

A COMPARISON BETWEEN LOVE [*'ISHQ*]
AND INTELLECT [*'AQL*]

It is reported in a hadith that when Allah ﷻ created Adam ﷺ in the world of the spirits [*'alam al-arwāb*],²¹ He struck His right hand [i.e. His might] on the back of Prophet Adam ﷺ, causing offspring to emerge from his body. Their bodies were those of humans, but they were short in stature and their faces were glowing with radiance [*nūr*]. Allah ﷻ struck the back of Prophet Adam ﷺ again, and more offspring emerged, but their faces were devoid of the radiance that had shown on the others. Upon seeing all the offspring, Prophet Adam ﷺ asked, “O Lord, who are they?” Allah ﷻ replied, “All of them are your children.”

Prophet Adam ﷺ looked at them again. The first time he had looked upon them as strangers, but this time he looked upon them as his own. He found that some faces were radiant while others were not. It is natural for a father to wish that all his

²¹ “*'alam al-arwāb*” literally means “world of the spirits.” It refers to the place where Allah ﷻ created the souls of man and took a covenant from them, before giving them a physical presence in this world.

children be perfect, so Adam ﷺ asked, “Why did You not make them all alike, my Lord?”

Allah ﷻ replied, “Those with *nūr* are the inhabitants of Heaven and those lacking such radiance are the inhabitants of Hell.” Allah ﷻ then addressed the children of Adam ﷺ saying,

أ لست بربكم

Am I not your Lord? (7:172)

All replied,

قالوا بلى

Verily, You are [our Lord]. (7:172)

During this exchange, there was no veil between Allah ﷻ and the children of Adam ﷺ.

On the occasion of this conversation, Allah ﷻ bestowed humanity with two gifts. By displaying His beauty [*jamāl*], love for Allah ﷻ [*ishq*] was instilled in humanity. And by posing the question, “*Am I not your Lord,*” humanity was endowed with the faculty of knowledge [*ilm*]. For the inculcation of His love, Allah ﷻ granted humanity a beating heart; and for the acquisition of knowledge, Allah ﷻ gave human beings acute minds. Thus, the sustenance of the heart is love [*ishq*] and the sustenance of the mind is sacred knowledge [*ilm*]. Love alone leads to deviant innovations [*bid'at*], and it is knowledge that restores a balanced equilibrium. Knowledge alone leads to arrogant pride [*takabbur*] and it is love that restores modesty and humility [*tawādu*]. Love and sacred knowledge are inseparable; a complete person requires both blessings. If someone is deficient in either, then there is a danger of leaning toward extremes.

Throughout the ages, writers and poets have extensively compared and analyzed the relationship between love [ʿishq] and intellect [ʿaql]. The true demand of love is to abandon everything at a single indication from the Beloved ﷺ and to strive to draw near to Allah ﷻ. On the other hand, the intellect seeks to avoid harm in every matter, seeking only that which seems beneficial. The intellect has a limit, whereas love knows no bounds. The intellect says that no path leads to the Beloved ﷺ, while love says I have returned having kissed the house of the Beloved ﷺ. A wise person is the one whose every footstep follows the dictates of the ʿaql. An enamored person is the one who, in the ardor of ʿishq, is impatient to reach his destination. *Hadrat* Nisar Fathi says:

*Many wise people have returned,
Only those madly lost in the ardor of love have endured the
journey.*

Searching for betterment is the quality of the ʿaql. On the other hand, restlessness and unease are the characteristics of ʿishq. In the words of a poet:

*Love's arduous passion has transcended many stations,
The intellect remains at the station where it started.*

At times, the intellect discerns the path, but it does not have the endurance to attain its goal. It is then ʿishq that lifts one on the wings of desire to reach the destination (i.e. nearness to Allah ﷻ).

*Proceed beyond the intellect,
The light (of the intellect) is the lamp of the road, not the
destination.*

It is reported in a hadith:

أول ما خلق الله العقل

The first thing created by Allah was the intellect.

The function of the intellect is to distinguish between truth [*haqq*] and falsehood [*bātil*], and to preserve a balanced sense of reason. He who possesses intellect has a light with which he may find the way.

It is narrated that when the blessed Prophet ﷺ was describing the severity of the questioning in the grave by Munkar and Nakir,²² *Hadrat Umar* ؓ asked, “O Rasulallah ﷺ, will the intellect be intact in the grave?” The blessed Prophet ﷺ replied, “Yes.” *Hadrat Umar* ؓ then said, “Then there is no need to worry.”

A hadith relates:

من لا عقل له لا دين له

He who has no intellect has no religion.

In this hadith, intellect refers to sound intellect [*'aql salīm*].²³ Thus, an intelligent person's religion is preserved because such a person can weigh his actions and distinguish between right and wrong. Another hadith regarding the intellect mentions:

أفصح من رزق له

That person who is blessed (with intellect) is successful.

²² Munkar and Nakir are the names of the two angels who interrogate a person in his grave shortly after death.

²³ The *'aql salīm* is that intellect which is in accordance with the dictates of the Sacred Law and the primordial disposition of man [*fitrah*].

On the Day of Judgment, when the angels will ask the people of Hell [*jahannam*],

ألم يأتيكم نذير

Did not anyone come to warn you (in the world)? (67:8)

They will reply,

لو كنا نسمع أو نعقل ما كنا في أصحاب السعير

Had we listened and had we possessed intellect, we would not be among the people of Hell. (67:10)

The Glorious Quran says regarding the signs of Allah ﷻ:

إن في ذلك لآيات لقوم يعقلون

Verily, in it are signs for those of intellect. (13:4)

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that distinguishing between benefit and harm and between doubt and certainty are the attributes of the intellect. Accordingly, a sound intellect is necessary to practice religion, and he who has a sound intellect is truly blessed. However, intellect alone is not enough. While the intellect is sufficient to acquire sacred knowledge, love is necessary for acting [*'amal*] upon one's knowledge. The intellect remains preoccupied in thought and reflection; action is dependent on *'ishq*.

*The intellect is never free of thoughts and reflection,
Make love the basis of actions.*

Traveling the path becomes difficult if one's footsteps follow the dictates of the intellect alone. The path leading to Allah ﷻ has many points where the intellect falters, causing one to

stumble. However, if one rides the mount of love, one easily races along the path. And, endeavors that a person deems impossible are rendered possible by love.

*One leap of love has completed the journey,
I had thought this Earth and sky to be boundless.*