



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Disciplining the Self and Moral Development: A Sufi and Educational Synthesis

Nasip DEMİRKUŞ \*

*Department of Biology, Faculty of Education, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Tuşba, Van, Turkey.*

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### Abstract

This article comprehensively discusses the concept of self-discipline (nefs terbiyesi) in Islamic Sufism and approaches to moral development in modern educational systems. The human spiritual journey is analyzed in detail through the seven levels of the self (Nafs-i Emmâre, Levvâme, Mülheme, Mutmainne, Râziyye, Marziyye, Kâmile). The roles and interrelationships of fundamental concepts such as intellect, soul, intelligence, will, innate disposition, conscience, and personality are examined. Sufi educational methods (seyr-ü sülûk, dhikr, guidance of a murshid, ascetic practices) and modern pedagogical approaches (Social-Emotional Learning, values education, character education, mindfulness) are evaluated comparatively. The study also addresses emerging challenges and opportunities for self-discipline in the digital age. In conclusion, the study emphasizes that both traditional Sufi methods and modern educational approaches are complementary in achieving moral maturity and should be integrated into a holistic educational model. It demonstrates how this synthesis can contribute to building an integrated human model to address new challenges posed by the digital era (digital distraction, social media influence).

**Keywords:** Self-Discipline; Moral Education; Sufism; Spiritual Development; Social-Emotional Learning; Character Education; Islamic Psychology; Intellect; Soul; Innate Disposition.

### 1. Introduction

In the Islamic Sufi tradition, the spiritual and moral development of the human being holds central importance. This process is founded upon disciplining the self (nefs) and maturing the soul (ruh). According to Sufi narratives, Allah tested humanity at different levels by creating the intellect and the self. At its creation, the intellect submitted by saying, "You are my Lord, and I am Your servant," whereas the self asserted its ego by replying, "You are You, and I am me" (Hakikat, n.d.). Thereupon, Allah abandoned the self to hunger to reform it, until finally the self surrendered, saying, "O my Lord, You are my Lord, and I am Your servant" (Hakikat, n.d.). Allah then said to the angels, "Bear witness; I will forgive whomever the intellect brings forth" (Yılmaz, 2014; Uddin & Khan, 2024).

This symbolic expression allegorically represents the purification process of the human ego, aligning with texts explaining the relationship between self, intellect, soul, and heart in the Sufi tradition (Yılmaz, 2014; Uddin & Khan, 2024). Sufi scholars state that Allah did not recognize the self (in its primordial arrogance), and thus dispersed its essence by breaking it, granting a portion of this self to every creature, from atoms to humans, jinn, and animals (Hürriyet, 2020). From this perspective, the apparent chaos and ferocity in the universe are a reflection of Allah's dominion over the self and are under the control of the Divine Names (Esmâü'l-Hüsna) (Toprak, 2020). While Islamic philosophers fundamentally consider the self and soul as one (Ulu, 2018), some theologians and modern Islamic psychology approaches regard the soul (source of consciousness, centered in the heart) and the self (source of impulses, centered in the brain) as distinct substances (Ekinci, n.d.). Sufi and Islamic psychology literature also views the universe as a holistic realm of existence with dimensions of self, soul, intellect, and heart, drawing a meaningful parallel between

\* Corresponding author: Nasip DEMİRKUŞ

conflicts within the human inner world and the chaos in the cosmos (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.; Shaari & Matore, 2019; Uddin & Khan, 2024).

This study does not delve deeply into the different theological interpretations of the concepts of 'self' (nefs) and 'soul' (ruh), but rather bases itself on the functional distinction within the Sufi tradition: The self is considered the source of the ego and impulses that need training, while the Soul is considered a divine essence that guides this disciplinary process. This offers a complementary perspective on human nature, rather than a direct mapping onto modern psychological models.

Allah granted intellect to rational creatures: humans, jinn, and angels. Additionally, He granted the self to humans and jinn. Therefore, the chaos in the universe exists under the dominion of Allah over the self and the control of the reality of the Divine Names. Modern studies also emphasize that the soul, heart, self, and intellect are interrelated domains from an Islamic perspective, and "spiritual intelligence" is shaped by their balanced integration (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.; Shaari & Matore, 2019; Uddin & Khan, 2024). Allah's will (addressed to) is humanity; His call is Islam.

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## 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Humans are unique beings possessing both animalistic (self, intelligence, body) and angelic (soul, intellect, conscience) characteristics within their nature (Demirkuş, 2025). The process of self-discipline and spiritual development discussed in this study essentially involves the individual using their intellect and soul to train their self through will, thus enabling the angelic characteristics to prevail over the animalistic ones (Demirkuş, 2024). In this process, personality integrity is formed, and the highest potential within human nature is realized (Demirkuş, 2025a).

### 2.1. Definitions of Core Concepts

The core concepts used in this study are defined as follows:

- **Intellect:** The operating system of the soul and the ability to distinguish right from wrong (Demirkuş, 2025).
- **Soul:** The divine trust blown by Allah into humans; the angelic dimension (Demirkuş, 2025).
- **Self:** The human's animalistic, worldly desires and inclinations (Demirkuş, 2025).
- **Intelligence:** The operating system of the self; rapid perception and inference (Demirkuş, 2025).
- **Will:** The power to make choices and implement them (Demirkuş, 2025).
- **Innate Disposition:** The inherent potential and structural characteristics of a human (Demirkuş, 2025).
- **Personality:** The integrated expression of all these elements (Demirkuş, 2025).
- **Conscience:** The personality dimension of intelligent beings that, regarding any matter, chooses the most **Compassionate/angelic decision of the heart's compass** from among all possibilities filtered, purified, or cleansed through intellect, intelligence, self, personality, environment, knowledge, etc. (Demirkuş, 2025).

### 2.2. Allah's Attributes of Beauty and Majesty

Allah's **Jamāl** (Beauty) and **Jalāl** (Majesty) attributes can be observed in the universe. The **Jalāl** attributes relate to the wild reality of the universe, manifesting power, grandeur, and awe. The **Jamāl** attributes are the reflection of the beautiful morals, mercy, and grace that Allah taught to rational creatures through His prophets (Shaari & Matore, 2019; Sayın, 2023). Contemporary studies on the Divine Names emphasize that they are not merely theoretical articles of faith but a system of values that must be transformed into moral benchmarks in the believer's emotions, thoughts, and conduct (Shaari & Matore, 2019; Sayın, 2023).

Allah declared what He wants from rational creatures—human and jinn—as follows: **"Follow the prophets. Establish My Jamāl attributes over My Jalāl attributes so that I may forgive you."** In Sufi literature, human maturation is explained by the principle of "takhalluq bi akhlaqillah" – embodying the manifestations of the Divine Names in one's own character (Shaari & Matore, 2019; Sayın, 2023). Studies centered on the Divine Names emphasize that knowing and internalizing them means carrying virtues like mercy, justice, patience, and excellence into all areas of life (Shaari & Matore, 2019; Sayın, 2023).

### 2.3. Conceptual Relationship

Allah's **Jamāl** and **Jalāl** attributes manifest differently in the human self and personality. The intellect and soul are closer to the **Jamāl** attributes; the self and intelligence are closer to the **Jalāl** attributes (Demirkuş, 2025). Balanced development requires recognizing both dimensions. The harmonious development of these potentials within human nature forms the basis of moral maturity (Demirkuş, 2025a).

### 3. The Stations of the Self and Spiritual Development

The seven fundamental stations of the self in Sufi knowledge represent the stages of an individual's spiritual journey (Wattpad, n.d.). Sufis determined these stations based on various verses in the Quran and defined the unique characteristics of each (Fikriyat, 2018). By following the path of the prophets' truth or grasping the consciousness of good morals recommended by Allah, individuals ascend from **Nafs-i Emmâre** to stations like **Nafs-i Levvâme** and **Nafs-i Mutmainne** (Yılmaz, 2014; Uddin & Khan, 2024). In summary, the entire universe is subject to the reality of **Nafs-i Emmâre**, which has descended to the lowest of the low; yet all existence is under the control of Allah's Names. Studies explaining the stations of the self note that the Quranic concepts of **Nafs-i Emmâre** (Yusuf 12:53), **Nafs-i Levvâme** (Al-Qiyamah 75:2), and **Nafs-i Mutmainne** (Al-Fajr 89:27) symbolize the stages of human moral and psychological transformation (Yılmaz, 2014).

These seven stations are ordered as follows:

#### 3.1. Nafs-i Emmâre (The Commanding Self)

The station of the self that constantly commands evil and inclines towards sin (Ayış, 2014). The Quranic verse "Indeed, the self is a persistent enjoiner of evil" (Yusuf 12:53) refers to this station (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). Individuals possessing this self feel no regret or guilt for their wrongdoings (Milliyet, 2024). It is the lowest level of **Nafs-i Emmâre** (Türk, n.d.).

- **Conceptual Analysis:** At this station, the self is outside the control of intellect and soul. Intelligence serves the self and is used only for survival and instant gratification. Will is underdeveloped; personality is fragmented and inconsistent. Innate potential is latent (Demirkuş, 2025). At this level, the individual cannot control "brainstorming," and thoughts are scattered (Demirkuş, 2013).

#### 3.2. Nafs-i Levvâme (The Blaming Self)

Defined as the self that blames itself (İlk Adım Dergisi, n.d.). At this station, the individual feels remorse for sins committed and constantly reproaches themselves (Sorularla Risale, 2024). The Quranic verse "I swear by the blaming self" (Al-Qiyamah 75:2) expresses this station (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). It is an intermediate stage where the person feels uneasy after sinning (Türk, n.d.). **This station can also be associated with the psychological concept of a 'growth mindset.' Carol Dweck's work shows that viewing one's mistakes as opportunities for learning and development (a healthy manifestation of Nafs-i Levvâme) plays a key role in making progress (Dweck, 2006). In this context, the self-criticism in Nafs-i Levvâme expresses an awakening that liberates the individual from stagnation (Nafs-i Emmâre) and directs them towards growth (Nafs-i Mülheme).**

- **Conceptual Analysis:** At this stage, the intellect awakens and begins to see the errors of the self. Conscience becomes active. Will is strengthening but full control is not yet achieved. Personality is in development (Demirkuş, 2025). This station is the first step towards "conscious evolution from the mischief of jinn" (Demirkuş, 2024).

#### 3.3. Nafs-i Mülheme (The Inspired Self)

The self to which inspiration is granted (Fikriyat, 2018). This self is aware of good and evil and strives to do what is right. Verses 7-8 of Surah Ash-Shams, "And by the soul and He who proportioned it. And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness" (Ash-Shams 91:7-8), describe this station (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.).

- **Conceptual Analysis:** A balance begins to be established between intellect and self. Intelligence now enters the service of the intellect. Will has strengthened, and divine inspirations begin to be received. Personality integrity is formed (Demirkuş, 2025). At this station, the individual develops the capacity to understand the "universal alphabet and language" (Demirkuş & Alkan, 2009).

#### 3.4. Nafs-i Mutmainne (The Contented Self)

The station of the self that has attained peace and contentment (Wattpad, n.d.). The Quranic verse "O contented soul! Return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him]" (Al-Fajr 89:27-28) defines this station (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). Individuals at this station do not deviate in the slightest from Allah's commands and prohibitions (Hürmet Kuran Okulu, n.d.). It is the station of being pleased with and submitting to Allah (Türk, n.d.).

- **Conceptual Analysis:** At this highest station, intellect, soul, self, and intelligence are in complete harmony. Will has matured, and personality integrity has been achieved. The individual has realized the highest potential within their innate disposition. All personality dimensions (spiritual, mental, conscientious, physical) function in balance (Demirkuş, 2025). This station requires a deep understanding of the concepts of "eternity, death, time, and the first point" (Demirkuş & Bilgin, 2018).

### 3.5. Nafs-i Râziyye (The Pleased Self)

The self that is pleased with Allah (Fikriyat, 2018). At this station, the self is content with everything that comes from and goes to Allah (Hürriyet, 2020).

### 3.6. Nafs-i Marziyye (The Pleasing Self)

The self that has gained Allah's pleasure and with whom He is pleased (Fikriyat, 2018). Upon reaching this station, the person is acceptable both in the sight of Allah and His servants (Hürmet Kuran Okulu, n.d.).

### 3.7. Nafs-i Kâmile (The Perfect Self)

The matured, perfected self (Wattpad, n.d.). The Quranic verse "He has succeeded who purifies it" (Ash-Shams 91:9) expresses this station (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). It is stated that a person at this station possesses all moral beauties, and every state of theirs is considered worship (Fikriyat, 2018).

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## 4. The Jigsaw Metaphor: Individual and Collective Self

The idea in Islamic Sufism of the fragmentation of the collective self and each individual receiving a piece recalls Jung's concept of the collective unconscious (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). The "jigsaw" metaphor in the text explains this individual and collective struggle. Every being is a "piece" of the collective self. Undisciplined selves (**Nafs-i Emmâre**) influence each other and create a collective negative energy (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). In modern social psychology, this can be explained by theories of social contagion and group dynamics (Shaari & Matore, 2019).

**Nafs-i Mutmainne** (the contented self) is the most mature stage of self-development in Islamic Sufism (Ulu, 2018). At this stage, the individual renders their own "jigsaw piece" independent by establishing Jamâl attributes over Jalâl attributes. When the individual "makes their jigsaw piece truth independent," i.e., liberates themselves from the collective Emmâre influence and reaches the **Mutmainne** level, they realize their unique spiritual potential (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). Jung's process of **individuation** shows parallels with this journey in terms of self-realization and integration (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.).

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## 5. Sufi Education and Seyr-ü Sülûk Methods

**Digital Asceticism:** The ancient practice of riyazah finds its modern equivalent in "digital detox" – consciously abstaining from digital stimuli for set periods. Just as traditional asceticism weakens the physical demands of Nafs-i Emmâre, digital detox weakens its technological grip, creating space for mindfulness and spiritual reflection. This practice directly supports the development of Nafs-i Mülheme by reducing digital distractions that obstruct inspiration and conscious awareness.

In the Sufi tradition, the process of disciplining the self and ascending through spiritual stations is called "seyr-ü sülûk" (Yılmaz, 2014). Seyr-ü sülûk means "to enter the path, to be upon the path," and in Sufism, it refers to the attitudes, actions, worship, and behaviors that lead a person to the Divine Truth (İlk Adım Dergisi, n.d.). The primary methods used on this spiritual journey are:

### 5.1. Riyazah and Struggle

Principles of struggle such as eating less, sleeping less, and speaking less have been adopted to break the deceptive and transient desires of the self (Hürmet Kuran Okulu, n.d.). In orders like the Khalwatiyya, **Self-Discipline** forms the basis of the path and is performed by reciting seven divine names designated for the seven levels of the self (**kalima-i tawhid, Allah, Hû, Haqq, Hayy, Qayyûm, Qahhâr**) (Hürmet Kuran Okulu, n.d.). According to Sufi sources, the way to weaken Nafs-i Emmâre is to debilitate it (Toprak, 2020). This is achieved through ascetic practices like "eating less, sleeping less, speaking less" (Toprak, 2020) and "secluding oneself from people (**khalwat**)" (Toprak, 2020). This necessitates constant struggle against the animalistic desires of the self (Yılmaz, 2014).

## 5.2. Dhikr and Spiritual Discourse

Among the most important methods of spiritual training are dhikr (remembrance of God) and sohbet (spiritual discourse) (Wattpad, n.d.). The Sufi master Naqshbandi said, "Our path of discipline is founded upon sohbet" (Wattpad, n.d.). Gatherings for sohbet and dhikr are considered spiritual environments where divine mercy and **presence** flow like a river (Wattpad, n.d.). One of the most fundamental ways to be free from the **pressure of Nafs-i Emmâre** is to continuously recite the dhikr "lâ ilâhe illallâh" (Toprak, 2020). Dhikr aims to detach the heart from worldly attachments and direct it towards Allah (Ulu, 2018).

## 5.3. Guidance of a Murshid

In all Sufi orders, the most crucial element in spiritual discipline is the murshid (guide) (Hürmet Kuran Okulu, n.d.). The murshid is the person who guides and leads the seeker through the spiritual stations (Hürmet Kuran Okulu, n.d.). The path to becoming a perfect human passes through the discipline of a perfect human (Sorularla Risale, 2024). On the Sufi path, the presence of an experienced guide who knows the way (**murshid-i kâmil**) is of vital importance (Yılmaz, 2014). It is believed that one who enters this spiritual path without a murshid will lose their way (Yılmaz, 2014).

## 5.4. Reflection and Verification

Some approaches suggest that instead of rigorous **asceticism and lengthy ordeals**, restraining the self and compelling its obedience through lessons on **verified faith** might be a shorter and more effective path (Türk, n.d.). This approach requires understanding the relationship between "science, technology, and society" (Demirkuş, 2025a).

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## 6. . Self-Discipline in Modern Education: SEL Approaches

In the 2024-2025 academic year, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs have become widespread globally. These programs can be considered the modern equivalent of Self-Discipline. The framework developed by CASEL defines five core competency areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Islami, 2016; Marasabessy, 2022).

These competencies directly parallel the development of the Stations of the Self in Sufism. Self-awareness corresponds to the Nafs-i Levvâme stage; self-management to Nafs-i Mülheme; and responsible decision-making to Nafs-i Mutmainne (Islami, 2016; Indigo Journal, 2024). Studies conducted in online global classroom environments have shown that emotional intelligence improves academic performance through self-regulation (Baharuddin & Ismail, 2015; Mohd Sani, 2023).

### 6.1. Mindfulness and Self-Discipline in the Digital Age

2024 research indicates that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy programs have neurological effects similar to Islamic meditation practices (reflection, mindfulness, dhikr) (Baharuddin & Ismail, 2015). Both approaches regulate the Default Mode Network, reducing self-centered thought. Specifically, meditation and mindfulness practices have been shown to strengthen the prefrontal cortex and reduce over-reactivity of the limbic system (Baharuddin & Ismail, 2015; Mohd Sani, 2023). Neuroscientific findings confirm that regular mindfulness practice reduces amygdala activity (the neural correlate of Nafs-i Emmâre) while increasing grey matter density in the prefrontal cortex and anterior cingulate cortex regions associated with the Nafs-i Mutmainne level (Tang, Hölzel & Posner, 2015). This neuroplasticity is significant in demonstrating the concrete, positive effects of ascetic practices and dhikr on the brain.

Today, technology addiction, particularly to smartphones and social media, reinforces behavioral patterns characteristic of the Nafs-i Emmâre level. 'Digital detox' as a component of modern asceticism helps individuals break this cycle and regain self-regulation capacity (progressing towards Nafs-i Mülheme and beyond). These practices serve as vital interventions that create the necessary space for reflection and self-awareness, required for moral and spiritual development, within what Turkle (2017) termed the "attention economy." Therefore, digital detox and conscious technology use strategies have become important components of contemporary Self-Discipline (Baharuddin & Ismail, 2015; Atak, 2024).

Digital Detox is Modern Asceticism: In the context of digital asceticism, "digital detox" emerges as a contemporary form of riyazah. This practice involves consciously abstaining from digital devices and platforms for predetermined periods, thereby breaking the cycle of instant gratification that characterizes the digital manifestation of Nafs-i Emmâre. Research shows that regular digital detox periods can increase prefrontal cortex activity, thereby strengthening the

"Rider's" capacity for self-regulation and conscious choice – qualities necessary for progressing to Nafs-i Mülheme and beyond.

The widespread adoption of Artificial Intelligence-powered personal development applications is anticipated by 2025 and could support the Self-Discipline process. These applications track an individual's emotional state and offer personalized meditation and self-regulation exercises (Mohd Sani, 2023). However, it should not be forgotten that these applications also bring ethical concerns such as personal data privacy and the neutrality of 'morality algorithms.' Therefore, the moral maturity of the individual using the technology is of primary importance, alongside the technology itself.

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## 7. Moral Education and Practices Today

The importance of moral education in modern educational systems is increasing. While humanity has made rapid progress in science and technology in the 21st century, spiritual and moral aspects have not developed at the same pace (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). Wars, societal insensitivity, and increasing family discord reflect the current state of society (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.).

### 7.1. Definition and Importance of Good Character

**Good Character** is defined as "the behaviors, rules, good manners, and beautiful conduct adopted by individuals within a society, which they are obliged to follow" (Ekinci, 2018). In Islam, good character forms the basis of the Prophet's mission. Indeed, the Prophet said, "**I was sent to perfect good character**" (Ekinci, 2018; Fikriyat, 2019).

Good character includes these traits: Behaving politely, well-mannered, and humble towards people; being soft-spoken, cheerful, and forgiving; avoiding lies, backbiting, and gossip; being generous and acting justly (Fikriyat, 2019). According to Imam Al-Ghazali, character is a set of predispositions and capabilities rooted in a person's spiritual makeup **and solidified into a stable trait** (Hürriyet, 2020). Acquiring these traits requires both education and continuous practice (Hürriyet, 2020).

### 7.2. Ways to Attain Good Character

The ferocity in the universe and the disappointment within humans are by Allah's will; but His call is Islam. In this call, Allah seems to be saying to us: "**Establish My Jamāl attributes over My Jalāl attributes. Follow the truth of the prophets so that I may forgive you and grant you Paradise.**" What Allah desires is the servant's return to Him. The path to this is following the truth of the prophets, applying the good moral characteristics specified in the Quran, fulfilling religious obligations, and living with a consciousness of good character. Islamic spiritual intelligence and education literature describe this process as an inner maturation achieved through the balanced living of the triad "**faith--worship--character**" (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.; Shaari & Matore, 2019; Fikriyat, 2018; Uddin & Khan, 2024).

In addition to obeying the truth of the prophets and living according to the rules of good character recommended by Allah, Islamic sources and moral philosophy offer various complementary methods (Yılmaz, 2014):

- **Knowledge and Gnosis:** The foundation of good character is knowing what is good and evil. Acquiring knowledge and internalizing it provides a moral foundation.
- **Spiritual Discourse and Righteous Company:** A person's character often resembles that of their close companions. Therefore, befriending people of good character and attending their gatherings is seen as one of the most effective ways to beautify one's character.
- **Self-Reckoning:** Knowing one's own faults is a critical step for moral development. Sources suggest four ways to recognize one's faults:
  1. Guidance from a wise teacher who knows moral diseases.
  2. A sincere friend who will warn one about their faults.
  3. Listening to the criticisms of enemies or opponents; while often exaggerated, they may point to a truth.
  4. Observing people's behavior and purifying oneself from the bad habits seen in them ("The believer is the mirror of the believer"). Al-Ghazali calls this process "muhasabah" and argues that moral purification is the fundamental condition for reaching the highest ideal of "gnosis."

- **Supplication and Repentance:** Asking Allah for help to beautify character and feeling remorse for moral errors are spiritual necessities. The Prophet's supplication, "O Allah, beautify my character as You have beautified my creation," summarizes this approach.
- **Patience and Struggle:** Disciplining the self is difficult. Beautifying character is not a short-term effort but requires "**constant perseverance**" and continuous **patience** and **struggle** to abandon bad habits.
- **Gratitude:** Not just a feeling but an active moral practice. Recognizing and appreciating one's blessings increases satisfaction and directs one towards other virtues like generosity and benevolence.

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## 8. ethods for Instilling Morality in Education

Moral education in childhood begins with the family and extends to the whole society (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). For the child's optimal upbringing, parents must teach faith, worship, respect for human rights, etiquette in eating/drinking/dressing, procedures of good character, and manners from an early age (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). The Prophet emphasized the importance of this matter by saying, "**No father can give his child a better inheritance than good character**" (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.).

According to modern pedagogical research, methods that can be used in moral education include:

### 8.1. Role Modeling

Children emulate their parents. Parents setting a positive example and striving for good character within the family translates into behavior in the child (Toprak, 2020). According to Bandura's social learning theory, children punished by parents might exhibit more aggressive behaviors, but children who witness adults being punished for wrong actions may distance themselves from those behaviors (Özel Safa Eğitim Kurumları, n.d.). This is the most powerful method in moral education. Children and students learn more from what their teachers or parents *do* than from what they *say*.

### 8.2. Values Education

It is important to reveal and develop students' moral potential, taking into account their personality and spiritual structure. Core principles like love, respect, cooperation, courage, justice, honesty, and mercy should be presented by teachers who are role models, appropriate to their readiness levels, and in line with psychological, cognitive, and social development.

### 8.3. Religious Culture and Ethics Courses

Islam emphasizes educating the heart, which governs human behavior. Love, goodness, mercy, and compassion should be instilled in the heart, and the path of what is good, right, and beautiful should be shown. Applying this knowledge is as important as the informational aspect of moral education.

### 8.4. Hidden Curriculum

Morality is not taught only in "Values Education" classes. The school's general culture, sports and social activities, club work, and teacher interactions constitute the "hidden curriculum." The internalization of values often occurs through this implicit program.

### 8.5. Active and Affective Methods

- **Moral Dilemma Discussions:** Instead of telling students right from wrong, confronting them with real-life moral dilemmas and having them reason through them helps them discover values.
- **Role-Playing:** Allowing students to act out a moral scenario helps them understand others' perspectives and build empathy.
- **Stories and Parables:** Telling stories containing moral values and then asking students "what did you learn from this?" combines cognitive and affective learning.

### 8.6. Assigning Responsibility and Reinforcement

Morality cannot be internalized if it remains an abstract concept. Giving students concrete responsibilities towards their community or environment allows them to "live" those values. When they demonstrate correct behavior, it should be reinforced with positive feedback.

### 8.7. Avoiding Coercion

Methods based on punishment or coercion in moral education often lead to "backlash" rather than developing a positive attitude. A "gentle and affectionate manner" is essential for internalization, appealing to the heart and enlightening the mind.

### 8.8. Modern Models of Character Education

Contemporary educational approaches treat morality not just as a subject but as a "character education" process permeating the entire school culture. Advocates of modern character education like Thomas Lickona emphasize that families, schools, and communities must work together for values to be "internalized" and transformed into behavior. Thomas Lickona's character education model aims to develop the triad of 'mind, heart, and action.' This directly parallels the Sufi integration of intellect, heart, and deeds. Lickona emphasizes that the 'cognitive, affective, and behavioral' dimensions of character must be developed in an integrated manner. Character, the moral aspect of personality, is this system of values rooted in the individual's self. As a practical example, KIPP schools in the USA use a 'Character Growth Card' that measures character traits like 'grit, zest, hope' alongside academic grades. This practice offers a concrete model placing character not just as a subject but at the center of the entire educational process.

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## 9. The Two Wings Metaphor and Foundational Principles in Education: Balancing Morality and Profession

The ultimate goal of education is to use everything gained through education as a habit conforming to the rules of good character. The "Two Wings for Flight in Life" metaphor symbolizes the balance between character and profession. Just as a bird cannot fly without two wings, a person cannot fully develop with professional competence alone or with character alone. Modern virtue ethics approaches express the inseparability of competence and morality through the concept of "competence as virtue." This holistic perspective is a universal invitation not only to Muslims but to all people. All humans, as parts of a social body, are members of a collective whole. The "jigsaw" metaphor emphasizes that each individual is a unique piece of this large societal puzzle. The individual's search for meaning is not only about finding inner peace but also about finding their own place and fulfilling their function within this great puzzle.

### 9.1. Five Basic Rules and the Two Wings Balance for Application in Education

- Five basic rules and a two-wings balance are proposed for this spiritual journey:
- **Knowing ourselves correctly:** Being aware of our own potential, limits, and inclinations.
- **Accepting that we are human:** Everyone is human; not everyone is Muslim or Christian. We must know and accept what we cannot change.
- **Knowing our environment:** When knowing ourselves and our environment, we need to diagnose ourselves in a "flat mirror"; we must look objectively and logically.
- **Choosing the right address:** We must determine an address where we will act justly for Allah's pleasure, not for ourselves, our pockets, our party, or our community.
- **Making staying at the right address a reflex:** For this, we must have two wings:
  1. The wing of **good character**,
  2. The wing of **knowing one's profession well**.

For example, a doctor may know their profession very well, but if they lack good character, they cannot truly benefit anyone. Another person might be very upright and well-mannered, but if they do not know their profession, they cannot be useful to their patients. To "fly" to the right address, both wings must be balanced and strong. Similarly, education and character education literature define moral maturity as the concurrent development of both knowledge/competence and value/virtue dimensions.

If a person acts for the benefit of their self, body, pocket, ego, or community/party, they cannot find true good. Therefore, the right address is the address of good character and justice. Modern character education approaches emphasize that interest-centered behaviors weaken both the individual and society in the long run, whereas values like justice, responsibility, reliability, and mercy are core elements of "internalized character."



## 9.2. Application Suggestions in Education

The following recommendations can be developed for applying the principles described above in education:

- Start moral education early and continue it systematically and progressively.
- Provide pedagogical training for teachers and parents on being role models.
- Combine theoretical knowledge with practical application, not limiting to imparting information.
- Help students recognize their natural traits and develop self-confidence.
- Prefer approaches based on love and understanding over punishment.
- Teach moral topics in Religious Culture and Ethics courses using engaging methods.
- Prepare children for real-life challenges they may encounter.

## 9.3. Reflex Strategies

For the "five basic rules" proposed in the text to become reflexive:

- **Self-awareness:** Use psychological tests, guidance services, and self-criticism methods.
- **Accepting being human:** Teach that mistakes are natural and the important thing is to learn from them.
- **Knowing the environment:** Develop critical thinking skills, teach objective analysis.
- **Choosing the right address:** Apply principles of justice and good character for Allah's pleasure in every situation.
- **Two wings balance:** Provide both good character education and professional competence.
- **Spiritual Counseling and Guidance:** Seeking professional "spiritual counseling" support for difficulties in moral development, meaning-seeking, and internal conflicts can facilitate the internalization of these values. This approach combines modern counseling techniques with Islamic methods.

Are there other ways to attain the characteristics of good character? What paths must we follow for a person to make these described characteristics reflexive – i.e., to reach the **Stations of the Self from Nafs-i Emmâre to Nafs-i Mutmainne**? The educational sciences literature calls this process "internalization of values" and states that it requires a long-term disciplinary process where school, family, and society work together.

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## 10. Synthesis and Conclusion

Based on the questions posed in the text, the following assessments can be made:

### 10.1. Paths for Ascending the Stations of the Self

For the servant to rise from the state of **Nafs-i Emmâre in the cosmos** to the other Stations of the Self, there are **two fundamental paths**:

- Imitating the character of the prophets,
- Living according to the rules of good character recommended by Allah.

Thus, the self is promoted from **Nafs-i Emmâre to Nafs-i Levvâme**; and from there, it is promoted **towards Nafs-i Mutmainne**. This journey is precisely so in Sufism.

Methods that can be used for a person to rise from **Nafs-i Emmâre to Nafs-i Mutmainne** and higher stations:

- **Self-reckoning** and constantly blaming oneself.
- **Controlling the desires of the self through asceticism and struggle.**
- Performing regular **dhikr and reflection.**
- Undertaking a **seyr-ü sülûk** under the guidance of a **perfect guide.**
- **Learning** the truths of the Quran to attain verified faith.
- Seeking Allah's pleasure and acting justly in every matter.

### 10.2. Conceptual Synthesis

The process of Self-Discipline discussed in this study can be summarized within the framework of core concepts as follows:

- **Innate Disposition:** The inherent potential and structural characteristics of a human.
- **Self:** The human's animalistic, worldly desires and inclinations.
- **Soul:** The divine trust blown by Allah into humans; the angelic dimension.
- **Intellect:** The operating system of the soul; the ability to distinguish right from wrong.
- **Intelligence:** The operating system of the self; rapid perception and inference.
- **Will:** The power to make choices, decide, and implement.
- **Personality:** The integrated expression of all these elements. It is our 'I', our own self, or our own ego, responsible for final choices.
- **Conscience:** The personality dimension that chooses the most Compassionate/angelic decision from filtered possibilities.

On the **journey of Self-Discipline**, the intellect and soul use the will to discipline the self. Intelligence enters the service of the intellect in this process. The result is a balanced and mature personality; the human reaches the highest potential within their innate disposition and draws closer to Allah.

**Conceptual Synthesis:** The Self-Discipline process discussed in this study is essentially the process of revealing the potential within human nature. The self is disciplined under the guidance of the intellect and soul, with intelligence correctly directed. Will plays a central role in this process, resulting in the emergence of a mature personality.

Self-Discipline in **Islamic Sufism** and moral education in modern educational systems, while employing different methods, serve the same purpose: To purify humans from bad traits and endow them with good character. The Sufi approach prefers a spiritual journey with methods like seyr-ü sülûk, dhikr, and murshid guidance, while the modern educational approach adopts systematic moral education through role modeling, values education, and pedagogical methods.

Both approaches converge on these common points: Starting early, continuity, setting a good example, patience, and perseverance. The ascent of the self from the **Emmâre** level to the **Mutmainne** level is not a change occurring overnight but a lifelong developmental process. In this process, both individuals and society must take responsibility, both learning and living good character.

### 10.3. General Conclusion

As this study demonstrates, Sufi self-discipline and modern educational approaches are not rivals but allies in humanity's journey toward moral maturity. Sufism offers the dimension of **intention, sincerity, and spiritual depth**, while modern pedagogy offers the methodology for turning this inner transformation into a **systematic, measurable process permeating all areas of life**. The new 'traps of the self' brought by the digital age make it imperative to reinterpret this ancient wisdom with modern methods and build a robust '**spiritual immune system**'. Future educational models should aim to cultivate individuals equipped with both wings, possessing both inner peace and the responsibility to generate solutions for societal problems.

Finally, the hadith of Prophet Muhammad, "**I was sent to perfect good character**," reminds us that morality is the essence of the Islamic religion and that every Muslim must strive accordingly. Educational institutions, families, and all segments of society must collaborate on this matter and bequeath a legacy of both science and morality to future generations.

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