

The Construction of Intellect in the Quran: A Semantic Study of Thinking Terminology

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Abstract

The concept of intellect (aql) occupies a foundational position in Islamic epistemology, yet its semantic depth within the Quranic text has rarely been examined with the rigor it deserves. The Quran does not employ a single term to describe rational activity; instead, it deploys a rich vocabulary of thinking-related expressions that carry distinct lexical, grammatical, and contextual meanings. This article examines the semantic construction of intellect in the Quran through an analysis of six key rhetorical formulas: *afalâ ta'qilûn* (do you not reason?), *afalâ yanzhurûn* (do they not observe?), *afalâ tatafakkarûn* (do you not reflect?), *afalâ yatadabbarûn* (do they not contemplate?), *afalâ tadzakkarûn* (do you not remember?), and *afalâ tubshirûn* (do you not see?). Employing a qualitative library research methodology underpinned by linguistic semantic analysis, this study draws on primary sources comprising Quranic verses interpreted through the classical commentaries of Tafsir al-Maraghi and Tafsir al-Mishbah, supplemented by authoritative Arabic lexicons including Taj al-Arus and Lisan al-Arab. The analysis proceeds across three semantic registers: lexical, grammatical, and contextual. Findings reveal that the Quran constructs intellect not as a purely cognitive faculty associated with the biological brain but as an integrative potential that fuses rational deliberation with spiritual awareness and moral guidance. Each of the six terminological sets carries a semantically differentiated function: *ta'qilûn* denotes the binding of rational conclusions as normative constraints on behavior; *nazhara* designates empirical observation directed toward understanding natural phenomena; *tafakkur* refers to concentrated reflection on created realities to reach certainty; *tadabbur* signifies deep, recursive contemplation of the Qurans layers of meaning; *tadzakkur* denotes the activation of stored spiritual and ethical knowledge to prevent moral forgetfulness; and *bashara* captures perceptual discrimination that penetrates to the detailed, inward constitution of what is seen. Together these terms construct a Quranic epistemology in which reason, sensation, memory, and spiritual discernment are inseparable dimensions of human intellectual life.

Keywords: Intellect, Quran, semantic analysis, thinking terminology, Islamic epistemology, tafsir.

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INTRODUCTION

The Islamic intellectual tradition has long grappled with the concept of intellect, or *aql*, as the foundational capacity that distinguishes human beings from other created beings. Within this tradition, intellect is never merely a biological or computational mechanism. It is, rather, a complex potential endowed by God that simultaneously governs rational inference,

moral discrimination, spiritual awareness, and responsible action. Despite centuries of scholarly engagement with this concept, the semantic texture of how the Quran itself articulates intellectual activity remains underexplored, particularly within the framework of modern Arabic linguistic semantics.

A significant source of conceptual confusion arises when English-language renditions of the Arabic term *al-aql* collapse its meaning into the single word "mind," which the Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary defines as the part of a person's brain where thoughts occur (Bull, 2011, p. 279). This reduction to a purely cognitive and neurological referent strips the Quranic notion of intellect of its moral and spiritual dimensions. In contrast, a classical hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad affirms that religion itself is intellect and that one who lacks intellect has no genuine religion (al-Suyuthi, n.d., p. 66). This equivalence between religion and intellect makes no sense if intellect is understood as a merely computational organ. The stakes of semantic precision are therefore not merely philological but profoundly practical: how one understands *aql* shapes how one lives as a Muslim.

The Quran addresses intellectual activity not through a single term but through a constellation of related verbs, each signaling a distinct mode of mental and spiritual engagement. Among the most rhetorically significant are the challenge-formulas introduced by *afalâ* (literally "do they not" or "will you not"), which appear throughout the Quranic text as invitations, reproaches, and incentives for the reader to activate their rational and spiritual faculties. The six formulas examined in this article are *afalâ ta'qilûn*, *afalâ yanzhurûn*, *afalâ tatafakkarûn*, *afalâ yatadabbarûn*, *afalâ tadzakkarûn*, and *afalâ tubshirûn*, each rooted in a distinct Arabic verb that designates a different dimension of human intellectual activity.

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond classical Arabic philology. In contemporary Muslim societies, as in historical ones, the degree to which the Quran's call to rigorous thinking is understood and enacted has direct consequences for intellectual culture, ethical formation, and spiritual development. Al-Ghazali observed in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* that genuine Quranic recitation engages the tongue, the intellect, and the heart simultaneously: the tongue produces correct articulation, the intellect comprehends meaning, and the heart draws moral lessons (Asyafah, 2014, pp. 1-2). This tripartite engagement is precisely what the challenge-formulas of the Quran are designed to activate.

Existing scholarship has examined aspects of this topic in isolation. Rosidin (2003) applied semantic methodology to educational terminology in the Quran and hadith, analyzing terms such as *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, *tadris*, *tahdzib*, and *ta'dib*. Anshori (2013) focused on the single root *al-aql* in the Quran and Sunnah, offering a critique of the Oxford dictionary definition. Hutasuhut (2017) examined the relationship between reason and revelation through a comparative study of Muhammad Abduh and Harun Nasution. Asyafah (2014) produced an extended study of *tadabbur al-Quran* as a distinct hermeneutical concept. What has been lacking is a comprehensive semantic comparison of all six major thinking-related formulas within a unified analytical framework. The present article fills this gap.

This article proceeds from three research questions. First, what are the lexical, grammatical, and contextual meanings of each of the six thinking-related formulas as they appear in the Quran? Second, how do the contextual uses of these formulas differ from one

another, and what distinct intellectual functions does each designate? Third, what integrated conception of intellect emerges from reading these six formulas together as a semantic field?

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative methodology grounded in library research and linguistic semantic analysis. The primary data consist of Quranic verses containing the six formulas under investigation, identified through systematic consultation of *Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfazh al-Quran al-Karim* and verified through digital search tools. The secondary data comprise classical Arabic lexicons, principally *Taj al-Arus* and *Lisan al-Arab*, which provide authoritative lexical definitions, and the tafsir works of Ahmad Musthafa al-Maraghi and M. Quraish Shihab, which supply grammatical and contextual interpretation.

The semantic framework employed in this study draws on three levels of analysis. Lexical semantics concerns the meaning of individual words considered as dictionary entries, capturing their core referential and denotative content. Grammatical semantics examines how morphological form and syntactic position modify or extend lexical meaning, including effects produced by verb conjugation patterns, the addition of prefixes and suffixes, and syntactic relations within the verse. Contextual semantics addresses the meaning produced by the verse as a whole, including the situational, discursive, and thematic contexts in which each formula appears.

Data collection followed a multi-stage procedure. All verses containing the relevant roots were compiled from the Quran. Each root was then subjected to morphological analysis to identify its base form, derived forms, and the functions of any additions. Lexical definitions were extracted from authoritative Arabic dictionaries. Contextual meanings were then drawn from the two tafsir sources, which were selected because of their complementary strengths: *Tafsir al-Maraghi* offers philologically rigorous analysis of Arabic vocabulary and morphology, while *Tafsir al-Mishbah* provides contemporary contextual and thematic interpretation that integrates classical and modern Islamic thought. The analysis proceeded inductively, building from individual word meanings to the contextual functions of each formula, and then comparatively across all six formulas to identify the integrated structure of the Quranic concept of intellect.

The study limits its attention to the six formulas introduced by *afalâ*, excluding other thinking-related vocabulary (such as *ta'lamûn*, *yafqahûn*, or *ya'lamûn*) that does not appear in this rhetorical pattern. Within the contextual analysis, the focus is restricted to the linguistic context of each verse rather than its wider social, political, or historical context, since the primary goal is semantic analysis rather than historical criticism.

Results and Discussion

The Quranic Vocabulary of Thinking

Before examining each formula in detail, it is necessary to situate the six terms within the broader Quranic vocabulary of intellectual activity. The Quran employs multiple roots to designate different aspects of thinking. Among the most frequently occurring are *'aqla* (49 occurrences in verb form), *nazhara* (approximately 120 occurrences), *tafakkara* (18

occurrences), tadabbara (11 derivational forms), tadzakkara (approximately 100 occurrences in various forms), abshara (16 derivational forms), and faqiha (approximately 20 occurrences). Each of these roots generates its own semantic field within which the Quran invites, commands, or challenges human beings to engage their intellectual faculties.

The term al-aql does not appear in the Quran in noun form. This morphological fact is itself semantically significant. As Quraish Shihab observed, the Quran consistently uses aql in verb form, indicating that intellect is understood not as a static possession but as a dynamic activity (Shihab, 2000). The forty-nine Quranic occurrences of verb forms derived from 'aqala distribute across thirty surahs and encompass a wide range of intellectual activities, from comprehending scripture to reasoning about natural phenomena to holding oneself accountable.

The Arabic lexical meaning of al-aql is equally revealing. According to Ibn Manzhur in *Lisan al-Arab*, the root 'aqala in its pure form means to prevent or to hold back (al-hijr) and to be wise (al-nuha). The same root, in its verbal uses applied to a camel, means to bind the camel's legs to prevent it from straying. In its extended application to the human being, aql is understood as the faculty that binds the self to the path of righteousness and prevents moral deviation (Manzhur, n.d., Vol. 11, p. 3046). This semantic origin reveals that the Quranic concept of intellect is not merely descriptive of mental processes but normative, oriented toward right action and moral constraint. A person who does not use their aql is in the same position as a camel that has broken its hobble and strays into destruction.

Afalâ Ta'qilûn: Intellect as Rational Constraint and Moral Binding

The formula *afalâ ta'qilûn*, meaning "do you not reason?" or more precisely "do you not bind [yourselves to rational conclusions]?", appears in fourteen verses of the Quran and is the most direct of the six formulas in expressing the Quranic expectation of rational engagement. The verb *ta'qilûn* is a second-person plural imperfect active verb derived from 'aqala. Its object, in grammatical terms, encompasses everything stated in the preceding verse or verses, so that the formula functions as a rhetorical challenge demanding rational synthesis of the preceding argument.

A detailed examination of the fourteen verses reveals a consistent contextual pattern. In al-Baqarah 2:44, the formula is directed at religious leaders who command others to do good while neglecting their own practice, despite reading scripture. The rhetorical force of *afalâ ta'qilûn* here is a demand for practical rationality: the contradiction between preaching and practice is irrational, and reason, properly exercised, should prevent it. In al-Baqarah 2:76, the formula challenges those who profess faith in the presence of believers but deny it in private, behavior that al-Maraghi characterizes as a fundamental contradiction of rational self-interest (al-Maraghi, 2006). In Ali Imran 3:65, it is directed at scriptural communities who dispute about Ibrahim when the Torah and the Gospel were revealed long after his time, a logical inconsistency that simple reasoning should expose.

The grammatical structure of these verses reinforces the semantic analysis. The formula is consistently placed at the end of the verse, functioning as a concluding challenge after the problematic behavior or belief has been described. This position means that the object of

ta'qilûn is the entire propositional content of the verse, not merely a single element within it. The person who reasons, in the Quranic sense, binds themselves to the logical conclusions that the verse has laid before them.

From the perspective of semantic context, afalâ ta'qilûn appears in seven broad thematic areas. It challenges failure to comprehend sacred scripture (al-Baqarah 2:75; Yunus 10:42); failure to maintain sound theological reasoning about the nature of God (al-Anbiya 21:10, 67; al-Zumar 39:43; al-Rum 30:28); short-term thinking that privileges the world over the hereafter (al-An'am 6:32; al-Qasas 28:60; al-A'raf 7:169; Hud 11:51; Yusuf 12:109); the need for logical argumentation in calling others to truth (al-Shu'ara 26:28; al-Ankabut 29:43); reading the signs of creation (al-Ankabut 29:63; al-Baqarah 2:164; al-Ra'd 13:4; al-Nahl 16:12; al-Jathiyah 45:5); distinguishing right from wrong (al-Baqarah 2:170-171); and acting in accordance with knowledge (al-Baqarah 2:44; al-Anfal 8:22).

The lexical analysis in Taj al-Arus and Lisan al-Arab confirms that 'aqala carries a distinctive semantic emphasis on binding and restraining. The Quranic formula therefore invites a mode of thinking that is not merely exploratory but action-guiding: to ta'qilûn is to draw rational conclusions that bind one's subsequent behavior. This distinguishes ta'qilûn from tafakkur, which is primarily contemplative, and from nazhara, which is primarily observational.

Afalâ Yanzhurûn: Observation as Empirical Investigation

The formula afalâ yanzhurûn, "do they not observe?" or "do they not look?", appears in the context of directing human beings toward empirical investigation of the created world. The verb yanzhurûn is a third-person plural imperfect active form of nazhara. The shift from the second person (ta'qilûn) to the third person (yanzhurûn) is grammatically significant: while ta'qilûn directly addresses the reader, yanzhurûn often speaks about a group who is failing to observe, presenting their failure to an implied audience.

According to Ibn Manzhur, nazhara-yanzhuru-nazhran carries the primary meaning of looking and carefully examining with the eye (al-nazharu bi al-'ayn wa al-ta'ammul biha), and by extension it means looking with the heart (nazhara al-qalb), that is, examining with understanding (Manzhur, n.d.). The lexicographer's distinction between visual looking and inner understanding is important: nazhara in the Quran encompasses both perceptual and intellectual dimensions.

The Quran identifies four major contextual meanings for nazhara. First, it denotes divine mercy or attention, as in Ali Imran 3:77, where God will not look at those who sell their covenants cheaply. Second, it means waiting or deferral, as in al-A'raf 7:15 when God grants Iblis a period of respite. Third, it means drawing lessons from what is observed, as in al-Ghashiyah 88:17, where human beings are commanded to consider how the camel was created. Fourth, it means simple visual perception, as in al-Qiyamah 75:23, where the blessed will gaze upon their Lord.

The contextually richest uses for the present inquiry are those in which nazhara signifies purposive empirical observation oriented toward understanding God's creative power. In 'Abasa 80:24, the formula falyanzhur al-insan ila ta'amihi invites human beings to reflect on

their food and the complex agricultural processes that produce it. In al-Tariq 86:5, human beings are directed to consider the origin of their own creation. In al-Ghashiyah 88:17-20, the sequence of questions about the camel, the sky, the mountains, and the earth models a systematic empirical inquiry into the natural world as evidence of divine creative power. In al-Hashr 59:18, the formula *waltanzhur nafsun ma qaddamat lil-ghad* encodes a future-oriented, visionary form of observation directed toward one's own moral preparation for the hereafter.

Grammatically, *yanzhurûn* most often appears with the preposition *ila* (toward), which directs the observer's attention to a specific object and requires that the observation penetrate to the end-point indicated, ensuring comprehensive rather than superficial examination (al-Maraghi, 2006; Shihab, 2000). This directedness distinguishes *nazhara* from *abshara*, which is discussed below. In the contextual semantic field, *yanzhurûn* covers five functions: perceptual observation of concrete objects; forward planning through anticipation of consequences; empirical investigation of created phenomena to extract their benefit and purpose; fact-based verification through direct evidence; and historical observation of past events as moral lessons.

Afalâ Tatafakkarûn: Concentrated Reflection toward Certainty

The formula *afalâ tafakkarûn*, "do you not reflect?" or "do you not think?", is rooted in *tafakkara*, a Form V verb derived from *fikr*. This morphological pattern (*tafa''ala*) typically implies intensification and reflexivity: *tafakkara* thus suggests not merely thinking but thinking that turns inward upon itself, reflecting repeatedly and deeply on an object. The addition of the Form V pattern makes the verb transitive in Arabic grammatical terms, meaning that the mental process must have an object on which it is brought to bear.

Al-Asfahani, in *Mu'jam Mufradat Alfazh al-Quran*, defines *fikr* as "the channeling of mental power toward knowledge of what is known in order to arrive at what is unknown" (al-Asfahani, n.d.). This definition highlights the inferential character of *tafakkur*: it begins with what is already known and uses it as a basis for reaching new understanding. Al-Asfahani also notes that the referent of *tafakkur* is restricted to what can be formed in the imagination or intellect, explicitly excluding reflection on the divine essence, as captured in the hadith cited by al-Maraghi: "Reflect on the creation of God, and do not reflect on the Creator" (al-Maraghi, 2006).

This restriction is semantically important. *Tafakkur* is always directed at created realities rather than at the unconditioned divine essence, and its purpose is to move from the observable characteristics of creation to a deeper and more certain knowledge of the Creator's attributes and purposes. This pattern appears consistently across the seventeen Quranic occurrences of forms from this root.

In al-Baqarah 2:219, 266, *tafakkur* is commended in relation to the wisdom embedded in Quranic legislation, specifically in the staged prohibition of intoxicants and the moral lessons embedded in the parable of the charitable person who acts from ostentation. In al-An'am 6:50, the formula *afalâ tafakkarûn* challenges those who refuse the prophethood of Muhammad, asking whether they cannot reason through the analogy between those who see and those who are blind. In Saba 34:46, the formula appears in the context of an earnest invitation: stand

before God, singly or in pairs, and then reflect on whether the Prophet is truly mad or is a genuine warner.

The grammatical analysis of verses containing *tatafakkarûn* shows that it is frequently preceded by *la'allakum* (so that you may) or *awalâ* (have they not), constructions that place the call to reflection within a framework of moral expectation and reproach. In the broader contextual field, *tafakkur* encompasses three primary domains: reflection on the diversity of natural creation to arrive at knowledge of the Creator (al-Hashr 59:21; al-Rum 30:8, 21; Ali Imran 3:191; al-Ra'd 13:3; al-Nahl 16:11, 44, 69; al-Jathiyah 45:13); clear, objective, and open-minded thinking as a path to truth (al-Muddaththir 74:18; al-Baqarah 2:219; al-An'am 6:50; al-A'raf 7:184); and the combination of reflection and meditation that orients life toward the hereafter rather than the world (Saba 34:46; al-Baqarah 2:266; al-A'raf 7:176; Yunus 10:24).

Afalâ Yatadabbarûn: Contemplative Penetration of the Quran

The formula *afalâ yatadabbarûn*, "do they not contemplate?" or "do they not meditate upon [the Quran]?", derives from the root *dabara*, meaning the back or the aftermath of something. *Tadabbara*, a Form V verb, thus carries the sense of attending to what comes after, or attending to the consequences and depths of something by returning to it repeatedly. Al-Sanidi, drawing on Ibn Manzhur, al-Askari, al-Jurjani, al-Qurtubi, and al-Thabari, defines *tadabbur* as "examining the consequence of a matter and thinking carefully about it," and the phrase *tadabbara al-kalam* as "attending to the beginning and end of a speech, and repeating that attention multiple times" (al-Sanidi, 2002).

The defining semantic feature of *tadabbur* in the Quran is that its object is exclusively Quranic speech or divine revelation. In al-Nisa 4:82, the formula *afalâ yatadabbarûna al-Quran* is accompanied by the argument that if the Quran were from other than God, contradictions would be found in it: the absence of contradiction is itself evidence of divine authorship, but only a mind that has subjected the text to deep, comparative, recursive contemplation can perceive this. In Muhammad 47:24, the formula appears in the context of reproaching those who turn away from divine guidance, with the alternative explanation that their hearts are locked shut.

Al-Qardhawi distinguishes *tadabbur* from *tafakkur* in a way that illuminates the semantic difference: *tafakkur* means directing the heart or mind to attend to evidence (*dalil*), while *tadabbur* means directing the mind to attend to the consequences and implications of what has been read (al-Qardhawi, 2001). In other words, *tafakkur* proceeds from phenomena to conclusions, while *tadabbur* proceeds through the text of divine speech to its deepest meanings and their consequences for life. Asyafah elaborates this further, describing *tadabbur* as "a genuine human effort combining intellect, emotion, and spirit, performed with concentration, to meditate on the content of Quranic verses so that the heart can grasp messages of value that lie deeper than what the verses explicitly state" (Asyafah, 2014, p. 67).

The semantic network surrounding *tadabbur al-Quran* includes several related concepts identified by Asyafah (2014). *Qira'ah*, reading, provides the textual engagement that makes *tadabbur* possible. *Tilawah*, recitation, involves reading according to the specific norms and etiquette of Quranic recitation. *Tafakkur*, as discussed above, provides the reflective

concentration that deepens the engagement. Tadzakkur, discussed below, functions to anchor what has been understood in memory and in habitual awareness. Tadzawwuq, savoring, refers to the affective resonance of Quranic meanings in the heart. Tashdiq, affirmation, designates the wholehearted acceptance of Quranic truth. Tajawwub, responsiveness, designates the creative integration of Quranic energies into a life of action.

Grammatically, the verses containing forms of tadabbara show a specific pattern in which God's invitation to tadabbur is directed at those who have already engaged with Quranic speech at a surface level but have not yet penetrated to its depths. The formula therefore functions as a challenge to move from passive reception to active, recursive, and penetrating engagement with the divine word. In the contextual semantic field, tadabbur covers six functions that correspond to the network identified above: reading all forms of divine signs; opening the space of spiritual consciousness to divine light; anchoring comprehension in durable heart-memory; tasting the affective impact of divine meaning; affirming Quranic truth with the whole self; and channeling the energy of the Quran into creative, responsible living.

Afalâ Tadzakkarûn: Memory and the Activation of Stored Wisdom

The formula afalâ tazakkarûn, "do you not remember?" or "do you not take heed?", is derived from tazakkara, another Form V verb, this time from the root dhakara. According to Sibawaih, the lexical core of dhikr is "keeping something that is remembered" or "the flowing of something onto the tongue" (Manzhur, n.d.). The Form V pattern tazakkara adds to this core sense of remembrance the connotation of a deliberate, effortful act of recollection and internalization.

The semantic range of tazakkur in the Quran is broad. In many verses, dhikr refers to the Quran itself, as in al-Hijr 15:9, where God affirms divine custodianship over "the reminder" (al-dhikr). The term also appears as a name or attribute of the Quran in the sense of a document that reminds human beings of their obligations, the divine attributes, and the realities of the next life. In other verses, tazakkur refers to the activated recollection of a divine warning or moral lesson that the person has previously encountered but has allowed to fade from active awareness.

The twenty-one morphological patterns of this root identified in the Quran reflect the extraordinary frequency and variety of dhikr-related language. Particularly significant are the Form V verb patterns tazakkarûn and yatadzakkarûn, which consistently appear in the contexts of drawing lessons from Quranic parables, natural phenomena, and the histories of past communities. In al-Baqarah 2:221, al-A'raf 7:57, and al-Nahl 16:90, the formula la'allakum tazakkarûn (so that you may take heed) appears after statements of Quranic legislation or natural illustration, indicating that the purpose of these passages is precisely to activate moral memory.

The contextual semantic field of tazakkarûn encompasses four primary domains. The first is the reminder to maintain active remembrance of God in all circumstances, to be grateful for divine blessings, to act on scripture, and to follow the Prophets (Ali Imran 3:191; al-Muddaththir 74:56; al-Zukhruf 43:13; al-Zumar 39:27). The second domain involves those who have genuinely repented and taken refuge from satanic temptation (Ali Imran 3:135; al-

A'raf 7:201). The third domain is the future regret of those who will remember, too late, the warnings they dismissed in the world (al-Nazi'at 79:35; al-Fajr 89:23). The fourth domain is the intelligence of those who habitually draw lessons from the signs of creation (al-Nahl 16:13; al-Furqan 25:62; Ibrahim 14:25).

A semantically important distinction emerges between tadzakkur and tafakkur. Whereas tafakkur is directed outward at created realities with the aim of reaching new knowledge, tadzakkur is directed inward at what has already been understood, with the aim of keeping it alive and operative in the heart and in practice. Tadzakkur is, in other words, the maintenance and reactivation of existing spiritual and ethical knowledge, preventing the kind of moral forgetfulness that the Quran associates with the influence of the lower self and satanic suggestion.

Afalâ Tubshirûn: Perceptual Discrimination and Inward Sight

The formula afalâ tubshirûn, "do you not see?" or "do you not perceive?", derives from abshara, a Form IV verb from the root bashara. The Form IV pattern (af'ala) typically carries a causative or completive sense, and abshara therefore denotes an act of seeing that is more complete or more penetrating than simple visual perception. According to al-Asfahani, bashara (in its simple form) designates the power residing in the eye as an organ of sight, and the sight that perceives phenomena at the level of their exterior appearances. By contrast, bashirah, derived from the same root, denotes the power of the heart to grasp the inward reality of things, what Shihab translates as inner insight (Shihab, 1996).

Al-Asfahani further distinguishes three verbs of visual perception in the Quran. Nazhara designates seeing the form and image of something. Bashara designates seeing in detail, capturing all the inward and outward particulars of what is seen. Ra'a designates seeing accompanied by deep knowledge of the essence of what is seen (cited in Shihab, 1996). This tripartite distinction maps onto different levels of perceptual-intellectual engagement: nazhara is directed and analytical observation; bashara is comprehensive and detailed perceptual discrimination; ra'a is vision fused with understanding of essence.

The Quran uses the formula afalâ tubshirûn in a relatively small number of high-stakes contexts. In al-Zariyat 51:21, the formula appears after the declaration that God's signs exist "within your own selves," challenging human beings to turn the faculty of comprehensive perceptual discrimination upon themselves rather than only upon external objects. In al-Qasas 28:72, the formula follows a hypothetical question about what would happen if God made the daytime continuous: who other than God could bring the night? The question demands that the reader see, in the full discriminating sense, the absolute dependence of all created order on divine creative power.

Grammatically, tubshirûn is a second-person plural imperfect active form with the prefix ta- and the suffix -ûn indicating a verbal noun of second-person plural address. The sixteen morphological patterns of this root in the Quran divide between outward visual perception and inward insight, reflecting the root's semantic range across the physical and spiritual registers. The contextual semantic field of tubshirûn covers four primary domains: the perception of specific concrete objects visible to the eye (Taha 20:96; al-Qasas 28:11; Maryam

19:42; al-Zukhruf 43:51); the visual witnessing of clear evidence of truth (al-An'am 6:104; al-Sajdah 32:12; al-Baqarah 2:17; al-A'raf 7:179; Yasin 36:9); engagement with signs of divine power in the natural world as an occasion for spiritual meditation (al-Sajdah 32:27; al-Ahqaf 46:26; al-Qasas 28:72; al-Zariyat 51:21); and the perceptual faculty of sight itself as an organ of divine gift and moral accountability (al-An'am 6:46; al-Nur 24:31).

Comparative Semantic Analysis and the Construction of Intellect

Reading the six formulas together as a semantic field reveals a richly differentiated Quranic epistemology. Each formula designates a mode of intellectual activity that is both cognitively distinct and functionally complementary to the others. The relationship between them is not one of simple synonymy but of what the Arabic semantic tradition calls a field of related meanings in which each term occupies a position defined by its similarities to and differences from its neighbors.

Three major groupings emerge from the comparison. The first grouping encompasses tafakkur, tadabbur, and tadzakkur, all of which involve activities of the heart and mind directed toward intangible objects, whether the realities of nature, the depths of divine speech, or the store of previously acquired moral and spiritual knowledge. They share a family resemblance in that all three are forms of meditative engagement rather than outward empirical observation. However, they differ in their objects and directions: tafakkur moves from known phenomena toward new understanding of divine attributes; tadabbur moves through the layers of Quranic text toward its deepest implications; tadzakkur moves backward into the treasury of existing knowledge to bring it alive again in present awareness.

The second grouping comprises nazhara and bashara, both of which are grounded in the faculty of visual perception and extend that faculty toward intellectual comprehension. Nazhara is directed and analytical, pressing observation toward a specific endpoint as signaled by the preposition *ila*. Bashara is comprehensive and discriminating, capturing all the particulars of what is seen, both outward and inward. Both are distinguished from mere passive looking: the Quran uses neither to describe simple visual reception but always to designate seeing that is active, purposive, and interpretively engaged.

The third element, 'aqala, occupies a position that bridges both groupings. It is simultaneously grounded in rational inference and directed toward moral constraint. Unlike tafakkur, which is primarily contemplative, 'aqala is action-guiding: to use one's *aql* is to draw conclusions that bind one's behavior. Unlike nazhara, which is primarily observational, 'aqala synthesizes observations into action-guiding principles. This bridging function explains why 'aqala is the most frequently occurring of the six roots in the Quran and why the noun *aql* has historically been taken as the master term for human intellectual faculty.

The Quranic notion of intellect that emerges from this analysis has three integrative dimensions. The first is the rational-cognitive dimension, represented primarily by *ta'qilûn* and *yanzhurûn*, which encompasses empirical observation, logical inference, the avoidance of contradiction, and the drawing of action-guiding conclusions. The second is the reflective-spiritual dimension, represented primarily by *tatafakkarûn*, *yatadabbarûn*, and *tadzakkarûn*, which encompasses concentrated contemplation of divine signs and divine speech, the

deepening of understanding through recursive meditation, and the maintenance of spiritual awareness through active remembrance. The third is the perceptual-discriminative dimension, represented by *tubshirûn*, which encompasses the detailed, inward-penetrating sight that grasps both the exterior appearance and the interior constitution of what is perceived.

This three-dimensional structure means that the Quranic concept of intellect is radically integrative, refusing the separation between reason and faith, observation and contemplation, outward sight and inward insight, that characterizes many modern epistemological frameworks. A person who truly *ta'qilûn* observes, reflects, contemplates, remembers, and perceives in all six modes simultaneously and in an integrated way. Conversely, the failure to engage any one of these dimensions is understood by the Quran as a failure of intellect, even if the other dimensions remain operative. The person who observes carefully but does not reflect (*nazhara* without *tafakkur*) gathers data without wisdom. The person who reflects but does not remember (*tafakkur* without *tadzakkur*) accumulates insights that dissipate in practical life. The person who contemplates scripture but does not act on its conclusions (*tadabbur* without *ta'qilûn*) remains in an esoteric circle that never transforms behavior.

This integrative construction also has direct implications for the relationship between reason and religion. If *aql* is understood as encompassing all six intellectual modes, then the hadith that "religion is intellect" does not make religion the servant of a narrow cognitive rationalism. Rather, it means that genuine religion requires the full exercise of all six modes: rational inference, empirical observation, concentrated reflection, deep contemplation of divine speech, active moral memory, and discriminating perceptual insight. These are not constraints on religious life but its constitutive intellectual activities.

Contextual Distribution and Thematic Patterns

The contextual analysis reveals systematic differences in the thematic domains associated with each formula, further confirming their semantic distinctiveness. The formula *afalâ ta'qilûn* is most frequently associated with challenges to religious hypocrisy, logical inconsistency in theological reasoning, and moral short-sightedness in the choice between worldly and eternal goods. The formula *afalâ yanzhurûn* is most frequently associated with the empirical investigation of natural phenomena, the historical observation of past civilizations and their fates, and the verification of specific factual claims. The formula *afalâ tatafakkarûn* is most frequently associated with concentrated reflection on the diversity of natural creation, including plants, animals, celestial bodies, human reproduction, and the alternation of day and night, all as occasions for deepening knowledge of the Creator. The formula *afalâ yatadabburûn* is exclusively associated with the Quran itself, challenging readers to penetrate its layers of meaning rather than engaging with it at a surface level. The formula *afalâ tadzakkarûn* is associated with the maintenance of moral awareness and spiritual orientation in everyday life, drawing on Quranic parables, legislative wisdom, and the lessons of history. The formula *afalâ tubshirûn* is associated with the comprehensive perception of both natural phenomena and the interior constitution of the self as an occasion for recognizing divine creative power and human dependence on God.

This distribution suggests that the Quran does not use these formulas interchangeably but deploys each within specific thematic and rhetorical contexts that reflect the distinct intellectual mode it designates. The selection of *yanzhurûn* for passages about the camel (al-Ghashiyah 88:17) and human food ('Abasa 80:24) reflects the empirical, analytical character of that verb. The selection of *tatafakkarûn* for passages about the diversity of fruits and plants (al-Ra'd 13:3; al-Nahl 16:11) reflects the concentrated, inference-drawing character of *tafakkur*. The selection of *yatadabbarûn* exclusively for Quranic speech reflects the recursive, depth-penetrating character of *tadabbur*. These contextual distributions are not accidents but evidence of systematic semantic differentiation.

Implications for the Understanding of Aql in Muslim Intellectual Life

The findings of this study have several implications for how *aql* is understood and cultivated in Muslim intellectual and educational life. First, any definition of intellect that reduces it to the cognitive functions associated with the biological brain misses the spiritual, moral, and contemplative dimensions that the Quran consistently associates with rational activity. The Oxford dictionary definition of "mind" as the part of the brain where thoughts occur (Bull, 2011) is not simply an imprecise translation of *aql*; it is a fundamentally different concept that carries the risk of reducing Islamic intellectual life to a form of cognitive rationalism that has no place for *tadabbur*, *tadzakkur*, or the inward sight of *bashirah*.

Second, the analysis reveals that the Quranic call to intellectual activity is not a call to pure rationalism but to an integrated engagement that refuses to separate reason from faith, observation from contemplation, knowledge from practice, and outward perception from inward discernment. Programs of Quranic education and Islamic intellectual formation that emphasize only one dimension, whether rational critique, memorization, or spiritual practice, fall short of the integrated ideal embodied in the six formulas.

Third, the semantic differences between the six formulas provide a framework for understanding different genres of Islamic intellectual activity and their proper objects. *Kalam* (rational theology) primarily exercises *ta'qilûn* in its concern with logical demonstration of theological truths. *Tafsir* in its philological mode exercises *nazhara* and *tafakkur* in its close attention to textual evidence and reasoned inference. *Tafsir* in its spiritual mode exercises *tadabbur* in its penetration of deeper Quranic meanings. *Dhikr* practices exercise *tadzakkur* in their maintenance of active divine awareness. Sufi practices of *muraqabah* (watchful meditation) exercise something analogous to *bashirah* in their cultivation of inward perceptual discrimination. The Quranic vocabulary thus provides a map of the intellectual landscape of Islamic tradition.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the semantic construction of intellect in the Quran through a systematic analysis of six challenge-formulas: *afalâ ta'qilûn*, *afalâ yanzhurûn*, *afalâ tatafakkarûn*, *afalâ yatadabbarûn*, *afalâ tadzakkarûn*, and *afalâ tubshirûn*. Drawing on lexical, grammatical, and contextual semantic analysis grounded in classical Arabic lexicography and

the tafsir tradition, the study has shown that the Quran employs these formulas with systematic semantic differentiation rather than as simple synonyms.

Ta'qilûn designates rational inference that binds itself to action-guiding conclusions, functioning as the master term for the intellectual constraint that prevents moral deviation. Yanzhurûn designates directed, analytical empirical observation of natural phenomena and historical events, oriented toward understanding their significance and extracting their benefit. Tatafakkarûn designates concentrated, recursive reflection on created realities with the purpose of moving from known characteristics of creation to more certain understanding of divine attributes and purposes. Yatadabbarûn designates deep, layered contemplation of Quranic speech that penetrates through its explicit statements to its inner implications, analogies, and consequences for life. Tadzakkarûn designates the active reactivation of previously acquired moral and spiritual knowledge, preventing the forgetfulness that the Quran associates with satanic influence and the lower self. Tubshirûn designates comprehensive perceptual discrimination that captures both the exterior form and the interior constitution of what is seen, extending the faculty of sight toward inward insight.

Together, these six terms construct a Quranic epistemology that is radically integrative. Intellect, in the Quranic understanding, is not a cognitive faculty operating independently of spiritual awareness, moral commitment, or perceptual sensitivity. It is a complex, multidimensional potential that encompasses rational inference, empirical observation, concentrated reflection, contemplative penetration, active moral memory, and discriminating insight. The failure to exercise any one of these dimensions constitutes, for the Quran, a failure of intellect, regardless of how highly developed the other dimensions may be.

The construction of intellect in the Quran thus stands in sharp contrast to definitions of mind as a purely cognitive mechanism. It is a construction that demands the integration of reason and faith, knowledge and practice, outward observation and inward insight, in the formation of human beings who are, in the fullest sense, rational, spiritual, and moral agents.

Future research should extend this analysis to other thinking-related vocabulary in the Quran, including ta'lamûn, yafqahûn, and ya'lamûn, and should examine how the six formulas function within specific Quranic surahs as part of their broader argumentative and rhetorical design. Cross-linguistic studies comparing the semantic fields of aql-related vocabulary in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu Islamic intellectual traditions would also advance understanding of how the Quranic concept has been received and modified across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

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