

THE INTERTWINED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NAFS (CARNAL SOUL), AQL (REASONING) QALB (HEART)

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Abstract

In a human being, each of nafs (carnal soul) aql (reasoning) and qalb (heart) have an important role to play in the development and make-up of a person. This paper will explore in detail the meaning of each of these key terms. This paper will then critically analyse the multifaceted relationship between these key terms, and what is the purpose of these terms with reference to the human being. These three terms have a distinct purpose, and are only but part of the constellation that make up the purpose of the human being and their soul. It is argued, that when harmoniously combined they form a greater unified purpose, in an effective and efficient relationship these terms lead to the sincere worship of God.

Keyword:

Abstrak

Pada manusia, nafs (jiwa), aql (pemikiran), dan qalb (hati) memainkan peranan penting dalam perkembangan dan pertumbuhan individu. Tulisan ini akan mengeksplorasi secara detil makna dari istilah-istilah tersebut. Artikel ini juga akan menganalisa secara kritis berbagai ragam hubungan diantara istilah-istilah tersebut, dan tujuan istilah-istilah tersebut terkait dengan umat manusia. Ketiga istilah ini memiliki tujuan yang berbeda dan merupakan bagian konstelasi yang membentuk tujuan manusia dan jiwa mereka. Argumennya adalah bahwa ketika digabungkan secara harmonis, ketiga hal tersebut akan membentuk kesatuan yang lebih baik; dalam sebuah hubungan yang efektif dan efisien, istilah-istilah ini membawa pada keikhlasan dalam penyembahan Tuhan.

Kata kunci:

مستخلص

لكل إنسان نفس الروح والعقل والقلب تلعب دوراً مهماً في تنمية الشخص وتطوره. هذه الورقة تستكشف بالتفصيل معنى كل من هذه المصطلحات الأساسية، ستحلل بعد ذلك بشكل نقدي العلاقة متعددة الجوانب بين هذه المصطلحات الرئيسية، وما هو الغرض من هذه المصطلحات بالإشارة إلى الكائن البشري. هذه المصطلحات الثلاثة لها غرض متميز، وهي جزء من الكوكبة التي تشكل غرض حياة الإنسان وروحه. يقال، أنه عند دمجها

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بتناغم، فإنها تشكل غرضاً موحدًا أكبر، في علاقة فعالة وفعالة تؤدي هذه المصطلحات إلى
عبادة الله المخلصة
الكلمات الرئيسية:

Introduction

In a human being, each of *nafs* (carnal soul), *aql* (reasoning) and *qalb* (heart) have an important role to play in the development and make-up of a person. This article will first define each of these key terms before discussing each point in detail. This article will then critically analyse the multifaceted relationship between these key terms, and what is the purpose of these terms with referencetothe human being. These three terms have a distinct purpose, and are only but part of the constellation that make up the purpose of the human being and their soul. It is argues, that when harmoniously combined they form a greater unified purpose, in an effective and efficient relationship these terms lead to the sincere worship of God.

Definitions:

From the outset, it is necessary to define the following terms from an Islamic perspective: *nafsaql* and *qalb*. For Imam Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), these three terms could be identified in two senses. For the *nafs*, the first meaning is the principle which “unites the irascible and appetitive faculties, and constantly enjoins evil”¹. The second meaning is the soul, which is a person’s essence, free of matter and has three distinct states². Ozalp³ describes these as (i) the commanding/inciting to evil self (*al-ammarah bi-l-su*), which is oblivious to God and under the insatiable animal desire; (ii) the accusing/admonishing self (*al-lawwamah*), which after receiving reminders from God, gains an awareness of God and see the need to enter the path of spirituality; and (iii) the restful/tranquil self (*al-mutma-innah*), which is heartfelt

¹Abu HamdiGhazali. *Disciplining the soul, refining the character, and curing the sicknesses of the heart* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995,p. 233.

² FethullahGulen. *Emerald hills of the heart: Key concepts in the practice of Sufism 3* (A. Unal, Trans.). New Jersey: Tugra Books, 2009.

³Mehmet Ozalp. What are the benefits of the prescribed prayers? In *101 questions you asked about Islam* (pp. 133-136). Blackheath: Brandl& Schlesinger, 2004.

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peace and tranquillity in the complete surrender to God⁴. According to Tritton⁵ *nafs* is the near equivalent of soul. Gulen states that the *nafs* is the “origin or centre of certain states or faculties such as lusts, anger, ill will, grudge, hatred and irritation”⁶. It is the connection or interface between the body and spirit (*ruh*), and helps drive the physical body’s feelings, movements and volition⁷. The *nafs* is prepared to accept bearing towards good or evil, which has a sharp effect on human behaviour⁸.

For Al-Ghazali, the *nafs* is the essence by which man can get to know God. It is a measure that makes God’s divine names and attributes known to a limited degree⁹. In the Quran narrates that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) teaches a very poignant lesson: “*Yet I do not claim my self free of error, for assuredly the human carnal soul always commands evil, except that my Lord has mercy (which saves us from committing evil acts). Surely my Lord is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate (especially towards His believing servants).* (Qur’an, 12:53)”¹⁰ Ali Unal¹¹ states that this verse refers to Prophet Yusuf’s lofty ideal of conveying God’s eternal message to the people of Egypt, and to his fellow prisoners when he was incarcerated. In Tafsir al-Tustari, Abu Muhammed Sahlibn 'Abd Allah (or Sahl al-Tustari) (c818 - c896), explained that:

*“Human nature (ab) comprises four natural dispositions (ab i): the first is the animal disposition (ab al-bah im), that of the stomach and genitals; the second is the satanic disposition (ab al-shay n), that of play (la b) and diversion (lahw); the third is the sorcerous disposition (ab al-sa ara), that of delusion (makr) and deception (khid); and the fourth is the devilish nature (ab al-ab lisa), that of refusal (ib) and arrogance (istikb r)”*¹²

⁴Mehmet Ozalp. "Chapter 1: Islam and Human Existence". In *Islam between Tradition and Modernity: An Australian Perspective* (pp. 2-19). Canberra, Australia: Barton Books, 2012.

⁵A.S. Tritton. "Man, nafs, ruh, aql". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 34, 3, 1971, 491-495.

⁶Gulen, 2009, p. 216.

⁷J.D.M. Zarabozo. "Definitions and discussion of terms". In *Purification of the soul: Concept, process and means* (pp.57-77). Denver, VO: Al-Basheer Publications & Translations, 2002, p. 58.

⁸Ibid, p. 60.

⁹Abu Hamdi Ghazali. "Revival of religious learnings". In *Imam Ghazzali's Ihya Ulum-Id-Din*. Karachi: Darul-Ishaat, 1993, retrieved from <http://www.ghazali.org/ihya/english/ihya-vol3-C1.htm>.

¹⁰Ali Unal's annotated interpretation of the Qur'an was used in this paper. Ali Unal. *The Qur'an with annotated interpretation in modern English*. New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2015.

¹¹Ibid p. 486.

¹²A. Keeler. and A. Keeler (tr). *Tafsir al-Tustari by Sahl b. Abd Allah al-Tustari: Great Commentaries on the Holy Quran*. Jordan: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Fons Vitae, 2011 accessed from

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In Tafsir al-Tustari, Sahl al-Tustari notes that God provides protection against the animal disposition through faith, namely *iman*. Safety from the satanic disposition is through glorification (*tasb*) and sanctification of God alone (*taqds*), which is the natural disposition of angels. Safety from the sorcerous disposition is through truthfulness sincere counsel, equity and graciousness, whereas safety from the devilish nature is through taking refuge (*iltij*) in God, by humbly imploring and making supplication to Him. The nature of the *aql* is to have knowledge, but the nature of the lower self (*nafs*) is ignorance.

Regarding the very same verse in Kashf Al-Asrar Tafsir, Rashad al-Din Maybudi (c1126)¹³ mentions a meeting between Fuzayl bin Iya (c803)¹⁴, and a visiting dervish, where Fuzayl bin Iya advises that the servant of God must always be passing back and forth between gratitude and apology. Whenever the servant looks at the Real (or God), he should see blessings, take delight, and increase in gratitude. Whenever the servant looks at himself, he should see sin. Fuzayl bin Iya advised the dervish: "Fear your place, guard your tongue, and ask God to forgive your sins and those of the faithful, men and women." Keeler and Keeler¹⁵ commenting on Maybudi's Kashf Al-Asrar Tafsir state that the "soul is a tremendous veil and the disrupter of religion, and is the quarry of every sort of ungodliness and the center of evils". All the prophets and messengers commanded the people to act with rigorousness and to struggle against the soul, and in this regard, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), after his army had returned from battle, said that they had returned from the lesser struggle to the greater struggle, which is the arduous struggle against the soul¹⁶.

Aql can mean intellect¹⁷ the ability to think or the place where knowledge develops and grows¹⁸, or reason¹⁹. According to Al-Ghazali²⁰, every human is born with *aql*,

http://www.greatafsirs.com/Tafsir_Library.aspx?SoraNo=12&AyahNo=53&MadhabNo=3&TafsirNo=93

¹³Rashad al-Din Maybudi (N.D.) *Kashf Al-Asrar Tafsir*. Jordan: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Fons Vitae, accessed from http://www.greatafsirs.com/Tafsir_Library.aspx?SoraNo=12&AyahNo=53&MadhabNo=4&TafsirNo=109

¹⁴ who was a repentant bandit who become a pious Muslim.

¹⁵A. Keeler. and A. Keeler, 2011, p. 96

¹⁶Fayd al-Qadir vol.4 pg. 511.

¹⁷Tritton, 1971, p. 494

¹⁸N. S. M. Akhir. *Al-Ghazali and his theory of the soul a comparative study*. Malaysia: Penerbit Universiti Sains, 2006, p. 217.

¹⁹Fethullah Gulen. *Emerald hills of the heart: Key concepts in the practice of Sufism* 1. New Jersey: Light, 2006, p. 206.

which is a native, instinctive intellect. It is used to perceive things that cannot be perceived through the physical senses. According to Akhir, *aql* is spiritual in nature and can also refer to *qalb*²¹. Al-Ghazali states that *aql* is the “seat of perception, the mind which perceived”²². Gulen states that *aql* provides evidence of truth for judging between good or evil, what is favourable or harmful, while not considered a decision maker or authority²³. The *aql* is the distinguishing feature of man from animal, which urges the rightly guided person to reflect, ponder and study (*tafakkur*) the signs of creation and the universe²⁴. Al Ghazali²⁵ states that *aql* is like a light placed in a man’s heart and allows and prepares the heart to receive knowledge, once a heart has been purified. It is the medium to receive and understand knowledge²⁶. Al-Ghazali also says that the *aql* refers to the knowledge on the reality of a thing²⁷. Nasr states that in Arabic *aql* is used to denote both reason and intellect, despite being distinct meanings and the “dependence of reason upon the intellect is always kept in mind”²⁸. Citing IbnSina, Nasr distinguishes between an active *aql*, which is universal and independent of the individual, and the intellectual *aql* function within man²⁹. IbnSina describes stages and states in intelligence from that basic intelligence possessed by all humans, called material or potential intelligence (*bi’l-quwwah*). As the human being grows in knowledge the first intelligible forms are placed in the soul from above and man attains to the level of the habitual intelligence (*bi’l-malakah*). As the intelligible becomes fully actualized in the mind, man reaches the level of actual intellect (*bi’lfi’l*) and finally as this process is completed, the acquired intelligence (*mustaf d*)³⁰. Ultimately, above these stages and states, stands the active *aql*, which is Divine and illuminates the mind through the act of knowledge.

Qalb also has a dual nature according to Al-Ghazali, the first is physical, a “pine-shaped piece of flesh in the body which contains a cavity filled with blood and is the

²⁰ as cited in Akhir, 2006, p. 224.

²¹ Ibid, p. 217.

²² Abu Hamdi Ghazali. "Soul', "Spirit', 'Heart' and 'Intelligence". In *Wonders of the heart* (W.J. Skellie, Trans., pp.5-11). Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007, p. 10.

²³ 2009, p. 206.

²⁴ N.S.M. Akhir. "Aql and noble character: A review from a scholarly perspective". *The Social Science*, 7(5), (2012), p. 718.

²⁵ as cited in Akhir, 2012, p. 720.

²⁶ Akhir, 2010, p. 722.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr. "Intellect and intuition: their relationship from the Islamic perspective". *Studies in Comparative Religion*, 13, 1 & 2. (Winter-Spring) (1979), p. 98.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 102.

³⁰ as cited in Nasr, 1979. p. 102.

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locus of the Spirit [ruh]”³¹The second meaning is spiritual, which is of a “spiritual, divine subtlety connected to the physical heart, which is the reality or real essence of man, which perceived, knows and intuit”³². This spiritual heart is also the “cognitive faculty of the human being”, and is the place of *ilm* (knowledge)³³ which is not surprising given that there are 40,000 neurons (or brain cells) in the heart³⁴. For Gulen³⁵, the *qalb* is that which God addresses and is either honoured or humiliated accordingly for its choices and actions. It has two aspects, one looking to the spiritual world and the other to the physical world³⁶. The spiritual *qalb* is the “centre of all emotions and intellectual and spiritual faculties”, and it is a sound*qalb*, when it is a “polished mirror” in which Divine knowledge is reflected³⁷.

Synergetic Effect

Working together and in harmony, each of *nafs*, *qalbandaql* do not share the same inclination, and in this regard this section will describe the relation of the *nafs* in relation to *qalb* and *aql*. When the *nafs* is purified there is balance between these three elements, giving rise to true humanity and advancing towards good, while keeping away from evil³⁸. In this regard, the Qur’an states:

And the human selfhood and that (All Knowing, All Powerful, and All Wise One), who has formed it to perfection. And who inspired it with the conscience of what is wrong and bad for it and what is right and good for it. He is indeed prosperous who has gown it in purity (away from self-aggrandizing rebellion against God). And he is indeed lost who has corrupted it (in self-aggrandizing rebellion against God) (Qur’an, 91:7-10).

Ali Unal comments the above verse is about learning and progress, which is fundamental to human life, and is one key difference between animals and humans: when born, animals are quickly adapt to their surrounds, whereas a human infant needs to be protected and nurtured for some years, before the same level of adaptation can be realized³⁹. In addition, humans have endowed by God a seed of great potential to attain perfection: to grow and have roots of virtue in this world, and

³¹Ghazali, 1995, p. 234.

³²Ibid, p. 234).

³³Akhir, 2006, p. 175.

³⁴Hamzah Yusuf. *Purification of the heart*. USA: Starlatch Press, 2004, p. 4.

³⁵2006, p. 22.

³⁶Ibid, p. 23.

³⁷Ibid, p. 22.

³⁸Gulen, 2009, pp. 218-219.

³⁹2015, p.1230.

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to have branches that reach out the next world, where the fruits of eternal happiness can be harvested. To germinate this seed to its potential, HojjarUnal recommends “the soil of spirituality and the water of faith and worship”⁴⁰. Humanity has been sent to the world to be “perfected through knowledge and faith”, and entrusted with establishing justice on it⁴¹.

Just as there is a potential for good in humans, there is also a “potential for evil within the souls of humans”⁴². This means while the *nafs* is not inherently evil, all evil in humans comes from the *nafs*⁴³. Effort must be made to keep it away from evil and blameworthiness, and to subdue and control the *nafs* from its own innate nature and also the whisperings of Satan⁴⁴.

Using analogy, we are able to better explain the relationship between these three elements, especially using the functions of a state. Al-Ghazali⁴⁵ posits that the *nafs* is a “king over body as a king over empire”, with the soul also having a number of armies and soldiers. The first soldiers are those of the physical body, and include the external senses. The second set of soldiers are the internal senses, located in the brain. The relationship with *nafs* as king can be explained where *aql* is the minister that rules over an army of greed and anger, which collects sustenance and is the police that guards over this collection, respectively. With the help of a mature and knowledgeable *aql*, the *nafs* is able to tame greed and anger, and accordingly move closer to God, through a sound *qalb*. The soul uses these senses, both internal and external to collect the sustenance and to help with the knowledge and maturity. An *aql* with limited knowledge or immaturity will not be able to control the soul, which will use its armies to feed its insatiable desire, and cause the *qalb* to become rusty as iron becomes rusty and cease to reflect God⁴⁶.

The relation of the *qalb* in regard to the *nafs* and *aql* is another aspect of the development and make-up of human nature. Tritton argues that man is “body and heart, where the heart is his spirit which is the seat of his knowledge of God”⁴⁷. Gulen

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Zarabozo, 2002, p. 61.

⁴³ Akhir, 2006, p. 176.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ 1993.

⁴⁶ M. Solihin. "Ghazali's tazkiyat al-nafs & its relation with individual's development & mental health". In *Psychology and Islam (2012)*. Retrieved from <http://psychology-of-islam.blogspot.sg/2012/03/ghazali-tazkiyat-al-nafs-its-relation.html>

⁴⁷ Tritton, 1971, p. 493.

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says that the *qalb* is a fortress, which maintains sound reasoning and thinking (*aql*) and healthy spirit and body (*nafs*). Just like the *nafs*, the *qalb* can become lowly and evil, where the Qur'an refers to it as the 'diseased' heart: *Or do those in whose hearts is a disease think that Allah will not bring to light their spite (against the Divine Religion and its followers)? (Muhammad, 47:29).*

⁴⁸Ali Unal states the disease is a result of the obedience of the soul to its desire and worldly ambition, causing fear of death⁴⁹. The resultant will be the death of the heart (that is spiritual intellect), respective blindness and deafness of the eye and ear of the heart.

The *qalb* maintain the sanctity of the *aql* and *nafs* by being polished through struggling against desires of the *nafs*, acquiring knowledge and good characteristics, and remembrance of God. Through polishing the *qalb*, Al-Ghazali says that the *qalb* will manifest vision of lights, unveilings of the unseen and manifestation of divinity⁵⁰. Coupled with purification of the *nafs*, a person should busy himself with cleansing the *qalb*, which Al-Ghazali describes as being able to wreck the whole body when it itself (the *qalb*) is ruined⁵¹. Al-Ghazali cites a famous saying from the Prophet (pbuh):

*Truly, in body is a chunk of meat, when it is good, the whole body will be good by it, and when it is ruined, the whole body will be ruined by it, indeed it is the heart, a chunk of meat suspended beneath the chest to the left side*⁵².

According to Akhir,⁵³ as a result of the *aql* being a major target of the Devil's temptations, the *qalb* plays an important role as per the aforementioned fortress analogy, to protect the *aql* and the rest of the body from such temptation. Through whisperings and promptings (*waswas*) of the Devil to the *qalb*, the Devil aims to have the *nafs al-ammarah* and animal desires usurp the *aql*, so that the body is directed towards material gratification and subsequent destruction: where desire trumps intellect⁵⁴. However, all of one's body, including *aql*, *nafs* and *qalb* need to be constantly guarded "from any act of disobedience to God"⁵⁵. This binds *aql*, *nafs* and *qalb* in a commonality, in seeking God's protection and mercy from all temptation,

⁴⁸ 2006, p. 24.

⁴⁹ 2015, p.1035.

⁵⁰ As cited in Solihin, 2012.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Iman as cited in Solihin, 2012.

⁵³ 2006, pp. 204-205.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 204.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 235.

albeit internal or external. In short, a strong *qalb* can protect the *aql* from deviation and wrongful thought and raise the *nafs* in status to *al-mutma-innah*. As a corollary, a weakness in one will lead to a weakness in each other, given their deep and intimate relationship.

As noted above, due to the deep links between *qalb*, *nafs* and *aql*, a sickness in one, will also manifest in the other. For example, a ‘sickness of the heart may be rendered [in] an unhealthy mind’⁵⁶. This can be manifested when the heart is controlled by desire, and the *aql* being deviated towards looking for means to satiate its never-ending desire, such as materialism, status, power or sexual desire. Al-Ghazali states that each part of the body has been fashioned to achieve a particular aim, and when it falls ill or becomes dysfunctional, it is no longer able to achieve its aim. Conversely, when it is not able to achieve that aim, it becomes ill affecting the sum of parts⁵⁷. In this regard, and in relation to the *qalb*, Al-Ghazali mentions that the function of the *qalb* is the acquisition of wisdom and gnosis, which is the specific aim of the human soul⁵⁸. When the *nafs al-ammarah* is in the ascendancy, the human soul is not subject to knowledge and man is obscured from worship of God⁵⁹.

A sickness of the heart can also develop when man possesses “a thing which is more dear to him than God”, such as the aforementioned materialism, wealth or sexual desire. Habib Balfaqih similarly states a person’s heart is “sound, his body and his entire affair will be sound”⁶⁰. If it is corrupt, however, his entire life will be corrupt”. Balfaqih continues by stating that human beings can ascend to heights of excellence and nobility only when “achieved through the intellect and the religion, and by the heart being filled with light and certainty”⁶¹. Thus, the right balance of *aql*, *qalb*, *nafs* and the other spiritual elements such as *ruh*, will ensure that sickness of *qalb* is negated and the spiritual balance achieves the higher unified purpose, and the person does not become heedless (*ghafila*) to God⁶².

Like the *nafs*, the *qalb* must also be protected and kept safe lest it becomes hardened. This type of both the hard *qalb* and the dead *qalb* do not know God, and do not worship him as commanded. It clings to lusts and desires, and worships other than

⁵⁶ Tritton, 1971, p. 491.

⁵⁷ Ghazali, 1995, p. 46.

⁵⁸ 1995, p. 47.

⁵⁹ As cited in Akhir, 2006, p. 183 and p. 196.

⁶⁰ A.A. R. Balfaqih. *The spheres of Islam, imam, ihasan and irfan*. Western Cape: Dar al-Turath al-Islami, 2014 p. 28.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 30.

⁶² Akhir, 2010, p. 722.

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God, and loves the temporal physical world most dearly⁶³. A healthy *qalb* is obtained through belief, self-reflection and control, worship and remembrance of the Creator⁶⁴. The *qalb* is used to penetrate one's *nafs*, physical body and *aql*, for a unified and overarching purpose. The objectives of the *qalb* are belief, knowledge and love of God. The Qur'an associates knowledge and understanding with the *qalb*, and blindness of the *qalb* with a loss of understanding: *So have they not travelled through the earth (and viewed all these scenes with an eye to learn lessons) so that they may have hearts with which to reason (and arrive at truth) or ears with which to hear (God's call)? For indeed, it is not the eyes that have become blind, it is rather the hearts in the breasts that are blind. (Qur'an, 22:46)*

Ali Unal states the above verse referring to a person's real nature being found in their heart⁶⁵. It is the heart, which God addresses and undertakes responsibilities, and it is the heart that is elevated through true guidance and debased through deviation: honoured or humiliated. Unal states that "(B)elief is the life of the heart; worship is the blood that flows in its veins; reflection, self supervision, and self-criticism are the foundations of its permanence"⁶⁶. These are the significant distinctions opposite the heart of an unbeliever (*a dead heart*), the heart of a believer that does not worship (*a dying heart*) and the heart of an observant believer (*a healthy, polished heart*)⁶⁷.

The balance between these three elements is not necessarily equal, and does not necessarily need to be so to ensure optimal inter-relational functioning. Al-Ghazali states that the appetitive faculty is "sound and good when it is under the command of (W)isdom...and the intellect"⁶⁸. We consume no more than we need, and not to excess or to the deprivation of others. The *aql* is the guiding counsellor, where it is nobler than the *nafs*, where man's soul is "for external acts and intellect for thinking"⁶⁹. The *aql* also does not control the body but rather influences it, per Al Ghazali's parable of the relationship between the minister and the King noted above⁷⁰. Gulen states that *aql* is open to the Creator, on a continuous quest for Him, which can be led astray when overcome by the *nafs*, which succumbs to desire and

⁶³ Yusuf, 2004, p. 159.

⁶⁴ Gulen, 2006, p. 26.

⁶⁵ 2015, p. 695.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ 1995, p. 19.

⁶⁹ Tritton, 1971, p. 494.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 495.

love of the temporal world⁷¹. As noted above, this in turn, will cause a sickness in the *qalb*, and ultimately in the host: the human being. Akhir states that man's creation is divided into two elements, which are the physical and the spiritual⁷². This entails two needs to meet these elements, of which there must be a balance. According to Akhir, balance "refers to the priority given to the spiritual aspects without neglecting the physical needs"⁷³, with the ultimate aim being spiritual perfection. The fine balance between *nafs*, *aql* and *qalb*, in an effective and efficient relationship, will ensure equilibrium between the physical and spiritual worlds.

Said Nursi discusses that man is indeed composed of an inner and outer nature, both complementary and intimately interrelated and interacting on each other⁷⁴. However, the internal nature of man is has two aspects (i) the spiritual or moral aspect and, (2) the intellectual aspect. The intellectual nature of man is made up of mind or intelligence or reasoning power. Abdalati commenting on the above, states "Islam wants Faith in God to be effective and permanent, to light every corner in man's heart and prevail in every aspect of his life"⁷⁵. Accordingly, Islam posits no restrictions "against the free thinker who is seeking knowledge to widen his vision and broaden his mind... (I)t urges him to resort to all methods of knowledge, be they purely rational or experimental".

Turner and Horckuc discuss the truths of belief, which can be found through both the *qalb* and the *aql*⁷⁶. Additionally, Turner and Horckuc argue that belief must be based on investigation and reflection, on deliberation and contemplation⁷⁷. Without knowledge, belief cannot be obtained, and consequently submission to God is worthless. This means that the *aql* has a prime role to play in ensuring a healthy *qalb* and a *nafs* that is restful and at peace, through the acquisition and application of knowledge of God. Al-Ghazali says that it is "not possible to come close to God by natural intellect", which can only be achieved through knowledge acquired by the soul, resulting from worship, reflection and contemplation⁷⁸.

⁷¹2009, p. 209.

⁷²2012, p. 721.

⁷³Ibid, p. 721.

⁷⁴V.F. Sheriff. "Philosophical perspective of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi on human creation". From *The Istanbul Foundation of Science and Culture (2013)*. Retrieved from <http://www.iikv.org/en/philosophical-perspective-of-bediuzzaman-said-nursi-on-human-creation>

⁷⁵K. Adalati, K. *Islam in Focus*. Ankara, Turkey: hlâsNurNe riyat, 2008, p. 177.

⁷⁶C. Turner, C. and H. Horkuc. *Said Nursi*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009, p. 61.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 76.

⁷⁸ 1993.

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Just as these terms are used interchangeably as they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they can blend into one another to create a unified purpose as noted above, which is the sincere worship of God. Topbas explains this unified purpose to be *taqwa* (piety), because it curbs “one’s fleshy desires and to strengthen the spiritual potential through prayers to God and doing good deeds for humanity”⁷⁹. For Topbas, *taqwa* is the unity with Allah in one’s heart, which can only be obtained through the struggle to transform one’s heart⁸⁰. Ibn Khaldun states that the “epicentre of the *aql* is the heart”⁸¹. The ability to think and to receive knowledge is very closely related to the heart, and a person who fails to use their *aql* according to the purpose of their creation will accordingly fail to serve and worship God⁸². As Akhileloquently states when discussing Al-Ghazali’s works, to attain knowledge of God is the goal of every person, not just Muslims. The “striving towards that knowledge should be the central purpose and guiding principle of life”⁸³. The perfection of the relationship between the *nafs*, *aql* and *qalb* is the realization of this goal, to advance towards the Divine, while cultivating the good, while keeping away from evil.

Conclusion

This paper has shown the intricate and intimate relationship between the *nafs* (carnal soul), *aql* (reasoning) and *qalb* (heart), which are part of the constellation that make up the human soul. Knowing what we are composed of is the first step towards self-knowledge. We can see that these three terms have a distinct purpose, and when combined, the fine balance between them can lead one closer to and knowledge of God. This is not to say that the balance is necessarily equal, as the *nafs* must be subdued, and under the control of *aql*, the polish of the *qalb* and the purification of soul can be achieved through spiritual excellence. When working in an effective and efficient relationship, these terms lead to the sincere worship of God.

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⁷⁹ O.N. Topbas. *Ikhlas and Taqwa: Sincerity and piety*. Istanbul: Erksam Publications, 2009, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 10.

⁸¹ as cited in Akhir, 2012, p. 721.

⁸² Ibid, p. 722.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 728.

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