



The Polished Intellect: Understanding the Heart (*Qalb*) as the Seat of Reason (*'Aql*)

Mücellâ Akıl: Aklın Tecelligâhı Olarak Kalp

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Abstract

This paper examines the multi-layered concept of '*aql* (intellect) within Islamic thought, specifically focusing on its evolution and interpretation in the Sufi tradition. Contesting modern reductions of '*aql* to mere brain activity or rationality, the study argues that in Sufism, the intellect is fundamentally a state (*hâl*) of the heart and a tool for ethical and spiritual discernment. Through a comparative analysis of key figures—Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932), Abu Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273)—the paper delineates the shifting perceptions of intellect from a practical ethical instrument to a celestial light. Tirmidhī's anthropological model introduces intellect as a divine light guarding against carnal desires, while Ghazālī categorizes '*aql* into innate and acquired realities, positioning theoretical intellect as secondary to divine truths. Rūmī further develops this by contrasting the "partial or particular intellect" (*'aql-e juz'ī*) with the Universal Intellect (*'aql-e kullī*), ultimately advocating for the superiority of divine love in reaching the Absolute. The study concludes that the modern dichotomy between intellect and heart is a product of rationalism, whereas the Sufi tradition integrates them, viewing the heart as the highest degree of polished intellect. This synthesis is presented as essential for achieving true wisdom and spiritual realization.

Keywords: Intellect, '*aql*, heart, *qalb*, Islamic thought, Sufism, divine truth.

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Özet

Bu çalışma, İslam düşüncesindeki “akıl” kavramının çok katmanlı yapısını, özellikle de tasavvuf geleneğindeki tekâmül ve yorumu çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Çalışma, modern dönemde aklın yalnızca bir beyin aktivitesine yahut rasyonaliteye indirgenmesine karşı çıkararak tasavvufta aklın temelde kalbe ait bir hâl ve ahlâkî/mânevî bir idrâk aracı olduğunu savunmaktadır. Hakîm Tirmizî (ö. 320/932), Ebû Hâmid Muhammed Gazzâlî (ö. 505/1111) ve Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî (ö. 672/1273) gibi büyük isimler üzerinden karşılaştırmalı bir tahlil yoluyla bu makale; akıl algısının, pratik bir ahlâk aracından semâvî bir nura dönüşen değişimini ana hatlarıyla ortaya koymaktadır. Tirmizî'nin antropolojik modeli, akli nefsi arzulara karşı koruyan ilâhî bir nur olarak sunarken; Gazzâlî, akli fitrî ve kesbî gerçeklikler olarak kategorize eder ve teorik akli ilâhî hakikatlerin ikincil bir unsuru olarak konumlandırır. Rûmî ise bu durumu, “cüz'î akıl” ile “Küllî Akıl” arasında bir ayırım yaparak daha da ileri götürür ve Mutlak olana ulaşmada ilâhî aşkın üstünlüğünü savunur. Çalışma, akıl ve kalp arasındaki modern dikotominin, rasyonalizmin bir ürünü olduğu, buna karşın tasavvuf geleneğinin bu ikisini bütünleştirerek kalbi, aklın en yüksek mertebesi olarak gördüğü sonucuna varmaktadır. Bu sentez, gerçek hikmete ve mânevî hakikate ulaşmak için temel bir gereklilik olarak sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Akıl, kalp, İslamî düşünce, tasavvuf, ilâhî hakikat.

I. Introduction

When considering the *'aql*, modern Muslims have come to translate it as rationality, or even simply “the mind.” With the addition of neurologists, this deep term has been simplified even more and come to be translated as “brain.” The true translation of *'aql* is intellect, but this intellect is not just the thinking brain that is alluded to by neurologists and modern scientists; it is a state (*hâl*) of the heart. The thinking intellect is not the brain, it is the heart, as God says in the Qur'ân: “Lehum qulûbun ya'qilûn bihâ” (Q 22: 46) The heart is regarded as the seat of *'aql*, in fact, the heart is the highest degree of *'aql*. With this argument in mind, I will go through a brief overview of how *'aql* has been defined by various Sufis such as Ḥakîm al-Tirmidhî, Al-Ghazâlî, and Rûmî, and give examples from each showing that boiling down *'aql* to neurons passing along information is too much of an oversimplification, particularly as it concerns the Islamic and specifically the Sufi tradition.

II. What is *'aql*?

With a dictionary definition of “preventing,

obstructing, disabling, tying down,” the word *'aql*, as a philosophical and logical term, has also gained the definition of “that which can comprehend the truth of creation, an instrument that can effect matter without itself being physical; a power that can conceptualize terms from matter through abstraction, that can postulate and compare by establishing connections between these terms.”¹ The intellect is the most important capacity for human beings in terms of allowing the human to ethically, politically, and aesthetically parse out the good from the evil and the beautiful from the ugly. In the Islamic tradition, there are various verses from the Qur'ân regarding the *'aql* where it is enjoined upon the humans to use this intellect which has been granted to them, with the joyful news of being blessed by heaven in the hereafter for those who do use their intellect. It should be clear that this intellect is to be used for good and beauty, meaning the *'aql* “must lead to praiseworthy conduct, so that a man of bad character, however ingenious he might be, is not an

1 Süleyman Hayri Bolay, “Akıl”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1989, II: 238-242.

‘āqil’;² thus prioritizing beautiful conduct rather than some sort of intelligence based on information. The intellect’s capacity to interpret, understand, and comprehend the inner workings of a thing – whether material or spiritual – is supposed to engage the human being even further with their conscience, their inner realm: most specifically, their heart.³

When it comes to how tasawwuf considers *‘aql*, a general overview shows that there were differences in Sufis’ understanding of intellect, with some regarding it as an “impediment to spiritual realization” while others maintained a positive interpretation by contrasting it with the more bodily concept of nafs and stating that it was through the different densities of light that came with *‘aql* that human beings could understand the divine.⁴ To be more specific, early period Sufis did not go into much detail regarding the examination and definition of *‘aql*, focusing more on its capacity for practical benefit in ethics and religion and as an instrument in ensuring a human’s servanthood vis-à-vis God. This period was more focused on the correct practice of what had been transmitted in the text, with intellect only useful insofar as it could understand what was written in those texts. In the same vein, there was a certain importance accorded to intellect as it was considered to be the tool for an individual to shift away from worldly desires and to focus on the hereafter; with such a focus, *‘aql* was regarded as being second only to faith/*īmān*.⁵

2 T. D. Boer, & F. Rahman, “Aql,” in *EI 2nd Edition Online*, ed. P. Bearman, 2012, accessed September 24, 2024, https://doi-org.proxy.uskudar.edu.tr/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0038.

3 Bolay, “Akıl”, II: 238-242.

4 A. Palmer, “Intellect in Sūfism,” in *EI 3rd Edition Online*, eds. K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas and D. J. Stewart, 2022, accessed 24 September 2024, https://doi-org.proxy.uskudar.edu.tr/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_32489.

5 Süleyman Uludağ, “Akıl – Tasavvuf”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1989, II: 246-247.

To briefly also consider how philosophers regarded intellect, there were some who only considered it within a textual context and thus a tool for understanding. There were also others, such as Farābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), who describe levels of intellect going from the active intellect (*‘aql al-fa’āl*) where individual forms are given to material objects and universal forms to human intellect. This stage leads to an actualized intellect (*‘aql bi’l-fi’l*) which reflects upon itself and attains the knowledge of categories and comes to a higher level of intellect. In line with my argument of degrees of intellect, certain Muslim philosophers put forth the idea of emanating intellects wherein the higher degree begets the lower degree of intellect.⁶ The highest degree of intellect, be it the Universal Intellect or the First Intellect, is the goal. Philosophers argue that this can only be reached in death; Sufis, through their various methods, attempt to get to this point while living in the world. It is also partially the focus on text only and the use of *‘aql* solely as a tool of understanding which would lead to Sufis’ argument of intellect’s insufficiency when it comes to the comprehension of divine truths.⁷

Although following “general Islamic notions of “intelligence” and “reason” as being inherently ethico-religious,”⁸ Sufi parlance of *‘aql* ranged from being regarded entirely negatively as a hobble holding one’s spirituality back, to a more middle ground approach of being useful insofar as it helps one live life as a good Muslim, to conceptions of intellect in degrees that accompany one on the path of becoming a Perfected Human Being (*insān*

6 Boer, & Rahman, “Aql,” accessed September 24, 2024, https://doi-org.proxy.uskudar.edu.tr/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0038.

7 Uludağ, “Akıl – Tasavvuf”, II: 246-247.

8 Palmer, “Intellect in Sūfism,” accessed 24 September 2024, https://doi-org.proxy.uskudar.edu.tr/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_32489.

al-kāmil). We will now look at more specific examples of how Sufis, particularly the views brought by Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, and Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, regarded intellect and the shifting perception of this contested concept.

III. Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932)

Known particularly for his systematic treatment of the concept of “*walāya*”, friendship with God, in Islamic thought, Tirmidhī’s depiction of divine attributes within his composite anthropological and cosmological world seamlessly integrate the human being and the cosmos into a single whole.⁹ Tirmidhī is also regarded as one of the figures who contributed to the formation of a new understanding of intellect in Sufism by transferring to it the concept of wisdom espoused by Hellenistic philosophy and gnosticism.¹⁰ Putting intellect as the opposing force to *hawā*/carnal desires like the conception of ‘*aql* in Ḥāris al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), Tirmidhī describes intellect as being neither matter nor material, and proposes ‘*aql* as a light/*nūr*, which separates the truth (*ḥaqq*) from the false (*bāṭil*).¹¹

Looking at the human being as a composite being, Tirmidhī argues that there are three centers within the human: the head, the heart or breast, and the belly. He specifies each of the centers in the following manner:

The head was the seat of reason, the faculty of discernment and differentiation, and spirit, the principle of life, while the belly housed the carnal soul, with its principal force lust (*shahwa*) and all the lower in-

stincts (*hawā*), which arose directly from Hell and were fanned by Satan himself. The heart (*qalb*) was the repository of the knowledge of God (*ma’rifā*), which shone forth in the form of the light of divine attributes from the heart into the breast (*ṣadr*). The light of the heart in the breast was, however, normally clouded over by the smoke generated by hot winds originating from the carnal soul, which formed a screen that made it impossible for reason’s light to discern the light of the heart and thus to know God, unless the carnal soul’s activities were countered and subdued by strict observance of what was ‘due to God’ (*ḥaqq Allah*), that is, fulfilling God’s commands as contained in His laws.¹²

In his *The Life of the Friends of God* work, Tirmidhī continues this discussion of the intellect/reason and how its illumination through divine knowledge that comes to the heart can help the human being in advancing spiritually with the following:

The breast is the courtyard of the heart (*qalb*), and the heart, as is generally the case in mysticism, is the center of higher religious experiences, knowledge and the emotions. Consequently, the heart forms the counterpart to the world of the *nafs*. It is the seat of a divine light, *ma’rifā*, which every human being, but in a special sense every Muslim, possesses from pre-eternity. This light becomes effective, i.e. is made conscious and known, when it shines forth from the heart into the breast and is there recognized by the *fu’ād* and the ‘*aql*. The *fu’ād* is the outer surface of the *qalb*, i.e. the heart’s skin, and endows the heart with sight, for the *fu’ād* possesses two eyes. This notion is an elaboration of the Qur’ānic line (Q 53: 11): *His fu’ād did not deny what it saw*. While the outer eye is active through the light of the *rūḥ*, the eye of the *fu’ād* sees through the light of God. Like immediately recognizes like:

9 Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 44-45.

10 Abdülfettâh Abdullah Bereke, “Ḥakīm et-Tirmizî”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1997, XV: 196-199.

11 Uludağ, “Akıl – Tasavvuf”, II: 246-247.

12 Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 45.

the divine light present in the *fu'ād*'s eye recognizes the light of *ma'rifa* which is cast into the *ṣadr* and must be filtered out of the dross of matter, out of whatever is of earthly nature. (...)

Understanding and comprehension follow upon sense perception by means of the *'aql*, reason. Reason must be strictly distinguished from understanding (*dhihn*), which is the tool of the carnal soul. The process of perception and consciousness of the divine light of *ma'rifa* is constantly under threat from the carnal soul, because the carnal soul, with all its lusts in the form of smoke and fire that well up out of the abdomen into the breast, positions itself in front of the *fu'ād*'s eye and obscures the light of the reason. In this way, the carnal soul hinders vision and recognition, thus impeding consciousness of the divine light. This is the normal state of affairs in which all men and the ordinary Muslims find themselves. The mystic, on the other hand, makes an effort to eliminate the hindering effects of the carnal soul. In his special case the path to God has been opened – the path to perfected consciousness of *ma'rifa*. The process begins when the light of *ma'rifa* shines in the breast without hindrance from the carnal soul.¹³

Continuing with this discussion of *'aql* as the defense against passion, Tirmidhī writes that it is this passion that is the infernal component in man, and the “carnal soul has no defense against passion, if it does not submit to the counsels of reason (*'aql*).”¹⁴ For the believer who has already achieved this awareness of the exterior world and the dangers passion poses, the knowledge that is accumulated in the chest and seen by the heart's eyes become

13 Bernd Radtke & John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 50-51.

14 Radtke & O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 58.

knowledge of the heart, and the individual's faith is strengthened, preparing them for a position wherein they will be able to aspire to a higher level. Tirmidhī continues,

The heart, observing the breast, discovers in itself and in the creatures of this inferior world attributes which they owe to the divine Omnipotence. Gradually, it will thus ascend towards the divine Unity and the awareness of God. There, finally, is the highest level accessible to man, and the heart will bring back to the chest the quintessence of an incomparable knowledge. Heart, reason, and *dhihn* together illuminate the chest, the “light of gnosis” and that of “monotheism” shine forth and, in the illumined chest, all these lights become a single one, the “light of certitude” and of the love of God. (...) It seems that the echelons of reason correspond to these stages: above “reason of faith” there are “reason of knowledge and perception (*idrak*)”, “reason of right guidance (*hidaya*)”, and “reason of gnosis and of insight (*basira*)”.¹⁵

Demonstrating the active manner in which *'aql* is the real agent when it comes to acquiring awareness of *ma'rifa*, Tirmidhī writes the following:

Individual reason (*'aql*), which is a part of the Supreme Intellect, is a divine light and has its seat in the head. From there it radiates its light into the breast. *'Aql* has the capacity to transform *ma'rifa*, i.e. the intuitive knowledge of God that shines forth in the breast, into conscious thought, provided a person's lower nature – his *nafs*, *shahwa* or *hawā* in conjunction with Satan – does not hinder it. Thus, *'aql* is the real agent in the interior process of acquiring

15 Y. Marquet, “al-Tirmidhī,” in *EI 2nd Edition Online*, ed. P. Bearman, 2012, accessed September 24, 2024, https://doi-org.proxy.uskudar.edu.tr/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1230.

awareness of *ma'rifa*.¹⁶

With all of this in mind, we can see that Tirmidhī is one of the sources for our argument that 'aql is more than just the brain and that there are degrees to the intellect, where it can be as grand as that which directly emanates from the Supreme Intellect to the tool which fights against the passions aroused within the carnal soul. This intellect that is comprised of degrees and levels can also be found in another important Muslim figure, Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī.

IV. Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)

In the period after Tirmidhī, Sufis would come to argue that the theoretical intellect was incapable of delivering when it came to providing evidence for the various proofs about the divine in which philosophers and theologians were engaged. For matters related to God's existence, the unseen realm (*alam al-ghayb*), and the states in the hereafter, Sufis' argument was that the greatest comprehension of all was that intellect-'aql is impotent in the face of these calamitous and astonishing questions. One of the proponents of the intellect being insufficient and in second place when it comes to comprehending divine truths, Ghazālī brings this understanding of placing the intellect in second place to its zenith, arguing that if the intellect can demonstrate that what our senses tell us are not true, then it is entirely likely for there to be a force greater than a human being's intellect which can show that all the knowledge facilitated by the intellect is just as wrong.¹⁷

When it comes to the reasons for such differences of opinion over the nature of intellect, Ghazālī argues that it can be drawn from the issue of there being four different realities

denoted by the word 'aql, where it can be

1. The attribute which distinguishes human beings from animals and makes them capable of learning arts and sciences; as such, intellect is an innate capacity (*garīza*) that is related to knowledge as the eye is related to vision.
2. Knowledge that is possessed innately by children once they have gained a certain power of discernment, e.g., that two of a thing are more than one.
3. Knowledge gained through experience.
4. The understanding by man's innate capacity for knowledge that all affairs have certain consequences and that passion and self-interest must be restrained. The first of these kinds of intellect, says Ghazālī, is the foundation and source, the second the initial consequence of the first and second combined, and the fourth the ultimate fruit and final goal. The first two are innate, while the third and fourth are acquired.¹⁸

Demonstrating a continuity in conceptualizing the intellect in degrees and as a force that regulates a human being's reactions to the carnal soul, Ghazālī points out that there are three types of knowledge that are needed to advance on the path of self-knowledge. In brief, these three types of knowledge are psychology where the individual comes to understand themselves and figures out ways of practicing self-discipline. The second type is related to domestic management, with the individual garnering the knowledge needed to raise children and take care of dependents. The third is knowledge of politics and the skills to manage the polis, requiring the knowledge of such critical matters as jurisprudence and civil administration. Ghazālī believed that harmony in these three spheres of personal, family and political would create the optimum conditions for the realization

16 Radtke & O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 75.

17 Uludağ, "Akıl – Tasavvuf", II: 246-247.

18 William Chittick, "Aql [in Persian Literature]", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1986, II: 195-198.

of true happiness. Knowledge is central to all three spheres, and in order for this knowledge to flourish three faculties have to be trained and disciplined. Ghazālī's three faculties (*quwwa*) are the faculty of contemplation or reason (*tafakkur*, or *fikriya 'aqliya*), the faculty of desire, or appetite (*shahwa*), and the faculty of anger (*ghadab*). These three faculties partially correspond to Plato's three elements of the soul, namely, intellect, desire, and emotion.

The refinement of the contemplative faculty results in wisdom (*ḥikma*), says Ghazālī, as promised in the Qur'ān: *He gives wisdom to whom he pleases; and the one to whom wisdom has been given, has received much good.* One endowed with a refined contemplative faculty can easily make a judgement between truth and falsehood in doctrinal matters. Such a person can distinguish between truth and untruth in speech and can discriminate between acts that are aesthetically pleasing and those that are abominable. The contemplative faculty is intimately connected to epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic sensibilities. By refining the appetite, moreover, one acquires the virtue of abstinence (*'iffa*) in order to avoid indecent acts. And in refining the faculty of anger, finally, one attains temperance (*ḥilm*), the ability to show restraint and thus acquire courage (*shuja'a*). As long as the latter two faculties – desire and anger – are governed by contemplative reason, a certain amount of harmony, equilibrium, and justice (*'adala*) is achieved between the various faculties.¹⁹

When these faculties are educated, Ghazālī believed that not only would they perform in a harmonious manner, they would also reach the highest ethical standard, which form the

lynchpin of prophetic teachings.

It should be noted here that when stating Sufis do not regard the intellect as being enough, they are particularly concerned with the theoretical and metaphysical intellect that attempts to understand pre-eternal, post-eternal, and divine truths: the intellect that rules a human being's material form, directing their ethical and religious behaviour, is not the intellect that is being scrutinized.

The final general point that we would like to make here, which is actually a very good transition point into how Rūmī conceptualizes the intellect in the face of love, is that for many Sufis, the hearth of intellect is the heart. Love and intellect are generally contrasted, with *'aql* only able to achieve things to a certain level with love needed to carry the individual beyond that point. Even Ghazālī would write, "Love for God is the ultimate goal of the spiritual stations (*maqāmat*)... Every station beyond it is one of its fruits, and every station before it leads up to it."²⁰ The Prophet's Ascension (*Mi'rāj*) is used as the ultimate example of the need for love to continue on the path: the angel Gabriel, representing the intellect, can only accompany the Prophet to a specific point but cannot go beyond, stating that he would burn if he attempted to do so. What becomes necessary, then, is the steed of love, to carry the Prophet even further.²¹

V. Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273)

While there are many Sufi predecessors to Rūmī who also argue for love as something that engages with realms beyond intellect's capacity, such as Sanā'ī (d. 525/1131?), 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131), Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), and Najm ad-Dīn Rāzī (d.

19 Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 243-244.

20 Chittick, "Aql [in Persian Literature]", II: 195-198.

21 Uludağ, "Akıl – Tasavvuf", II: 246-247.

654/1256), Rūmī remains the representative figure of the relationship between love and intellect. Although acknowledging love's superiority over the intellect, Rūmī

never ignores intellect's positive dimension. Even more than Sanā'ī or Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, he gives intellect a clear role to play in the cosmos and in the stages of spiritual growth undergone by the traveler (*sāliq*). He teaches that intellect is one in substance with the angels and is constantly engaged in seeking God; he contrasts it with the ego (*nafs*), which was originally one substance with Satan. Most men are veiled from the light of intellect by their egos; hence their intellects are in fact partial, while only the prophets and saints have reestablished contact with the Universal Intellect, through which all things are created. If intellect has a negative side, it is because the "partial intellect has disgraced the Intellect". But in spite of the intellect's fundamentally positive role, it must eventually be left behind in the quest for God. Just as Gabriel could only go so far in guiding the Prophet on his celestial ascent (*mi'rāj*), so the intellect must be finally naughted, since it pertains to creation and therefore duality. The intellect takes the saints to the Lote Tree of the Far Boundary, but "Intellect is a shadow, God the sun: How can the shadow stand up to the sun?" Hence Rūmī devotes many lines, especially in his *Dīvān*, to criticizing the intellect from the point of view of love, which burns away all multiplicity and leaves only the One God. Rūmī also makes clear the close connection between sobriety and intellect on the one hand and intoxication and love on the other: "The form of intellect is all stricture of heart, but the form of love is nothing but drunkenness."²²

There are myriad examples that can be given from Rūmī regarding the state of the intellect

22 Chittick, "Aql [in Persian Literature]", II: 195-198.

and its contrasting yet complimentary role to love. We will suffice with a few for this lecture. In the *Masnavī*, Rūmī writes:

The intellect is of two kinds: The first is acquired. You learn it like a boy at school, from books, teachers, reflection and rote, from concepts and from excellent and new sciences. Your intellect becomes greater than that of others, but you are heavily burdened because of your acquisition... The other intellect is a gift of God. Its fountainhead lies in the midst of the spirit. When the water of knowledge bubbles up from the breast, it will never become stagnant, old, or discolored. If the way to its outside source should become blocked, there is no reason to worry since the water keeps on bubbling up from within the house. The acquired intellect is like a stream led into a house from outside. If its way should be blocked, it is helpless. Seek the fountain from within yourself!²³

When it comes to the degrees of intellect, Rūmī says the following:

Be well aware of the discrepancies among intellects, which extend in degrees from earth to heaven! There is an intellect like the disc of the sun, and another less than Venus or a shooting star. There is an intellect happily flickering like a lamp, and another like a spark of fire... Partial intellect has disgraced the Intellect; desire for the world has deprived man of the Object of his desire.²⁴

Combining the issue of imitative knowledge and intellect being bogged down by it, Rūmī writes,

Although your intellect is flying upward, the bird of your imitative knowledge is feeding upon the ground. Imitative knowledge is the bane of our spirit: It is

23 William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 35-36.

24 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 229.

a borrowed thing, and we sit complacently saying, “It is ours.” You must become ignorant of this intelligence: you must become mad!²⁵

Looking into intellect as a light and light as divine attributes, as we have seen in Tirmidhī, Rūmī writes,

There are spiritual spheres, other than the spheres of this world, from which gifts descend to the heavens’ constellations. Replenishment to the constellations of earth, gifts for the constellations of water, flames for the constellations of fire – all are given by a most perfect Giver. So also this constellation of the senses, ever full of perceptions: it seeks intelligence not from the senses, but from the spirit and the intellect’s lightning.²⁶

On the relation between intoxication and intellect, Rūmī says the following:

The inauspicious ego has wines of wretchedness that take it far from the Way. The intellect has wines of felicity that lead it to the everlasting abode. Hark, oh heart! Be not deceived by every intoxication! Jesus is drunk with God, but his ass is drunk with barley. (...) Know that every sensual desire is like wine and hashish – it veils the intelligence and stupefies rationality. Wine is not the only intoxicant of intelligence: whatever is sensual shuts the eyes and ears. Iblis was far from being a wine-drinker – pride and denial made him drunk.²⁷

Continuing with the theme of sobriety, intellect, and intoxication, Rūmī writes in his *Dīvān*:

Man’s sober-mindedness and intellect derive from his coldness – when wine has made him warm, where are intellect and discernment? Of course in the lack

of sober-mindedness he has another kind of intelligence – how can sober-minded wakefulness be compared with dreams of sleep? As long as the bird is caged it suffers strictures. When the cage has been broken, what happens then? When the intellect is present, the ego is full of faults because of sin, but when the Intellect of intellect is present, where are the sins of the ego?²⁸

Again in the *Dīvān*, Rūmī states his preference for love of God over intellect with the following:

Someone said, “Samā’ diminishes dignity and respect” – you can have the dignity, for my good fortune and dignity are His love. I do not want intellect and wisdom – knowledge of Him is enough for me. At nighttime the light of His Face is my morning’s moon.²⁹

We will end the section of Rūmī on intellect with the following from his *Dīvān*:

Listen to my words: Drink the wine of the spirit! Make your sober mind selfless and drunk! The form of intellect is all stricture of the heart, but the form of Love is nothing but drunkenness. Oh intellect! You make me existent! Oh Love! You make me drunk! Although you make me despicable you pull me to the All-High Lord. Pour for me the unmixed, royal wine! Put my many talented intellect to sleep! Were a single drop of this intoxication to fall upon the intellects of all the world’s inhabitants, neither the world nor man, neither compulsion nor free will, would remain. First give that cup to the talkative ego so that its rational faculty will tell no more tales. Once rationality is blocked, a torrent will come and erase all signs of this world and place. Yesterday intellect went out with a cane in its hand and entered into the circle of profligates: “How

25 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 229..

26 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 253.

27 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 312.

28 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 323.

29 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 329.

long will you work this corruption?” When our Saki poured on its head a cup of wine, it broke down the door of the ascetic’s cell: “How much more of this worship?” It threw away its rosary and abandoned hypocrisy: “Now is the time for joy! How much more of this senseless heartache?” Oh sir, I used to have a thousand intellects and good manners. Now that I am drunk and ruined, bad manners are welcome! Man in his heartache resembles a target for arrows – he has no armor but intoxication and selflessness. Oh Saki, we have raised a commotion and gone to war! Pour that rose-colored wine, so that all may become one color!³⁰

VI. Conclusion

A dichotomy of intellect, *'aql*, versus heart, *qalb*, has been created with the spread of modernism and rationalism. Modernism’s argument has been that there is only one, single cognitive mechanism. However, God says in the Qur’ān that knowledge was given in degrees, meaning if the knowledge is in degrees, intellect must also be so (Q 58: 11). In fact, this should be fairly obvious, given there is an intellect that is used to buy something at the market, compared to the intellect that is in force when discussing metaphysical concepts.

There is an assumption that with a shift in terminology, the meaning behind them changes as well. This distinction in terminology can be applied to the use of certain terms among the same group as well. According to Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), for example, there are those among the Sufis who distinguish and argue about the station of *ma’rifa* compared to that of *'ilm*, debating that one is higher than the other. In truth, he continues, everyone is defining the same thing, but their “disagreement lies in the names, not in the meaning.”³¹

30 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 320-321.

31 William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn*

For Sufis, *qalb*, the heart, is the polished intellect (*'aql*), it is the highest degree of intellect. What is referred to as *al-'aql al-kullī*, the Universal Intellect, is the *qalb* of Sufis. There was an enforced separation enacted upon the terms, tearing intellect and heart away from each other, ending up with those studying in the heart realm as starry-eyed mystics who are completely ungrounded, while those in the realm of the intellect were scientists conducting experiments and speaking with hard facts. Inspiration was something to be spurned, not supported, intuition denied, not accepted. More recently, the danger and ignorance of this position has been acknowledged in the West and inspiration (*ilhām*) has been given more credence than before. It is our hope with this paper that this bountiful relationship between intellect and love is once again rekindled, and the separation between the two removed so that true wisdom can be achieved.

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