



Modeling the Position of Thinking in the Geometry of Religious Knowledge through a System Dynamics Approach

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Abstract

Purpose: The present study seeks to reexamine the position of reflection (tafakkur) within the framework of religious knowledge by employing a system dynamics approach in order to model the mechanism through which reflection contributes to the existential elevation of the human being.

Design/methodology/approach: Based on content analysis of authentic Islamic texts (the Qur’an and the narrations of the Infallibles, peace be upon them) and informed by expert opinions, this research develops a structured model that explains the causal relationships among fundamental variables, including thought, remembrance (dhikr), piety (taqwa), and the purification of the heart, within six reinforcing feedback loops.

Findings: The findings indicate that reflection, as a strategic and leverage variable, transforms the system of human purposes and intentions, thereby activating the entire epistemic system and providing a scientific explanation for the exceptional value attributed to “one hour of reflection.” The proposed model also depicts the reciprocal interaction between reason and heart in such a way that the awakening of the intellect leads to inner purification, while the clarity and tenderness of the heart prepare the ground for deeper rational perceptions.

Originality/value: A precise understanding of the structure of religious concepts and the relationship between rational and spiritual dimensions requires analytical tools capable of explaining the internal dynamics of these teachings beyond a linear perspective. The ultimate aim of this system is identified as the attainment of the sound heart (qalb salīm) as the most balanced state of the system. Overall, the study demonstrates that the application of systemic modeling can open new horizons for understanding the complex relationships among religious concepts and contribute to the development of knowledge in Islamic management.

Keywords

Islamic management, thought, sound heart, systems thinking, soft modeling.

Introduction

Certain Islamic sources and teachings—foremost among them the Holy Qur’an—possess *inner layers (butūn)*. This means that, in addition to their outward meanings, they encompass multiple esoteric and interpretive strata. For example, according to certain narrations, the Qur’an has seven inner layers (*bāṭin*) (Babaei & Shaker, 2014). In essence, these teachings contain multiple levels of knowledge: while no one is deprived of their basic understanding, each person accesses deeper layers in proportion to his or her intellectual, spiritual, and moral capacity (As’adi, 2019).

System dynamics, on the other hand, is a perspective and a set of conceptual tools that enable understanding the structural configurations and dynamic behaviors of complex systems (Sterman, 2000, p. vii). It facilitates deeper comprehension and the provision of more profound analyses. The central question of the present study is whether system dynamics can be used to gain deeper insight into religious teachings and to access their latent layers. Considering the multilayered nature of Islamic knowledge and the analytical power of this approach in structural studies, such an endeavor appears plausible. Nevertheless, beyond theoretical debates about its feasibility, it is necessary to evaluate the practical applicability of this analytical tool by dissecting one of the key concepts in Islamic teachings.

Islam places exceptional emphasis on thinking, and the religious leaders of Islam have expressed statements on this topic that, at first glance and from a linear-thinking perspective, may appear astonishing or even illogical. For example, one hour of thinking is deemed superior to one year of worship; and reflection (*tafakkur*) has been described as the father and mother of all virtues and greater than any act of worship. Accordingly, the topic of “reflection (*tafakkur*)” was selected for analysis within Islamic teachings using a system dynamics approach.

To the linear mind, thinking appears to be a simple matter; thus, many people easily pass over it without attention. The key question is how a seemingly simple phenomenon, such as reflection, can be the source of all virtues and possess such immense value. This is a question that linear reasoning cannot adequately answer. In this study, an effort is made—drawing upon religious sources and system dynamics tools—to offer at least a partial response. It should also be noted that, during the modeling process, additional elements such as “remembrance (*dhikr*)” and “piety (*taqwa*)” were identified as core variables influencing the model, and their foundational role in strengthening the system of reflection was articulated.

1. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

Before explaining the causal links and loops, it is essential to examine certain foundational concepts from the perspective of Islamic sources. This not only prevents potential misunderstandings but also facilitates a more accurate grasp of the causal relations within the model. Accordingly, several key concepts are presented below with reference to Qur'anic verses and narrations, and where appropriate, their significance within the structure of the study is highlighted.

1-1. Intellect (‘aql)

Imam Hasan (a) was asked what intellect is, and he replied: “To drink the cup of sorrow, sip by sip, until opportunity presents itself” (Ibn Shu‘ba Harani, 1984, p. 225). Imam Ali (a) stated: “Intellect is that you adopt moderation, avoid excess, fulfill your promises, and when angered by the Temimi tribe, you respond with forbearance” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 252). Imam Ali (a) also said: “Intellect is, in reality, avoiding sin, being farsighted, vigilant, and cautious. Souls are unrestrained, but the hands of intellect hold their reins and prevent them from plunging a person into misfortune” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51).

When Imam Sadiq (a) was asked what intellect is, he responded: “Intellect is that by which the All-Merciful is worshipped, and Paradise is attained.” The narrator asked: “Then what was in Mu‘awiya?” He replied: “That is cunning; that is devilry. It resembles intellect, but it is not intellect” (Kulaini, 1984, Vol. 1, p. 11).

Allamah Tabataba’i, in his commentary on verse 242 of Surah al-Baqarah—“Thus God makes His signs clear to you so that you may understand”—explains that intellect originally means binding and restraining. The application of the term ‘aql to the kind of human cognition through which one commits to what one perceives, and to the faculty by which good and evil and truth and falsehood are distinguished, derives from this meaning. In contrast to ‘aql are terms such as madness, foolishness, stupidity, and ignorance, each used in different contexts. Intellect refers to cognition accompanied by the heart’s affirmation of what God has innately instilled in human nature—namely, the understanding of truth and falsehood in theoretical matters and the discernment of good, evil, benefit, and harm in practical matters (Tabataba’i, 1995, Vol. 2, p. 374).

Many narrations from the Prophet (s) emphasize the value of intellect. For example, he states: “God has not distributed anything better to His servants than intellect. The sleep of an intelligent person is superior to the

night vigil of a fool; the staying at home of the intelligent is superior to the traveling of a fool (for worship, such as pilgrimage or jihad). God never sent a prophet or messenger until his intellect reached perfection and surpassed the intellects of his community.” He also said: “The intelligent are the possessors of intellect (ulu al-albāb) of whom God has spoken: ‘And none take heed except those of intellect.’” (Kulaini, 1984, Vol. 1, p. 15).

The Prophet (s) further stated: “Everything has an instrument, and the instrument of the believer is intellect; everything has a mount, and the mount of a human being is intellect; everything has an ultimate goal, and the goal of worship is intellect; every group of travelers has a tent that shelters them, and the tent of Muslims is intellect” (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, Vol. 8, p. 3874).

1-2. Thinking (ta‘aqqul)

The term ta‘aqqul (on the morphological pattern tafa‘‘ul) denotes firmness in accepting and applying (Ibn Manzur, Vol. 11, p. 458). In other words, ta‘aqqul is the process of actualizing the faculty of intellect (Tabataba‘i, 2011, Vol. 2, p. 114). However, within the structure of religious knowledge, mere thinking is not intrinsically valuable; rather, the subject-orientation of reflection and its direction toward essential truths demarcate genuine reflection from illusion (Jawadi Amoli, 2012, p. 184). The quality of the output of the human mental system is determined by the subjects one selects as the input for reflection (Motahhari, 2012, p. 54).

For example, Qur’anic verses and narrations recommend reflection in the following strategic domains:

a) The system of creation and the realm of existence (systemic holism)

The Qur’an calls the human being to contemplate the truth-oriented structure of the universe so that one may transcend a fragmented view:

“Have they not reflected within themselves? God has not created the heavens and the earth and what is between them except with truth and for a specified term...” (al-Rum: 8).

choosing this systemic perspective, Imam Ali (a) states: “Reflection on the dominion of the heavens and the earth is the worship of the sincere” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 58).

b) Divine blessings (system resources)

Another key domain is the recognition of the capacities and blessings granted to the human being. Imam Ali (a) states: “Reflection upon God’s blessings is a noble act of worship” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 58).

c) The conditions of past nations (historical dynamics)

In system dynamics, studying the past behavior of a system is essential for anticipating its future. The Qur'an likewise instructs humans to travel upon the earth and observe the causal structures underlying the fate of earlier communities:

“Have they not traveled through the land so that they may observe how the outcome was for those before them...” (al-Rum: 9).

The Qur'an further emphasizes in Surah Al-'Imran that such events are not random but unfold according to established patterns:

“Many precedents have passed before you, so travel through the earth and observe...” (Al-'Imran: 137).

1-3. Remembrance (dhikr)

According to Islamic narrations, remembrance is not limited to verbal repetition; rather, it encompasses the entire spectrum of recalling God across all dimensions of human existence—verbal and non-verbal. The Prophet (s) describes the multifaceted nature of this inner presence: “My Lord commanded me that my speech be remembrance, my silence reflection, and my gaze a lesson” (Majlisi, 1984, Vol. 93, p. 165).

In the same spirit, Imam Ali (a) links felicity to the union of silence and divine remembrance, saying: “Blessed is the one who speaks only in remembrance of God” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 392; Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, Vol. 4, p. 1837).

In a deeper statement, he describes remembrance as a reality beyond outward rituals: “Remembrance of God is neither among the duties of the tongue nor among the formalities of thought; rather, its beginning lies with the One remembered (God), and only in the second degree does the rememberer appear” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 188).

The priority of inward, hidden remembrance is also emphasized. The Prophet (s) said: “Remember God with silent remembrance.” They asked: “What is silent remembrance?” He replied: “Hidden and concealed remembrance” (Muttaqi Hindi, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 431).

1-4. Heedlessness (ghaflah)

In the view of the Infallibles (a), heedlessness is not a mere lapse but a fundamental obstacle to awareness. Imam Ali (a) states: “Heedlessness is the opposite of alertness” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 462). The Prophet (s), in a cautionary tone, describes the roots of heedlessness related to worldly distraction and forgetfulness of death: “I am astonished at one who is

heedless while others are not heedless of him; and astonished at one who pursues the world while death pursues him; and astonished at one who opens his mouth in laughter while not knowing whether God is pleased with him or displeased” (Mufid, 1992, p. 169).

This downfall—heedlessness—directly affects human action. Imam Sadiq (a) states: “Whoever truly remembers God obeys Him, and whoever is heedless of God disobeys Him... The root of both is remembrance and heedlessness” (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, Vol. 4, p. 1857). Thus, Imam Ali (a) identifies “remembrance with presence of heart” as the path out of heedlessness, stating: “Do not remember God in a state of heedlessness... Rather, remember Him in a manner where your heart and your tongue are one” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 188).

An analysis of these narrations reveals that heedlessness and remembrance stand in direct opposition. Ontologically, the two cannot coexist; the presence of one negates the other.

1-5. Literature Review

Prior studies relevant to the thematic domain of this research can be classified into two general categories:

1-5-1. Studies on the Systemic Nature of Concepts Related to Reflection in Islamic Sources

Within the field of Islamic teachings, numerous studies have examined the status of reflection and its connection with other ethical concepts. For instance, Izadpanah (2013), in explaining the Qur’anic moral system, argues that Qur’anic concepts are not scattered elements but are interconnected within a “networked structure.” Likewise, Parhizkar et al. (2017) demonstrated that reflection in religious texts constitutes the starting point of inner transformation, which—through strengthening remembrance (dhikr)—leads to the acquisition of piety (taqwa). However, most of these studies are descriptive or exegetical in nature and seldom present the “interactive mechanisms” or causal relationships among these variables within a structured model.

1-5-2. Application of the Systemic Approach and System Dynamics in the Humanities and Religious Studies

The use of system dynamics—established by Sterman as a tool for understanding complex systems—has, in recent years, expanded from industrial and engineering domains into the social sciences and humanities. In Iran, Azar et al. (2016) emphasized the need for soft modeling in

analyzing complex human phenomena. However, specifically regarding “religious knowledge,” very few studies have employed this approach. Mousavi et al. (2019), in an article titled “A Systemic Analysis of Islamic Lifestyle Components,” attempted to explain the relationships among religious variables using causal-loop diagrams. They concluded that many ethical dead-ends originate from “heedlessness (ghaflah)” as a reduction of the positive feedback loop within the system. At the international level, scholars such as Witt (2010) argue that system dynamics can serve as a “shared language” for developing an intuitive understanding of classical and philosophical texts.

1-5-3. Research Gap and Contribution of the Present Study

A review of the literature indicates that although the multilayered nature of religious teachings and the significance of reflection have been widely discussed in theological and exegetical writings, the interactive dynamics between reflection and other components of religious knowledge have not been analyzed within a feedback-based system. The contribution of the present study is that—unlike conventional linear approaches that treat these concepts as isolated—it uses system dynamics tools to demonstrate how strengthening a foundational element such as reflection can, through reinforcing loops, elevate the entire cognitive-religious system of the individual and provide a scientific explanation for the extraordinary value attributed to “one hour of reflection.”

2. Materials & Methods

The process of conducting this research commenced with the clarification of the problem and the formulation of initial objectives. In the data collection phase, to achieve a coherent model, priority was given to examining the views and opinions of religious experts. Accordingly, in the first step, the content of 23 religious lecture sessions centered on “reflection (tafakkur)” was identified and analyzed. Simultaneously, narrations relevant to the subject were extracted and categorized.

In the subsequent step, based on the findings derived from the primary sources, a preliminary model of causal relationships was designed. This model was refined and adjusted through an iterative back-and-forth process, drawing upon supplementary resources. For the purpose of validating and revising the initial model, it was presented to experts along with the delineated causal loops and a brief explanation of the relationships among the variables.

In selecting the experts, criteria such as “mastery of Islamic teachings,” “deep understanding of the foundations of reflection,” and “familiarity with the methodology of systems thinking” were applied. Among the nine invited experts, five expressed willingness to collaborate. Their educational qualifications and academic ranks are presented in Table 1.

Table1. Educational Degrees and Academic Ranks of Experts

Row	Educational Degree	Academic Rank
1	PhD in Philosophy	Full Professor
2	PhD in Philosophy	Assistant Professor
3	PhD in Organizational Behavior Management	University Lecturer and Memorizer of the Entire Qur'an
4	PhD in Philosophy	Lecturer in Seminary and University
5	PhD in Systems Management	Assistant Professor

In the final stage, based on the corrective feedback provided by the experts, the review of related postgraduate theses, and a deeper examination of narrational sources, the research model was revised through several iterations. The final model resulting from this process exhibited noticeable changes compared to the initial model. All relationships incorporated in the final version were directly derived and finalized with reference to the narrations of the Infallibles (peace be upon them) and the verses of the Holy Qur'an, which enhanced the rigor and validity of the extracted model.

3. Research Findings

In this section, the overall causal loop model is first presented. Subsequently, each loop related to the model is explained separately using narrations from the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them) and, where appropriate, supported by verses from the Holy Qur'an.

3-1. The Overall Causal Relationship Model

In this section, the overall causal loop model is first presented. Subsequently, each loop in the model is explained separately using narrations from the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them) and, in some cases, supported by verses from the Holy Qur'an.

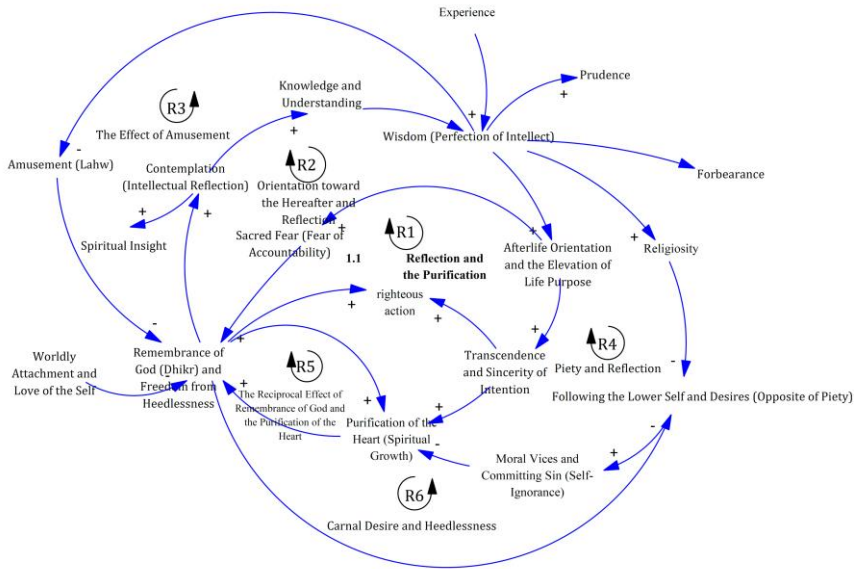


Figure 1. The overall causal relationship model in the system of religious knowledge

The overall model of the identified causal relationships—representing the system of religious knowledge—is shown in the figure below.

As illustrated, the model consists of six loops. For a clearer explanation of the model and a better understanding of the causal relationships, each loop and the relationships within it are explained in turn.

3-2. Loop One: Reflection and the Purification of the Heart

In the model of the system of religious knowledge, this loop constitutes a “cycle of virtue” or reinforcing loop, demonstrating how rationality and spirituality, through continuous interaction, contribute to the elevation of the human being’s existential level.

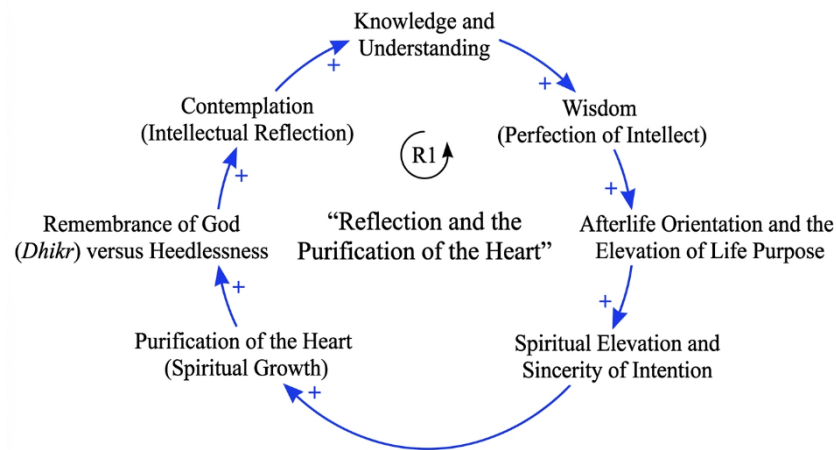


Figure 2. The reflection and purification of the heart loop

According to the following narrations, reflection in the Islamic sense is not merely a mental activity but leads to an increase in knowledge and understanding:

- Imam ‘Ali (a): “Through reflection, the darkness of affairs becomes illuminated.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 56)
- Imam ‘Ali (a): “There is no knowledge like reflection.” (Nahj al Balaghah, Saying 113)
- Imam al Rida (a): “Reflection is your mirror; it shows you your good and bad qualities.” (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 3, p. 436)
- Imam ‘Ali (a): “Reflection is a clear mirror.” (Nahj al Balaghah, Saying 5)

As also indicated in the overall model, reflection (tafakkur) increases insight (basīrah), a point explicitly mentioned in the following narrations:

- Imam ‘Ali (a): “Whoever reflects for a long time, his insight becomes sound.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 57)
- Imam ‘Ali (a): “Whoever reflects becomes perceptive.” (Nahj al Balaghah, Letter 31)

Continuing the explanation of causal relations, a narration from Imam ‘Ali (a) states that the intellect (‘aql) is an innate faculty that increases through knowledge and experience (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 7, p. 404). He also states:

“The intellect and desire are two enemies. The ally of intellect is knowledge, and the adornment of desire is passion. Between these two, there is a struggle over the soul; whichever prevails, the soul follows it.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 96)

Numerous narrations likewise point to the effect of reflection on the intellect, a relationship that in fact operates through the production of knowledge and understanding:

- Imam ‘Ali (a): “Reflection yields wisdom.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 56)
- Imam ‘Ali (a): “Reflection polishes the intellects.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 56)
- Imam ‘Ali (a): “The root of intellect is reflection, and its fruit is safety from error and sin—or from the punishment of the Hereafter.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52)
- Imam al Sadiq (a): “Frequent contemplation in knowledge opens and blossoms the intellect.” (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 7, p. 3418)

One effect of the perfection of the intellect is that a person chooses higher and more transcendent goals and turns his attention toward the eternal abode of the Hereafter. As the human intellect becomes more complete, attention shifts from the transient world to the enduring one. This idea appears in the following narrations:

- Imam ‘Ali (a): “The wise seek perfection, whereas the ignorant seek wealth.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 48)
- The Prophet (s): “The most intelligent of people is the servant who recognizes his Lord and obeys Him, recognizes his enemy and disobeys him, knows his eternal abode and cultivates it, and knows that he will soon depart and thus prepares provisions for the journey.” (Daylami, 1408 AH, p. 337)
- Imam ‘Ali (a): “The most intelligent people are those who are most mindful of the consequences.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52)
- Imam ‘Ali (a): “The limit of intellect is separation from what perishes (this world) and attachment to what endures.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51)

When human goals—that is, the purposes a person selects for his life—are elevated and become more transcendent, intentions (*niyyāt*) are likewise elevated; they become purer and more refined. Consequently, this elevation

of intention—meaning focused attention on God, His signs, and His awliyā’—leads to the purification of the heart (spiritual growth).

The purification of the heart, in turn, prevents a person from becoming heedless of the remembrance of God. In proportion to the degree of purification and spiritual growth, moments of heedlessness and the overall extent of heedlessness decrease. Imam al Sadiq (a) states:

“A servant must have sincere intention (for God) in all his movements and stillness; otherwise he is counted among the heedless.” (Majlisi, 1983, vol. 70, p. 210)

The more a person remembers God and engages in dhikr, the more his reflection increases. In fact, a necessary condition for reflection in the sense defined here—reflection as understood in Islam—is freedom from heedlessness. Imam ‘Ali (a) says:

“...So, O listener! Awaken from your intoxication, arise from the sleep of heedlessness, restrain your haste, and reflect well upon what has been conveyed to you from the tongue of the unlettered Prophet—something from which there is no escape.” (Nahj al Balaghah, Sermon 153)

Some narrations also refer to indirect relationships. For example, Imam Hasan (a) points to the role of reflection in reviving and purifying the heart:

“Reflection revives the heart of the insightful person.” (Ibn Shu‘bah Harrani, 1984, p. 226)

Regarding the influence of intellect on knowledge, the following narrations from Imam ‘Ali (a) may be cited:

- “The intellect is the mount of knowledge, and knowledge is the mount of forbearance.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 55)
- “The intellect is the root of knowledge and the motivation for understanding.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51)
- “The intellect is the root of knowledge and the cause of comprehension.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1981, vol. 2, p. 91)
- “Through the intellect one may attain the highest levels of knowledge.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1981, vol. 3, p. 221)
- “The wealth of the intelligent person lies in his knowledge.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1981, vol. 4, p. 376)

A wise person does not fall into heedlessness; this is another indirect relationship mentioned in the narrations. Imam ‘Ali (a) states:

“I am astonished that intelligent people could be heedless of seeking the best provision for the Hereafter and preparing for their return.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 160)

He also says regarding the effect of heedlessness on intellect:

“Whoever becomes heedless remains ignorant.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 73)

Sincerity of intention likewise removes heedlessness. The Prophet (s) advised Abu Dharr:

“O Abu Dharr! Intend to perform a good deed, even if you do not actually perform it, so that you are not written among the heedless.” (Tabarsi, 1991, vol. 2, p. 378)

In summary, this loop shows that reflection revives the heart, and a heart that has come alive—through remembrance of God and spiritual awakening—provides a more precise and receptive ground for deeper reflection. This continuous interaction between intellect (reflection) and heart constitutes the driving engine of growth in the system of religious knowledge.

3-3. Loop Two: Orientation toward the Hereafter and Reflection

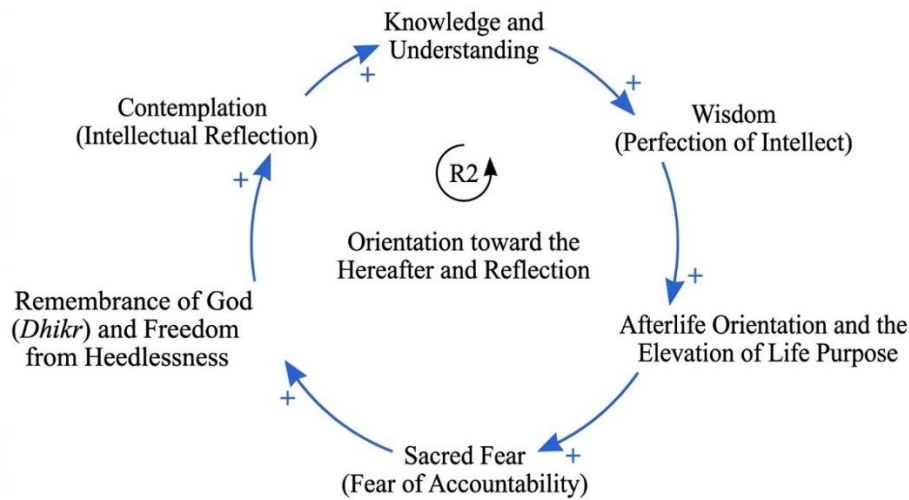


Figure 3. The Hereafter orientation and reflection loop

Like the previous loop, this loop is also a reinforcing loop and shares many similarities with it, but it highlights the motivational dimensions of the system. From the element of remembrance of God to orientation toward the Hereafter, the relevant relationships were explained in the previous loop.

Attention to the eternal abode and the selection of transcendent goals lead a person to see himself as accountable before God for his actions in this world. Awareness of divine reckoning and attention to the punishment of sinners create a form of sacred, awakening fear within the person who is oriented toward the Hereafter. The Prophet (s) once passed by a gathering where loud laughter was heard and said:

“Mix your gatherings with the remembrance of that which disturbs pleasures.” They asked, “What is that?” He said, “Death.” (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 12, p. 5623)

Imam ‘Ali (a) similarly states:

“Remember the destroyer of pleasures, the disturber of enjoyments, the disperser of gatherings, the one that cuts off hopes, brings death near, and announces separation and dispersal.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 161)

This fear and awakening resulting from orientation toward the Hereafter do not lead to stagnation; rather, they draw a person toward the Lord of the Day of Judgment and lead him to maintain continuous remembrance of God. As the Qur’an states:

“Men whom neither trade nor sale distracts from the remembrance of God, the establishment of prayer, and the giving of alms; they fear a day when hearts and eyes will be overturned.” (Qur’an 24:37)

In the words of Imam ‘Ali (a), sustained, vigilant fear assists the believer on the long journey of life, preventing him from relying on heedlessness and false hopes. (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 161)

Indirect relations within this loop also show that heedlessness—by causing forgetfulness of the journey to the Hereafter—is the principal obstacle to the growth of this cycle. Imam ‘Ali (a) states:

“Woe to the one overcome by heedlessness who, as a result, forgets the journey to the Hereafter and fails to prepare for it.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 161)

Conversely, orientation toward the Hereafter ensures that a person never becomes weary of remembering God (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 4, p. 1758). A heart that has been softened by the remembrance of death is freed from hardness and rigidity. As Jesus (a) is reported to have said:

“If a beast is not ridden and no burden is placed upon it, it becomes wild and ill-tempered. Hearts are the same: if they are not softened by the remembrance of death and followed by constant worship, they become hard and harsh.” (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 11, p. 5005)

Imam ‘Ali (a) likewise warns:

“Beware of seeing the endpoint of life (death) as far away, for this hardens the hearts.” (Arbili, 2002, vol. 3, p. 140)

Therefore, this loop—by linking awakening fear and continuous dhikr—provides the necessary ground for returning to deeper reflection and for sustaining ongoing growth within the system of religious knowledge.

3-4. Loop Three: The Effect of Amusement

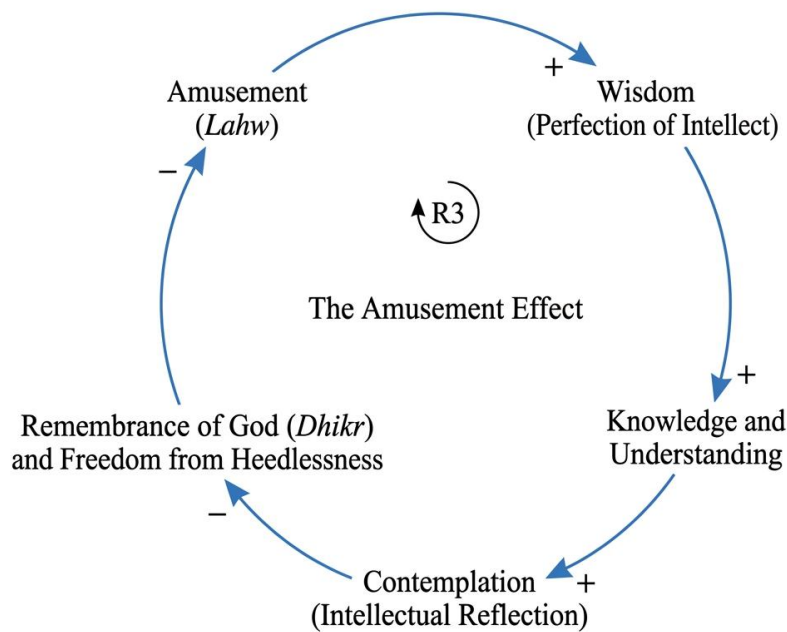


Figure 4. The amusement effect loop

A substantial portion of this loop was implicitly clarified in the earlier loops. The third loop in the system of religious knowledge explicates the inhibitory role of *lahw*—idle, heedlessness-inducing forms of amusement—in obstructing intellectual and spiritual growth. Within this cycle, the intellect (*‘aql*) functions as a guiding and regulatory force that prevents the human being from devoting time to activities devoid of value or teleological benefit.

According to the teachings of Imam ‘Ali (a), refraining from futile amusement represents one of the highest degrees of wisdom (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51), whereas persistent engagement in amusement is a sign of intellectual deficiency (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 221). At a deeper level,

heedless amusement is counted among the fruits of ignorance (*jahālah*) itself (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 75).

The destructive influence of *lahw* stems from the fact that it directly drives the heart toward heedlessness (*ghaflah*) and weakens the servant's bond with the sacred domain. Imam Hasan (a) states that the believer avoids vain amusement lest he fall into heedlessness (Warram ibn Abi Firas, 1990, vol. 1, p. 52). This link is so decisive that Imam 'Ali (a) declares:

“Whoever busies himself with remembering people, God—majestic is He—separates him from remembering Himself.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 437)

Thus, amusement acts as an impediment to remembrance (*dhikr*), and as *dhikr* diminishes, the entire mechanism that enables reflection (*tafakkur*) loses its vitality.

Beyond the direct effects, the indirect relationships within this loop reveal that *lahw* progressively erodes the very substance of the intellect. From the viewpoint of Imam 'Ali (a), amusement and heedlessness are in fact “food for foolishness” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 221). Continuous indulgence in *lahw* weakens rational faculties and distances the person from the path of perfection.

Accordingly, this reinforcing loop demonstrates that the more the intellect becomes perfected, the more it rejects *lahw*; and by distancing itself from heedless amusement, it clears the ground for sustained remembrance of God and for deeper reflection. Avoidance of futility, therefore, becomes itself a source of protection and advancement for religious knowledge.

3-5. Loop Four: Piety and Reflection

Figure 5. The piety and reflection loop

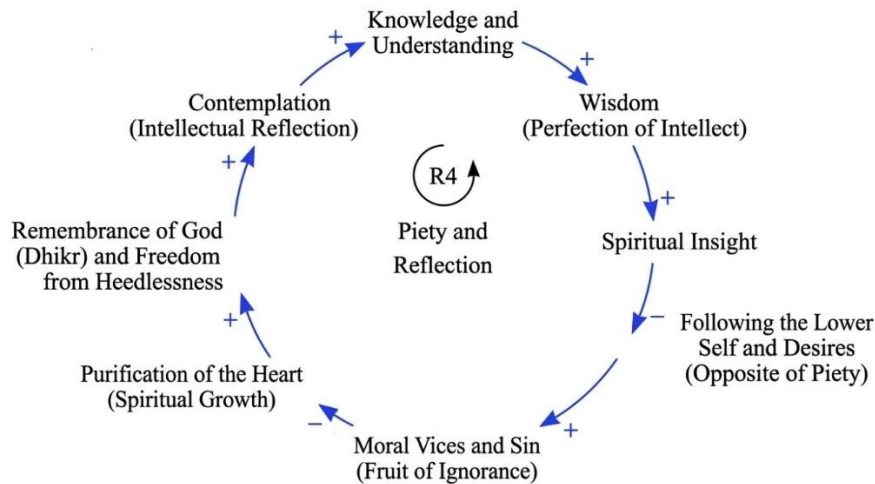


Figure 5. The piety and reflection loop

The fourth loop in the system of religious knowledge explains how the structure of thought is safeguarded through behavioral purity—namely, piety (taqwa). Earlier loops clarified that remembrance of God, through several intermediaries, contributes to the perfection of the intellect (‘aql).

According to the narrations, the perfection of intellect naturally leads to religiosity. Imam al-Sadiq (a) states that “whoever possesses intellect is religious” (Kulaynī, 1984, vol. 1, p. 11), and Imam ‘Ali (a) likewise affirms that religiosity and refinement are among the fruits of intellect (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51). Fundamentally, the truly intelligent person is one who submits to the truth (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 8, p. 3393). Imam ‘Ali (a) further states: “The believer does not attain faith until he employs his intellect.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52)

When religiosity is deep and authentic—not merely external—it manifests in practice as taqwa, which is defined as resistance to the impulses of the lower self (nafs) and the pleasures it demands. Imam ‘Ali (a) states: “The order of religion lies in opposing the lower self and turning away from the world.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 241) In another narration, he states: “The apex of religion is opposing desire.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 241)

One who practices taqwa avoids sin and moral vices, whereas following the desires of the lower self inevitably leads to sin. Imam ‘Ali (a) declares:

“Obedience to the lower self and its desires is the foundation of every misery and the source of every misguidance.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 233)

He also warns: “Avoid desires, for they lead you toward sins and drive you toward evil.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 305)

From an indirect perspective as well, remembrance of God prevents sin. Imam al-Sadiq (a) states:

“Whoever truly remembers God obeys Him; whoever is heedless of God disobeys Him. Obedience is a sign of guidance, and disobedience a sign of misguidance—and the root of both is remembrance and heedlessness.” (Majlisi, 1983, vol. 93, p. 158)

Ultimately, sin and moral corruption result in hardness of heart (*qasāwat*) and destroy the purification of the heart. Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: “Nothing corrupts the heart more than sin.” (Kulaynī, 1984, vol. 2, p. 268) Imam ‘Ali (a) likewise states: “Tears do not dry except because of the hardness of hearts, and hearts do not harden except due to an increase in sin.” (Ibn Bābawayh, 2001, vol. 1, p. 81)

The indirect relationships in this loop are also reinforced by numerous narrations. Concerning the role of *taqwa* in awakening from heedlessness, Imam ‘Ali (a) states:

“I enjoin you to have *taqwa* of God... Through *taqwa*, turn your sleep into wakefulness and complete your day with it.” (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 191)

Multiple narrations from Imam ‘Ali (a) indicate that reflection reduces heedlessness and prevents wrongdoing. He states: “Reflection leads to taking heed, protects from slips, and produces caution and vigilance.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 57) Elsewhere, he says: “Persistent reflection and alertness safeguard one from slips and free him from fluctuations.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 57)

Regarding the effect of intellect on remembrance of God, Imam ‘Ali (a) says:

“The intelligent person, when silent, reflects; when he speaks, he remembers God; and when he looks, he takes heed.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 58)

Numerous narrations also affirm the influence of intellect on avoiding sin and moral vices. Imam ‘Ali (a) states: “The fruit of intellect is detesting the world and subduing desire.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52) He also affirms: “Intellect distances one from wrongdoing and calls him toward goodness.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51) And: “The intelligent person aspires to abandon sins and eliminate faults.” (Karajaki, 2015, vol. 1, p. 200)

On the influence of intellect on controlling desires, several narrations state: “Among the qualities of the intelligent is little desire and little heedlessness.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 54)

“When the intellect becomes complete, desire diminishes.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52)

And fundamentally: “The intelligent person is one who causes his desires to die.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 240)

Regarding the role of reflection in accepting religion, Imam al-Kāzīm (a) states:

“God did not send His prophets and messengers except so that His servants might reflect about God. Whoever’s recognition is deeper is more accepting of the Divine call. And the most knowledgeable among them about God is the one whose intellect is most complete.” (Kulaynī, 1984, vol. 1, p. 16)

Numerous narrations also describe the destructive impact of following desire on the intellect.

- Imam ‘Ali (a) states: “Through desire, intellect is destroyed.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 242)
- Imam ‘Ali (a) also states: “The enemy of intellect is the lower self.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 241)
- Imam al-Bāqir (a) states: “No intellect is like opposing the lower self.” (Ibn Shu‘bah Harrani, 1984, p. 286)
- Imam ‘Ali (a) also states: “Preserving the intellect lies in opposing the lower self and distancing oneself from the world.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 241)
- And: “Whoever distances himself from his desires, his intellect becomes sound.” (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 8, p. 3480)

The effect of following desire on heedlessness is also explicit. Imam ‘Ali (a) states: “Among sins, none is more destructive than following desire, for it makes you heedless of God.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 240). Imam al-Sajjad (a) explains that overeating, laziness born of satiation, and heedlessness born of worldly power all slow a person’s actions and erase remembrance of God, making him heedless of the nearness of death and intoxicated with love of the world. (Ibn Shu‘bah Harrani, 1984, p. 273)

The influence of moral vices on intellect is also emphasized. Imam al-Bāqir (a) says: “No pride enters a person’s heart except that an equal measure of his intellect is taken away.” (Majlisi, 1983, vol. 78, p. 186) Imam ‘Ali (a) likewise states: “Self-admiration is among the adversaries of intellect.” (Nahj al-Balaghah, Saying 212).

3-6. Loop Five: The Reciprocal Effect of Remembrance of God and the Purification of the Heart

Figure 6. The reciprocal effect of remembrance of God and purification of the heart

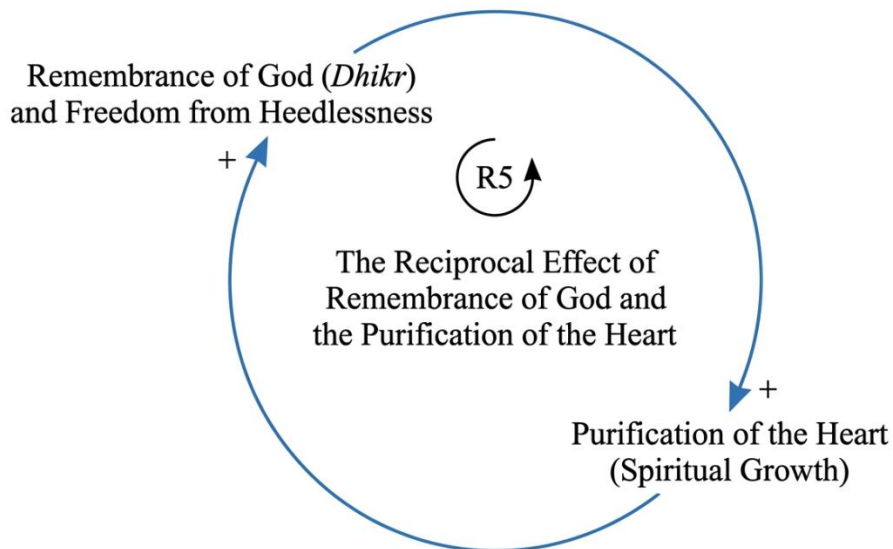


Figure 6. The reciprocal effect of remembrance of God and purification of the heart

The fifth loop in this epistemic system elaborates on the core synergistic interaction between divine remembrance (*dhikr*) and the inner purification of the heart (*qalb salim*). This reinforcing feedback loop demonstrates how these two factors reciprocally elevate the spiritual dimension of the human being.

According to the luminous sermons of *Nahj al-Balaghah*, the Almighty God has ordained His remembrance as a “polish for hearts” so that even the ears heavy with heedlessness may become attentive through it (*Nahj al-Balaghah*, Sermon 222). Therefore, continual engagement in *dhikr* is not merely a ritualistic activity; it forms the root of spiritual rectitude and heart’s purification (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 188). The Prophet (ﷺ) similarly emphasizes that remembrance of God is the cure that brings hearts to life (Muttaqi Hindi, 1991, vol. 1, p. 433), breathing vitality into the spiritual faculties.

Conversely, this loop highlights the indispensable role of a prepared heart ready for sustained *dhikr*. When the heart is freed from spiritual opacities and garnished with polish, the servant’s desire and inclination towards the Divine presence intensify. Imam ‘Ali (a) strongly exhorts believers to decisively “treat the fatigue of the heart,” rouse the soul, and withdraw the “sleep of heedlessness from the eyes” (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 223), thus creating a fertile ground for unceasing remembrance.

This dynamic interaction between *dhikr* and *qalb salim* underpins the essential pulsation of the spiritual system and reveals how the purification of the heart and the act of remembrance mutually reinforce and exponentially amplify the spiritual elevation of the servant.

3-7. Loop Six: Carnal Desire and Heedlessness

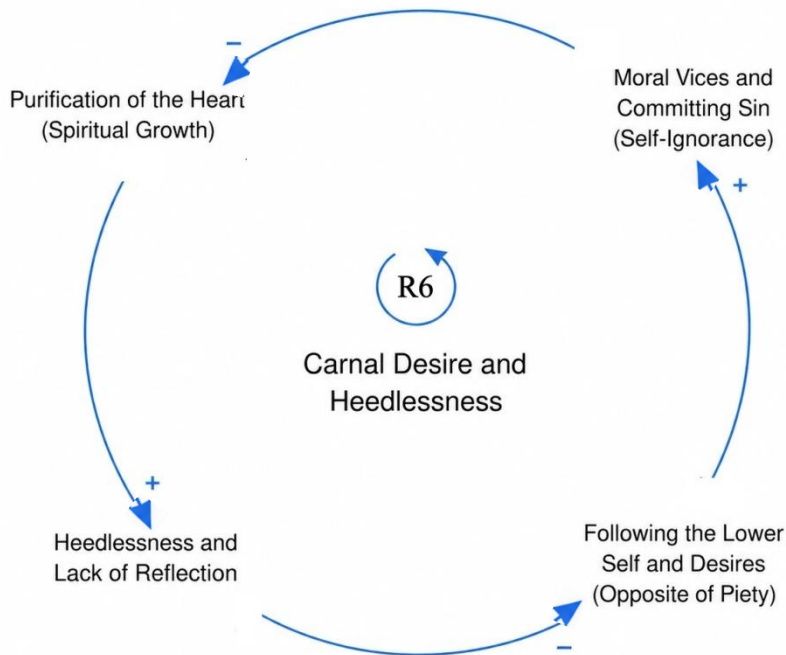


Figure 7. The carnal desire and heedlessness loop

The sixth loop addresses the intricate connection between the lower self’s carnal desires (*hawā al-nafs*) and spiritual heedlessness (*ghaflah*), demonstrating how *dhikr* functions as a robust barrier against satanic intrusion and the dominance of base desires.

Imam ‘Ali (a) clearly asserts that remembrance of God repels Satan and constitutes a pillar of faith and protection from satanic influence (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 188). The Prophet (s) also illustrates that Satan is constantly lying in ambush over the heart. It is only by remembrance of God that Satan withdraws, but the slightest lapse into heedlessness prompts the resumption of his insidious whisperings and temptations (Huweizi, 1994, vol. 5, p. 725).

Moreover, divine tradition elucidates a profound spiritual cycle:

“When remembrance of Me overcomes My servant, I place his desires and pleasures within My remembrance; then he loves Me, and I love him. When we love each other, I remove the veil between us and overpower his soul with My love so that he no longer falls into heedlessness and distraction. These people are the true champions, as spoken by the Prophets.” (Muttaqi Hindi, 1991, vol. 1, p. 433)

This evidences how *dhikr* strengthens *taqwa* (God-consciousness) and reinforces the servant’s spiritual resilience to passions and desires.

Opposingly, this loop warns that heedlessness not only impedes remembrance but also wreaks havoc upon the seat of the heart. Imam al-Baqir (a) states that heedlessness leads to the hardening of the heart (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 9, p. 3892). Imam ‘Ali (a) declares:

“Whoever is overcome by heedlessness, his heart dies.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 266)

Therefore, this feedback loop completes the chain of human spiritual ascent or decline by coupling *dhikr* and *taqwa* on the one hand, and the devastating consequences of heedlessness and unchecked desire on the other.

3-8. Relationships Outside the Loops

Beyond the major feedback loops, several critical relationships operate independently, mediated by variables defined outside the loops themselves.

One such relationship is the effect of *reflection* (*tafakkur*) on *righteous action* (*amal salih*). Imam ‘Ali (a) proclaims:

“Contemplation upon good deeds motivates one to perform them.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 56)

Similarly, Imam clarifies:

“Reflection calls one toward goodness and its practice.” (Kulayni, 1363 SH, vol. 2, p. 55)

The Prophet (s) further affirms the primacy of *knowledge* in guiding action:

“Knowledge is the leader [of action], and action follows it.” (Ibn Shu‘bah Harrani, 1363 SH, p. 28)

Moreover, *remembrance of God* itself catalyzes righteous conduct. Imam ‘Ali (a) states:

“Whoever adorns his heart with continual remembrance of God performs goodness openly and privately.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 189)

Conversely, attachment to worldly life (*hubbu ad-dunya*) and self-love serve as primary causes of heedlessness. The Qur’an explicitly commands believers: “O you who have believed, let not your wealth or your children distract you from the remembrance of God...”(Qur’an 63:9)."

Another significant external relation is the effect of *intention (niyyah)* on action.

- Imam ‘Ali (a) remarks: “Actions are the fruits of intentions.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 92)
- Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: “Nobody is incapable of accomplishing what his intention strongly wills.” (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 12, p. 5686)
- And again, Imam ‘Ali (a) emphasizes: “Good intention draws divine success.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 92).

4. Discussion & Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout the study, the final model extracted—fully grounded in the verses of the Holy Qur’an and the narrations of the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them)—possesses strong scientific and narrative authenticity and, by employing the minimum number of variables, succeeds in facilitating an integrated understanding of the Islamic epistemic system. Systemic analysis of the model indicates that remembrance of God (*dhikr*) is a leverage variable present in all loops and constitutes the primary key to human awakening and felicity. Every moment of the removal of heedlessness pushes the entire system toward spiritual elevation.

Alongside *dhikr*, reflection (*tafakkur*) functions as the driving engine of the growth of the intellect, for based on the logic of revelation, even experience—without reflection and taking heed—cannot lead to the perfection of the intellect. Similarly, piety (*taqwa*), understood as refraining from following the lower self, operates as a protective variable that provides the essential ground for the purification of the heart and the continuity of *dhikr*. The strategic connection among these elements is embodied in the advice of the Holy Prophet (s): “Soften your hearts, reflect frequently, and weep much out of fear of God” (Warram ibn Abi Firas, 1990, vol. 1, p. 250).

This synergistic pathway ultimately leads to the station of the sound heart (qalb salim)—the highest level of the purification of the heart (Naraqi, 2009, p. 567)—in which a person, having transcended the destructive cycles of carnal desire, attains stable equilibrium in the realm of servitude to God, and all of his existential faculties become harmonized in the pursuit of God’s pleasure. As the Qur’an states, it is the only accepted capital on the Day of Resurrection (Qur’an 26:87–89).

From this systemic vantage point, it becomes clear why the religious authorities have described reflection as the father and mother of all virtues and have regarded an hour of reflection as superior to years of worship. Reflection is not a static act; rather, it is a dynamic process whose effects propagate exponentially through all the epistemic “gears” of the human being. In this model, reflection functions as a leverage point that, by transforming intentions and goals, reorients the entire existential system. Because its influence on other variables operates through reinforcing and feedback-based mechanisms, each increment of growth in the domain of reflection produces exponential growth in the domains of taqwa and the purification of the heart—an effect that linear modes of reasoning are incapable of fully analyzing.

Within this epistemic framework, the inseparable relationship between rationality and spirituality becomes clearly delineated. Purification of the heart is not only the product of taqwa but also a vital input for rational insight. The closer a person draws to the truths of existence through reflection, the stronger his inclination toward inner purification becomes; and this purity, in turn, removes mental obscurities and opens the way for deeper intellectual perception. This continuous interaction generates a system in which awakened rationality safeguards spirituality, while refined spirituality nourishes and revitalizes the intellect.

In response to the potential objection that the reinforcing nature of all loops may appear inconsistent with systemic realities, it must be noted that the goals emphasized in Islam—such as perfection of the intellect, purification of the heart, and righteous action—do not have intrinsic upper limits and possess open-ended capacity for growth. Moreover, these loops resemble interlocking gears whose combined movement determines the overall direction of the system: growth may occur either toward elevation and ascent through dhikr or toward decline and regression through heedlessness.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates the effectiveness of the system dynamics approach in uncovering the complex relationships among profound religious concepts and hopes to provide an appropriate scientific

foundation for the application of this method in Islamic management studies and related fields.

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