



## PAPER DERIVED FROM THESIS

# Quranic Perspective of Intellect: How Intellectual Development Practically Shapes a Pure Life

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## ABSTRACT

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**SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES:** This research article investigates the development of 'Aql (intellect) from a Quranic perspective and its significant role in achieving a "PURE LIFE". The objective is to differentiate the Quranic concept of intellect from conventional ideas of intelligence and to propose a practical, holistic framework for intellectual growth grounded in Quranic teachings. The study aims to show how cultivating intellect, as emphasized in the Quran, leads to individual and societal prosperity in this world and the hereafter.

**METHOD & FINDING:** Using qualitative content analysis, the study focuses on Quranic verses containing the Arabic root 'Aql [-q-l]. Through thematic coding and interpretive analysis, a Quranic model of intellectual development is extracted, highlighting stages such as *Tafakkur* (thinking), *Ta'aqqul* (pondering), *Dhikr* (remembrance of the Almighty), *Shukr* (gratitude), culminating in divine *Hidāyat* (guidance). The findings indicate that the Quranic framework is inherently holistic, integrating cognitive, and has ethical, and spiritual dimensions. This model enriches reasoning and decision-making while fostering virtues and social responsibility, thus facilitating a pure and balanced life.

**CONCLUSION:** The research concludes that 'Aql (intellect) is a divinely bestowed faculty, one of Allah's noblest gifts to humanity, serving as the foundation for understanding, discernment, and ethical living. Unlike mere intelligence, intellect integrates rational, moral, and spiritual aspects, enabling humans to distinguish between *Haqq* (truth) and *Bāṭil* (falsehood). This discernment guides ethical conduct, protecting individuals and societies from moral decline. When aligned with divine guidance, intellect leads to a PURE LIFE marked by inner peace, contentment, and righteous action, culminating in true felicity and success in both this world and the hereafter.

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## Introduction

The Quran is presented not merely as a physical book or a collection of written verses, but as a living existence or entity. A well-known sacred tradition states, “When Allah created intellect, He said to it, 'Come forward,' and it came forward. He then said, “Go back,” and it went back. Then Allah said, “I swear by My honor and glory that I have not created any creature more beloved to Me than you. I will give you (i.e., the intellect) in its complete form only to those whom I love. I, however, will command only you to do things and prohibit only you from doing certain things. I will grant blessings (rewards) to you only and will subject only you to punishments” (Kulaynī, 1999, p. 35, Hadīth 1).

This perspective emphasizes that the Quran is a dynamic, ever-relevant source of guidance that transcends time and place. It is seen as a comprehensive manual for life, offering solutions and direction for all aspects of human existence. The Quran is an active force, shaping lives and societies, and its teachings apply to all humanity, regardless of culture or era.

In the contemporary world, humanity faces unprecedented challenges. Acts once deemed unethical or illegitimate have, in many societies, gained acceptance and even respectability. While multiple factors contribute to this transformation, a critical one is the

neglect of nurturing the human intellect. Despite ongoing worldwide developments and innovations in educational systems, there remains a gap in fostering the core intellectual faculties of individuals.

Modern education has embraced various theories of intelligence, offered diverse curricula, and encouraged participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and community service. These avenues aim to develop cognitive, social, and emotional capacities. However, the intellect — the deeper, reflective, and discerning faculty of the human being — remains largely untouched. In this respect, Parthasarathy (2007) said, “The crux of the problem that humanity faces today is the failure to distinguish intellect from intelligence. Even the educated remain unaware of the exact nature of the intellect. Educators have focused their attention solely on reinforcing intelligence while investing little effort in developing the intellect.”

In light of the foregoing discussion, an essential inquiry arises: What is the Quranic concept of intellect, and how can it be developed to achieve *al-Ḥayāt al-Ṭayyibā* (pure life)? Addressing this question is pivotal, as it not only deepens understanding of intellect from the Quranic viewpoint but also guides practical pathways for intellectual and spiritual growth that culminate in holistic well-being and ethical living, ultimately leading to the realization of pure life.

## Conceptual Framework

### 1. Quranic Concept of Intellect

The concept of intellect in this research is grounded in its dictionary meaning as the faculty of reasoning, understanding, and discerning truth from falsehood. Classical Arabic lexicons define intellect as the capacity to think deeply and make sound judgments. The late Ṭabāṭabā'ī in the book *Al-Mīzān* elaborated this by describing intellect not merely as cognitive ability but as a divine endowment that integrates knowledge with moral and spiritual insight, enabling humans to recognize God's signs and follow the righteous path (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1972, p. 592). The Quran itself uses a variety of terms related to intellect, including *Qalb* (heart), *Ṣadr* (chest), *Fu'ād* (heart), and *Lubb* (core intellect), to describe this faculty, emphasizing its holistic nature that transcends mere brain function. Verses containing the root word 'Aql and its derivatives, e.g., *Ya 'qilūn* or *Ta 'qilūn*, occur repeatedly, underscoring the Quran's call for reflection, reasoning, and the use of intellect as a means to understand divine revelation, avoid error, and lead a morally upright life. This multidimensional Quranic portrayal situates intellect as central to human existence, linking rationality with faith and ethical conduct (Quran 2:164)

### 2. Holistic Development

Holistic development is the extensive approach in teaching which objective rich the goal of developing multiple

abilities in the human mind. It is the development of physical, emotional, and intellectual, social development of students, and promotes the learning style with higher order skill improvement (Channawar, 2022).

Holistic development in this research refers to the integrated growth of the individual's intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social dimensions as inspired by Quranic teachings. The Quran advocates for the development of intellect not in isolation but as part of a comprehensive process that includes ethical awareness, emotional maturity, and social responsibility. Intellect enables humans to engage in *Tafakkur* (thinking), which fosters self-awareness and a deeper connection with God's guidance. This holistic approach ensures that intellectual growth leads to practical outcomes, ethical behavior, a pure life, and societal harmony, rather than merely accumulating knowledge. The Quran's emphasis on intellect as a means to achieve a pure life highlights that true development is multidimensional, encompassing the mind, heart, and actions in pursuit of a balanced, meaningful, and pure life.

### 3. Ḥayāt-i Ṭayyiba (Pure Life)

By Pure life, we mean a state in which a man lives a happy life and can use all the faculties of his soul (Islaminasab & Moridian, 2023). The notion of a pure life in the Quranic worldview extends beyond material well-being to encompass

spiritual, ethical, and intellectual purity. It signifies a life lived in harmony with divine guidance, characterized by sincerity, righteousness, and inner peace. The Quran repeatedly associates *Ṭayyib* (pure) or wholesome with sustenance, deeds, and existence, implying that purity is a holistic state that includes both material and spiritual life. Leading a pure life involves the practical application of intellect to discern truth, avoid harmful desires, and cultivate virtues that promote personal and societal well-being. Thus, Pure life is the outcome of intellectual development grounded in Quranic principles, reflecting a balanced and wholesome existence that nurtures both the soul and the body.

#### 4. Intelligence

As per Jean Piaget (1950), Intelligence is expressed through sensory experiences and motor actions; children develop object permanence. However, the theories of intelligence focus on the cognitive area. Moreover, Sternberg criticized traditional intelligence tests for focusing mostly on analytical intelligence and neglecting creative and practical facets (Sternberg, 1999). Intelligence is developed within an individual by acquiring information and knowledge from external sources, such as teachers, textbooks, schools, universities, and other information repositories. By utilizing these sources, one becomes informed, knowledgeable, and even brilliant in one or more

subjects of interest. It is worth taking a moment to reflect and understand what has been achieved. The intelligence thus gained provides one with the means to make a living.

#### Literature Review

The article *Sound Intellect Leads a Pure Life* written by Qutbuddin & Qutbuddin (2023), encapsulates a profound philosophical and spiritual principle rooted in Islamic thought, particularly as expressed in *Ṭahīr Ṣaifuddīn's Poem of the Intellect*. The poem portrays the intellect as the essence of the human being, originating from a divine realm and capable of achieving its highest potential when it remains sound, free from corruption by base desires, arrogance, or malice. A Sound Intellect, guided by the divinely appointed Imam who embodies pure intellect, enables a person to find *Ḥayāt-i Ṭayyiba*, characterized by true belief, virtuous character, and righteous actions. This Pure Life is not merely moral conduct, but a holistic way of being that aligns the individual with their original, primordial state of intellect and closeness to God. Thus, cultivating a Sound Intellect is essential for leading a life of spiritual purity, ethical integrity, and ultimate salvation, as the intellect governs one's choices and directs one away from vice toward virtue.

Parthasarathy (2007), in his book *The Fall of the Human intellect*, argued, “The crux of the problem that humanity faces today is the failure to distinguish intellect from intelligence. Even the educated remain unaware of the exact nature of the intellect. Educators have focused their attention solely on reinforcing intelligence while investing little effort in developing the intellect. The educational institutions focus on providing sheer knowledge, intelligence with no plan or program to develop the intellect. The world today is all intelligence, no intellect. The loss of intellect has left humans with stress, depression, and disease. And the world is with vandalism, militancy, and terrorism. There is no plan or program in the world today to develop the human intellect.”

The assertion that the domain of the true intellect is being overlooked within academic and educational spheres highlights a significant philosophical gap. We define *'Aql* here not merely as cognitive capacity or intelligence, but as the faculty of deep, ethical, and discerning judgment, which is the very ability to grasp ultimate truths and align action with virtue. Because of this deeper definition, its marginalization is certainly crippling to any educational system. An educational system that truly understands and incorporates the Intellect in its profound meaning will serve not only as a vehicle for human

formation and character building but will also sculpt an excellent, just, and stable society. When this higher faculty, the Intellect, is neglected, education fails to provide the necessary framework for purpose, which results in graduates who are technically skilled yet morally unmoored, ultimately leading to a society that is functional on the surface but profoundly unstable at its core.

### Research Method

This study adopts qualitative content analysis as its core research method to systematically examine the Quranic text, focusing on the Arabic root “-‘-q-l” (*'Aql*) because this root conceptually relates to intellect, reasoning, understanding, and discerning truth from falsehood. The analytical process begins with thematic coding concepts extracted from Quranic verses having this root, using established Quranic lexicons to identify relevant verses. Selecting verses with the mentioned root thus aligns the research methodologically, intending to investigate the Quranic concept of intellect and its role in intellectual development. This method enables a rigorous and holistic exploration of the research topic, combining direct textual analysis with scholarly insights to present a practical framework for holistic development based on the Quran. This approach allows for a deep understanding of the Quran’s role not just as a sacred text but as a dynamic



source of guidance applicable to holistic growth for achieving pure life.

The research employs qualitative content analysis with thematic coding of concepts extracted from Quranic Surahs that contain the root “-‘q-l” (‘Aql). The analytical process begins by systematically identifying relevant verses using Quranic lexicons that define and contextualize meanings related to intellect. Then, the verses undergo coding where key concepts are labeled—for example, functions of intellect like “listening” and “reasoning,” and signs for intellectual flourishing in nature. These codes are grouped into thematic categories that represent stages or functions of intellect according to the Quranic framework (e.g., *Tafakkur* (thinking), *Ta‘aqqul* (pondering), *Dhikr* (remembrance of the Almighty), *Shukr* (gratitude), culminating in divine *Hidāyat* (guidance)). This cyclical process reveals the interconnected nature of intellectual development in the Quran. The paper details specific codes with criteria and practical effects linking textual analysis to conceptual themes.

### **Quranic Perspective of Intellect**

The Holy Quran refers to the concept of ‘Aql (intellect) in its verbal form across forty-nine verses. Through a detailed analysis of these verses, five key components have been identified: the obstacles to intellect, the functions

of intellect, the factors influencing intellect, the signs of intellect, and the characteristics of the non-rational person. This paper, however, focuses only on the signs and functions of intellect.

#### **1. Listening as a Function of Intellect**

The Quran emphasizes a profound connection between listening and the use of intellect, presenting both as essential faculties for guidance and spiritual growth. Mainly, two verses urge believers not merely to hear, but to listen attentively and make it equivalent to using their intellect. The Quran frequently addresses those who ‘listen’ and ‘ponder’, highlighting that true comprehension and acceptance of divine guidance require active engagement of both auditory and intellectual faculties. In this respect, Allah said, *“When they are thrown in it, they hear it blaring, as it seethes, almost exploding with rage. Whenever a group is thrown in it, its keepers will ask them, ‘Did not any warner come to you?’ They will say, ‘Yes, a warner did come to us, but we impugned [him] and said, ‘Allah did not send down anything; you are only in great error.’ And they will say, ‘Had we listened or applied reason, we would not have been among inmates of the Blaze.”* (Quran, 67:7-10).

Listening, in the Quranic context, is not a passive act but a conscious,

thoughtful process that leads to understanding, discernment, and ultimately, right action. The repeated pairing of hearing and reasoning in the Quran underscores that intellectual reflection is integral to faith, and that heedlessness, failing to listen or think, results in great loss. Thus, from a Quranic perspective, listening and using intellect are interdependent processes, foundational for personal development and the attainment of truth. Actually, in those human persons, the failure of their sensory organs does not stem from biological imperfection, but essentially from the closure of their mind and heart to the truth. As in perceiving things, our sensate faculties and reason work together, and the latter makes sense of what our senses perceive. Hence, they deserve the punishment, which the Quran promised, as they deadened their faculties of reason and perception by not using them in seeing, hearing, listening, encountering, responding, reacting, contemplating, and then drawing the appropriate practical conclusions (Abdel-Maguid & Abdel-Halim, 2015)

### **The Interrelationship Between Listening and Using Intellect**

The Quranic verses present a profound integration of listening and intellect as twin faculties necessary for required comprehension. When examined closely, we see that the condemned group's failure was not one of listening

but of intellectual engagement with what they listen to. The verses establish *Sam'* (listening) not as mere auditory reception, but as an intellectual act requiring cognitive processing and discernment. The group's admission "Had we listened or applied reason" (Quran, 67:10) reveals them as parallel and mutually reinforcing processes rather than sequential ones.

The text demonstrates that authentic listening necessarily involves *Ta'aqqul* (activation of intellect). When the warner's message came, the group committed a double failure: they heard without intellectual consideration, "we impugned him", then compounded this by willful rejection (Quran 67:8-9). Their subsequent regret shows that proper listening would have engaged their cognitive faculties to evaluate the message's truth claims. The Quran here presents an epistemological framework where sound listening is intellectual listening. The ear and mind work in concert to penetrate surface meaning and apprehend divine truth. Without this intellectual dimension, listening remains hollow, unable to produce the transformative understanding that leads to right guidance and salvation from spiritual ruin.

The equivalence between listening and intellect in the mentioned verses points to a holistic concept of comprehension in Islamic thought. True hearing is never passive reception

but always involves the mind's active participation. The group's fate serves as a caution against divorcing auditory experience from intellectual processing. A disconnection that leads to the very error and destruction they lament. The Quran thus establishes that revelation demands both the physical capacity to hear and the intellectual willingness to comprehend, with the absence of either resulting in destruction (Quran 67:10).

## **2. Signs For the Flourishing of Intellect**

Signs for the flourishing of intellect are abundantly present in nature and human creation, inviting thoughtful reflection and intellectual growth. The diversity and complexity of the cosmos, including the heavens and the earth, serve as profound signs that stimulate human curiosity and reasoning. The Quran highlights these natural phenomena as clear indicators for those who engage their intellect. By observing and contemplating these signs, individuals are encouraged to develop their reasoning abilities, deepen their understanding of existence, and recognize the purposeful design behind nature and human creation. In this respect, Allah said, *"In the heavens and the earth there are indeed signs for the faithful. There are signs for people who have certainty in your own creation and in animals. He scatters abroad. There are signs for*

*people who exercise their reason in the alternation of night and day, in the provision that Allah sends down from the sky, with which He revives the earth after its death, and in the changing of the winds (Quran 45:3–5).*

The above verses elaborate that the natural world offers profound signs that encourage the flourishing of human intellect by inviting reflection and contemplation in the following seven areas or signs, and these are:

- The skies and the land
- Human creation
- Scattered things that move lowly.
- Alternation of night and day
- Provision from Sky
- Revival of the Earth after its death
- In the changing of the winds

Such engagement with nature not only nurtures intellectual faculties but also fosters spiritual awareness and ethical insight.

## **3. Analysis of Quranic verse**

Quranic verses insist on the crucial importance of attentive listening and reflection as prerequisites for effective intellectual operation. Intellect also guides moral conduct and sustains the dynamic process of intellectual and ethical development, enabling one to navigate complex life challenges with wisdom and foresight. Additionally, the intellect develops profoundly when a person observes the natural signs because such observation initiates a dynamic cognitive process that engages



curiosity, reflection, and critical reasoning. By contemplating vast phenomena like the skies, the diverse land, biological creation, and rhythmic natural cycles, one realizes that these are systematic, purposeful manifestations rather than random occurrences. This recognition cultivates a deeper understanding of existence, prompting the intellect to move beyond superficial knowledge to meaningful comprehension. Observation of natural signs fosters a habit of thoughtful inquiry, stimulating the intellect to discern patterns, causes, and underlying wisdom embedded in creation. It nurtures an ability to connect empirical evidence with metaphysical insights, supporting an integrated worldview that harmonizes knowledge and spirituality. This reflective engagement encourages intellectual humility and openness, enabling growth in discernment and ethical judgment. Hence, the Quranic invitation to ponder creation equips the intellect to flourish holistically, expanding not only rational faculties but also moral and spiritual awareness, thus guiding one towards enlightened, purposeful living. “An obsession with the ‘natural world’ gave a lasting boost to all sorts of experimental sciences. This was due mainly to the closer linkages the Quran sought to establish between the natural signs and the human intellect” (Kamālī, 2018).

#### **4. The Quranic Cycle of Intellectual Journey to Achieve Pure Life**

The Quranic worldview presents an integrated framework that intertwines intellectual reflection with spiritual refinement. Through contemplation of the natural world and its divine order, human beings are guided toward understanding their purpose and relationship with the Creator. The verses from Surah *al-Nahl* encapsulate this divine pedagogy by inviting humankind to think, reason, remember, give thanks, and ultimately receive guidance. Together, these stages form a continuous cycle of intellectual and spiritual growth that leads one toward *Hayāt-e-Ṭayyibah*, a pure and meaningful life grounded in awareness, gratitude, and moral direction. These stages, deduced from the Quran, come as follows:

##### **4.1. Thinking**

*For you, He makes the crops grow with it and olives, date palms, vines, and fruits of all kinds. There is indeed a sign in that for people who reflect (Quran 16:11).*

##### **4.2. Reasoning**

*He disposed the night and the day for you, and the sun, the moon, and the stars are disposed by His command. There are indeed signs in that for people who exercise their reason (Quran 16:12).*

### 4.3. Remembering

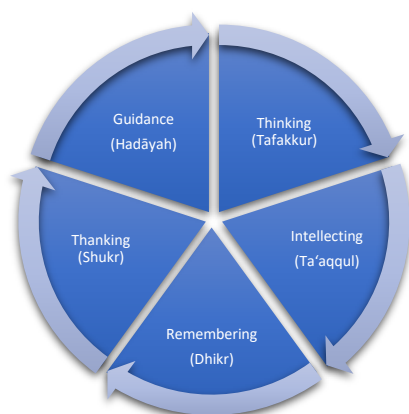
*And [He disposed for your benefit] whatever He has created for you in the earth of diverse hues—there is indeed a sign in that for a people who take admonition (Quran 16:13).*

### 4.4. Thanking

*It is He who disposed the sea [for your benefit] that you may eat from it fresh meat, and obtain from it ornaments which you wear, and you see the ships plowing through it, that you may seek His bounty and that you may give thanks (Quran 16:14).*

### 4.5. Getting Guidance

*He cast firm mountains in the earth lest it should shake with you, and [made] streams and ways, so that you may be guided (Quran 16:15).*



**Table No.1: The Quranic Cycle of The Intellectual Journey to Achieve Pure Life**

The selected Quranic verses illustrate a profound intellectual and spiritual progression that can be termed ‘The Cycle of the Intellectual Journey to achieve a Pure Life.’ This cycle begins with ‘Thinking’, a reflective observation

of the natural world, such as the descending rain that sustains life and nurtures growth. This stage invites humans to contemplate the divine order embedded in creation. The second stage, ‘Reasoning’, emerges as an elevation of thought into rational understanding, recognizing the harmony of the celestial systems: night, day, the sun, moon, and stars, all functioning under divine command. From reasoning arises ‘Remembering’, where reflection turns inward, enabling moral and spiritual awareness of one’s relationship with the Creator through observing the diversity and beauty of the earth. Once remembrance deepens understanding, ‘Thanking’ follows naturally as a conscious expression of gratitude for divine provisions. This gratitude cultivates humility and recognition of human dependence on divine grace. Finally, gratitude leads to ‘Guidance’, a state in which the intellect, heart, and will align with divine purpose, enabling an individual to discern the righteous path amid life’s complexities.

This cyclical process of thinking, reasoning, remembering, thanking, and receiving guidance serves as a transformative model for achieving *Hayāt e Tayyibah* (pure life). In this framework, intellectual engagement with the signs of creation does not end with abstract knowledge; rather, it culminates in embodied wisdom and moral direction. Each stage refines

human awareness: thinking awakens curiosity, reasoning establishes understanding, remembering embeds moral consciousness, and thanking nurtures humility and emotional balance. When these faculties harmonize, the individual transcends superficial perception and attains guidance, a state of enlightened living that integrates reason, faith, and ethical action. This guidance purifies life by aligning human cognition and behavior with divine will, producing inner peace, purposeful living, and a sustained sense of gratitude and direction. Ultimately, this cycle encapsulates the Quranic vision of transforming intellectual reflection into spiritual realization, where knowledge is not merely accumulated but lived, resulting in Pure Life.

### **Conclusion**

The research presented in this study conclusively establishes the Quranic concept of *'Aql* (intellect) as a unique and multidimensional faculty that transcends mere cognitive ability to embody an integrative mechanism essential for ethical discernment, spiritual awareness, and holistic human development. Unlike conventional notions of intelligence that focus solely on knowledge acquisition or problem-solving skills, the Quranic intellect connects reasoning with moral and spiritual insights, enabling individuals to navigate truth and falsehood in a

dynamic and context-sensitive manner. Central to this development are two components highlighted in the Quranic verses: active listening, which engages the intellect in attentive comprehension and thoughtful processing of knowledge; and observation and contemplative reflection upon the signs of Allah in creation, which stimulate intellectual curiosity and moral insight. This critical cognitive activity allows the individual to grasp complex realities, discern subtle distinctions, and make informed decisions anchored in the differentiation of *Haqq* and *Bāṭil* (truth and falsehood). At this level, the intellect is no longer passive but is engaged in dynamic processes of reasoning and evaluation that refine understanding and promote cognitive maturity. The process of intellectual development is integral to the human capacity to navigate life's complexities with clarity and wisdom. It facilitates not just theoretical comprehension but practical prudence in actions and judgments. Hence, cultivating sound intellect through listening and reflective engagement with natural signs is essential for realizing the ultimate Quranic goal of *Hayāt e Tayyibah* (pure life).

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The first author prepared the primary draft of the article and revised the final version extracted from his Ph.D. thesis. The first author is also the corresponding author. The second author, Dr. Abbas Ali Shameli, is the supervisor for the Ph.D. thesis and guided the writing of the thesis and research article. Dr. Majid Toroghi Ardakani is the third author of this research article and served as advisor for this Ph.D. thesis and research article.

### **Conflict of Interests**

The authors declare that there is no

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### **Negative AI Statement**

The author(s) declare that no AI tools or services were not used or not highly applied during the preparation of this work.

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