephew. Nursi confesses that they were so close to each other that he saw Abdurrahman more as a son.<sup>159</sup> Throughout the years, Abdurrahman helped and supported his uncle in diverse ways. Nursi recounts the positive presence Abdurrahman was in his life, explaining how he was, “extremely intelligent and self-sacrificing, and was both my student, and servant, and scribe, and who was like a son to me.”<sup>160</sup> Later, through circumstances of events, they parted ways. After approximately seven years, while Nursi was exiled in Barla, Abdurrahman was able to locate and write to him.<sup>161</sup> This letter comforted Nursi so immensely that he conveys:

His letter afforded me great hope in respect of my affairs. Thinking that I had found a daring student with the intelligence of a genius, one who would serve me more faithfully and closely than a real (biological) son, I forgot my painful captivity, loneliness, separation from home, and old age.<sup>162</sup>

However, about two months later, Abdurrahman passed away. Losing his nephew again after recently reconnecting was ten times harder for Nursi to bear than his painful captivity, loneliness, separation, old age, and illness combined.<sup>163</sup> Reflecting on his grief-stricken state, he expressed how half of his heart was lost when his mother passed away and the other half when Abdurrahman died. Although his grief and sorrow were intense, Nursi, being exiled, could not confide in any of his close friends. For this reason, he turned to the Qur’an for support and consolation.

One verse provided comfort and guidance to Nursi during this time of distress. Within his state of loneliness and grief, he reflected on his memories with Abdurrahman and other students.<sup>164</sup> His emotional and spiritual state heavy with longing for his loved ones, Nursi reflects on the verse, “Everything is perishable (and so perishing) except His ‘Face’ (His eternal Self, and what is done in seeking His good pleasure). His alone is judgment and authority, and to Him you are being brought back.”<sup>165</sup> Through this meditative reflection, Nursi describes attaining deep comfort and consolation.<sup>166</sup> Being reminded that, as a friend, God is everlasting and He will always be there to support him, Nursi attains hope, strengthening his resilience.<sup>167</sup> He concludes that, by using Qur’anic revelation and through an intrinsic conscious connection with God, he can receive continuous emotional and spiritual consolation and guidance, especially in the absence of human social support.

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<sup>157</sup> Nursi, *The Letters*, 297.

<sup>158</sup> Nursi, *The Rays*, 309.

<sup>159</sup> Nursi, *The Gleams*, 340.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Qur’an 28:88.

<sup>166</sup> Nursi, *The Gleams*, 341.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

Tedeschi and Calhoun define post-traumatic growth (PTG) as a “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances.”<sup>168</sup> Community connectedness is crucial for PTG, fostering social identity, shared norms, and accountability that promote healing.<sup>169</sup> In Nursi’s case, these norms, grounded in Islamic values like compassion and tolerance, create safe, non-judgmental spaces for emotional regulation.<sup>170</sup> Connectedness with oneself and the world helps trauma victims shift negative perceptions, adopt a more positive worldview, and engage in prosocial behaviour rooted in altruism.<sup>171</sup> Research by Hobfoll et al. emphasises that PTG occurs when cognitive changes are transformed into action,<sup>172</sup> as seen in Holocaust survivors finding meaning and resilience through helping others.<sup>173</sup> Nursi’s teachings on *ta’awun* (mutual assistance) and *tasānud* (solidarity) highlight how providing support fosters hope, strengthens resilience, and aids emotional regulation, particularly for those struggling with PTSD.

Social support is a reciprocal process that prevents PTSD and strengthens resilience, as seen in Vietnam veterans<sup>174</sup> and survivors of natural disasters<sup>175</sup> who valued their social networks for emotional safety. For those unable to access social networks, Nursi’s reliance on Qur’anic revelations demonstrates how an intrinsic connection with God can provide comfort and guidance, alleviating isolation, depression, and anxiety.<sup>176</sup> Through encouraging the engagement of spiritual reflective practices modelled by Nursi, clinicians can support clients to build resilience and PTG by finding spiritual and emotional support even when away from social support.

## FINDINGS

Research shows that the number of individuals suffering from traumatic experiences has significantly increased over the years. From refugees affected by natural disasters and war to victims of domestic violence, the need for trauma care has become crucial. This reality includes Muslims, who, due to ongoing conflicts, are one of the largest displaced groups

<sup>168</sup> Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence,” *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (2004): 1.

<sup>169</sup> Katie Schultz et al., “Key Roles of Community Connectedness in Healing from Trauma,” *Psychology of Violence* 6, no. 1 (2016): 42–43, <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000025>.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>171</sup> Ervin Staub and Johanna Vollhardt, “Altruism Born of Suffering: The Roots of Caring and Helping after Victimization and Other Trauma,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 78, no. 3 (2008): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014223>.

<sup>172</sup> Stevan E. Hobfoll et al., “Refining our Understanding of Traumatic Growth in the Face of Terrorism: Moving from Meaning Cognitions to Doing What Is Meaningful,” *Applied Psychology* 56, no. 3 (2007): 349, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2007.00292.x>.

<sup>173</sup> Staub and Vollhardt, “Altruism Born of Suffering,” 271.

<sup>174</sup> Charlene Laffaye et al., “Relationships among PTSD Symptoms, Social Support, and Support Source in Veterans with Chronic PTSD,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 21, no. 4 (2008): 399, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.20348>.

<sup>175</sup> Fardin Alipour and Shokoufeh Ahmadi, “Social Support and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Earthquake Survivors: A Systematic Review,” *Social Work in Mental Health* 18, no. 5 (2020): 511, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332985.2020.1795045>.

<sup>176</sup> Batool Alizadeh Taghiabad et al., “Mental Health and Stress-Coping Strategies among Memorizers of Holy Quran,” *Health, Spirituality and Medical Ethics* 2, no. 2 (2015): 18.

globally. Despite trauma in the Muslim world being identified as a research priority, Islamically focused PTSD interventions remain sparse. While the short-term study conducted in Somalia yielded positive results, further research is essential. For this reason, this article has analysed how Nursi's teachings on compassion, connection, and social support can aid trauma treatment for Muslims with PTSD.

Compassion, a cornerstone of the Islamic faith, is reinterpreted by Nursi through the Qur'an, Sunnah, and universe. He views the world as a place of cooperation and mutual service, where God, as the All-Compassionate and Self-Sufficient, provides sustenance for all. Through God's compassionate care, each being receives what it needs to survive. For Nursi, compassion is selfless care toward oneself and others. His understanding of a compassionate God also allows for cultivating a secure God-attachment, creating a stable base for those with PTSD. Knowing that a compassionate God is ever-present has been shown to improve wellbeing, reduce anxiety, and decrease negative thoughts. Through *tafakkur* on God as a Compassionate Protector, Nursi explains how his hope was restored during traumatic experiences, cultivating a sense of safety and helping regulate physiological arousal. Additionally, Nursi's method of self-compassion, through humble self-assessment, emphasises that humans are inherently poor, helpless, and needy. This humility nurtures an intimate friendship with God, fostering a sense of safety as one becomes His "protected friend." For Nursi, true self-compassion is achieved by living in accordance with one's limitations. Through his approach, trauma victims can integrate cognitive and compassion-based methods, providing holistic treatment. Moreover, compassion-based approaches create opportunities for social support and increase connectedness in trauma victims.

With a *tawhidic* worldview, Nursi's understanding of connectedness extends to everything in the universe. From elements like hydrogen and oxygen to galaxies, he experiences a connection with all creation. The universe's interconnectedness, as a manifestation of the Creator's unity, reflects solidarity and cooperation. He explains how humans can connect with God and creation profoundly. Through *muraqabah an-nafs*, individuals align their thoughts and behaviour with what pleases God, the All-Compassionate, cultivating a deeper relationship with Him. Nursi describes how *muraqabah* allowed him to connect with God and others who shared his values, alleviating his loneliness and enhancing a sense of safety. Using the concept of *fena fi-ikhwan*, Nursi reminds readers that all believers are like one body, working together in cooperation. He defines social relationships as rooted in *ta'awun* and *tasānud*, where mutual assistance, positive regard, and shared difficulties form the foundation. Building relationships within this framework strengthened Nursi's resilience, allowing him to persevere through hardships. Applying Nursi's understanding of connectedness and social support, trauma victims may achieve greater PTG. Support from others provides safe, non-judgmental spaces where they can receive help with emotional regulation. By cultivating a sense of connectedness with the world around them, trauma victims can strengthen their resilience, build a sense of safety, and alleviate loneliness.

## LIMITATIONS

This study is limited by its reliance on textual analysis of Nursi's works rather than empirical data from trauma-affected populations. While the study uses Islamic principles and spiritual applications, providing valuable insights, their applicability across Muslim communities may vary and may not generalise to non-Muslim communities. Additionally, the historical context of Nursi living in the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey may differ from contemporary settings, and the long-term effects of these approaches have yet to be established. Finally, interpretations of Nursi's writings may reflect the author's perspective, leaving interpretations open to alternative readings.

## CONCLUSION

Nursi's approach to compassion, connection, and social support uniquely contributes to trauma care through his comprehensive view of each concept. His teachings show that a compassionate attachment to God, recognising the unity within creation, and nurturing supportive relationships are essential for resilience. Additionally, his teachings provide a holistic approach to incorporating the spiritual, mental, and social dimensions of trauma healing, promoting emotional regulation and PTG. Within this paradigm, a model of trauma care grounded in an Islamic framework can be developed through further research. This article supports continued study toward building a comprehensive Islamic model of trauma care. Empirical research is crucial to validate these insights, providing data for further studies and supporting their real-life application. Lastly, examining how Nursi's perspectives and teachings can be adapted in diverse Muslim communities will enrich and broaden the study of Islamic trauma care.

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