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## A POETIC INTERPRETATION OF THE INTELLECT: A TRANSLATION FROM YUSUF NABAHANI'S MAJMU' THALATHAH KUTUB

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### **Abstract**

*The main focus of this paper is 'the intellect' and 'the poetic interpretation' found in Nabahani's Majmu' thalathah kutub'. In other words, this paper is an explanation of the intellection, its functions, and veracity from the view of Nabahani. The paper shows some comparison between the concept of the intellect (al- 'Aql) in Islam and other religions, precisely Christianity. While the paper has Nabahani's opinion in focus, it has not claimed to have represented everything he has said concerning the intellect and it has not limited the views expressed herein to him alone. This paper is purposely focused on presenting the poetic interpretation as projected by al-Nabahani himself; the poetic interpretational analysis and commentation are beyond this paper and would be submitted in the major study of the concept of the intellect.*

*Keywords: Poetic, Intellect, Yusuf Nabahani, Majmu' Thalathah kutub*

**Kata kunci:** Syair, Akal, Yusuf Nabahani, Majmu` Thalathah Kutub

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Everything has a pillar. The pillar of any given community, society or group of people is education. The pillars of this education are serious intellectual or scholars who strive day and night to put things in their right places and orders. The pillar that supports the activities of these intellectuals is a vital tool that governs human life in all its spheres. This vital tool is *al- 'Aql* (the Intellect) that is invisible but undoubtedly noble and an integral part of every human being. It is a quality that differentiates man from other living creatures. The importance of *al- 'Aql* in

Islam is no less than the importance of other obligations such as prayers and purification. For example, *al-Salat* (the five daily obligatory prayers) is the pillar of Islamic religion; whoever observes it observes the pillar of his al-din and whoever ignores it destroys the pillar of his al-din. Similarly, *al-wudu'* (obligatory purification) is the pillar of *al-Salat*; the means with which one engages in communication with one's Lord. Based on *fiqh* maxim, all means such as *al-wudu'* needed for observing an obligation become in themselves obligations. So, *al-'Aql* is one such important means for understanding what is obligatory, legal, prohibited, allowed, disallowed, liked, disliked, necessary, unnecessary and so on. Hence, intellect as suggested and affirmed by *Mahmud 'Abbas al-'Aqqad* in his *al-Tafkir faridah Islamiyyah* is an Islamic obligation. The importance of the intellect is self-evident throughout the theological, philosophical, logical, historical and intellectual discussions in Islamic thought.

### SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE PAPER

The concept of the intellect is so wide a range that it could not be wholly contained in this type of article. The discussion in this piece is limited to the poetic interpretation of *Yusuf al-Nabahani*, in his *Majmu' thalathah kutub*, regarding the importance of the intellect in religious affairs. In the history of Islamic thought, thinkers, theologians, ideologists, rationalists and philosophers all applied intellect, in accordance with revelation, to deal with religious and intellectual issues of their age.

Historically, the main argument regarding the intellect and revelation is basically about 'which supersedes which in superiority'. Although revelation is considered more superior to the intellect because it includes intellectuality in reality, the intellect as Allah's creation preceded the scriptures. This is so because the intellect is the foundation for the comprehension of Divine revelations (*wahy*) in the Books and the Universe. Revelation came to guide the intellect, which had been divinely prepared to comprehend the message. The *'aql* had been pre-informed of the arrival of revelation, hence it readily accepted without any objection what was brought by Divine revelation (Ibn Manzur, vol. 5, part 34, pp. 3046-3050; Joseph Catafago, p. 245 and p. 442; Habib Anthony Salmon, 1978, p. 1115; and Hans Wehr, 1980, p. 1005). It is worthy of note here that Hans Wehr directly interpretes *al-Nuha* as the intellect, a cognate to *al-'Aql*. Furthermore, it is said that the intellect is the heart and the heart is the intellect (*al-'Aql: al-qalb, al-qalb: al-'Aql*) (Ibn Manzur, pp. 3046-3050; Catafago, p. 245 and p. 442; Salmon, 1978, p. 1115; and Hans Wehr, 1980, p. 1005). They are two cognate words used interchangeably. *Al-N'Aql* also denotes to forbid from being led into destructions.

### A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF YUSUF AL-NABAHANI

Shaykh Yusuf Isma'il Yusuf al-Nabahani was born in the year 1265AH-1849CE, in a village called *ijzim* in the governorate of *Hayfa*, Northern Palestine. His full name is Yusuf bin Isma'il bin Yusuf bin Isma'il bin Muhammad Nasir al-din al-Nabahani. He was from the lineage of *Nubhan* of the Nomadic Arab in Palestine, who lived and settled at *ijzim* in the governorate of *Hayfa*, Northern Palestine. He was a great scholar, pious, and ascetic, who was firmly rooted in the love and praise of the Prophet S'AW, a *Busairi* of his time. He was brought up in a highly

respected, generous and wealthy family, which was famous for its righteousness and piety. His father, may Allah bless his soul, was a religious, ethical, and knowledgeable man who was well cultured and civilized. He spent most of his time on the path of Allah SWT; his supplication days and nights used to be one- third of the glorious Qur'an, finishing the whole Qur'an three rounds weekly ('Abd al-Razaq al- Baytar, pp. 1612-1616; al-Nabahani, p. 3, vol. 2, pp. 52-53, p. 332, p. 383 and p. 390; Zakiy, pp. 600-603; al-Nabahani, p. 7 and p. 10; Mu'jam al-matbu'at, pp. 1838-1842; and al-Zarkali, vol. 8, p. 218).

## HIS LITERACY

He studied Qur'an with his righteous father al-Shaykh Isma'él al-Nabhani, and he memorized from him most records in Jurisprudential Sciences, as well as Arabic language and grammar, and Rhetorics. He proceeded afterwards to Egypt where he secured an admission into the great Azhar University on Saturday, the first of *Muharram* 1283AH-1866CE, at the age of eighteen. He was in Egypt until 1289AH-1872CE when he graduated from the Azhar, after acquiring considerable lot of what was available to him from its notable scholars.

After his graduation from Azhar in 1289AH-1872CE he returned to 'Aka city in Palestine where he taught religious and Arabic language subjects. Apart from teaching activities he was also the head *Janin* Judiciary (*niyabah al-Qudaa'*) in 1873CE, after which he proceeded to the house of representative (*Dar al-Khilafah*) al-Astanah in 1293AH-1876CE where he worked and remained, as an editor to *al-Jawanid* magazine, for two years. He was selected a judge at *al-Muwassal* in central Kurd cities for five months, from where he left for Syria (*Sham*) in 1296AH. He returned to the house of representative (*Dar al-Khilafah*) of al-Astanah in 1297AH and spent two years therein, after which he headed to *al-Ladhiqiyyah* where he worked as the head of Criminal Court in 1300AH-1883CE and spent about five years therein. He later led the leadership of the Criminal court of Jerusalem (*al-Quds*) where he spent about a year before leaving for Beirut where he was the president in the Court of Law, in 1305AH. He spent about twenty years in Beirut, and it was in Beirut where he authored and published all his books. He left Beirut for *al-Madinah al-Munawwarah* to neighbor the messenger of Allah S'AW, and he was in Madinah until the First World War in 1914CE when he had to return to his village, Ijzim, where he lived the rest of his life.

## HIS TEACHERS

Most notable among his teachers and mentors are al-Shaykh Ibrahim al-Saqa al-Shafi'i (d. 1298AH aged 90), al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Damanhuri al-Shafi'i (d. 1286AH aged 90), al-Shaykh Ibrahim al-Zarw al-Khalili al-Shafi'i (d. 1287AH aged 70), al-Shaykh Ahmad al-Ajhuri al-Darir al-Shafi'i (d. 1293AH aged 60), al-Shaykh Hasan al-'Adwi al-Maliki (d. 1298AH at age 80), al-Shaykh al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Hadi Naja al-Abyari (d. 1305AH aged about 70), al-Shaykh Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Anbabi al-Shafi'i (Shaykh Azhar), al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sharbini al-Shafi'I, al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Rafi'i al-Hanafi al-Tarabulisi (Shaykh Ruwaq al-Shawam), al-Shaykh Yusuf al-Barqawi al-Hanbali (Shaykh Ruwaq al-Hanabalah), and many others.

## HIS ASCETIC (SUFIIYAH) LIFE

Al-Shaykh al-Nabahani is considered one of the great ascetics (*Sufiyun*) of modern time. This is prevalent in most of his writings focusing on the ethics of Sufism, the history of Sufis and their moralities, and his regard for righteous people and his close relation to them. He was a member of many sufi orders, and he received sufi initiations from numerous sufi leaders. Some of these are, but not limited to:

- 1- The sufi order of Idris (*al-Tariqah al-Idrisiyyah*), and was initiated by Shaykh Isma‘il al-Nawab;
- 2- The Shadhili sufi order (*al-Tariqah al-Shadhiliyyah*), and got initiated by both Muhammad ibn mas‘ud al-Fasi and ‘Ali Nur al-Din al-Yashriti;
- 3- The sufi order of Naqshabandi (*al-Tarîqah al-Naqshabandiyyah*), been initiated by ImdaduLlah al-Faruqi and Giyath al-Din al-Irbili;
- 4- The sufi order of Qadiri (*al-Tariqah al-Qadiriyyah*), which he got through Hasan ibn Abi Halawah al-Ghaziyy;
- 5- The sufi order of Rifai (*al-Tariqah al-Rifa‘iyyah*), which he received through ‘Abd al-Qadir ibn Abi Rabah al-Dajani al-Yafi; and
- 6- The sufi order of Khalwati (*al-Tariqah al-Khalwatiyyah*), and he was initiated by Hasan Radwan al-Saidi.

## HIS NOTABLE MIGRATIONS

He travelled to Egypt, where he studied at Azhar, next he went to Turkey as an editor, and to Syria (*Sham*) as a judge. His last trip was to Madinah, where he decided to feel the neighbourhood of the Prophet S‘AW.

## HIS WRITINGS

Shaykh Yusuf al-Nabahani has his writings scattered in many fields. This depicts his diverse input in many facets of life. Some among his writings are, but not limited to: *Ithaf al-muslim bi ithaf al- tarhib wa al-tarhib min al-bukhari wa muslim*; *al-ahadith al-arba‘in fi amthal afsah al-‘alamin*; *al- ahadith al-arba‘in fi fada’il afdal al-mursalin*; *al-ahadith al-arba‘in fi wujub ta‘ah amir al-mu‘minin*; *Ahsan al-wasa’il fi nazm asma’ al-nabiyy al-kamil*; *Irshad al-hayara fi tahdhir al-muslimin min madaris al-nasara*; and lot, over fifty, more. The one which is the focus of this paper is *Majmu‘ thalathah kutub* (Yusuf Isma‘il al-Nabahani, *Majmu‘ thalathah kutub*, (Egypt-Cairo: Mustafa al-babi al-halabi, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 191 pages, n.d)).

## HIS DEATH

He died at his home town, Ijzim, in the year 1350AH-1932CE.

## YUSUF AL-NABAHANI’S POETIC INTERPRETATION OF THE INTELLECT

This translation is done from Yusuf Isma‘il al-Nabahani, *Majmu‘ thalathah kutub* (A Combination of three books): *al-Qasidah al-ra‘iyyah al-kubra fi al-kamalat al-ilahiyyah wa al-sirah al-nabawiyyah wa wasf al-millah al-islamiyyah wa al-milal al-ukhra* (The great poem of Divine Perfection, The prophetic History, and The explanation concerning Islam and other religious paths), *al-kalam ‘ala qawlihim al-din fawq al-‘aql wa al-farq bayn dinihim wa din al-Islam al-mu’ayyad bi al-‘aql wa al-naql* (Challenging the statement that religion is above the intellect, and clarification of the difference between their religion and Islam, which is strengthened with both the intellect and revelation). The book, in its first edition containing about a hundred and ninety-one pages, and without a publication date, was published in Cairo-Egypt by Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, and the pages under interpretation here are from 85 through 90. The principal and correspondence author first read and studied this book sometimes ago under the tutelage of Alh. Shaykh Abdul Lateef Alatishe in the city of Kaduna, Kaduna State, Nigeria. He finds it so fascinating and relevant now, most especially in the study of the concept of the intellect so much that the particular portion of the book begs for an attention and inclusion into the ongoing study on the concept of the intellect.

In clarifying the importance of the intellect in religious affairs and issues, al-Nabahani resorts to the comparison between the concept of the intellect, both from the perspective of Christianity and from the Islamic religious point of view. Al-Nabahani clarifies first the confusions that there are in the Christianity movement’s concept of the intellect, and later establish the fact about the notion from the understanding of the Islamic religion. If one sums up al-Nabahani’s reference to Christianity, one could clearly reach to a perception that al-Nabahani agrees not to religiosity of Christianity, but rather a movement. It would also be noted in the poem some reference to the Biblical and Qur’anic concepts of the intellect.

For clarity of meaning and conception, the poetic representation is rendered in both the original language, Arabic, and English, and the alternative meaning of a seemingly difficult word is rendered in brackets. We would like to clarify from the onset that this paper is purposely focused on presenting the poetic interpretation as projected by al-Nabahani himself, and that the poetic interpretational analysis is beyond this paper; it would be submitted in the major study of the concept of the intellect. The text goes thus:

تقولون فوق العقل أسس دينكم      صدقكم فمات العقل من نحته حصرا (ضيق عليه)

You say [that] above the intellect your religion is founded (based/built),  
You are right, but the intellect is dead and exclusively sculpted from its root (base)

فعثتم بلا عقل تدينون ربكم      به وعليه دينكم قد غدا قبرا

You [then] live without [any sort of] Intellect to adore (worship) your Lord  
With, and upon it [therefore] your religion has turned to a tomb (grave)

وهذا كلام دبروه لدينهم      يقبه لأن العقل يرمي به دبرا (الظهر)

This is what they adulterated with their religion,

For its sanctuary, for the intellect throws it backward (the intellect clears the doubt therein)

ولو كان فوق العقل لم يك مدرك وقد أدركت منه النهى (العقول) كل مل أزرق (عاب)

If [it is true that] that [your religion] is [built] above the intellect it would not have been known,

For the intellect has recognized in it all that are disheartening

نعم هو ضد العقل ما هو فوقه وأحكامه في الله أعظمها نكرا (المنكر)

Yes, it is opposed to the intellect [and] not above it,

And its divine provisions are greatly forbidden

وأشكل (التبس) معناه لدي كل عاقل وشاكل (شابه) في أفاته (العاهة) لبه القشرا (جمعا)

Its (your religion) meaning is confusing to all [those who are] sane, and it confuses,

In its irrationality, his entire lobe (brain/sense/mind)

وما خير دين ليس يدركه النهى تغور على أغوار (قعر) أسرار غورا (أسفل في الأرض)

Of what good is a religion the intellect understands not,

The secret of which is deeply buried underground

ولكن فضل الدين يبدو إذا أتت عليه عقول الناس تسبره (تختبره) سبرا

But religion preference seems prevalent when visited,

By mortals' intellect which examines it critically

كما أن دين الله دين محمد له يسر المولى أئتمته الغزا

Such is the religion of Allah [made] Mohammed's religion,

To which Allah has facilitated his glorious ummah

له صنفوا فقها حديثا تصوفا عقائد تفسيرها بإسنادها تدرى

To it (religion) they authored [books in] jurisprudence, prophetic tradition, sufism,

Doctrinal creeds, [and] exegeses, all through it (the intellect) are known

وقد شغلوا الأعمار في درسه له      بآلاته حتى به استغرقوا الدهرا

They have spent [all] ages in its study,  
With its (the intellect) tool they spent their [entire] life

وقد ضبطوا بالتقل والعقل شرعه      فدام على أوصافه ذهباً نضراً (الذهب الخالص)

They have documented with the use of [both] revelation and intellect its (the religion) law,  
And it has remained on its features [like] fresh gold

وكيف بلا عقل يكون تدين      إذن كلفوا المجنون والطفل والعييرا (الحمرا)

And how, without an intellect, there can be a servitude [to Allah],  
Then assign [religious, social, political...] responsibility to a mentally deranged one, a child,  
and the donkeys

ليدرك حكم الله والنهي والأمر      أليس مدار (أصل) الدين عقلاً مكملاً

Is the base of religion not an integrated intellect,  
[In order] To comprehend the divine law of Allah, its prohibitions and obligations

عبارة فوق العقل سجن مضيق      لقد حصرورهم في مضايقه حصراً (الحبس)

The expression 'above the intellect' is [like] a compressed prison,  
The captivity of which they have been exclusively captured

نعم ربنا فوق العقول بذاته حقيقته غيب عن الخلق لا تدري

Yes, our Lord is above intellects in His essence,  
His reality is beyond the creation's comprehension, it is not known

وكل الورى في كنهه ذو جهالة      حيارى فإن الله يدرى ولا يدرى

All human, concerning His intrinsic essence, are [equally] ignorant,  
[and] confused, for Allah knows [all thing] but He is not [intrinsically] known

ولكننا ندري بتعريفه لنا      كمالاته والكون عن نوره افترا (ابتسم)

But we [only] know Him through His define perfection,  
And the whole Universe which is evolved from His light.

وأنتم وصقتم ربكم بمعائب      تلامون لو كنتم وصفتم بها هذا (القط)

You depict/portray your Lord with imperfection,  
[Upon which] you will be condemned if were to depict with it a cat

وهل جائز أن يجعل الله دينه      يعود عليه بالحقارة واللاذرا (الإهانة والعيب)

Or is it proper (permissible) that Allah subject His Religion [to imperfection],  
Which would then [in turn] result onto Him ignominy and degradation

فشتان دين الله دين محمد      وما شارك القسيس في وضعه الحبرا

An enormous gap there is [between their religion and] religion of Allah, Mohammed's  
religion,

[to which] No priest has contributed anything to its organization (foundation)

لقد غلب الأديان بالحق دينه      كما غلب الليث الغضنفر سنورا (القط)

He (Allah) has made His [own] religion to dominate, with truth, all other religions,  
Such as the Lioness overpowers the cat

ولما بدا للكون دلت لعزه      كعصفورة في الجؤ قد شاهدت صقرا

And when it [is made to] surface to the universe, the universe bowed to it,  
Just as a female sparrow [is humiliated] at the sight of a falcon



وإن يك في شيء به شبه به      فذاك كما قد أشبه الذهب الصّفرا (النحاس)

If there exists in anything a similitude to it,  
Such is [like] a similitude of the gold to the brass

أيا عقلاء النَّاس هل ثمّ (هناك) عاقل      على أنفس الياقوت قد فضّل الصّخر (الحجر)

Oh [you] people [who are] endowed with intellect, is there a mentally balanced person, Who  
would, to the most precious rubies, prefer a [common] stone?

وهل كان أو هل قد يكون أخو حجي      إذا خيروه اختار عن درّة بعرا (العظم المكسور)

Or was there and can there be a sane fellow,  
Who, when given a choice, would, to pearls, prefer [to chose] broken bones?

يقول بأنّ الثّبّن قد يفضل الثّبّرا (الذهب الخالص)      وهل أحد فيه أقلّ بصيرة (علم وخبرة)

Or could there be one of the least insight,  
Who would say wet-soil is better than (preferred to) wet-gold?

ومن ذا الذي يختار أرضا وبيئة (مريضة/عقيمة)      علي روضة صحّ الهواء بها خضرا

Or who would prefer an unfertile soil,  
To a well cultivated garden (meadow) filled with conditioned breeze and green pastures?

أما ثمّ فرق بين عين وأخواتها      فواحدة حورا (شدة البياض وسواد العين) وواحدة عورا (فقد الرّؤية)

Or is there no difference between two [pairs of] eyes,  
One [pair of them] is bright-eyed and the other one [pair] is sightless?

فأديانهم مع ديننا قد تباينت      له المثل الأعلى لها المثل الأزرى (أكثر عيبا)

[In the light of the previous expatiations] therefore, theirs and our religion are distinctively  
different [from one another],

To it (our religion) belongs most exalted and eminent significance and to theirs is most defected and faulted similarity.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the above that truth is universal, and a universal truth cannot be denied. The intellect has been the major bone of contention in the philosophical discussions of the Ancient, Medieval, Christian, Islamic, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophers and Scholars, and if this depicts a thing it is nothing but its importance. The intellect's role in mortals' affairs is not hidden and cannot be hidden. At the same time its role and importance cannot be over emphasized. Thus, Islam, in all its ramifications, values the intellect so much so that the distinction between it and the revelation is such tiny and slim. The intellect precedes the revelation in creation, but the information for the proper usage of the intellect is contained in the revelation. The intellect serves a tool and means of conveniently comprehending the instructions and commandments there are in the Divine instruction, the revelation. Hence, the Qur'an calls and addresses those endowed with the intellect for proper and accurate dissemination of the messages it contains. Al-Nabahani's position here is that Christianity's understanding of the concept of the intellect is distorted, and not accurate; no al-din can survive without the intellect, and not without the intellectuals whose tasks are to intellectualize and practicalize the messages and commandments such a religion may have brought for the betterment of human life.

## RUJUKAN

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