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IQBAL REVIEW
Journal of the Iqbal Academy Pakistan

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TIME – THE ESSENCE OF ETERNITY

Ghulam Sabir

ABSTRACT

The question of Time has been common among philosophers of all ages. Even Greeks and after them Muslim philosophers belonging to pre-scientific age tried to understand the reality of time. The Ikhwan rejected the Aristotelian notion of time as being nothing but a measure of movement. They considered the time as related to the motion of heavenly bodies in the physical world. But at the same time they maintained that from metaphysical point of view time is a pure form, an abstract notion, simple and intelligible, elaborated in the soul by the faculties of the spirit. According to Kant all objects of the senses are in time and necessarily stand in time-relation. Iqbal is very clear in his concept of the difference between real or absolute time and false or unreal time. Iqbal takes life as well as time quite seriously. Iqbal, in a meeting with Bergson at France, expressed his concern on the declaration of Einstein that there did not exist any absolute time. Bergson was in full agreement with the point of view of Iqbal on the existence of absolute time, which he called as 'pure duration'. Life, according to Iqbal, with its intense feeling of spontaneity constitutes a centre of indetermination, and thus falls outside the domain of necessity. Hence science cannot comprehend life. This article describes and elaborates these various dimensions of nature of time.

What is exactly the nature of time? This question has been common among philosophers of all ages. Even Greeks and after them Muslim philosophers belonging to pre-scientific age tried to understand the reality of time. The Ikhwan rejected the Aristotelian notion of time as being nothing but a measure of movement. They considered the time as related to the motion of heavenly bodies in the physical world. But at the same time they maintained that from metaphysical point of view time is a pure form, an abstract notion, simple and intelligible, elaborated in the soul by the faculties of the spirit. To them it is an abstract simple and intelligible idea, a form abstracted from matter and existing only in consciousness. To Iqbal "*Haqiqat men rooh-i abad hai zamana*", means that the time is the essence of eternity.

Newton regarded Time as absolute. Iqbal D. Novikov says that 'in Newton physics time is a flow of duration which involves all processes without exception. It is the river of time, whose flow is not influenced by any thing.' Novikov quotes Newton as saying, "Absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without regard to any thing external, and by name is called duration".¹

Immanuel Kant believes that the space and time are both forms of sensible intuition. Let us briefly quote here the metaphysical exposition of his concept of Time. He maintains:

1. Time is not an empirical concept derived by any experience.
2. Time is a necessary representation that underlies all intuitions.
3. Time has only one dimension ...;
4. Time is not discursive, or what is called a general concept, but a pure sensible intuition. Different times are but part of the same and one time; and the representation which can be given only through a single object is intuition.
5. The infinitude of time signifies nothing more than every determinate magnitude of time is possible only through limitation of one single time that underlies it.

Kant concludes, "I can also say from the principle of inner sense, that all appearances whatsoever, that is, all objects of the senses, are in time, and necessarily stand in time-relation."²

Novikov remarks that Time is a uniform river without beginning or end, without source or sink, and all events are carried by the

river's flow. Time has no other property except the only property which is of always being of the same duration. To him the absolute time is identical throughout the universe.³

Henry Bergson writes that Plato expresses in his magnificent language when he says that God, unable to make the world eternal, gave it Time, "a moving image of eternity". Bergson offers a practical example of the real Time: 'If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy-nilly, wait until the sugar melts. This little fact is big with meaning. For here the time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out instantaneously in space. It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like.' He continues, 'It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*. It is no longer a relation, it is an absolute.' According to him the duration is immanent to the whole of the universe and he says that 'the universe *endures*. The more we study the nature of Time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creations of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new'.⁴

John Wheeler, a patriarch of modern theoretical physics, as described by Igor D. Novikov, visited him on the 5th. June 1992. They had very useful exchange of views particularly on problems of black hole physics. Before Wheeler left, he asked him: 'John, you pioneered several revolutionary developments in physics and in addition you are famous for your pithy, terse definitions of the most profound concepts of modern physics. Could you try to formulate what time is? I need for a physics popularising book, to be translated into English.' He says that 'John took a very long time to mull it over; I suspected that he had fallen asleep (we had just finished a very good dinner). Actually he was deep in thought.' When he opened his eyes he said very seriously that he would think about it and write to him. After a little more than a month Igor received a letter from him together with a copy of his book *Frontiers of Times* with his hand-written dedication: 'To Igor – May you be timeless! John. 25.IX.92.' In the letter he wrote: 'You asked for a phrase. There are graffiti on the wall of the men's room in Austin, Texas, and among them is this, "Time is nature's way to keep everything from happening all at once".'⁵

John Butler Burke says that we can avoid much futile discussion by recognising the difference between various concepts of time. He defines them as: (1) Absolute time, implying a definite *Now* common throughout the universe; (2) Physical time, which is relative but

partly subjective; (3) Psychological time, purely subjective. Elaborating further he writes:

1. Absolute time, though implying a definite *Now* common throughout the Universe, can no more be determined physically than absolute space. The reality of either cannot be denied and need not be asserted, for in physical measurement they do not enter into experimental considerations. From the metaphysical standpoint the idea of absolute time is of importance. It is not necessarily inconsistent with idealism, for even if time be subjective it may be common to all minds, and, like truth itself, be a universal reality.
2. Physical time, however, depends upon simultaneity and the measurement of equal intervals, both of which are affected by the motion of bodies relatively to each other. Time as a measurable quantity cannot be reckoned without space. The two must be considered together as in the ‘space-time continuum’ of the physicist. But in so doing it still remains ‘subjective’.
3. Psychological time is purely subjective. This psychological time is what Locke called duration. It may be slowed down in moments of distraction, so that an hour may appear as a few minutes, or to the Buddhist as eternity; while the evidence of persons saved from drowning and similar cases shows that a few moments may appear as a lifetime.⁶

Hugo Ross, an astrophysicist, says that “by definition time is that dimension in which cause and effect phenomena take place. ... If time’s beginning is concurrent with the beginning of the universe, as the space-time theorem says, then the cause of the universe must be some entity operating in a time dimension completely independent of and pre-existent to the time dimension of the cosmos. This conclusion is powerfully important to our understanding of who God is and who or what God isn’t. It tells us that the creator is transcendent, operating beyond the dimensional limits of the universe. It tells us that God is not the universe itself, nor is God contained within the universe”. Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) said that “cultivation of man’s evolving spiritual perception was the most important task facing humanity”.⁷

Henry Bergson, the French philosopher presents the idea somewhat similar to that of Hugo Ross in a different and more explicit manner. In chapter III of his well known book *Creative Evolution* he says that ‘intuition and intellect represent two opposite directions of the work of consciousness: intuition goes in the very direction of life, intellect goes in the inverse direction, and this finds itself naturally in accordance with the movement of matter. A

complete and perfect humanity would be that in which these two forms of conscious activity should attain their full development’.

Iqbal places real Time much higher than that described by other philosophers. These philosophers have admitted the existence of real time and everyone in his own way has also provided solid arguments supported by valid reasons of their claim. But the way of Iqbal is quite different in the expression through his powerful poetry. Iqbal is very clear in the difference between temporal time real Time. He expresses his view of temporal time in the following verses:

خرد ہوئی ہے زمان و مکاں کی زتاری

نہ ہے زماں نہ مکاں، لا الہ الا اللہ^۹

Human mind is worshipping time and space as idols;

In the Divine Order (such) time and space are non-existent.

The above cited verses are actually a sharp reaction of Iqbal to Einstein’s declaration in which he says that there is no absolute or real time but there exists only a time which is part of space and has one dimension out of four of the space-time. Einstein’s second remark was that space and time should be no more a subject for the poets and philosopher. The findings of Einstein created anxiety and disturbed the minds of many philosophers including Iqbal. We find that Iqbal is very much mindful to the existence of serial time and physical space. He admits that these are also real in the physical universe. He says that serial time is ‘the time of which we predicate long and short’ and also that the serial Time is divided into past, present and future. It is useful in our daily life in dealing with the external order of things. Iqbal agrees that it is hardly distinguishable from space, but adds that ‘beneath the appearance of serial duration there is true duration’. And to him true duration is change without succession. This is what Iqbal sometimes calls real Time or pure time. We quote below extracts from Iqbal’s extensive deliberation on the subject:

Pure Time, then, as revealed by a deeper analysis of our conscious experience, is not a string of separate, reversible instants: it is an organic whole in which the past is not left behind, but is moving along with, and operating in, the present. And the future is given to it not as lying before, yet to be traversed; it is given only in the sense that it is present in its nature as an open possibility. It is Time regarded as an organic whole that the Qur’an describes as *Taqdir* or the destiny – a word which has been so much misunderstood both in and outside the world of Islam. Destiny is time regarded as prior to the disclosure of its possibilities. It is time freed from causal sequence. ... In one word, it is Time as felt and not as thought and calculated.⁹

Einstein's scientific contribution to mankind cannot be ignored, but at the same time his denial of absolute or real time is a heavy blow to the believers as it caused the human brain to find refuge in the seen world and tried to liberate itself from the unseen, that includes Reality and things closely related to the Real (God). Iqbal, a philosopher of the East and Bergson a philosopher of the West were contemporaries of Einstein. Both of them, as so many others, since then, have refused to accept the idea of Einstein that there is nothing like absolute time. There is no doubt in the greatness of this person being one of the greatest scientists the world has known. He brought about a revolution in the world of science. His theory of relativity opened the doors of new fields in cosmology. It was Einstein who paved the way of man to be able to travel far away regions into the skies and explore nature's hidden secrets; it was Einstein who proved theoretically that energy and mass were equivalent, which meant that energy could be converted into mass and mass be converted into energy; it was Einstein who managed to change the way of investigation for cosmologists in respect of movement of bodies in cosmos and measuring the time and distances to and in between these inhabitants of skies. But at the same time he failed to grasp the existence of real time or absolute time. His total denial to time by making it as a part of space demonstrated his lack of faith in the existence of God. A little before his death he had told that his body should not be buried but it should be burnt and the ashes should let be flown in the air. As a result of his aggressive attitude towards organised religion some people believed that Einstein was atheist. But this is an extreme view of the fact.

In fact religion also is a feeling or an instinct, which is built in the nature of Man, and Einstein was not an exception. This feeling when develops becomes faith and then turned into belief in the existence of God. All inventions of science have been the result of some sort of revelation from 'unknown' as indicated by most of the top scientists of the world. Their experiences are on record. As for Einstein he himself wrote in reply to a question of J. Murphy:

Speaking of the spirit that informs modern scientific investigations, I am of the opinion that all the finer speculations in the realm of science spring from a deep religious feeling and that without such feeling they would not be fruitful. I also believe that, this kind of religiousness, which makes itself felt today in scientific investigations, is the only creative religious activity of our time.¹⁰

From the above cited caption of Einstein we find that Einstein though believed in religion, but his concept of religion is evident from his last sentence, in which he has limited the scope of religion to scientific investigations, stressing that this 'is the only creative

religious activity of our time.’ In 1936 Einstein clarified his concept of religion in a letter written in reply to the question of Phyllis Wright, a student in the Sunday school of the Riverside Church in New York. Phyllis asked whether scientists pray, and if so, what they pray for? Einstein wrote to her a detailed reply, from which we quote the last few lines which say:

...Everyone who is seriously engaged in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that the laws of nature manifest the existence of a spirit vastly superior to that of men, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble. The pursuit of science leads therefore to a religious feeling of a special kind, which differs essentially from religiosity of more naive people.

With friendly greetings, yours Albert Einstein.¹¹

As a matter of fact Einstein’s mind remained completely occupied in exploring nature’s laws. He was mostly involved in the affairs of the world of matter and could never use his power of contemplation to look behind the visible screen of the seen world. Whatever exists behind the screen is real and infinite, to which unfortunately some of the great minds like Einstein did not have visionary access.

The knowledge of the unseen is only possible by looking at the depths of our own soul, and this is the mystical way that some of the great scientists and philosophers of the world have very successfully adopted. This is another source of knowledge, besides reason and sense perception. This is called ‘inner perception’ that reveals ‘non-temporal and non-spatial planes of being’ Here I would like to quote Bergson again, who says that ‘we must strive to see in order to see, and no longer to see in order to act. Then the Absolute is revealed very near to us, and in a certain measure, in us. It is of psychological and not of mathematical nor logical essence. It lives with us’.¹²

Bertrand Russell, as quoted by Iqbal in his *Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam*, said that ‘the theory of relativity by merging time into space has damaged the traditional notion of substance more than all the arguments of the philosophers. ... The old solidity is gone, and with it the characteristics that to the materialist made matter seem more than fleeting thoughts’. Iqbal says that Einstein’s Relativity presents one great difficulty, i.e. the unreality of time. ‘A theory which takes Time to be a kind of fourth dimension of space must, it seems, regard the future as something already given, as indubitably fixed as the past. Time as a free creative movement has no meaning for the theory. It does not pass. Events do not happen, we simply meet them. It must not, however, be forgotten that the theory neglects certain characteristics of time as experienced by us; and it is not possible to say that the nature of time is exhausted by the characteristics which the theory does note in the interests of a

systematic account of those aspects of Nature which can be mathematically treated. Nor it is possible for us laymen to understand what the real nature of Einstein's time is. It is obvious that Einstein's time is not Bergson's pure duration. Nor can we regard it as serial time. Serial time is the essence of causality as defined by Kant. The cause and effect are mutually so related that the former is chronologically prior to the later, so that if the former is not, the latter cannot be. If mathematical time is serial time, then on the basis of the theory it is possible, by a careful choice of the velocities of the observer and the system in which a given set of events is happening, to make the effect precede its cause. It seems to me that time regarded as a fourth dimension of space-time really ceases to be time. A modern Russian writer, Ouspensky, in his book called *Tertium Organum*, conceives the fourth dimension to be movement of a three-dimensional figure in a direction not contained in itself.¹³

To Bergson Reality is a continuous flow, a perpetual Becoming and external objects which appear to us as so many 'immobilities' are nothing more than the lines of interest which our intellect traces out across this flow. They are, so to speak, constellations which determine the direction of our movement and thus assist us in steering across the over-flowing ocean of life. Movement, then, is original and what appears as 'fixity' or rest in the shape of external things is only movement retarded. This is as seen by a mathematically inclined intellect, which sees surface of things only, it has no vision of real change from which they are derived. The method of physical science, working with spatial categories does not and cannot carry us very far in our knowledge of Reality. Therefore, to catch a glimpse of ultimate nature of Reality a new method is necessary and that method is intuition, which according to Bergson is only a profound kind of thought, revealing to us the nature of life. This method discloses to us that the element of time, which physical science ignores in its study of external things, constitutes the very essence of living things; and this is another name for life. Thus the ultimate reality is time the stuff out of which all things are made – a Becoming, movement, life and time are only synonymous expressions. But this time which Bergson calls 'Pure Duration' must be carefully distinguished from the false notion which our mathematical intellect forms of it. Our intellect regards time as an infinite straight line portion of which we have traversed and a portion has yet to be traversed. This is only rendering time to a space of one dimension with moments as its constitutive points. This spatialised time is false and unreal time. Real time or 'Pure Duration'

does not admit of any statically conceived todays and yesterdays. It is as actual ever present “now” which does not leave the past behind it, but carries it along in its bosom and creates the future out of itself. Thus Reality, as conceived by Bergson is a continuous forward creative movement with opposites implicit in its nature and becoming more and more explicit as it evolves itself.¹⁴

Bergson defining real time says:

Ones we place ourselves in the position of a disinterested observer and dismiss the natural habits of mind, we see easily that the movement and time are the reality we deal with directly, in the simplicity of unmediated contact. ... We can go beyond ourselves and extend our time in both directions: the way down leads towards our homogeneity or pure repetitiveness, that is, materially; on the way up we come closer and closer to living eternity.¹⁵

All the way from Aristotle down to Newton’s time most philosophers and a large number of scientists conceived time as absolute and real. They had well differentiated between the real time and unreal or clock time. But during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with all the achievements of man due to development of science, a part of the intellectuals became materialistic. To this Einstein’s general theory of relativity worked like a hammer on hot iron. He declared time and space as one, to which he named “space-time” having four dimensions consisting of three dimensions of space and one dimension of time. Obviously time related with the universe can only be finite and therefore unreal, as this began with the emergence of the universe and is going to end up at the future singularity, the ultimate destination of the universe as regarded by scientists.

Adolf Grunbaum, in his *Philosophical Problems of Space and Time* has quoted St. Augustine, from *Confession, Book Eleven*, reprinted as translated and edited by Albert C. Outler, in Volume VII of the Library of Christian Classics, Westminster Press and SCM Press, Philadelphia and London, 1955. We reproduce its Chapter XIV as following:

17. There was no time, therefore, when thou hadst not made anything, because thou hadst made time itself. And there are no times that are co-eternal with thee because thou dost abide for ever; But if times should abide, they would not be times.

For what is time? Who can easily and briefly explain it? Who can even comprehend it in thought or put the answer into words? Yet is it not true that in conversation we refer to nothing more familiarly or knowingly than time? And surely we understand it when we speak of it; we understand it also when we hear another speak of it. What then is time? If no one asks me I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know. Yet I say with confidence that I know that

if nothing passed away, there would be no past time; and if nothing were still coming, there would be no future time; and if there were nothing at all, there would be no present time.

But, then, how is it that there are the two times, past and future, when even the past is now no longer and the future is now not yet? But if the present were always present and did not pass into past time, it obviously would not be time but eternity.”

Like all other concepts Iqbal has made time and space as one of the major themes of his poetry. It is his poetry that goes directly to the heart of matter and emphasise the fact that reality is there. In the following verses he is saying that the problem of not understanding the nature of true time originates from our ignorance of the very basis of everlasting life. We quote below four verses from his famous Persian book *Asrar-i-Khudi* (Secrets of the Self):

تو کہ از اصل زمان آگہ نہ نی
از حیاتِ جاودان آگہ نہ نی
تا کجا در روز و شب باشی اسیر
رمر وقت از ”لی مع اللہ“ یاد گیر^{۱۶}

Knowing not the origin of Time,
Thou are ignorant of the everlasting life,
How long will you be a thrall of night and day?
Learn the mystery of Time from the words “I have a time with God”.¹⁷

We have been studying the two kinds of time, the clock time or mathematical time and an absolute time or real time as viewed by different philosophers and scientists. Stephen W. Hawking has also commented on the issue of time. To him there is nothing like an absolute time, but at the same time he says that there are three sorts of time, to which he terms as 1) Thermodynamic arrow of time, 2) Cosmological arrow of time, and 3) psychological arrow of time. His idea of the three arrows of time follows a lengthy scientific discussion to which he has devoted a full chapter in his book *A Brief History of Time*. Out of the three arrows of time Hawking’s Psychological arrow of time comes quite near to the absolute time, as he comments: “Our subjective sense of the direction of time, the psychological arrow of time, is therefore determined within our brain by the thermodynamic arrow of time”.¹⁸ Hawking has also talked on the idea of imaginary time but purely in scientific language. Inviting our reader’s imagination we just quote him on his “imaginary” time, wherein he says: ‘When one tried to unify gravity with quantum mechanics, one had to introduce the idea of “imaginary” time. Imaginary time is indistinguishable from directions of space.’ It

means that Einstein's one dimension of time out of four in Space-time is different from Hawking's imaginary time.

B.K. Ridley also refuses the existence of absolute time and believes only in Earthly time or clock time. But he is also compelled to think otherwise by concluding his argument in these words: "But then again perhaps time is imaginary, as religious mystics often claim. The idea of imaginary time might solve the problem of the beginning of time and the end of time. At any rate, there is time of thinking which believes it has a chance of doing so".¹⁹

From the foregoing study we may assume that whosoever tries to deny real time must, by dint of his own arguments and reflections on the infinite, embrace this counterpoint argument and accepts that there is an absolute time which is reflected in the metaphysical and the divine. Iqbal, however, is very clear in his concept of the difference between real or absolute time and false or unreal time. He calls clock time as unreal and the absolute time as real time, since the former belongs to the objective world and the later relates to subjective realm. Iqbal takes life as well as time quite seriously. Iqbal had a meeting with Bergson at France in which the problem of time also came under discussion besides other philosophical issues. Iqbal expressed his concern on the declaration of Einstein that there did not exist any absolute time. Bergson was in full agreement with the point of view of Iqbal on the existence of absolute time, which he called as 'pure duration'. Iqbal and Bergson had no two views on this issue, since both of them had faith in the existence of a personal God and they had a clear perception of real or absolute time.

Iqbal relates the issue of time with human self. He says that 'on the analogy of our inner experience, then, the conscious existence means life in time. A keener insight into the nature of conscious experience, however reveals that the self in its inner life moves from centre outwards. It has, so to speak, two sides which may be described as appreciative and efficient.' Elaborating both the sides of human self Iqbal tells us that the efficient self is the subject of 'associationist psychology' and this is the practical self of our daily life 'in its dealing with external order of things which determine our passing states of consciousness and stamp on these states their own spatial feature of mutual isolation. The self here lives outside itself as it were, and, while retaining its unity as a totality, discloses itself as nothing more than a series of specific and consequently numerable states'. He concludes on the life and time of efficient self saying that 'the time in which the efficient self lives is, therefore, the time of which we predicate long and short. It is hardly distinguishable from space.' This is the time, which according to Einstein is the fourth

dimension of space-time continuum. We can conceive it, says Iqbal, ‘only as a straight line composed of spatial points which are external to one another like so many stages in a journey.’ He, therefore, rules that such a time is not true time, because ‘Existence in spatialised time is spurious existence’. And, then, he explains his viewpoint in this way: ‘A deeper analysis of conscious experience reveals to us what I have called the appreciative side of the self. With our absorption in the external order of things, necessitated by our present situation, it is extremely difficult to catch a glimpse of the appreciative self.’ The reason, according to him, is that ‘in our constant pursuit after external things we weave a kind of veil round the appreciative self which thus becomes completely alien to us.’ He concludes: ‘It is only in the moments of profound meditation, when the efficient self is in abeyance, that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner centre of experience. In the life-process of this deeper ego the states of consciousness melt into each other.’ The unity of the appreciative self with efficient self is, as Iqbal puts it, ‘like the unity of the germ in which the experiences of its individual ancestors exist, not as a plurality, but as a unity in which every experience permeates the whole’. At the end Iqbal says that ‘it appears that the time of appreciative self is a single ‘now’ which the efficient self, in its traffic with the world of space, pulverises into a series of ‘nows’ like pearl beads in a thread. Here is, then, pure duration unadulterated by space.’²⁰ A beautiful couplet of Iqbal’s verses is quoted below::

کسی نے دوش دیکھا ہے نہ فردا
فقط امروز ہے تیرا زمانہ^{۲۱}

No one has seen yesterday or tomorrow,
It is only today which is your duration.

Mustansir Mir, an imminent Iqbal’s scholar, now residing in Ohio, USA, says that the distinction between serial time and pure time also helps us to understand the important concept of *Taqdir* or destiny; which are commonly misunderstood as fixed and determinate future (called *Kismet*). To Iqbal ‘destiny is time regarded as prior to the disclosure of its possibility. It is time freed from the net of causal sequence – the diagrammatic character which the logical understanding imposes upon it.’ Iqbal adds: ‘In one word, it is time as felt and not as thought and calculated.’ Therefore, says Iqbal, ‘the appreciative self ‘is more or less corrective of the efficient self, inasmuch as it synthesises the ‘heres’ and ‘nows’ – the small changes of space and time, indispensable to the efficient self – into the

coherent wholeness of personality. Pure time, then, as revealed by a deeper analysis of our conscious experience, is not a string of a separate, reversible instant; it is an organic whole in which the past is not left behind, but is moving along with and operating in, the present. And the future is given to it not as lying before, yet to be traversed; it is given only in the sense that it is present in its nature as an open possibility. It is time regarded as an organic whole'.²²

Seyyed Hossein Nasr in 'the Gifford Lectures' said that there are two modes of time, one objective and the other subjective. 'Objective time is cyclic by nature, one cycle moving within another with a quaternary structure which manifests itself on various levels ranging from the four parts of the day (morning, midday, evening and night). ... As for subjective time it is always related to the consciousness of past, present and future which flow into one another, each possessing its own positive as well negative aspects. The past is a reflection of the origin, the memory of paradise lost and the reminder of faithfulness to tradition and what has been already given by God. But it is also related to imperfection to that man has left behind in his spiritual journey, the world that man leaves for the sake of God. The future is related to the ideal which is to be attained, the paradise that is to be gained. But it is also a sign of loss of childhood and innocence and elongation and separation from the Origin which means also tradition. As for the present which is man's most precious gift it is the point where time and eternity meet; it symbolises hope and joy. It is the moment of faith and the door toward non-temporal. Contemplation is entry into the eternal present which is now.' He concludes that both objective and subjective time have a relative reality. ... 'As far as spiritual experience is concerned, the present moment as the gateway to the eternal is so significant that practically all the traditions of the world speak with nearly the same tongue concerning the present moment, the instant (*nu alzemale*), the present now (*gegenwurtig nu*), and the eternal now (*ewigen nu*) of Meister Eckhart in which God makes the world, the *waqt or aan* of Sufism whose "son" the Sufi considered himself to be (according to the well-known saying "the Sufi is the son of the moment – *al Sufi Ibn al Waqt*.²³

The Russian-German mathematician Hermann Minkowski, who happened to be a teacher of Einstein, said in 1908 during an interview in Cologne: "Henceforth space by itself and time by itself are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent identity."²⁴ These remarks of Minkowski bear great importance and need to be taken seriously.

As stated above Minskowski said that ‘henceforth space by itself and time by itself are doomed to fade away into mere shadows’. Iqbal also said the same but in different words. To him Time and Space are non-existent in the Divine Order even as relationship, modalities or dimensions of Being. Divine Order is timeless and spaceless or non-spatio-temporal. Time and Space are the categories that do not pertain to God. The verse of Iqbal “*Na hai zaman na mkan’ la-Ilaha Illallah*” means that in the Divine Order time (as part of space) is non-existent. Real time to Iqbal is more fundamental than space; it is related to space as soul is to a body; it is the matrix of the heavens and the Earth

To the scientists time has lost its separate existence, but the fact remains that the importance of ‘real time’ is far greater than the importance of the time attached to space-time. For scientists time has no existence separate from Space; it is just a fourth dimension of Space. In other words the name of a fourth dimension of Space is time. Pure or true time being the real, as also called pure duration, has always remained beyond the scope of study by most of the modern scientists. What barred them from stepping in this arduous field, we feel, is the metaphysical aspect of the issue to which they are reluctant to recognise. Life, as Iqbal says, ‘with its intense feeling of spontaneity constitutes a centre of indetermination, and thus falls outside the domain of necessity. Hence science cannot comprehend life. The biologist who seeks a mechanical explanation of life is let to do so because he confines his study to the lower forms of life whose behaviour discloses resemblances to mechanical action. If he studies life as manifested in himself, i.e. his own mind freely choosing, rejecting, reflecting, surveying the past and the present, and dynamically imagining the future, he is sure to be convinced of the inadequacy of his mechanical concepts’²⁵

With the following additional verses of the great poet-philosopher Iqbal on the issue of time we come to the end this subject:

زندگی سڑیت از اسرار وقت
اصل وقت از گردش خورشید نیست
وقت جاوید است و نور جاوید نیست
عیش و غم عاشور و ہم عید است وقت
سڑ تاب ماه و خورشید است وقت
وقت را مثل مکان گسترده کی
امتیاز دوش و فردا کرده کی

ای چو بو رم کرده از بتان خویش
ساختی از دست خود زندان خویش
وقت ما کو اول و آخر ندید
از خیابان ضمیر ما دمید

Phenomena arise from the march of Time,
Life is one of Time's mysteries.
The cause of Time is not the revolution of the Sun,
Time is everlasting but the Sun does not last for ever
Thou hast extended Time, like Space,
And distinguished Yesterday from Tomorrow.
Thou hast fled like a scent, from thine own garden,
Thou hast made thy prison with thine own hand.
Our Time which has neither beginning nor end,
Blossoms from the flower-bed of our mind.²⁶

NOTES AND REFERENCE

¹ TRT p. 29-30

² IK I p. 77

³ TRT p. 31

⁴ CE p. 10-11

⁵ TRT p. 198-199

⁶ EOL p. 292-3

⁷ DOP p. 15

⁸ Zarb-i Kalim (in *Kulliyat-i Iqbal*) p.527, 7th. edition, published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan – 2006.

⁹ RRT p. 39-40

¹⁰ EAR p. 68-69

¹¹ EAR p. 93

¹² CE p. 315

¹³ RRT p-31-32

¹⁴ This paragraph is an extract from Iqbal's handwritten article now saved in Archives of Iqbal Academy Pakistan.

¹⁵ LZB p. 27

¹⁶ AOR p. 170

¹⁷ SOS p. 136-7 – The translator, R.A. Nicholson, writes in the footnote that the prophet Muhammad said, "I have a time with God of each sort that neither angel nor prophet is my peer." Meaning (if we interpret his words according to the sense of this passage) that he felt himself to be timeless.

¹⁸ ABH p. 147

¹⁹ TST p. 68

²⁰ RRT p. 38-39

²¹ KIU p. 90 (Bal-i Jibril)

²² IMM p. 102

²³ NAS p. 224-5

²⁴ TGB p. 73.

²⁵ RRT p. 40-41

²⁶ AOR p. 170 and SOS p. 137-8

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABH *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen W. Hawking, published by Transworld Publishers, London WS SSA (Reprinted 1992).
- AOR *Asrar-o Ramoos*, translated by Mian Abdul Rashid published by Sheih Ghulam Ali and Sons, Lahore, 1991.
- CE *Creative Evolution* by Henri Bergson, translated by Arthur Mitchell, published by Macmillan and Co, Ltd., London, 1922.
- DOP *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, second revised edition published in 1983 by Macmillan Press. This edition published by Pan Books Ltd., London, in 1984
- EAR *Einstein and Religion* by Max Jammer, published by Princeton University Press, New Jersey (1999).
- EAL *The Emergence of Life* by John Butler Burkey, Published by Oxford University Press, London (1031)
- IKI *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* by Immanuel Kant, English translation of Paul Carus revised by James W. Ellington, published by Hackett Publishing Company, printed in the United States of America, 1977.
- IMM *IQBAL* by Mustansir Mir, 1st. edition published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore in 2006..
- KIU *Kuliyat-i Iqbal* Urdu, published by Iqbal Academy, Lahore , eighth edition 2007.LON *Laws of Nature* by Rom Harre, published by Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 48 Hoxton Square, London NI 6PB (1993).
- LZB *BERGSON* by Leszek Kolakowski, published by Oxford University Press (1985).
- NAS *Knowledge and the Sacred, The Gifford Lectures, 1981* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Published by Suhail Academy Lahore, Pakistan.
- TRT *The River of Time* by Igor D. Novikov, published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, U.K. in 1998 (Reprinted 2004).
- RRT *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* by Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, first published in 1934 by Oxford University Press, reprinted and published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan in 1989.
- SOS *Secrets of Self*, Translation of Iqbal's *Asrar-i Khudi* by Professor R.A. Nicholson, First published by Macmillan, London, repinted by Sh..Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1983.
- TGB *The Great Beyond* by Paul Halpern, published by John Wiley and Sons Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey (2004).
- TST *Time, Space and Things* by B.K. Ridley, Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, U.K. in 1994.

THE FORGOTTEN TREASURE OF IQBAL'S
RECONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Iqbal is the unique flowering of poetical, mystical and philosophical genius in recent Islamic history. What makes him truly modern and gives him a permanent place in the annals of modern history is *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. *Reconstruction* makes Iqbal the most important intellectual of modernist Islam. His unique contribution in appropriating modern science and its methodological and philosophical premises in Islam has not been duly appreciated. He has attempted to write a prolegomena to new *kalam*. *Reconstruction* is the boldest ever critique of traditional religious thought in the light of modern episteme. It is the most frantic and intellectually advanced attempt to reconcile the cognitive and epistemic universe of traditional Islam with that of modern scientific and philosophical thought. It attempts to reorient or restructure traditional hierarchy of power relations. This book has either not been read or understood or reckoned with seriously by the Muslims. This article elaborates that if the project of reconstruction has any validity, if modern science is really a stupendous problem in the way of traditional Islam, if modern thought needs to be respectfully approached and if Islam is to appeal to modern sensibility, then Iqbal's significance and relevance can't be doubted and his contribution needs to be highlighted. It is important that providing a consistent theory for modernist Muslim approach to science, Iqbal is undoubtedly worth reckoning for not only the student and historian of modern Islam but also for anyone interested in the field of philosophy of religion and modern science in general.

Iqbal's is the unique flowering of poetical, mystical and philosophical genius in recent Islamic history. He has few predecessors and fewer inheritors. His encyclopedic mind wrestled with almost all the important issues that modern Muslim and modern man confronts in his life's odyssey. His is the original, bold and very unorthodox approach. He is an arch innovator and non-conformist. His attempt of bridging philosophy and religion, or in general, knowledge and religion is unique in boldness and originality. What makes him truly modern and gives him a permanent places in the annals of modern history is his largely forgotten gospel of religious modernism, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

Reconstruction makes Iqbal the most important intellectual of modernist Islam. His unique contribution in appropriating modern science and its methodological and philosophical premises in Islam has however not been duly appreciated. In an unprecedented move in Islamic history he reinterpreted the idea of finality of prophethood in such terms as to legitimize modern scientific project. His apology for the modern age that defines itself with respect to modern science constitutes a very interesting chapter not only in the history of Islam but also that of modern thought. His demythologizing, evolutionist, empiricist, inductionist, rationalist reading of Islam constitutes his unique contribution in the development of modernist Islam. His *Reconstruction* is an attempt in the direction of appropriating modern scientific thought in Islam. His brilliant insights in this context need to be foregrounded and critically evaluated. Iqbal has written and embarked on hitherto unprecedented enterprise of reconstruction of traditional religious thought in the light of modern scientific and philosophical developments. This kind of title of any book and this kind of reconstructive work implying reconstruction of traditional metaphysical-philosophical-theological-juristic thought structures has never been proposed in the history of Islam before him. There is a huge difference between reconstruction and reinterpretation. Many think that Iqbal has just written some sort of a new *tafsir* like so many new commentaries that have been read in the modern age. This only shows crass ignorance of Iqbal and traditional metaphysics. Indeed he has attempted to modernize Islam, not only its theology but *shariah* in many significant ways. He has attempted to write a prolegomena to new *kalam*. *Reconstruction* is the boldest ever critique

of received/traditional religious thought in the light of modern episteme. It is the most frantic and intellectually advanced attempt to reconcile the cognitive and epistemic universe of traditional Islam with that of modern scientific and philosophical/thought. It attempts to reorient or restructure traditional hierarchy of power relations. One can safely assert that the Muslims have not realized the significance of this Iqbal who wrote *Reconstruction*. This book has either not been read or understood or reckoned with seriously by the Muslims. The Muslims have usually denounced it (excepting certain modernists) or they have not bothered to read or could not understand it as it demands good familiarity with everything that constitutes modern episteme – one must have a deep acquaintance with the whole philosophical tradition of the West, especially its post-Cartesian developments, with modern science and its methodological and philosophical assumptions, with modern social-political and economic structures that shape modern mind, with changed perception that has grown from a sort of frameshift mutation of the traditional religious (Christian) *Weltanschauung*. Understanding *Reconstruction* also needs a knowledge of such variety of disciplines as modern physics, psychology and psychoanalysis, biology and even mathematics to certain extent. One must also have a good understanding of history of civilizations and religions and especially of Muslim history to properly contextualize and foreground the theses of *Reconstruction*. The integrated knowledge of both sciences of humanities, both traditional and modern, alone will allow one to properly understand and appreciate the radical nature of his claims made in *Reconstruction*.

He and his *Reconstruction* are phenomena in themselves and history hardly ever repeats such phenomena. His appropriation of modern science in Islam, his rereading of Sufism and his individualist religious metaphysics are uniquely his and constitute his originality. It is ridiculous to argue that Ibn Hnifa did something similar. Ulema have some reservations about the whole project of reconstruction. If any *aalim* had done something similar there would have been no reason for saying that “it would have been better if Iqbal had not written it.” Rational appropriation of traditional Islamic metaphysical thought that invokes modern philosophical and scientific thought structures as has been done in these lectures has hardly any orthodox/ traditional warrant. Saeed Akbar Abadi’s defense of *Reconstruction* in traditional terms has not found and cannot find much favour with the generality of Ulema. Iqbal’s concept of ego, his individualistic metaphysics, his divinization of time, his epistemology, his rejection of orthodox Unitarian Sufi metaphysics,

his theological and philosophical dualism, his humanist orientation, his evolutionist and empiricist approach, his concept of God's omniscience and freedom, his view of good and evil, his concept of *taqdir* and so many other dimensions of his metaphysical and theological thought—all are not easily reconcilable with traditional/orthodox interpretation of Islam. Iqbal has reread Rumi and certain other great classical authorities and conceptions of traditional Islam from the perspective of philosophy of ego and this constitutes his unique approach to Islam. There is no other modern Muslim philosopher or traditional scholar who has done anything comparable. Iqbal and his overall philosophy, not just his *Reconstruction* are phenomena in themselves, unique, unprecedented. Iqbal is in himself an institution, a school that originated with him. Here I intend neither to defend nor to critique Iqbal vis-à-vis traditional metaphysical/mystical/religious thought spearheaded by either the exoteric ulema or the Sufi authorities or the perennialists but just point out how radical a divergence is between the two.

There is only one Iqbal and only one *Reconstruction* in history. Without a deep familiarity with such abstruse metaphysical and Sufi works as *Insani Kamil* of Al-Jili, *Fusus* of Ibn Arabi, such modern philosophers as Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson etc., such scientific works as Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Freud's important works, Fraser and Comte's works, such physicist philosophers as Einstein and Eddington, such theosophical works as *Secret Doctrine* to name only a few, understanding Iqbal or his *Reconstruction* and his originality and genius is not possible. He is *mazloom* as someone has well remarked as everybody who has memorized some of his verses and has not mastered or at least has not good acquaintance with world's metaphysical, religious, philosophical and literary traditions has hardly any moral right to dabble in Iqbali studies or discuss *Reconstruction*.

Another point is understanding Islam – its doctrines, both at theological and metaphysical planes, its esoteric and exoteric dimensions, its symbolist sciences. It is safe to assert that most interpretations and appropriations of Islam with which we are flooded are guilty of meaning closure as they ignore/marginalize some aspect or dimension of Islam as an integral metaphysical-mystical-theological tradition. Islam ultimately is practical existential affair; it is a matter of realization rather than disputation. Faith and metaphysic transcend language and thought. And it is only to the pure in heart to which is granted God's vision. Reason is limited; it cannot comprehend the Infinite that traditional metaphysics (but not its modern Western counterpart) tackles. Mysteries of faith become

clear to only those who purify themselves with severe moral discipline as Iqbal emphasizes in his *Asrar* and *Ramooz*. It is ultimately only in silence that God dawns. This is because God transcends phenomena and all categorical frameworks. He is not caught in the net of language. Those who are closer to God know that he is to be attained by humility and *faqr* and in the believer's heart in utter silence. *Mutakallim* and *faqeeh* with their propositional exoteric approach cannot comprehend or apprehend Gos as Iqbal also says. We need to be lovers to have some glimpse of transcendence. Love alone can transcend finitude. Iqbal's whole metaphysics of love makes this point admirably. Many fatwas were issued against him but he didn't consider them worth reckoning and how could he for even Jibriel was his prey and he was the only secret in *seena-i-kaayinat*, and deemed man to be *masjoodi kayinat*.

We need to rediscover Iqbal in light of his forgotten / ignored / misappropriated *Reconstruction*. Their relevance for modern(ist) Islam can't be overemphasized. The epochal significance of *Reconstruction* which is a key in understanding this seminal thinker of the 20th century Islam lies in:

1. Plea for opening the gates of absolute *Ijtihad* (*ijtihad-i-mutlaq*).
2. Questioning many an outworn theological and juristic dogmas that do not have any Quranic warrant.
3. Anticlerical spirit of Islam.
4. Questioning or pointing out all pervasive influence of Greek thought on Islamic heritage and arguing for emancipation from it.
5. A unique attempt to bridge the West and the East by focussing on a sort of modern (Western) reading of Islam which is seen as a bridge builder as though originating from the East has intellectual affinities with the West.
6. How creative and fruitful can be an encounter between Islam and the West and pointing out hitherto unheeded affinities between them; how Islam has a potential to adapt to modernity and how the latter could be moulded in an Islamic framework is brilliant.
7. Amongst a variety of responses to modernity such as traditionalist, fundamentalist, neofoundationist and secularist Iqbalian "inner radicalist" interpretation of Islam in response to modernity and a sort of Islamized modernity has the merit of being capable of wide appeal to modern audience that is committed irrevocably to thought structures of post-Renaissance – empirical scientific inductionist evolutionist this-worldly orientation. Iqbal takes modernity as 'the given' with its concrete mind and to physiology and then tries to interpret/reconstruct religious thought of Islam. For many modern thinkers which

include some influential theologians Iqbalian type of response is the only possible religious response that could be taken seriously by modern man. For the modern scientific mind Iqbal's case is a worth reckoning one and cannot be a priorily dismissed. The secular scientific colouring of almost everything modern incapacitates modern man from sympathetically responding to traditional religious thought structures as they stand. In a world that declares itself post-Darwinian post-Nietzschan and post-Freudian and now post-modern where traditional religious symbols are either rejected or appropriated in a secular perspective as essentialistic thinking is disparaged, the God of exoteric theology who stands over and against man as some interested being and manipulator of human destiny and the universe and threatening human individuality and freedom, is dead. This is a world where nothing makes sense except in the light of evolution and which is committed to some sort of progressivist myth where material biological and psychological roots of human personality are very much emphasized and taken as *ab initio* for any other reading of man such as spiritual one, where science stands almost as a metanarrative, reason's authority is supreme and where anthropocentric humanistic secularist assumptions are so deeply entrenched – in short where everything that goes by the name of tradition is suspect – Iqbal's modernist (non-orthodox) reading of tradition is of great value. If modern man is not willing to renounce modernity with its aintitraditional commitments lock, stock and barrel and still in search of a soul he would possibly see his salvation in such appropriations of modernity as that of Iqbal. To enter a dialogue with modernity on latter's terms is possible (to negotiate *sulabi-hudaibiyah* with it) in Iqbalian modernist reconstructionist perspective. If the West cannot fundamentally reconsider and revise its Aristotelian and then Cartesian heritage that necessitate a dualistic mode of thinking that absolutizes subject-object duality and is not quite favorably taking mystico-metaphysical outlook and is irrevocably committed to the realm of finitude and some sort of humanism Iqbal's personalist philosophy and individualist religious metaphysics has something to offer for consideration.

8. If reconstruction of religious thought is a need as modernists argue then Iqbal's is a great contribution. He has provided the methodology and consistent theory for modernist reading of Islam.

We shall now take up certain points that Iqbal has raised in *Reconstruction*.

Iqbal lays down the charter of *Reconstruction* in its preface. He has succinctly put forward his agenda in the book. The very first line that “Islam is a religion which emphasizes deed rather than idea” is quite a loaded statement in tune with modern sensibility. Iqbal has elsewhere declared that action is the highest form of contemplation. This is quite an innovative rereading of the whole Eastern tradition. Modern man, for good or worse, is committed to action instead of contemplation. It is not however very clear what Iqbal here means by the word “Idea”. But one may reasonably infer that he has in mind eastern and Platonic idea of Idea and contemplation for which the consistent philosophy of ego has not much space as the East is against the ego as well as actions that fortify it as a separate individual entity in a tensionful state with a dialectical relation to the world and associated dualistic philosophical framework. The whole metaphysical and mystical tradition privileges contemplation over action, being over becoming, eternity and space over time, universal over individual (spirit over soul and body). However Iqbal problematizes most of these binaries and sometimes argues for reversing the hierarchies.

Starting with this assertion Iqbal makes another statement that the traditionalists would contest. He says that for a concrete type of mind the traditional modes of thought (as represented in classical mainstream Sufism as he explains after a few lines) are no longer valid or need to be adapted to changed perception. This is indeed true but the question is ‘is not concrete type of mind itself a problem?’ Could not the whole problem lie in modern mind’s peculiar make-up itself? Should it not be asked to remould itself and renounce the whole (rationalist-empiricist) philosophical-scientific tradition that has shaped it in the first place.

God of the traditional religions (or the Absolute of traditional metaphysics) – and the means of realizing Him/It (metaphysical and mystical realizations) – is something that is alien to modern sensibility. Modern man’s turning away from God is not entirely unconnected with Cartesian philosophical turn. From a strictly Eastern viewpoint mind itself is the problem, the inheritance and consequence of the primordial fall and needs to be transcended. Mind itself is a distorting lens and thus illusory entity. The “I”, the cogito, the thinking thing is a weak read. It constitutes the misery of men though for the modern Western philosophical tradition it constitutes his grandeur and the defining identity of man.

Modern mentality seems to be trapped in the realm of the individual, the finite the psyche, and does not know much of the universal, the infinite, the intellect, the spirit. However Iqbal is very

anxious to somehow bring modern mind back to God, to make heaven accessible and desirable for him, to present it in an image that is not too incongruous with hum. This necessitates giving great concessions to modern sensibility. But Iqbal, unlike the traditionalists, thinks that times have changed for good and there is nothing wrong with the modern mind itself, with time's movement or Islam's moving closer towards the West. Much of modern psychology and modern psychological turn is implicitly accepted in the preface. The type of mystical meditational techniques that he demands cannot be devised because all realization must be violence to the mind, the ego, the realm of thought and language. The domain of psyche has to be transcended. For the realization of true *tawhid*, subject must be transformed rather annihilated in the Divine subjecthood. Man cannot utter *shabadab*. The separate experiencing subject must go. The experiencer, the empirical self, the separate subject who perceives the world and God as the other, the objects must go. Philosophical and theological dualisms are simply irreconcilable with the Unitarian world view where God alone is the Reality, the whole Reality, the infinite. Mysticism and metaphysics are antithesis of anthropocentric humanistic worldview of the modern west. Only God is and man is not in Sufism and traditional metaphysics. The Spirit in man that alone constitutes his glory and that alone can assert "I" is not his though in him. This Spirit is not realizable in time; it is not realized through actions/deeds and becoming or through any concrete experiences. It is realized in the repose of being, in the silence of all thought and mind, in love. For this self-naughting is a must. All separative divisive entities such as the mind and the ego must be transcended. Iqbal's concept of *ishq* comes close to it though he would like to appropriate from a personalistic individualistic metaphysical perspective. Such weird and useless phenomena in the western personalist philosophical context/phenomena as experience of sleep (rather dreamless sleep) and mystical ecstasy hold a key to such a state. Iqbal does reach a threshold of such things at many places in his *Reconstruction*. He too feels need of transcending the fundamental dualisms of thought and being by seeing religions object not in the category of seeing but being. But the proposed means for doing so in the context of background dualistic philosophy seem to be problematic. New "suitable" techniques for doing so can not be developed. Even Rajnesh – the most modern of the mystics – also who concedes so much to the perversions of modern mind could not devise technique that are not psychologically less violent. His dynamic meditations or

his techniques for attaining silence all do great violence to modern mind.

Iqbal makes another big claim that we need to reconstruct theology in the light of modern discoveries. This seminal claim has hardly been made in the history of Islam until modern times. From a metaphysical point of view such claims that presuppose modern science's epistemic sovereignty are problematic. Integral metaphysics is independent of developments in individual science, as Guenon has explained. Traditional cosmology is incommensurate with modern cosmology and has quite a different objective. The same is true of traditional psychology and most traditional sciences. Modern scientific disciplines having abandoned the symbolist view and belief in the hierarchy of existence are simply degenerate residues of traditional sciences according to the perennialists. A science cultivated in a secular perspective is crass ignorance according to the perennialists. Iqbal too is very critical of modern science, its claim to be a meta-narrative, its disenchanting alienating soulless mechanistic materialistic worldview. But he is hopeful that religion and modern science will discover hitherto unsuspected harmony and it is possible to reread modern science and its methodological and philosophical assumptions Islamically and there is nothing fundamentally wrong with modern science's knowledge and existence claims. The traditionalists, however, have quite a different view of modern science and reject any constructive dialogue with it. They are for its reorientation that amounts to almost total rejection of post-Renaissance science and see no possibility of reconciliation between modern science and Islam. However if Iqbal just means that law must be reformulated in consonance with changing times it is hard to disagree with him for traditional authorities.

These introductory explanatory remarks provide a context to appreciate a host of theses of *Reconstruction*. We will attempt a brief critical appreciation of some of these theses.

1. Islam is a religion which emphasizes deed rather than idea. This point could not be contested if one understands it from the perspective of Iqbal's concept of *ishq* and concede his rereading of action as contemplation.
2. Traditional Sufi techniques (he does not elaborate what he means by this) are not suitable for concrete type of a mind that modern man's is characteristically. As Iqbal is already critical of Sufi metaphysics – its central doctrine of oneness of being and the idea of the self – so his plea for reformulating its techniques also is understandable. Modern man has alienated himself from the well-springs of tradition and he finds traditional metaphysics that

has hardly any scope for his thought inassimilable. The objective of mystical and metaphysical realization seems to be quite strange and alien to dualist cogito-centred personalist philosophical tradition of the West. The means and techniques that lead to such an end cannot but be suspected on this or that ground.

3. Every age has a right to formulate its own theology as the frontier of human knowledge extends further and farther. Religious thought must adapt itself to changed perceptions generated by modern outlook which is principally shaped by modern science. We must reread our classical tradition in light of modern scientific developments. This may necessitate a partial break from the past or commitment of certain heterodox notions for which we must be prepared. Modern man's demand for a scientific form of religion is quite legitimate and we must reinterpret/ reconstruct traditional religious thought to give it a scientific guise. Iqbal does not clearly explain what he means by "scientific form of religion." But one can reasonably infer that he thinks modern scientific developments – which he later catalogues in the book and which include such things as evolution and psychoanalysis – are vitally relevant in understanding/interpreting traditional religious thought. Any formulation of religious doctrine – which constitutes an intellectual element in religion as it makes existence and knowledge claims – must be respectful (though critically respectful) towards developments in the fund of human knowledge. Science's claim to have some jurisdiction to clarify, test and evaluate knowledge and existence claims of religions – Islam is thus implicitly conceded.
4. Modern mind's empirical and positivist attitude is a fact that is there to stay; religion cannot afford a position that is antithetical to it. Iqbal asserts that religion too has adapted empirical methodology in its exploration of Reality though it treats only a specific type of experience called religious experience. Thus he argues that science and religion have similar methodologies and both build their case on empirical experience. He does not think that there is any necessary link between modern empiricism (and positivism) and reductionist demythologizing agnostic philosophy of modern science. He does not see science committed to any specific ideology and questions its materialist mechanist appropriation at the hands of certain philosophers. He sees science as ideology-free, as innocent looking objective exploration of reality. Experimental and inductive scientific attitude he sees as characteristically Quranic in spirit.

5. With Whitehead he maintains that the ages of faith are the ages of rationalism. He does not elaborate on his use of the term rationalism. If by rationalism one means giving reason the sovereignty that modern rationalism has given it then it is an unwarranted claim. However Iqbal does not seem to have such a version of rationalism in mind that denies intellective intuition and revelation. But Iqbal's perspective is not fully identifiable with what the perennialists call the intellectual perspective according to which reason is an individual mental faculty but Intellect is something supra-individual and universal and is capable of absolute certitude and direct apprehension of truth. Islam is intellect centred rather than rationalistic as modern Western philosophy understands the latter. Iqbal's conception of reason illumined by love or *danish-i-yazdani* comes close to the traditional notion of Intellect. Reason complements intuition. Science complements religion. Intuition is developed reason. This seems to be his original claim. However Iqbal accepts non-discursive element of reason. This could well allow him to connect reason to intuition through intellect as Naquib al Attas does. Iqbal doesn't limit reason to conceptual intellect as Stace does. So Iqbal's very original approach needs to be seriously reckoned with. Reason can comprehend the infinite according to Iqbal and this can be possible by means of non-discursive element in reason. Iqbal has Ghazal's critique of reason in mind who argued against such a possibility. I think loose use of terms by philosophers creates confusion. Most philosophical texts don't make any distinction between reason (*ratio*) and intellect (*nous*).
6. The Quran is anticlassical in spirit. This argument is original contribution of Iqbal to classification of Islamic thought. Speculative as against the empirical spirit is alien to the Quranic world-view according to Iqbal.
7. The birth of Islam is the birth of inductive intellect. However carrying this thesis too far and absolutizing the inductive mode as the only Quranic mode of reasoning is unwarranted. The Quran uses deductive as well as inductive argumentation. The speculative tradition has been cultivated in Islam also and it has fructified in magnificent philosophical and metaphysical structures built by Muslim philosophers and sages. However it should also be noted that numerous pointless controversies between Muslim theologians are traceable to Greek influence that privileged essentialist abstract way of seeing things.
8. Hitherto the spirit of Islam had only been partly realized. Our ulema as well as the perennialist authors flatly deny this thesis.

9. The idea of Mahdi is connected with Magian mentality of constant expectation and is alien to the Quranic spirit. He quotes Ibn Khaldun's authority also in this connection. Ulema's view of the same is well known. The Sufi view too and thus any deeper significance of the idea of Mahdi seem to have escaped Iqbal's notice.
10. Muslims did not realize the full meaning and revolutionary import of the idea of finality of prophethood. This is distinctively Iqbalian and unprecedented claim.
11. The Prophet (SAW) heralded the birth of modern age and said goodbye to the ancient mentality by sealing off the institution of prophethood. Now inductive reason will reign. Mystics and all those who invoke supernatural authorities are to be subjected to the critical scrutiny of reason. This might legitimize post-Enlightenment exclusion of nonrational modes of knowledge that led to unilateral development of the West which created huge problems for modern man.
12. There is no qualitative distinction between prophetic and mystic experiences. But he does not explain how should the same experience make one's return creative. Traditional Islam emphasizes qualitative distinction between the two.
13. He does not recognize/accept conception of metaphysical realization and focusses wholly on mystical realization.
14. He takes Lord-man polarity to be absolute and dubs Unitarian Sufism and the doctrine of *Wahdatul Wajud* as pantheistic. This is simply unacceptable if we consider the explanations given by traditional authorities.
15. An act of scientific observation is an act of observing behaviour of God. Science studies habit of Allah. Thus scientific observation is an act of prayer. Scientist is a sage – a mystic in the act of prayer. Modern spirit is thus ingeniously appropriated by Iqbal. We need not refer to the traditionalist view of the same. While as in principle it could be conceded that scientific observation is an act of prayer but when applied to modern science which excludes and even distorts truth because of constraints of its very methodology and then contemplate fruits of modern science's understanding in the "habit of Allah" we hesitate to go too far with Iqbal.
16. Defends Mansoor by his ingenious reinterpretation of his *An'al Haqq*. He does this without the concept of metaphysical realization which is central to Sufi thought. His ambivalent attitude towards Sufism or unique individualistic personalistic appropriation of it is his unique characteristic.

17. Dubs all mysticism as quietist and individual centered. He has no concept of prophetic mysticism.
18. Following Hegel believes in the fundamental unity of thought and being.
19. Like process philosophers takes a panentheistic rather than classical theistic view of God.
20. Defends to the hilt man's autonomy and freedom vis-à-vis divine freedom. And gives his own view of divine omniscience.
21. Gives his own twist to the concept of *taqdir* that is at variance with orthodox metaphysical thought.
22. Divinizes time following Bergson. Appropriates the traditional notion of eternity in his Bergsonian conception of pure duration. Declares that appreciative self lives in eternity. Attempts to synthesize otherwise polar opposites of time and eternity in the concept of appreciative self. But he does not satisfactorily work out complex relation between pure duration and serial time. The Bergsonian influence leads to unorthodox reading of traditional metaphysical and religious thought.
23. Declares that man due to his fragmentary vision is unable to comprehend the mystery of evil. Leaves the problem of evil largely unsolved.
24. Disagrees with Sufistic interpretation of the famous light verse of the Quran. Invokes the theory of relativity in its commentary.
25. Invokes Sufi insights in explaining the concept of creation and makes a panentheistic reading of the Islamic doctrine of creation. He takes recourse to Sufism whenever he encounters difficulty. His central ideas on the self, pure duration, religious experience, creation, heaven and hell, Prophet, love etc. are all deeply informed by Sufism. *Reconstruction* can be described as a Sufi work in modern idiom. Iqbal had later largely retracted his key criticisms of traditional Sufism. Even his idea of the self and its relation to the Divine Self that constituted his key disagreement with traditional Sufism comes very close to traditional view when properly understood.
26. Hell and heaven are states but that doesn't mean he denies their ontological status. On this point Iqbal is almost in full conformity with traditional metaphysical and Sufistic thought. Iqbal only emphasized the concrete living existential and psychological reality of hell and heaven. On this point he has been widely misunderstood. For him hell and heaven are more real than this world though he rightly rejected unsophisticated view that has crept in popular exoteric imagination. Iqbal's view on the duration of hell has also been held by great authorities in Islam.

27. Without completely breaking from the past we must boldly chart fresh terrains. We must apply the principle of movement not only to *fiqh* but to other domains of religious thought in order to encounter modern challenges. Iqbal, unlike some extreme modernists didn't nullify the past or tradition but asked for a creative and critical approach to it. It is Rumi rather than any modern philosopher who is his guide (though he would reread him in his own fashion). He is servile imitator of neither the East nor the West but appropriates all the universes in himself. His consciously chosen frame of reference was the Quran though he self avowedly (he has confessed this in one of his letters) saw through the Western eyes as well. But his primary intention was always to defend religion and have a secure place for *umma*.

Thus it is evident that his unique philosophy and interpretation of Islam is understandable only in reference to *Reconstruction*. Masses don't read and understand *Reconstruction*. Even Iqbalian scholars have usually focused on his poetical works. There are very few competent scholars of *Reconstruction* and still fewer studies of it. But comprehensive studies of this seminal work have hardly been attempted. This has caused certain misunderstandings about Iqbal's philosophical and religious thought. Pervasive impact of modern science on Iqbal has yet to be fully documented. Without in depth understanding of modernity and modern science we can't comprehend Iqbal's unique contribution, his differences from traditionalists and why he wrote this book. I will content myself with just pointing out how modern science has impacted on his thought in order to emphasize my point that we must be firmly grounded in knowledge of modern science, its methodology and philosophy to understand Iqbal and *Reconstruction*.

Iqbal's belief in evolution with its methodological naturalism, his idea of perfect man and belief in progress, his eschatology, his interpretation of finality of prophethood, his theodicy, his critique of mysticism, his empiricist defence of religion, his inductionist outlook, his demythologizing attitude towards the legend of Fall, his divinization of time and his time-centred interpretation of Islam, his views on psychology, his rejection of parapsychology or occultism as pseudoscience, his plea for absolute *ijtihad* and dynamism and the whole project of reconstruction of religious thought in Islam, his appropriation of the West as the further development of some of the most important phases of Islamic culture and thus welcoming Islam's movement towards the West, his critical attitude towards traditions, his privileging of becoming over being and time over space, his interpretation of prophetic and mystical experience, his

elevation of scientist to the status of sagehood, his philosophy of ego, his rejection of traditional cosmology, his condoning of the Renaissance, his attitude towards Nature and environment, his interpretation of man's vicegerancy, his reading of many modern scientific notions in the Quran and Islamic history, his rejection of what is called as Islamization of knowledge, his concepts of space, time, causality and destiny, his positivist spirit (seen in his praise of Zia Gokalp), his approaching certain tricky theological issues in the light of modern science, his proofs for the existence of God, his belief in a growing universe, his defense and interpretation of Muslim culture and civilization, his advocacy of deed and action over idea and thought, his advocacy of experimental method, his critique of "Magian" supernaturalism, and "worn out" or "practically a dead metaphysics" of present day Islam – all these reveal the influence and unique appropriation of modern science.

The significance of Iqbalian insights for modern Islam however can't be overemphasized. If the project of reconstruction has any validity, if modern science is really a stupendous problem in the way of traditional Islam, if modern thought needs to be respectfully approached and if Islam is to appeal to modern sensibility, then Iqbal's significance and relevance can't be doubted and his contribution needs to be highlighted. The present piece is an attempt to point out importance of this ignored and forgotten treasure. Providing a consistent theory for modernist Muslim approach to science, Iqbal is undoubtedly worth reckoning for not only the student and historian of modern Islam but also for anyone interested in the field of philosophy of religion and modern science in general.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE:
SOME OBSERVATIONS IN THE CONTEXT
OF ISLAM–WEST ENCOUNTER

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

ABSTRACT

If the ideal of freedom is based less on ideas of inalienable natural rights than on the notion that all truth is relative, then the mainstream Islamist thinking will need to unhitch itself more explicitly from the broadly Western paradigms which it accepted for most of the twentieth century. Yet the relation Islam/Enlightenment seems predicated on simplistic definitions of both. Islamism may be an Enlightenment project, but conservative Sufism (for instance) is probably not. Conversely, even without adopting a postmodern perspective we are not so willing today to assume a necessary antithesis between tradition and reason. The way forward, probably, is to recognize that Islam genuinely converges with Enlightenment concerns on some issues; while on other matters, notably the Enlightenment's individualism and its increasingly Promethean confidence in humanity's autonomous capacities, it is likely to demur radically. What matters about Islam is that it did not produce the modern world. If modernity ends in a technologically-induced holocaust, then survivors will probably hail the religion's wisdom in not authoring something similar. If, however, it survives, and continues to produce a global monoculture where the past is forgotten, and where international laws and customs are increasingly restrictive of cultural difference, then Islam is likely to remain the world's great heresy. The Ishmaelite alternative is rejected. But what if Ishmael actually wishes to be rejected, since the one who is doing the rejecting has ended up creating a world without God? Grounded in our stubbornly immobile liturgy and doctrine, we Ishmaelites should serve the invaluable, though deeply resented, function of a culture which would like to be an Other, even if that is no longer quite possible!

*Soiling one's tongue with ill-speech is a sin
The disbeliever and the believer are alike creatures of God.
Humanity, human respect for human reality:
Be conscious of the station of humanity.*

...

*The slave of love who takes his path from God
Becomes a loving friend of both disbeliever and believer.¹*

Thus sang the sage, Iqbal the poet-philosopher, in his magnum opus, the *Javid Nama* (Pilgrimage of Eternity). He was not the sole spokesman. In the years immediately before and after the First World War, the western world was hearing to three poetic voices. The first was Tagore;² the second voice was of T. S. Eliot;³ the third voice was that of Iqbal.⁴ In the late stage of secular modernity, when Iqbal pondered over the problems of his age, melancholy had become a collective mood. Melancholy used to afflict individuals who felt rejected and exiled from the significance of the cosmos. By Iqbal's day it had turned into a cultural malady deriving from a world that has been drained of all meaning and which had come to cast doubt on all traditional sources— theological, metaphysical, and historical. The dominant mood of Iqbal's time was "A desperate search for a pattern." The search was desperate because it seemed futile to look for a pattern in reality. In terms of its mindset or worldview the modern world was living in what has been called the *Age of Anxiety*, and Iqbal, feeling the pulse of the times, was trying to look beyond symptoms to find the prime cause. Through his studies and observation of the modern world Iqbal had come to realize that there was something wrong with the presiding paradigm or worldview that his age had come to espouse. What was that which generated the feeling that something had gone wrong with the world and the Time was again out of joint? East and West both seemed to face a predicament!

فکرِ فرنگِ پیشِ مجازِ آوردِ سجد
بینایِ کور و مستِ تماشایِ رنگ و بوست

مشرق خراب و مغرب از آن بیشتر خراب
عالم تمام مرده و بی ذوق جستجوست^۵

Iqbal was seriously thinking about the grave question.

من از هلال و چلیپا دگر نیندیشم
که فتنه دگری در ضمیر ایام است

I am no longer concerned about the crescent and the cross,
For the womb of time carries an ordeal of a different kind.⁶

In Iqbal's view, the crisis that the world found itself in as it swung on the hinge of the 20th century was located in something deeper than particular ways of organizing political systems and economies. In different ways, the East and the West were going through a single common crisis whose cause was the spiritual condition of the modern world. That condition was characterized by loss— the loss of religious certainties and of transcendence with its larger horizons. The nature of that loss is strange but ultimately quite logical. When, with the inauguration of the scientific worldview, human beings started considering themselves the bearers of the highest meaning in the world and the measure of everything, meaning began to ebb and the stature of humanity to diminish. The world lost its human dimension, and we began to lose control of it. In the words of F. Schuon:

The world is miserable because men live beneath themselves; the error of modern man is that he wants to reform the world without having either the will or the power to reform man, and this flagrant contradiction, this attempt to make a better world on the basis of a worsened humanity, can only end in the very abolition of what is human, and consequently in the abolition of happiness too. Reforming man means binding him again to Heaven, re-establishing the broken link; it means tearing him away from the reign of the passions, from the cult of matter, quantity and cunning, and reintegrating him into the world of the spirit and serenity, we would even say: into the world of sufficient reason.⁷

In Iqbal's view, if anything characterizes the modern era, it is a loss of faith in transcendence, in God as an objective reality. It is the age of eclipse of transcendence. No socio-cultural environment in the pre-Modern times had turned its back on Transcendence in the systematic way that characterized Modernity. The eclipse of transcendence impacts our way of looking at the world, that is, forming a world view, in a far-reaching manner. According to Iqbal's perspective, Transcendence means that there is another reality that is more real, more powerful, and better than this mundane order. The

eclipse of transcendence impacted our way of looking at the world, that is, forming a worldview? It was an issue of the greatest magnitude in Iqbal's opinion. He was convinced that whatever transpires in other domains of life— politics, living standards, environmental conditions, interpersonal relationships, the arts— was ultimately dependent on our presiding world view. This is what was wrong with the presiding paradigm or worldview that his age had come to espouse (قننه عصر روان). In Iqbal's view, Modern Westerners, forsaking clear thinking, allowed themselves to become so obsessed with life's material underpinnings that they had written science a blank cheque; a blank cheque for science's claims concerning what constituted Reality, knowledge and justified belief. This was the cause of our spiritual crisis. It joined other crises as we entered the new century—the environmental crisis, the population explosion, the widening gulf between the rich and the poor.

دو صد دانا درین محفل سخن گفت
سخن نازک تر از برگ سمن گفت
ولی با من بگو آن دیده ور کیست؟
که خاری دید و احوال چمن گفت

The Man who saw a thorn and spoke of the garden?...⁸

That science had changed our world beyond recognition went without saying, but it was the way that it had changed our worldview that concerned Iqbal. More importantly, the two worldviews were contending for the mind of the future. The scientific worldview is a wasteland for the human spirit. It cannot provide us the where withal for a meaningful life. How much, then, was at stake? That was the fundamental question; and it surfaced again and again throughout his prose and poetry. The overarching question that occupied Iqbal at that time related to the view of Reality; of the *WORLDVIEWS: THE BIG PICTURE*. It was of great consequence to ask as to WHO WAS RIGHT ABOUT REALITY: TRADITIONALISTS, MODERNISTS, OR THE POSTMODERNS (which he anticipated)? The problem, according to his lights, was that somewhere, during the course of its historical development, western thought took a sharp turn in a different direction. It branched off as a tangent from the collective heritage of all humanity and claimed the autonomy of reason. It chose to follow reason alone, unguided by revelation and cut off from its transcendent root.⁹ Political and social

realms quickly followed suit. Autonomous statecraft and excessive individualism in the social order were the elements that shaped a dominant paradigm that did not prove successful.¹⁰ Iqbal struggled with the conflicts that existed between the scientific and traditional worldviews. There were five places where these contradicted each other.

- According to the traditional, religious view spirit is fundamental and matter derivative. The scientific worldview turns this picture on its head.
- In the religious worldview human beings are the less who have derived from the more. Science reverses this etiology, positioning humanity as the more that has derived from the less; devoid of intelligence at its start, evolving and advancing to the elevated stature that we human beings now enjoy.
- The traditional worldview points toward a happy ending; the scientific worldview does not. As for the scientific worldview, there is no way that a happy ending can be worked into it. Death is the grim reaper of individual lives, and whether things as a whole will end in a freeze or a fry, with a bang or a whimper is anybody's guess.
- This fourth contrast between the competing worldviews concerns meaning. Having been intentionally created by omnipotent Perfection—¹¹ or flowing from it “like a fountain ever on,”— the traditional world is meaningful throughout. In the scientific worldview, meaning is minimal if not absent. “Our modern understanding of evolution implies that ultimate meaning in life is nonexistent.”¹² Science acknowledges that “the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless.”
- In the traditional world people feel at home. Nothing like this sense of belonging can be derived from the scientific worldview which is the dawning of “the age of homelessness.”

Iqbal realized that an age comes to a close when people discover they can no longer understand themselves by the theory their age professes. For a while its denizens will continue to think that they believe it, but they feel otherwise and cannot understand their feelings. This had now happened to his world.

Even today, when traditional peoples want to know where they are— when they wonder about the ultimate context in which their lives are set and which has the final say over them— they turn to their sacred texts; or in the case of oral, tribal peoples (what comes to the

same thing), to the sacred myths that have been handed down to them by their ancestors. *Modernity* was born when a new source of knowledge was discovered, the scientific method. Because its controlled experiment enabled scientists to prove their hypothesis, and because those proven hypotheses demonstrated that they had the power to change the material world dramatically, Westerners turned from revelation to science for the Big Picture. Intellectual historians tell us that by the 19th century Westerners were already more certain that atoms exist than they were confident of any of the distinctive things the Bible speaks of.

This much is straightforward, but it doesn't explain why Westerners aren't still modern rather than Postmodern, for science continues to be the main support of the Western mind. By headcount, most Westerners probably still *are* modern, but I am thinking of frontier thinkers who chart the course that others follow. These thinkers have ceased to be modern because they have seen through the so-called scientific worldview, recognizing it to be not *scientific* but *scientistic*. They continue to honour science for what it tells us about nature or the natural order/natural world, but as that is not all that exists, science cannot provide us with a worldview— not a valid one. The most it can show us is half of the world, the half where normative and intrinsic values, existential and ultimate meanings, teleologies, qualities, immaterial realities, and beings that are superior to us do not appear.¹³

In his second lecture, “The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience”, in *The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam* Iqbal has made a very perceptive remark:¹⁴

There is no doubt that the theories of science constitute trustworthy knowledge, because they are verifiable and enable us to predict and control the events of Nature. But we must not forget that what is called science is not a single systematic view of Reality. It is a mass of sectional views of Reality— fragments of a total experience which do not seem to fit together. Natural Science deals with matter, with life, and with mind; but the moment you ask the question how matter, life, and mind are mutually related, you begin to see the sectional character of the various sciences that deal with them and the inability of these sciences, taken singly, to furnish a complete answer to your question. In fact, the various natural sciences are like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh. Nature as the subject of science is a

highly artificial affair, and this artificiality is the result of that selective process to which science must subject her in the interests of precision. The moment you put the subject of science in the total of human experience it begins to disclose a different character. Thus religion, which demands the whole of Reality and for this reason must occupy a central place in any synthesis of all the data of human experience, has no reason to be afraid of any sectional views of Reality. Natural Science is by nature sectional; it cannot, if it is true to its own nature and function, set up its theory as a complete view of Reality.

Where, then, do we now turn for an inclusive worldview? Postmodernism hasn't a clue. And this is its deepest definition.¹⁵ The generally accepted definition of Postmodernism now that Jean-Francois Lyotard fixed in place decades ago in *The Postmodern Condition* is, "incredulity toward metanarratives".¹⁶ Having deserted revelation for science, the West has now abandoned the scientific worldview as well, leaving it without replacement. In this it mirrors the current stage of Western science which leaves *nature* unimaged. Before modern science, Westerners accepted Aristotle's model of the earth as surrounded by concentric, crystalline spheres. Newton replaced that model with his image of a clockwork universe, but Postmodern, quantum-and-relativity science gives us not a third model of nature but no model at all. Alan Wallace's *Choosing Reality* delineates eight different interpretations of quantum physics, all of which can claim the support of physics' proven facts.¹⁷ A contemporary philosopher described the situation as "*the Reality Market Place*"— you can have as many versions of reality as you like.

Another analogy can pull together all that we have just said and summarize the difference alluded to in these remarks. If we think of traditional peoples as looking out upon the world through the window of revelation (their received myths and sacred texts), the window that they turned to look through in the modern period (science) proved to be stunted. It cuts off at the level of the human nose, which (metaphysically speaking) means that when we look through it our gaze slants downward and we see only things that are inferior to us.¹⁸ As for the Postmodern window, it is boarded over and allows no inclusive view whatsoever. In the words of Richard Rorty, "There is no Big Picture." This analogy is drawn from the works of one of the traditionalist writers, namely, Huston Smith, who is by far the easiest to understand. It is fascinating to note that Iqbal not only mediates between these conflicting views in exactly

the same manner by pointing out to the shortcomings and achievements of all the three paradigms objectively but– and that is remarkable– uses the same analogy. Smith or Iqbal never met or read each other! Iqbal agrees that there is a Big Picture and his writings give us to understand that the Postmodern view of the self and its world is in no way nobler than the ones that the world’s religions proclaim. Postmoderns yield to their dilapidated views, not because they like them, but because they think that reason and human historicity now force them upon us. Iqbal would argue that it is not necessarily the case and the present predicament is the result of a tunnel vision that we have adopted but which really is not the only option for us. Here is Iqbal’s depiction of the conceptual shift that the enlightenment project and modernity’s world view had brought in the human thought, the damage that it had done to the academia. Cultures and their world-views are ruled by their mandarins, the intellectuals and they, as well as their institutions that shape the minds that rule the modern world are unreservedly secular. The poem is addressed to our present day intellectual mandarins, the leaders of the academia.¹⁹

شیخ مکتب سے
شیخ مکتب ہے اک عمارت گر جس کی صنعت ہے روحِ انسانی
نکتہ دلپذیر تیرے لیے کہ گیا ہے حکیم قآنی
”پیش خورشید بر کش دیوار
خواہی ار صحن خانہ نورانی“

To the Schoolman

*The Schoolman is an architect
The artefact he shapes and moulds is the human soul;
Something remarkable for you to ponder
Has been left by the Sage, Qā’ānī;
“Do not raise a wall in the face of the illuminating Sun
If you wish the courtyard of your house to be filled with light”*

What does the metaphor of خورشید (the illuminating Sun) in this analogy try to convey which, in the parallel analogy used by Huston Smith, is depicted by the stunted/slanted window of Modernity that resulted in a truncated, tunnel vision and the Postmodern window, boarded all over, thus precluding the possibility of any world view what so ever! And this is intimately connected to our initial remarks

about (فتنة عصر روان), the challenge posed by the modern age of secular modernity and materialism, which Iqbal, like Rūmī, takes up.

The most important question that concerned Iqbal in this period related to the conceptual shift that the enlightenment project and modernity's worldview had brought in the human thought, the damage that it had done to the academia, and the means of repairing the ills. Iqbal's contemporary discourse was marked by incredulity. Incredulity toward metaphysics. There was no consensual worldview. The incredulity took many forms that grew increasingly shrill as they proceeded. Minimally, it contented itself with pointing out that "we have no maps and don't know how to make them." Hardliners added, "and never again will we have a consensual worldview! In short, Iqbal's contemporary discourse was filled with voices critiquing the truncated worldview of the Enlightenment, but from that reasonable beginning it plunged on to argue unreasonably that world-views (or grand narratives) are misguided in principle. Wouldn't we be better off if we extricate ourselves from the worldview we had unwittingly slipped into and replace it with a more generous and accurate one that shows us deeply connected to the final nature of things? Iqbal contemplated.²⁰ He had realized that a world ends when its metaphor dies, and modernity's metaphor–endless progress through science-powered technology– was dead. It was only cultural lag– the backward pull of the outgrown good– that keeps us running on it.

Already at the opening of the last century, when Postmodernism had not yet emerged on the scene, Yeats was warning that things were falling apart, that the centre didn't hold. Gertrude Stein followed him by noting that "in the twentieth century nothing is in agreement with anything else," and Ezra Pound saw man as "hurling himself at indomitable chaos"— the most durable line from the play *Green Pastures* has been, "Everything that's tied down is coming loose." T. S. Eliot found "The Wasteland" and "The Hollow Men" as appropriate metaphors for the outward and the inward aspects of our predicament.²¹ Poetry of first magnitude or great poetry itself works as a bridge and with inevitable particularities always carries an aspect of universality. It brings you face to face with questions that are truly perennial human questions and not just Muslim or Christian or Hindu questions; who am I? What does it mean to be human?? Where have I come from? Where am I going? What is this universe and how am I related to it? Great poetry may seem grounded in a certain particular idiom or a specific universe of discourse but it always opens out onto the universal.

While Iqbal's cotemporaries were lamenting the state of the world with its shaky institutions and rudderless situation with the dominant mood of melancholy, without suggesting a viable alternative, Iqbal had a message of hope. The conclusion is that if for the survival of humanity it is necessary for man to respect his fellow-men; in the same way it is necessary for him to learn to respect religions other than his own. It is only through the adoption of this moral and spiritual approach that, borrowing Iqbal's phrase, "man may rise to a fresh vision of his future." And this brings us to the opening point of our discourse, "*Be conscious of the station of humanity*" which is intimately related to the question of the "Other"—religious, cultural, political— which, in turn, subsumes the issue of "tolerance" that we wish to address in this paper from the point of view of **Kinship of Thought between Islam and the West**. It, however, calls for a few remarks of a different order as our point of departure.

I would allow Robert Whitemore to make the point. He had observed:²²

Examine Western philosophy from an Islamic standpoint and one characteristic of it is inescapable: from Thales to Wittgenstein Western thought has been for the most part invariably insular, insufferably parochial. European and American thinkers, in so many ways so diverse, have been from the time of their Greek forebears virtually as one in their provincial assurance that such ontological, cosmological and theological speculation as is worthy of their notice is a product of their Western culture.

The philosophy of Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) affords a notable case in point. In the world of modern Muslim thought he stands alone. His *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* aspires to a place akin to that occupied by al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* ("Revivification of the Religious Sciences"). His philosophical poetry is regarded by many Muslim scholars as a worthy postscript to the *Divan* and *Mathnawi* of Jalaluddin Rumi."

This echoes the views expressed earlier during the century by the French metaphysician René Guénon as a prelude to his masterly study *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*.²³ Guénon had termed it "The Classical Prejudice" leading to "intellectual myopia". The attitude manifested itself in a different mode after the advent of Modernity when the Western cultural imagination turned away after its encounter with the stunning variety of cultural worlds that appeared for the first time in the Age of Discovery. This inward turn sparked the appearance of all sorts of imaginary realities and was responsible for the withdrawal of the Western thinkers of Enlightenment from the whirling world of cultural values into an utterly imaginary world of 'objective' forms of knowledge.²⁴ It was

specifically a Modern phenomenon as, during the Middle Ages, despite the outwards conflicts and even protracted wars, intellectual exchange had continued at a deeper and more meaningful level. In this regard it is useful to investigate how the West engaged with the idea and practice of tolerance as it had manifested in other religions and cultures and how does it relate to the historical trajectory through which it became established in the West.

Tolerance– Religious and Secular

Tolerance is a multi-faceted concept comprising moral, psychological, social, legal, political and religious dimensions. The dimension of tolerance addressed by this essay is specifically religious tolerance, such as this principle finds expression within the Islamic tradition, and how it came to be enshrined in the Western thought after the Enlightenment. Further to that we would try to look at the shared legacy of the idea that suffered a diverse destiny in the West. Religious tolerance can be defined in terms of a positive spiritual predisposition towards the religious Other, a predisposition fashioned by a vision of the divinely-willed diversity of religious communities. If the diversity of religions is seen to be an expression of the will of God,²⁵ then the inevitable differences between the religions will be not only tolerated but also celebrated: tolerated on the outward, legal and formal plane, celebrated on the inward, cultural and spiritual plane. As is the case with secular tolerance, here also one will encounter a positive and open-minded attitude, one capable of stimulating policies and laws of a tolerant nature towards the religious Other, but the root of this attitude derives from a principle going beyond the secular domain: the tolerant attitude emerges as the consequence of a kaleidoscopic vision of unfolding divine revelations, a vision which elicits profound respect for the religions of the Other, rather than reluctantly, begrudgingly or condescendingly granting mere toleration.

Tolerance born of a divinely ordained imperative cannot but engender respect for the religious Other. But the converse does not hold: one can be tolerant in a secular sense outwardly and legally, without this being accompanied by sincere respect for the religion of the Other. Moreover, the purely secular approach to tolerance carries with it the risk of falling into a corrosive relativism of the ‘anything goes’ variety. It can lead to the normativity and particularity of one’s own faith being diluted, if not sacrificed, for the sake of an abstracted and artificial social construct.

The Islamic tradition, in principle as well as in practice, provides compelling answers to many questions pertaining to the relationship between religious tolerance and the practice of one’s own faith. The

lessons drawn from the Islamic tradition reveal that tolerance of the Other is in fact integral to the practice of Islam— it is not some optional extra, some cultural luxury, and still less, something one needs to import from some other tradition. This being said, one needs to take note of an irony: the essential sources of the Islamic faith reveal a sacred vision of diversity and difference, plurality and indeed of universality, which is unparalleled among world scriptures; the practice of contemporary Muslim states, however, not to mention many vociferous extra-state groups and actors, falls lamentably short of the current standards of tolerance set by the secular West. In consequence, it is hardly surprising that many argue that what the Muslim world needs in order to become more tolerant is to learn to become more modern and secular, and less traditional and ‘visionary’. This kind of argument, however, ignoring and belittling the vast treasury of ethical and spiritual resources within the Islamic tradition, will succeed only in making Muslims more, rather than less, intolerant, by provoking defensive backlashes. But we would come back later to the issue of this apparently more intelligible demand that we must pass through an Enlightenment, voiced by the late Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn when he wrote that “Christianity and Judaism have gone through the laundromat of humanism and enlightenment, but that is not the case with Islam.”²⁶

A more fruitful approach would be to encourage an honest acknowledgement by Muslims that, as regards the practice of religious tolerance, the secular West has indeed set high standards, albeit at the price of a corrosive relativism, a price which is becoming increasingly apparent to many with the passage of time. Instead of being seen as contrary to the Islamic vision, however, such tolerant codes of conduct can be seen as formal expressions of the universal principle of tolerance inhering in the vision of Islam itself. In this sacred vision the plurality of paths to the One is viewed as a reflection of the infinitude of the One; tolerance of diversity and difference on the human plane thus flows as a moral consequence of this divinely willed plurality, becoming thereby not just a social ethic, but also an expression of the wisdom of the One, being ordained first ‘from above’, and then here below. Tolerance within the framework of a divinely ordained schema expresses both an obligation and a right: a moral obligation to permit people of different faiths to manifest their own specific ways of embodying and radiating these universal values, and the spiritual right to benefit from the specific manifestations of these universal values oneself. This accords with the very purpose of diversity as envisioned by the Qur’an: ‘O mankind, We have created you male and female, and We have

made you into tribes and nations in order that you might come to know one another. Truly, in the sight of God, the most honoured amongst you is the most pious amongst you' (49:13).

The Prophet was asked: 'which religion is most loved by God?' His answer can be seen as a succinct commentary on the above verse. Instead of referring to such and such a religion, he highlights the key character trait which should be infused into the soul by all religions, or by religion as such; whichever religion is most successful in producing this trait becomes 'the most beloved' religion to God: "The primordial, generously tolerant faith" (*al-hanafyya al-samba*). This strongly authenticated saying highlights the centrality of tolerance to the religious endeavour as such; it also implies, as does verse 49:13, the absolute equality of all believers, the sole permissible hierarchy within humanity being that based on intrinsic piety, not on such extrinsic factors as gender or affiliation to tribe or nation, race or religion. Given this view of equality on the human plane, and the Islamic belief in universal and cyclical revelation—no community being deprived of authentic divine revelation and guidance—intolerance of the Other is reprehensible both morally and spiritually.

Tolerant Islam or the Liberal West? Which came first?

Before directly addressing the principle and practice of tolerance in Islam, let us ask ourselves the question as to what is the provenance of the secular concept of tolerance in the West, for this provides some important—and ironic—lessons in this domain. In 1689 John Locke, one of the founding fathers of modern liberal thought, wrote a famous text, 'A Letter Concerning Toleration'. This letter is widely viewed as instrumental in the process by which the ethical value of religious tolerance was transformed into a universal ethical imperative, as far as individual conscience is concerned, and into a legal obligation, incumbent upon the upholders of political authority, as far as the state is concerned. It is evident from this letter that Locke was deeply struck by the contrast between tolerant 'barbarians'— the Muslim Ottomans— and violently intolerant Christians. The contrast was compounded by the fact that Muslims exercised more tolerance towards non-Muslims than Christians did to each other, let alone non-Christians. In his letter, Locke ruefully reflected on the absurdity that Calvinists and Armenians were free to practice their faith if they lived in the Muslim Ottoman Empire, but not in Christian Europe: would the Turks not 'silently stand by and laugh to see with what inhuman cruelty Christians thus rage against Christians?'

Locke passionately proclaimed the need for 'universal tolerance', whatever one's religious beliefs, and, indeed, in the prevailing

Christian climate, *despite* one's beliefs. Following on logically from this secular principle of tolerance was the right for non-Christians to live unmolested in the state of England, and be accorded full civil and political rights: '...neither pagan nor Mahometan nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the Commonwealth because of his religion.' This strict separation between religion and politics, church and state, so often viewed only as part of the evolutionary trajectory of western secularization must also be seen in the light of the historical interface between mutually intolerant Christian states and denominations, on the one hand, and a vibrantly tolerant Muslim polity, on the other. The current unquestioned right of freedom of religious belief and worship in the Western world is thus not simply a corollary of secular thought; it is a principle inspired, at least in part, by the influence of Islam.

The spectacle of Muslim Ottoman tolerance was something to which Christendom was used: 'Better the turban of the Sultan than the mitre of the Pope', was a well-worn saying among Eastern Orthodox Christians, acutely aware of the fact that their rights were more secure under the Ottomans than under their Catholic co-religionists. Ottoman conquest was followed almost without exception by Islamic tolerance of the conquered peoples. 'Tolerance', according to (Reverend) Dr Susan Ritchie, 'was a matter of Ottoman policy and bureaucratic structure, and an expression of the Ottoman interpretation of Islam, which was in most instances stunningly liberal and cosmopolitan.' She argues convincingly that this Ottoman tolerance decisively influenced the process leading to the famous Edict of Torda in 1568, issued by King John Sigismund of Transylvania (which was under Ottoman suzerainty), an edict hailed by western historians as expressing 'the first European policy of expansive religious toleration.'²⁷ It is thus hardly surprising that Norman Daniel should allow himself to make the simple—and, for many, startling—claim: 'The notion of toleration in Christendom was *borrowed* from Muslim practice' (emphasis added).²⁸

Ottoman tolerance of the Jews provides an illuminating contrast with the anti-Semitism of Christendom, which resulted in the regular pogroms and 'ethnic cleansing' by which the medieval Christian world was stained. Many Jews fleeing from persecution in central Europe would have received letters like the following, written by Rabbi Isaac Tzarfati, who reached the Ottomans just before their capture of Constantinople in 1453, replying to those Jews of central Europe who were calling out for help: 'Listen, my brethren, to the counsel I will give you. I too was born in Germany and studied Torah with the German rabbis. I was driven out of my native

country and came to the Turkish land, which is blessed by God and filled with all good things. Here I found rest and happiness ... Here in the land of the Turks we have nothing to complain of. We are not oppressed with heavy taxes, and our commerce is free and unhindered ... every one of us lives in peace and freedom. Here the Jew is not compelled to wear a yellow hat as a badge of shame, as is the case in Germany, where even wealth and great fortune are a curse for the Jew because he therewith arouses jealousy among the Christians ... Arise, my brethren, gird up your loins, collect your forces, and come to us. Here you will be free of your enemies, here you will find rest ...²⁹

At the very same time as the Christian West was indulging in periodic anti-Jewish pogroms, the Jews were experiencing what some Jewish historians themselves have termed a kind of 'golden age' under Muslim rule. As Erwin Rosenthal writes, 'The Talmudic age apart, there is perhaps no more formative and positive time in our long and chequered history than that under the empire of Islam.' One particularly rich episode in this 'golden age' was experienced by the Jews of Muslim Spain. As has been abundantly attested by historical records, the Jews enjoyed not just freedom from oppression, but also an extraordinary revival of cultural, religious, theological and mystical creativity. Such great Jewish luminaries as Maimonides and Ibn Gabirol wrote their philosophical works in Arabic, and were fully 'at home' in Muslim Spain. With the expulsion, murder or forced conversion of all Muslims and Jews following the *reconquista* of Spain—brought to completion with the fall of Granada in 1492—it was to the Ottomans that the exiled Jews turned for refuge and protection. They were welcomed in Muslim lands throughout north Africa, joining the settled and prosperous Jewish communities already there.

As for Christians under Muslim rule in Spain, we have the following interesting contemporary testimony to the practice of Muslim tolerance, from within the Christian community itself. In the middle of the 10th century embassies were exchanged between the court of Otto I of Germany and court of Cordoba. One such delegation was led by John of Gorze in 953 who met the resident bishop of Cordoba, who explained to him, how the Christians survived:³⁰

We have been driven to this by our sins, to be subjected to the rule of the pagans. We are forbidden by the Apostle's words to resist the civil power. Only one cause of solace is left to us, that in the depths of such a great calamity, they do not forbid us to practise our own faith ... For the time being, then, we keep the following counsel: that provided no

harm is done to our religion, we obey them in all else, and do their commands in all that does not affect our faith.

Even so fierce a critic of contemporary Islam as Bernard Lewis cannot but confirm the facts of history as regards the true character of Muslim-Jewish relations until recent times. In his book, *The Jews of Islam*, he writes that even though there was a certain level of discrimination against Jews and Christians under Muslim rule, 'Persecution, that is to say, violent and active repression, was rare and atypical. Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were not normally called upon to suffer martyrdom for their faith. They were not often obliged to make the choice, which confronted Muslims and Jews in reconquered Spain, between exile, apostasy and death. They were not subject to any major territorial or occupational restrictions, such as were the common lot of Jews in premodern Europe.'³¹ This pattern of tolerance characterised the nature of Muslim rule vis-à-vis Jews and Christians until modern times, with very minor exceptions. As the Jewish scholar Mark Cohen notes: 'The Talmud was burned in Paris, not in Cairo or Baghdad ... Staunch Muslim opposition to polytheism convinced Jewish thinkers like Maimonides of Islam's unimpeachable monotheism. This essentially 'tolerant' view of Islam echoed Islam's own respect for the Jewish "people of the Book".'³²

Whence the sacred vision of Islam?

The intrinsic nature of the Muslim polity is derived from the Prophet's embodiment of the Qur'anic revelation. His acts of statesmanship should not be seen in isolation as a series of historical events, but as a series of symbolic acts which, more powerfully than words, uphold the inviolability of the religious rights of the Other and the necessity of exercising a generous tolerance in regard to the Other. The seminal and most graphic expression of this sacred vision inspiring the kind of tolerance witnessed throughout Muslim history is given to us in the following well-attested episode in the life of the Prophet. In the ninth year after the Hijra (631), a prominent Christian delegation from Najrān, an important centre of Christianity in the Yemen, came to engage the Prophet in theological debate in Medina. The main point of contention was the nature of Christ: was he one of the messengers of God or the unique Son of God? What is important for our purposes is not the disagreements voiced, nor the means by which the debate was resolved, but the fact that when these Christians requested to leave the city to perform their liturgy, the Prophet invited them to accomplish their rites in his own mosque. According to Ibn Ishaq, who gives the standard account of this remarkable event, the Christians in question performed the

Byzantine Christian rites.³³ This means that they were enacting some form of the rites which incorporated the fully-developed Trinitarian theology of the Orthodox councils, emphasising the definitive creed of the divine sonship of Christ—doctrines explicitly criticised in the Qur'an. Nonetheless, the Prophet allowed the Christians to accomplish their rites in his own mosque. Disagreement on the plane of dogma is one thing, tolerance—indeed encouragement—of the enactment of that dogma is another.

One should also mention in this context the tolerance that is inscribed into the first Muslim constitution, that of Medina. In this historic document a pluralistic polity is configured. The right to freedom of worship was assumed, given the unprejudiced recognition of all three religious groups who were party to the agreement: Muslims, Jews and polytheists—the latter indeed comprising the majority at the time the constitution was drawn up. Each group enjoyed unfettered religious and legal autonomy, and the Jews, it should be noted, were not required at this stage to pay any kind of poll-tax. The Muslims were indeed recognised as forming a distinct group within the polity, but this did not compromise the principle of mutual defence which was at the root of the agreement: Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document. They must seek mutual advice and consultation, and loyalty is a protection against treachery.³⁴

To sum, the record of tolerance in Muslim history must surely be seen as the fruit of the prophetic paradigm, which in turn derives from and is a commentary upon, the vision revealed by the Qur'an, to which we should now turn. Notwithstanding the many verses critical of earlier religious traditions, the fundamental message of the Qur'an as regards all previous revelations is one of inclusion not exclusion, protection and not destruction. Arguably the most important verse in this regard is: *'We have revealed unto you the Scripture with the Truth, to confirm and protect the Scripture which came before it ... For each We have appointed a Law and a Way. Had God willed, He could have made you one community. But that He might try you by that which He has given you [He has made you as you are]. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God you will all return, and He will inform you of that wherein you differed'* (5:48).

This verse, supplemented by a multitude of other proof texts (given in the endnotes), establishes four crucial principles that enshrine the Qur'anic Vision which both fashion and substantiate an open-minded approach to all religions and their adherents and

inculcates the attitude that if God is the ultimate source of the different rites of the religions, no one set of rites can be legitimately excluded from the purview of authentic religion. :

- the Qur'an confirms and protects all divine revelations;³⁵
- the very plurality of these revelations is the result of a divine will for diversity on the plane of human communities;³⁶
- this diversity of revelations and plurality of communities is intended to stimulate a healthy 'competition' or mutual enrichment in the domain of 'good works';³⁷
- differences of opinion are inevitable consequences of the very plurality of meanings embodied in diverse revelations; these differences are to be tolerated on the human plane, and will be finally resolved in the Hereafter.³⁸

In our times, the secular principle of separation between church and state derives much of its legitimacy from the religious tolerance which fidelity to these principles fosters and protects. As stated earlier, this cannot be disputed on empirical grounds. However, what must be recognised and resisted is the temptation to universalise the particular historical trajectory by which tolerance became established in the West, and apply (or impose – as observed in the representative trend manifesting in the Mr. Fortuyn's observation) this trajectory normatively to the Muslim world. Political analysts are fond of pointing to examples of religious intolerance in the contemporary Muslim world and attribute this absence of tolerance to the 'backwardness' of Islam, and in particular to the insistence by Muslims that religion must dominate and fashion the whole of life, that restoring God to the public and the private sphere is non-negotiable and essential. This refusal to separate 'mosque' from 'state', such analysts conclude, is one of the main reasons why the Muslim world lags behind the West as regards both the principle and practice of religious tolerance.

This type of analysis is not only simplistic and erroneous; it also obscures an irony at once historical and theological. The principle of religious tolerance has historically been one of the hallmarks of Muslim society, right up to its decline in the pre-modern period– a decline accelerated by the assault of western imperialism, mimetic industrialism, and corrosive consumerism, all of which diminished radically the spiritual 'sap' of the Islamic tradition, and thereby the ethics of tolerance and compassion. In contrast, the *intolerance* which characterised Christendom for much of its history only began to be 'deconstructed' in this same period, with the advent of western

secularism. In other words, the rise of religious tolerance in the West appears to be correlated to the diminution of the influence of Christian values in public life in the modern period; conversely, in the Muslim world, it is the decline of the influence of Islamic values that has engendered that peculiar inferiority complex of which religious intolerance is a major symptom. Through the emasculation of this spiritual heritage, all sorts of imported ideological counterfeits— from apologetic liberal Islam to militant radical Islamism— have been manufactured in an effort to fill the vacuum, most of them appearing as the desperate but impotent reflexes of a decaying religious form. In such a situation, what is required is a return to the spirit of the tradition, not another form of mimesis; it is therefore highly ironic that Muslims are being called upon to follow the path of secularisation in order to become more tolerant.

Rather, Muslims ought to be invited to become aware of the tolerance which truly characterises the spirit—and the history—of the Islamic tradition; to use this tradition as the yard-stick by which to critically gauge contemporary Muslim conduct and attitudes; to strive to revive and revalorise the principles of tolerance, diversity and pluralism which are enshrined at the very heart of this tradition; and to realise that tolerance is ‘neither of the East nor of the West’: no religion or culture can claim a monopoly on this universal human ethic. For Muslims, then, being tolerant of the religious Other does not require imitating any philosophical teachings on tolerance the Western thought has to offer, but rather returning to the moral and spiritual roots of their own tradition, while benefiting from and acknowledging the positive aspects of practical tolerance enacted by western nations in the realms of public law, human rights and political governance.³⁹

Shared Legacy: Diverse Destinies!

The last remarks bring us to consider the question that we evoked with reference to the remarks of Pim Fortuyn.⁴⁰ Mr. Fortuyn’s views have generated many debates in the Islamic communities in the West and even reverberate in the Islamic world where the question has gained space in the prevalent discourse. There are arguments in defence and responses that challenge the argument but the insistent question of Mr Fortuyn remains with us. Do we have to pass through his laundromat to be made internally white, as it were, to have an authentic and honoured place of belonging at the table of the modern reality? Islam has a great history of universalism, that is to say, that Islam does not limit itself to the uplift of any given section of humanity, but rather announces a desire to transform the

entire human family. This is, if you like, its Ishmaelite uniqueness: the religions that spring from Isaac (*a.s.*), are, in our understanding, an extension of Hebrew and Occidental particularity, while Islam is universal. Islam's civilizational eminence stemmed from a spectacular plenitude. Of the other religions of the pre-Enlightenment world, only Buddhism rivaled Islam in massively encompassing a range of cultures; however Islam, uncontroversially, was the foundation for a still wider range and variety of cultural worlds.⁴¹ Has this triumphant demonstration of Islam's universalism come to an end? Perhaps the greatest single issue exercising the world today is the following: is the engagement of Islamic monotheism with the new capitalist global reality a challenge that even Islam, with its proven ability to square circles, cannot manage? The current agreement between zealots on both sides – Islamic and unbelieving– that Islam and Western modernity can have no conversation, and cannot inhabit each other, seems difficult given traditional Islamic assurances about the universal potential of revelation. The increasing numbers of individuals who identify themselves as entirely Western, and entirely Muslim, demonstrate that the arguments against the continued ability of Islam to be inclusively universal are simply false.

Yet the question, the big new Eastern Question, will not go away this easily. Palpably, there are millions of Muslims who are at ease somewhere within the spectrum of the diverse possibilities of Westernness. We need, however, a theory to match this practice. Is the accommodation real? What is the theological or *fiqh* status of this claim to an overlap? Can Islam really square this biggest of all historical circles, or must it now fail, and retreat into impoverished and hostile marginality, as history passes it by?

The same argument underlies the claim that Muslims cannot inhabit the West, or– as successful participants– the Western-dominated global reality, because Islam has not passed through a reformation. This is a tiresome and absent-minded claim and is often advanced by those who are simply cannot troubled to read their *own* history, let alone the history of Islam. A reformation, that is to say, a bypass operation which avoids the clogged arteries of medieval history and seeks to refresh us with the lifeblood of the scriptures themselves, is precisely what is today underway among those movements and in those places which the West finds most intimidating. The Islamic world is now in the throes of its own reformation, and our Calvins and Cromwells are proving no more tolerant and flexible than their European predecessors.⁴² A reformation, then, is a bad thing to ask us for, if you would like us to be more pliant. But the apparently more intelligible demand, which is

that we must pass through an Enlightenment, articulated in the late Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn's remarks cited earlier remains with us.⁴³ In this regard the case of the Netherlands is especially pertinent because it was, until very recently, a model of liberalism and multiculturalism. Indeed, modern conceptions of religious toleration may be said to have originated among Dutch intellectuals. Without wishing to sound the alarm, it is evident that if Holland can adopt an implicitly inquisitorial attitude to Islam, there is no reason why other states should not do likewise. Fortuyn, a highly-educated and liberal Islamophobe, was convinced that Islam cannot square the circle. He would say that the past genius of Islam in adapting itself to cultures from Senegal to Sumatra cannot be extended into our era, because the rules of that game no longer apply. Success today demands membership of a global reality, which means signing up to the terms of its philosophy.⁴⁴ How should Islam answer this charge? The answer is, of course, that 'Islam' can't. The religion's strength stems in large degree from its internal diversity. Different readings of the scriptures attract different species of humanity. There will be no unified Islamic voice answering Fortuyn's interrogation. The more useful question is: *who* should answer the charge? What sort of Muslim is best equipped to speak for us, and to defeat his logic?

Fortuyn's error was to impose a Christian squint on Islam. As a practising Catholic, he imported assumptions about the nature of religious authority that ignore the multi-centred reality of Islam. On doctrine, we try to be united - but he is not interested in our doctrine. On *fiqh*, we are substantially diverse. Even in the medieval period, one of the great moral and methodological triumphs of the Muslim mind was the confidence that a variety of *madhhabs* could conflict formally, but could all be acceptable to God.⁴⁵ Fortuyn and others who share his views work with the assumption that Islam is an ideology⁴⁶ and given the nature of the Islam-West encounter the emergence of 'ideological Islam' was, particularly in the mid-twentieth century, entirely predictable. Everything at that time was ideology. Spirituality seemed to have ended, and postmodernism was not yet a twinkle in a Parisian eye. In fact, the British historian John Gray goes so far as to describe the process which Washington describes as the 'war on terror' as an internal Western argument which has nothing to do with traditional Islam. As he puts it: "The ideologues of political Islam are western voices, no less than Marx or Hayek. The struggle with radical Islam is yet another western family quarrel."⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the irony remains. We are represented by the unrepresentative, and the West sees in us a mirror image of its less attractive potentialities. Western Muslim theologians as well as

many Muslim theologians living in the West— René Guénon, S. H. Nasr, Tim Winter, Tage Lindbom, Roger Garaudy to name just a few—frequently point out that the movements which seek to represent Islam globally, or in Western minority situations, are typically movements which arose as reactions against Western political hegemony that themselves internalised substantial aspects of Western political method. In Europe, Muslim community leaders who are called upon to justify Islam in the face of recent terrorist activities are ironically often individuals who subscribe to ideologised forms of Islam which adopt dimensions of Western modernity in order to secure an anti-Western profile. It is no surprise that such leaders arouse the suspicion of the likes of Pim Fortuyn, or, indeed, a remarkably wide spectrum of commentators across the political spectrum.

Islam's universalism, however, is not well-represented by the advocates of *movement* Islam. Islamic universalism is represented by the great bulk of ordinary mosque-going Muslims who around the world live out different degrees of accommodation with the local and global reality. One could argue, against Fortuyn, that Muslim communities are far more open to the West than vice-versa, and know far more about it. There is no equivalent desire in the West to learn from and integrate into other cultures.⁴⁸ Islam, we will therefore insist, is more flexible than the West. Where they are intelligently applied, our laws and customs, mediated through the due instruments of *ijtihad*, have been reshaped substantially by encounter with the Western juggernaut, through faculties such as the concern for public interest, or *urf*- customary legislation. Western law and society, by contrast, have not admitted significant emendation at the hands of another culture for many centuries. From our perspective, then, it can seem that it is the West, not the Islamic world, which stands in need of reform in a more pluralistic direction. It claims to be open, while we are closed, but in reality, on the ground, seems closed, while we have been open. There is force to this defense but does it help us answer the insistent question of Mr Fortuyn? Historians would probably argue that since history cannot repeat itself, the demand that Islam experience an Enlightenment is strange, and that if the task be attempted, it cannot remotely guarantee an outcome analogous to that experienced by Europe. If honest and erudite enough, they may also recognize that the Enlightenment possibilities in Europe were themselves the consequence of a Renaissance humanism which was triggered not by an internal European or Christian logic, but by the encounter with Islamic thought, and particularly the Islamized version of Aristotle which, via

Ibn Rushd, took fourteenth-century Italy by storm. The stress on the individual, the reluctance to establish clerical hierarchies which hold sway over earthly kingdoms, the generalized dislike of superstition, the slowness to persecute for the sake of credal difference: all these may well be European transformations that were eased, or even enabled, by the transfusion of a certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain.⁴⁹ For the humanities, George Makdisi traces European humanism to Islamic antecedents⁵⁰ saying that “the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the reception of both movements, scholasticism and humanism, from classical Islam by the Christian Latin West.” The implication being that without Islam, the medieval world might have endured forever. However Westerners, unlike the Moors of Cordova, proved less able to tolerate diversity or fecundation by the Other, and their own Renaissance and Enlightenment only added to the European’s absolute sense of superiority over other cultures, a prejudice that was augmented further by an escalating positivism that finally dethroned God. Garaudy thus concludes that only by radically challenging its own version of Enlightenment and accepting a Muslim version, rooted in what he calls the Third Heritage (the first two being the Classics and the Bible), will the West save itself from its “deadly hegemonic adventure”, and “its suicidal model of growth and civilization.”⁵¹

Nonetheless, it is clear that the Christian and Jewish Enlightenments of the eighteenth century did not move Europe in a religious, still less an Islamic direction. Instead, they moved outside the Moorish paradigm to produce a disenchantment, a desacralising of the world which opened the gates for two enormous transformations in human experience. One of these has been the subjugation of nature to the will (or more usually the lower desires) of man. The consequences for the environment, and even for the sustainable habitability of our planet, are looking increasingly disturbing. There is certainly an oddness about the Western desire to convert the Third World to a high-consumption market economy, when it is certain that if the world were to reach American levels of fossil-fuel consumption, global warming would soon render the planet entirely uninhabitable.

The second dangerous consequence of ‘Enlightenment’, as Muslims see it, is the replacement of religious autocracy and sacred kingship with either a totalitarian political order, or with a democratic liberal arrangement that has no fail-safe resistance to moving in a totalitarian direction.⁵² The West is loath to refer to this possibility in its makeup and believes that Srebrenica, or Mr Fortuyn, are aberrations, not a recurrent possibility. Muslims, however, surely

have the right to express deep unease about the demand to submit to an Enlightenment project that seems to have produced so much darkness as well as light. Iqbal, identifying himself with the character Zinda-Rud in his *Javid-name*, declaims, to consummate the final moment of his own version of the Mi'raj: *Inghelab-i Rus u Alman dide am*: 'I have seen the revolutions of Russia and of Germany!'⁵³ This in a great, final crying-out to God.

Another aspect of the question needs attention here. Western intellectuals now speak of post-modernism as an end of Enlightenment reason. Hence the new Muslim question becomes: why jump into the laundromat if European thinkers have themselves turned it off? Is the Third World to be brought to heel by importing only Europe's yesterdays?⁵⁴ Iqbal represents a very different tradition which insists that Islam is only itself when it recognizes that authenticity arises from recognizing the versatility of classical Islam, rather than taking any single reading of the scriptures as uniquely true. *Ijtihad*, after all, is scarcely a modern invention!

An age of decadence, whether or not framed by an Enlightenment, is an age of extremes, and the twentieth century was precisely that. Islam has been Westernized enough, it sometimes appears, to have joined that logic. We are either neutralized by a supposedly benign Islamic liberalism that in practice allows nothing distinctively Islamic to leave the home or the mosque— an Enlightenment-style privatization of religion that abandons the world to the morality of the market leaders and the demagogues. Or we fall back into the sensual embrace of extremism, justifying our refusal to deal with the real world by dismissing it as absolute evil, as *kufr*, unworthy of serious attention, which will disappear if we curse it enough.⁵⁵ Revelation, as always, requires the middle way. Extremism, in any case, never succeeds even on its own terms. It usually repels more people from religion than it holds within it. Attempts to reject all of global modernity simply cannot succeed, and have not succeeded anywhere. To borrow the words of Tim Winter, "A more sane policy, albeit a more courageous, complex and nuanced one, has to be the introduction of Islam as a prophetic, dissenting witness *within* the reality of the modern world."⁵⁶ In response Basit Koshul has very pertinently observed:⁵⁷

[It] means that the dissent from the Enlightenment can only be "within the limits of reason alone". It also means that the prophetic witness will have to play the indispensable role of affirming witness from outside the Enlightenment tradition—affirming some of the deepest aspirations of Enlightenment ethos from the Qur'anic perspective. I'd like to explicitly articulate the

logic underpinning both of the approaches offered above with respect to the ultimate goal of Islam in its encounter with the modern West is not to critique-condemn-replace but to redeem-reform-embrace. ... The critique is a means towards redeeming, which itself is a prelude to reforming with the ultimate goal being the embracing of the afflicted paradigm/event.⁵⁸

In the final analysis if there is one unredeemable part of the Enlightenment tradition it is the fact that it allowed its critique of illumination, wisdom and the Divine turn into an outright rejection because of the reification of the critique. The flip-side of this reified critique is the fact that the Enlightenment affirmation of individualism, universalism and materialism became a set of reified/dogmatic assertions based on completely abstract concepts rather than a living (and life-giving) ethos. It is obviously the case that the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment analysis of illumination, wisdom and the Divine laid bare deeply problematic aspects of traditional culture that were not known before. But instead of endeavouring to redress these problematic aspects of traditional culture as a “philosophic healer” using the resources already present in the afflicted paradigm, Enlightenment thought played the role of a colonizing imperialist on a mission to civilize the savages by means of socio-cultural engineering. In short the only unredeemable aspect of the Enlightenment is that its stance towards non-Enlightenment paradigms is one of critique-condemn-replace.

It should not be hard to see where we naturally fit. The gaping hole in the Enlightenment, pointed out by the postmodern theologians and by more skeptical but still anxious minds, was the Enlightenment’s inability to form a stable and persuasive ground for virtue and hence for what it has called ‘citizenship’. David Hume expressed the problem as follows:⁵⁹

If the reason be asked of that obedience which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer: *Because society could not otherwise subsist*; and this answer is clear and intelligible to all mankind. Your answer is, *Because we should keep our word*. But besides that, nobody, till trained in a philosophical system, can either comprehend or relish this answer; besides this, say, you find yourself embarrassed when it is asked, *Why we are bound to keep our word?* Nor can you give any answer but what would immediately, without any circuit, have accounted for our obligation to allegiance.

But why are we bound to keep our word? Why need we respect the moral law? Religion seems to answer this far more convincingly than any secular ethic.⁶⁰ Religion offers a solution to this fatal weakness. Applied with wisdom, it provides a fully adequate reason for virtue and an ability to produce cultural and political leaders who embody it

themselves. Of course, it is all too often applied improperly, and there is something of the Promethean arrogance and hubris of the *philosophes* in the radical insistence that the human subject be enthroned in authority over scriptural interpretation, without a due prelude of initiation, love, and self-naughting. Yet the failure of the Enlightenment paradigm, as invoked by the secular elites in the Muslim world, to deliver moral and efficient government and cultural guidance, indicates that the solution *must* be religious. Religious aberrations do not discredit the principle they aberrantly affirm.

What manner of Islam may most safely undertake this task? It is no accident that the overwhelming majority of Western Muslim thinkers have been drawn into the religion by the appeal of Sufism. To us, the ideological redefinitions of Islam are hardly more impressive than they are to the many European xenophobes who take them as normative. We need a form of religion that elegantly and persuasively squares the circle, rather than insisting on a conflictual model that is unlikely to damage the West as much as Islam. A purely non-spiritual reading of Islam, lacking the vertical dimension, tends to produce only liberals or zealots; and both have proved irrelevant to our needs.

Are we to conclude that modern Islam, so often sympathetic to the Enlightenment's claims, and in its Islamist version one of their most powerful instantiations, has been deeply mistaken? The totalitarian forms of Enlightenment reason which recurred throughout the twentieth century have discredited it in the eyes of many; and are now less dangerous only because postmodernism seems to have abolished so many of the Enlightenment's key beliefs.⁶¹ If the ideal of freedom is now based less on ideas of inalienable natural rights than on the notion that all truth is relative, then perhaps mainstream Islamist thinking will need to unhitch itself more explicitly from the broadly Western paradigms which it accepted for most of the twentieth century. Yet the relation Islam/Enlightenment seems predicated on simplistic definitions of both. Islamism may be an Enlightenment project, but conservative Sufism (for instance) is probably not. Conversely, even without adopting a postmodern perspective we are not so willing today to assume a necessary antithesis between tradition and reason.⁶² The way forward, probably, is to recognize that Islam genuinely converges with Enlightenment concerns on some issues; while on other matters, notably the Enlightenment's individualism and its increasingly Promethean confidence in humanity's autonomous capacities, it is likely to demur radically.

What matters about Islam is that it did not produce the modern world. If modernity ends in a technologically-induced holocaust, then survivors will probably hail the religion's wisdom in not authoring something similar.⁶³ If, however, it survives, and continues to produce a global monoculture where the past is forgotten, and where international laws and customs are increasingly restrictive of cultural difference, then Islam is likely to remain the world's great heresy. The Ishmaelite alternative is rejected. But what if Ishmael actually wishes to be rejected, since the one who is doing the rejecting has ended up creating a world without God? Grounded in our stubbornly immobile liturgy and doctrine, we Ishmaelites should serve the invaluable, though deeply resented, function of a culture which would like to be an Other, even if that is no longer quite possible!

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ *Javid Nama* in *Kulliyat i Iqbal*, (Persian), Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 672-673.

² He received the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1913. The Preface written by W. B. Yeats to the anthology of Tagore highlighted the mellowness of his voice and the representation of the Indians as a humble and harmless race.

³ Whose "Love Song of G. Alfred Prufrock" appeared in 1915. It was a view of pessimism and boredom.

⁴ His *Secrets of the Self* appeared in Persian the same year, although his Urdu poem had been common recitals in India for more than ten years by then. His book was translated into English in 1920. It was clear that out of these three new voices, his was the voice that the west was going to ignore. Ironically, this was the only voice in that age which was inviting its listeners to get real, and do something to change the world to a better place.

⁵ *Zubur i 'Ajam*, in *Kulliyat i Iqbal*, (Persian), Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 376.

⁶ **I am... kind.** By "the crescent and the cross" is meant the historic confrontation between Islam and Christianity that took the form of the Crusades in the Middle Ages. Iqbal is saying that, unlike many other Muslims, who remain mentally imprisoned in the past, allowing their thought and action to be determined by certain crucial events of former times, he is more concerned about the momentous developments taking place in the present age. Iqbal does not specify what he means by "an ordeal of a different kind" (*jitnah-i digar*)—whether he means a particular major development, like communism, or whether he uses the singular "ordeal" in a generic sense to refer to several major and decisive developments taking place on the world stage. The main point of the verse, in any case, is that the issues of the present and the future have greater claim on one's attention than issues belonging to a past that may have no more than historical or academic

importance. In the second hemistich, “the womb of time” is a translation of *damir-i ayyam*, which literally means “in the insides of time.” See M. Mir, (ed.), *Iqbal-Nāmāh*, Vol. 5, No. 3-4, Summer and Fall, 2005, p. 3-6.

⁷ F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, reprinted, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2004, pp. 26.

⁸ *Armaghan i Hijāz*, in *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, Persian, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 860.

⁹ See Martin Lings, “Intellect and Reason” in *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, rpt. (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1988, 57-68; F. Schuon, *Gnosis Divine Wisdom* London: J. Murray, 1978, 93-99; S. H. Nasr, “Knowledge and its Desacralization” in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981, 1-64; Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 60-95. Also see his *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989).

¹⁰ See René Guenon, “Individualism” in *Crisis of the Modern World*, (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1981, 51-65. Also see Social Chaos” in the same document.

¹¹ less anthropomorphically described in Plotinus’s wording

¹² As John Avis and William Provine have said,

¹³ This important point is not generally recognized, so I shall spell it out. The death-knell to modernity, which had science as its source and hope, was sounded with the realization that despite its power in limited regions, six things slip through its controlled experiments in the way sea slips through the nets of fishermen:

1. *Values*. Science can deal with descriptive and instrumental values, but not with intrinsic and normative ones.

2. *Meanings*. Science can work with cognitive meanings, but not with existential meanings (Is X meaningful?), or ultimate ones (What is the meaning of life?).

3. *Purposes*. Science can handle teleonomy— purposiveness in organisms— but not teleology, final causes.

4. *Qualities*. Quantities science is good at, but not qualities.

5. *The invisible and the immaterial*. It can work with invisibles that are rigorously entailed by matter’s behaviour (the movements of iron filings that require magnetic fields to account for them, e.g.) but not with others.

6. *Our superiors, if such exist*. This limitation does not prove that beings greater than ourselves exist, but it does leave the question open, for “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”.

¹⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (referred to as *Reconstruction*, here after), Iqbal Academy Pakistan/Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1989, p. 26.

¹⁵ Ernest Gellner defines Postmodernism as relativism—“*relativismus über Alles*” (*Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*)— but relativism is not an easy position to defend, so postmoderns do everything they can to avoid that label; Clifford Geertz’s “anti-relativism” is a case in point. The T-shirts that blossomed on the final day of a six-week, 1987 NEH Institute probably tell the story. Superimposed on a slashed circle, their logo read, “No cheap relativism”. By squirming, postmoderns can parry crude relativisms, but sophisticated relativism is still relativism. Postmoderns resist that conclusion, however, so I shall stay with their own self-characterization.

¹⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1984, pp. xxiv, 3ff.

¹⁷ Alan Wallace, *Choosing Reality*, Boston and Shaftsbury, Shambala, 1989.

¹⁸ No textbook in science has ever included things that are intrinsically greater than human beings. Bigger, of course, and wielding more physical power, but not

superior in the full sense of that term which includes virtues, such as intelligence, compassion, and bliss.

¹⁹ “Shaykh i Maktab” *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, Urdu, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 494

²⁰ The views about the prevailing human predicament converged. Fresh “infusions” were needed. The opinions about the nature and origin of these fresh “infusions” that could rectify or change it for the better were, however, divergent. Some of Iqbal’s cotemporaries tried to find an alternative from within the dominant paradigm. Others suggested the possibility of a search for these fresh “infusions” in a different direction: different cultures, other civilizations, religious doctrines, sapiential traditions. What could it be?

²¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that when in her last interview Rebecca West was asked to name the dominant mood of our time, she replied, “A desperate search for a pattern.” The search is desperate because it seems futile to look for a pattern when reality has become, in Roland Barth’s vivid image, kaleidoscopic. With every tick of the clock the pieces of experience come down in new array.

²² In his 1966 article, referring to Iqbal, Robert Whittemore, “Iqbal’s Panentheism” had remarked, if we seek through the pages of most modern European and American philosophy for a mention of his name, Iqbal is unknown even to the compilers of philosophical dictionaries and encyclopaedias. (One prominent exception was Hartshorne & Reese’s *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 294-97. The situation has changed since. In the last few decades, Iqbal has been studied by a number of scholars in the West. And, to be sure, he is now being mentioned and discussed in philosophical encyclopedias, dictionaries, and handbooks published in Western countries. For example, in Robert L. Arrington’s edited volume *A Companion to the Philosophers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), Iqbal is one of the eight philosophers included in the section on Islamic and Jewish philosophers, and he is in respectable company in Diané Collinson, Kathy Plant, and Robert Wilkinson’s *Fifty Eastern Thinkers* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²³ René Guenon, “The Classical Prejudice”, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, Sophia Perennis, Hillsdale, NY, 2004, p. 19. The book was originally written in French and appeared in its first English edition in 1925.

²⁴ Those interested in learning more about some of the criticisms we have in mind might begin by looking at the books cited by Lawrence E. Sullivan in his masterly study, *Icanchus Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 884-85. What he says in the passage leading up to the suggested reading applies also to Western perceptions of Islam: “One of the great disservices to our understanding of South American religions [read: Islam] has been the perception of tribal peoples [read: Muslims] as slavishly dedicated to an unchanging order revealed in the images of myth and handed down unquestioned and unmodified from one generation to the next.

This attitude accompanies the evaluation of ‘myth’ as a banal and inane narrative. Tribal peoples (representing ‘archaic’ modes of thought) childishly cling to their myths, infantile fantasies, whereas mature contemporaries jettison myths with the passage of ‘historical time’ and the entrance’ into ‘modernity. ‘It would be fascinating to study these and other justifications proffered for avoiding a serious encounter with the reality of myth [read: Islamic thought] and symbolic acts.... This is, however, not the place to carry out a history of the ‘modern’ ideas of myth and religion. It is enough to suggest that the Western cultural imagination turned away when it encountered the stunning variety of cultural worlds that appeared for the

first time in the Age of Discovery. Doubtless this inward turn sparked the appearance of all sorts of imaginary realities. The Enlightenment, the withdrawal of Western thinkers from the whirling world of cultural values into an utterly imaginary world of 'objective' forms of knowledge, and its intellectual follow-up coined new symbolic currency. These terms brought new meanings and new self-definition to Western culture: 'consciousness/unconsciousness,' 'primitive/civilized,' 'ethics/mores,' 'law/custom,' 'critical or reflective thought/action.'

²⁵ The fundamental message of the Qur'an as regards all previous revelations is one of inclusion not exclusion, protection and not destruction. Arguably the most important verse in this regard is: '*We have revealed unto you the Scripture with the Truth, to confirm and protect the Scripture which came before it ... For each We have appointed a Law and a Way. Had God willed, He could have made you one community. But that He might try you by that which He has given you [He has made you as you are]. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God you will all return, and He will inform you of that wherein you differed*' (5:48).

²⁶ Fortuyn's religious views are detailed in his book *Against the Islamisation of our Culture*, published in 1997 (cited in Angus Roxburgh, *Preachers of Hate: The Rise of the Far Right*, London, 2002, 163) to celebrate Israel's fiftieth birthday. He believed that Islam, unlike his own strongly-affirmed Christianity, is a 'backward culture', with an inadequate view of God and an inbuilt hostility to European culture. He called for massive curbs on Muslim immigration, and for greater stress on Holland's Christian heritage. A prominent homosexual activist, Fortuyn also condemned Islam's opposition to same-sex marriage. Cited in Angus Roxburgh, *Preachers of Hate: The Rise of the Far Right*, London, 2002, 163.

²⁷ Susan Ritchie, 'The Islamic Ottoman Influence on the Development of Religious Toleration in Reformation Transylvania', in *Seasons—Semi-annual Journal of Zaytuna Institute*, vol.2, no.1, pp.62, 59.

²⁸ Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh, 1966), p.12.

²⁹ Quoted in S. A. Schleifer, 'Jews and Muslims—A Hidden History', in *The Spirit of Palestine* (Barcelona, 1994), p.8.

³⁰ Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent—Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (New York/London, 2004), p. 48.

³¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, 1984), p. 8.

³² Mark Cohen, 'Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History', in *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no.38, 1986, p.135.

³³ A. Guillaume (Tr.) *The Life of Muhammad—A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford, 1968), pp.270-277.

³⁴ F. E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, 1990), vol.1, p. 217.

³⁵ 'there is no compulsion in religion' (2:256); 'Permission [to fight] is given to those who are being fought, for they have been wronged ... Had God not driven back some by means of others, then indeed monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques—wherein the name of God is oft-invoked—would assuredly have been destroyed (22: 39-40).

³⁶ The plurality of revelations, like the diversity of human communities, is divinely-willed, and not the result of some human contingency. Universal revelation and human diversity alike are expressions of divine wisdom. They are also signs intimating the infinitude of the divine nature itself: '*And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colours. Indeed, herein are signs for those who know* (30:22).' Just as God is both absolutely one yet immeasurably

infinite, so the human race is one in its essence, yet infinitely variegated in its forms. The *fitra*, or primordial nature, is the inalienable substance of each human being and this essence of human identity takes priority over all external forms of identity such as race and nation, culture or even religion: *'So set your purpose firmly for the faith as an original monotheist, [in accordance with] the fitra of God, by which He created mankind. There can be no altering the creation of God. That is the right religion, but most people know it not'* (30:30). The diversity of religious rites is also derived directly from God, affirmed by the following verse: *'Unto each community We have given sacred rites (mansakan) which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with you about the matter, but summon them unto your Lord (22:67). For every community there is a Messenger (10:47). And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his people, so that he might make [Our message] clear to them (14:4). Truly We inspire you, as We inspired Noah, and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We bestowed unto David the Psalms; and Messengers We have mentioned to you before, and Messengers We have not mentioned to you (4:163-164). (emphasis added) And We sent no Messenger before you but We inspired him [saying]: There is no God save Me, so worship Me (21:25). Naught is said unto you [Muhammad] but what was said unto the Messengers before you (41:43).*

³⁷ The ultimate goal in such a competition between religious believers is salvation. The performance of 'good works' (*khayrat*) is intended not only to establish moral conduct on earth but also to grant access to that grace by which one attains salvation in the Hereafter. One of the key sources of religious intolerance is the exclusivist notion that one's religion, alone, grants access to salvation, all others being false religions leading nowhere. This exclusivism is summed up in the Roman Catholic formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*: no salvation outside of the Church. This kind of exclusivism has no place in the Qur'anic worldview, as is clearly demonstrated by such verses as the following: *'Truly those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and performs virtuous deeds—surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve (2: 62; repeated almost verbatim at 5:69).* The only criteria for salvation according to this verse are belief in the Absolute, and in accountability to that Absolute, conjoined to virtue in consequence of these beliefs. Given this clear expression of the universality of salvation, any lapse into the kind of religious chauvinism which feeds intolerance is impermissible. This is made clear in the following verses, which explicitly mention forms of religious exclusivism which the Muslims had encountered among various communities of the 'People of the Book': *'And they say: "None enters Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian". These are their vain desires. Say: "Bring your proof if you are truthful". Nay, but whosoever submits his purpose to God, and he is virtuous, his reward is with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve (2:111-112).* In other words, the Muslim is not allowed to play the game of religious polemics. Instead of responding in kind to any sort of chauvinistic claims or 'vain desires' aimed at monopolising Paradise, the Muslim is instructed to raise the dialogue to a higher level, and to call for reasoned debate: 'bring your proof'. The Qur'anic position is to affirm the universal salvific criteria of piety, accessible to all human beings, whatever be their religious affiliation. This position is further affirmed in the following verses: *'It will not be in accordance with your desires, nor with the desires of the People of the Book. He who does wrong will have its recompense ... And whoso performs good works, whether male or female, and is a believer, such will enter Paradise, and will not be wronged the dint of a date-stone. (4:123-124)* One can read this verse as implying that insofar as the Muslim 'desires' that salvation be restricted to Muslims in the specific, communal sense, he falls into exactly the

same kind of exclusivism of which the Christians and Jews stand accused. It should be noted that the very same word is used both for the 'desires' of the Jews and the Christians, and the 'desires' of the Muslims, *amaniyy* (s. *umniyya*). The logic of these verses clearly indicates that one form of religious prejudice is not to be confronted with another form of the same error, but with an objective, unprejudiced recognition of the inexorable and universal law of divine justice, a law which excludes both religious nationalism and its natural concomitant, intolerance.

³⁸ Given the fact that '*there is no compulsion in religion*' (2:256), it follows that differences of opinion must be tolerated and not suppressed. This theme is not unconnected with the principle of divine mercy: just as God's mercy is described as *encompassing all things* (7:156), so divine guidance through revelation encompasses all human communities. The Prophet is described as a '*mercy to the whole of creation*' (21:107), and his character is described as merciful and kind in the Qur'an (9:128); in the traditional sources the trait which is most often used to define the essence of his personality is *hilm*, a forbearance compounded of wisdom and gentleness. The tolerance accorded to the Other by the Prophet is thus an expression not only of knowledge of the universality of revelation, but also of the mercy, love and compassion from which this universal divine will to guide and save all peoples itself springs. Seen thus, the spirit of Islamic tolerance goes infinitely beyond a merely formal toleration of the Other; it is the outward ethical form assumed by one's conformity to the very nature of the divine, which encompasses all things '*in mercy and knowledge*' (40:7). It is also a mode of emulation of the prophetic nature: '*Say [O Muhammad]: If you love God, follow me; God will love you*' (3:31). To follow the Prophet means, among other things, to be gentle and lenient to all, in accordance with the *hilm* which defined his character: '*It was a mercy from God that you are gently disposed to them; had you been fierce and hard-hearted, they would have fled from you*' (3:159). In regard to the disbelievers, then, the Muslim is enjoined to let them go their way unmolested, to let them believe in their own 'religion': '*Say: O you who disbelieve, I worship not that which you worship, nor do you worship that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which you worship, nor will you worship that which I worship. For you your religion, for me, mine* (109:1-6)'. Returning to the duty to deliver the message and no more, there are a number of verses to note; for example:

'If they submit, they are rightly guided, but if they turn away, you have no duty other than conveying the message ... (3:20) 'If they are averse, We have not sent you as a guardian over them: your duty is but to convey the message (42:48).'

³⁹ Islam teaches that tolerance, far from being the preserve of this or that religion, is a universal ethical imperative which must be infused into the moral fibre of each human being. This imperative acquires additional urgency given the fact that human society is characterised by a divinely-willed diversity of religions and cultures. Without tolerance, diversity is jeopardised; without diversity, the God-given nature of humanity is violated. If the diversity of religions and cultures is an expression of the wisdom of divine revelation, then tolerance of the differences which will always accompany that diversity becomes not just an ethical obligation to our fellow-creatures, but also a mode of respecting and reflecting the wisdom of the Creator. That wisdom is inextricably bound up with mercy, for God encompasses all things '*in mercy and knowledge*' (40:7). From the point of view of the sacred vision of Islam, tolerance is not just a noble human ethic, it is also, and above all, an invitation to participate in the compassionate wisdom of the Creator.

⁴⁰ A quick survey of the region would be in order here. In Norway, the 1997 election saw the sudden appearance of the anti-immigrant Progress Party of Carl

Hagen, which now holds twenty-five out of a hundred and sixty-five parliamentary seats. Similar to Hagen's group is the Swiss People's Party, which commands 22.5% of the popular vote in Switzerland, and has been widely compared to the Freedom Party of Jörg Haider, which in 1999 joined the Austrian coalition government.

In Denmark, the rapidly-growing ultranationalist DPP has become the third most popular party, benefiting from widespread popular dislike of Muslims. Its folksy housewife-leader Pia Kjaersgaard opposes entry into the Eurozone, rails against 'welfare cheats', and is famous for her outbursts against Islam. 'I think the Muslims are a problem,' she stated in a recent interview. 'It's a problem in a Christian country to have too many Muslims.'

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/europe/2000/far_right/]

In Britain, the same tendency has to some extent been paralleled in the recent growth of the British National Party. A cassette recording issued by the party, entitled 'Islam: A Threat to Us All: A Joint Statement by the British National Party, Sikhs and Hindus', describes itself as 'a common effort to expose and resist the innate aggression of the imperialistic ideology of Islam'. As with its Continental allies, the BNP is gaining popularity by abandoning racist language, and by attempting to forge alliances with non-Muslim Asians and Blacks. The result has been documents such as the October 2001 'Anti-Islam Supplement' of the BNP newsletter *Identity*, which ended with an appeal to 'Join Our Crusade'. The chairman of the BNP, Nick Griffin, wades in with discussions of 'The Islamic Monster' and the 'New Crusade for the Survival of the West'. [<http://www.bnp.org.uk/articles.html>]. In July 2001, Griffin and his skinheads polled 16% of the votes in Oldham West: the highest postwar vote for any extremist party in the UK. Nonetheless, British fascism remains less popular than most of its European counterparts. An issue to consider, no doubt, as Muslim communities ponder their response to growing British participation in schemes for European integration, and the long-term possibility of a federal European state.

To offer a final, more drastic example of how such attitudes are no longer marginal, but have penetrated the mainstream and contribute to the shaping of policy, often with disastrous results. On the outbreak of the Bosnian war, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* told its readers that 'Soon Europe could have a fanatical theocratic state on its doorstep.' [Cited in Andrea Lueg, 'The Perception of Islam in Western Debate', in Jochen Hippler and Andrea Lueg (eds), *The Next Threat: Western Perceptions of Islam*, London: Pluto Press, 1995, p.9.] (The logic no doubt appealed to the thirty-eight percent of Germans polled in [Brandenburg] who recently expressed support for a far-right party's policy on 'foreigners'. [The Independent, 5 October 1999.]).

The influential American commentator R.D. Kaplan, much admired by Bill Clinton, thought that '[a] cultural curtain is descending in Bosnia to replace the [Berlin] wall, a curtain separating the Christian and Islamic worlds.' [Cited by Lueg, op. cit., p.11] Again, those who travelled through that 'curtain' can do no more than record that the opposite appeared to be the case. Far from reducing to essences, in this case, a pacific, pluralistic Christianity confronting a totalitarian and belligerent Islam, the Bosnian war, despite its complexities, usually presented a pacific, defensive Muslim community struggling for a multiethnic vision of society against a Christian aggressor committed to preserving the supposed ethnic hygiene of local Christendom. In Bosnia the stereotypes were so precisely reversed that it is remarkable that they could have survived at all. Here the Christians were the 'Oriental barbarians', while the Muslims represented the 'European ideal' of

parliamentary democracy and conviviality. Neither can we explain away the challenge to stereotypes by asserting that religion was a minor ingredient in the very secularized landscape of post-Titoist Yugoslavia. The Bosnian President was a mosque-going Muslim who had been imprisoned for his beliefs under the Communists. The Muslim religious hierarchy had been consistent in its support for a multiethnic, integrated Bosnian state. Ranged against them were all the forces of the local Christian Right, as the Greek Orthodox synod conferred its highest honour, the Order of St Denis of Xante, on Serb radical leader Radovan Karadzic. Ignoring the unanimous verdict of human rights agencies, the Greek Synod apparently had no qualms about hailing him as 'one of the most prominent sons of our Lord Jesus Christ, working for peace.' [Michael Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 85.]

⁴¹ In particular, we may identify distinctive high civilizations among Muslim Africans, Arabs, Turks (including Central Asians), Persians (including, as an immensely fertile extension, Muslim India), and the population of the Malay archipelago, radiating from the complex court cultures of Java.

⁴² The defining demand of the Reformation was the return to the most literal meaning of Scripture. Hence Calvin: 'Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and simple one, and let us embrace and hold it resolutely. Let us not merely neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions which lead us away from the literal sense.' (John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (Edinburgh, 1965), 84-5. Is this what the West is demanding of us? That a Muslim state should, in consequence, be a 'city of glass', like Calvin's terrified Geneva?

⁴³ Fortuyn was not a marginal voice. His funeral at Rotterdam Cathedral, reverently covered by Dutch television, attracted a vast crowd of mourners. As his coffin passed down the city's main street, the Coolsingel, so many flowers were thrown that the vehicle itself almost disappeared from sight, recalling, to many, the scenes attending the funeral of Princess Diana. The election performance of his party a week later was a posthumous triumph, as his associate Hilbrand Nawijn was appointed minister for asylum and immigration. Fortuyn's desire to close all Holland's mosques was not put into effect, but a number of new, highly-restrictive, policies have been implemented. Asylum seekers now have to pay a seven thousand Euro deposit for compulsory Dutch language and citizenship lessons. A 90 percent cut in the budget of asylum seeker centres has been approved. An official government enquiry into the Dutch Muslim community was ordered by the new parliament in July 2002. (These are old statistics but, I presume, the situation has deteriorated since then).

⁴⁴ The alternative is poverty, failure, and - just possibly - the B52s.

⁴⁵ In fact, we could propose as the key distinction between a great religion and a sect the ability of the former to accommodate and respect substantial diversity. Fortuyn, and other European politicians, seek to build a new Iron Curtain between Islam and Christendom, on the assumption that Islam is an ideology functionally akin to communism, or to the traditional churches of Europe.

⁴⁶ The great tragedy is that some of our brethren would agree with him. There are many Muslims who are happy to describe Islam as an ideology. One suspects that they have not troubled to look the term up, and locate its totalitarian and positivistic undercurrents. It is impossible to deny that certain formulations of Islam in the twentieth century resembled European ideologies, with their

obsession with the latest certainties of science, their regimented cellular structure, their utopianism, and their implicit but primary self-definition as advocates of communalism rather than of metaphysical responsibility.

⁴⁷ *The Independent* July 28, 2002. There are, of course, significant oversimplifications in this analysis. There are some individuals in the new movements who do have a substantial grounding in Islamic studies. And the juxtaposition of 'political' and 'Islam' will always be redundant, given that the Islamic, Ishmaelite message is inherently liberative, and hence militantly opposed to oppression.

⁴⁸ On the ground, the West is keener to export than to import, to shape, rather than be shaped. As such, its universalism can seem imperial and hierarchical, driven by corporations and strategic imperatives that owe nothing whatsoever to non-Western cultures, and acknowledge their existence only where they might turn out to be obstacles. Likewise, Westerners, when they settle outside their cultural area, almost never assimilate to the culture which newly surrounds them.

⁴⁹ It has been made with particular elegance by Roger Garaudy, for whom its highest expression unfolded in medieval Cordova, a city which witnessed a combination of revealed and rational wisdom so sophisticated that it was a 'first Renaissance'. Saint-Simon and others had claimed that the Middle Ages ended once Arab science was transmitted to the West. The case for classical Islam as an enlightenment that succeeded in retaining the sovereignty of God thus seems a credible one. It has been made with particular elegance by Roger Garaudy, for whom its highest expression unfolded in medieval Cordova, a city which witnessed a combination of revealed and rational wisdom so sophisticated that it was a 'first Renaissance'. Saint-Simon and others had claimed that the Middle Ages ended once Arab science was transmitted to the West. Also see Luce Lopez-Baralt, *The Sufi Trobar Clus*, IAP, Lahore, 2000.

⁵⁰ George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism: Classical Islam and the Christian West: With special reference to scholasticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. Xx.

⁵¹ Roger Garaudy, *Promesses de l' Islam* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 19.

⁵² Take, for instance, the American Jewish philosopher Peter Ochs, for whom the Enlightenment did away with Jewish faith in God, while the Holocaust did away with Jewish faith in humanity. As he writes: "*They lost faith in a utopian humanism that promised: 'Give up your superstitions! Abandon the ethnic and religious traditions that separate us one from the other! Subject all aspects of life to rational scrutiny and the disciplines of science! This is how we will be saved.' It didn't work. Not that science and rationality are unworthy; what failed was the effort to abstract these from their setting in the ethics and wisdoms of received tradition.*" (Peter Ochs, 'The God of Jews and Christians', in Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder and Oxford, 2000), 54.)

Another voice from deep in the American Jewish intellectual tradition that many in the Muslim world assume provides the staunchest advocates of the Enlightenment. This time it is Irving Greenberg: "*The humanistic revolt for the 'liberation' of humankind from centuries of dependence upon God and nature has been shown to sustain a capacity for demonic evil. Twentieth-century European civilization, in part the product of the Enlightenment and liberal culture, was a Frankenstein that authored the German monster's being. [...] Moreover, the Holocaust and the failure to confront it make a repetition more likely - a limit was broken, a control or awe is gone - and the murder procedure is now better laid out and understood.* (Irving Greenberg, 'Judaism, Christianity and Partnership after the Twentieth Century', in Frymer-Kensky, *op. cit.*, 26.)

⁵³ Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, translated from the Persian with introduction and notes, by Arthur J. Arberry (London, 1966), 140.

⁵⁴ The implications of the collapse of Enlightenment reason for theology have been sketched out by George Lindbeck in his *The Nature of Doctrine: religion and theology in a postliberal age* (London, 1984).

⁵⁵ Traditional Islam, as is scripturally evident, cannot sanction either policy. Extremism, however, has been probably the more damaging of the two. Al-Bukhari and Muslim both narrate from A'isha, (*r.a.*), the hadith that runs: 'Allah loves kindness in all matters.' Imam Muslim also narrates from Ibn Mas'ud, (*r.a.*), that the Prophet (*salla'Llahu 'alayhi wa-sallam*) said: 'Extremists shall perish' (*balaka 'l-mutanatti'un*). Commenting on this, Imam al-Nawawi defines extremists as 'fanatical zealots' (*al-muta'ammiqun al-ghālin*), who are simply 'too intense' (*al-mushaddidun*).

⁵⁶ "Faith in the future: Islam after the Enlightenment", *First Annual Altaf Gauhar Memorial Lecture*, Islamabad, 23 December 2002.

⁵⁷ Basit Koshul, "Studying the Western Other..", in *The Religious Other- Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2007.

⁵⁸ I think that Murad is much closer to advocating a "redeem, reform, embrace" approach to the Enlightenment than appears to be the case at first glance. This is suggested by the proposal he makes regarding contemporary Islam's engagement with modern feminism. The following is a quote from the concluding part of Murad's essay titled "Islam, Irigaray and the Retrieval of Gender": <http://www.masud.co.uk.islam./ahm/gender.htm>

Feminism, in any case, has no orthodoxy, as Fiorenza reminds us; and certain of its forms are repellent to us, and are clearly damaging to women and society, while others may demonstrate striking convergences with the Shari'a and our gendered cosmologies. We advocate a nuanced understanding which tries to bypass the sexism-versus-feminism dialectic by proposing a theology in which the Divine is truly gender neutral, but gifts humanity with a legal code and family norms which are rooted in the understanding that, as Irigaray insists, the sexes 'are not equal but different', and will naturally gravitate towards divergent roles which affirm rather than suppress their respective genius.

Murad is arguing that the most fruitful Islamic response to modern feminism is "redeem, reform, embrace" rather than "critique, condemn, replace". In this particular quote if the term "feminism" is replaced with "Enlightenment" and if the "sexism-versus-feminism dialectic" is replaced with the "modernism-versus-traditionalism dialectic" then it obvious that the "redeem, reform, embrace" approach is as applicable to the Enlightenment in general as it is to feminism in particular.

⁵⁹ David Hume, *Essays* (Oxford, 1963), 469.

⁶⁰ In spite of all stereotypes, the degree of violence in the Muslim world remains far less than that of Western lands governed by the hope of a persuasive secular social contract. [17] Perhaps this is inevitable: the Enlightenment was, after all, nothing but the end of the Delphic principle that to know the world we must know and refine and uplift ourselves. Before Descartes, Locke and Hume, all the world had taken spirituality to be the precondition of philosophical knowing. Without love, self-discipline, and care for others, that is to say, without a

transformation of the human subject, there could be no knowledge at all. The Enlightenment, however, as Descartes foresaw, would propose that the mind is already self-sufficient and that moral and spiritual growth are not preconditions for intellectual eminence, so that they might function to shape the nature of its influence upon society. Not only is the precondition of the transformation of the subject repudiated, but the classical idea, shared by the religions and the Greeks, that access to truth itself brings about a personal transformation, is dethroned just as insistently. [This has been discussed with particular clarity by Michel Foucault, *L'Hermeneutique du sujet: Cours au College de France (1981-2)* (Paris, 2001), pp.16-17] Relationality is disposable, and the laundromat turns out to be a centrifuge.

⁶¹ Vaclav Havel could write that 'the totalitarian systems warn of something far more serious than Western rationalism is willing to admit. They are [...] a grotesquely magnified image of its own deep tendencies, an extremist offshoot of its own development' (William Ophuls, *Requiem for Modern Politics: the tragedy of the Enlightenment and the challenge of the new millennium* [Boulder and Oxford: Westview, 1997], 258); this seems somewhat outdated.

⁶² Hans-Georg Gadamer, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method* (second edition, London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 281.

⁶³ Is this what Melville, whose days in Turkey had made him an admirer of Islam, meant when he made Ishmael the only survivor of the Pequod?

SOURCES OF TOLERANCE AND INTOLERANCE IN ISLAM

Dr. Ibrahim Kalin

ABSTRACT

Islam's encounter with other religions is as old as Islam itself. The two sources of Islam, i.e., the Qur'an and Hadith, contain extensive discussions, narrations, and injunctions on the various religious traditions before Islam and especially Judaism and Christianity. The Muslim awareness of the multiplicity of faith traditions is evident not only in the Qur'an but also in the sayings of the prophet Muhammad as well as in the later Islamic scholarship. The fact that Islam is the last of the three Abrahamic faiths puts it in a special relationship with Judaism and Christianity. The Qur'an is explicit and occasionally harsh in its criticism of certain Jewish and Christian themes because no serious dialogue is possible without raising the most fundamental issues. The Qur'an presents this claim to universality as a trait of not only Islam but also other Abrahamic faiths and calls upon Jews and Christians specifically to renew their bond with the father of monotheism. Based on the textual evidence gathered from the Qur'an and prophetic traditions, we can assert that other religions, and especially Judaism and Christianity, play a significant role in Islam. Islam's self-view as the seal of the Abrahamic tradition links it to the Jewish and Christian faiths in a way that we don't find in relation to any other religion. Much of the interreligious dialogue we find in the sacred sources of Islam is addressed to these religions. This article discusses that how Islam acknowledges the plurality of human societies and faith traditions but insists on reaching a common ground between them. A genuine culture of tolerance and accommodation is possible only when the principles of respect are observed without compromising the integrity and orthodoxy of a religion.

Islam's encounter with other religions is as old as Islam itself. The two sources of Islam, i.e., the Qur'an and Hadith, contain extensive discussions, narrations, and injunctions on the various religious traditions before Islam and especially Judaism and Christianity. The Muslim awareness of the multiplicity of faith traditions is evident not only in the Qur'an but also in the sayings of the prophet Muhammad as well as in the later Islamic scholarship. Historically, the first Muslim community came into being within a fairly diverse society where Jews, Christians, pagans, polytheists, monotheists, fire-worshippers (Magians or Majus), and others lived together across the Arabian Peninsula. The major and minor religions that the Islamic world encountered from its earliest inception to the modern period make up a long list: the religious traditions of the pre-Islamic (*jabiliyyah*) Arabs, Mazdeans in Mesopotamia, Iran, and Transoxania, Christians (of different communions like Nestorians in Mesopotamia and Iran, Monophysites in Syria, Egypt and Armenia, Orthodox Melkites in Syria, Orthodox Latins in North Africa), Jews in various places, Samaritans in Palestine, Mandaeans in south Mesopotamia, Harranians in north Mesopotamia, Manichaeans in Mesopotamia and Egypt, Buddhists and Hindus in Sind, tribal religions in Africa, pre-Islamic Turkic tribes, Buddhists in Sind and the Panjab¹, and Hindus in the Punjab.² In short, Islam is no stranger to the challenge of other religions. The fact that Islam is the last of the three Abrahamic faiths puts it in a special relationship with Judaism and Christianity. On the one hand, the Qur'an defines Jews and Christians as the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*) and gives them the status of protected religious communities (*ahl al-dhimmah*) under the provision of paying a religious tax called *jizya* (compare the Qar,ān, al-Tawbah 9:29). Within this legal framework, the People of the Book are accorded certain rights, the most important of which is the right of religious belief, i.e., no forced conversion. On the other hand, the Qur'an engages the People of the Book head-on as the primary counterparts of a serious dialogue on the unity of God, the Abrahamic tradition, some biblical stories, salvation, the hereafter, and the nature of Jesus Christ. The Qur'an is explicit and occasionally harsh in its

criticism of certain Jewish and Christian themes because no serious dialogue is possible without raising the most fundamental issues.

In relation to the treatment of non-Muslims, we thus see a tension between what we might loosely call the requirements of law and theological doctrine. Islamic law grants certain rights to non-Muslims including freedom of religion, property, travel, education, and government employment. These rights extend not only to Jews and Christians but also to other faith traditions such as the Manicheans, Hindus, and Buddhists. Muslims encountered these latter communities as the borders of the Islamic world expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula. One of the major legal adjustments in this process was the enlargement of the concept of the People of the Book to include those other than Jews and Christians. This, however, was complemented by an economic system that allowed non-Muslims to move freely across the social strata of Muslim societies in which they lived. Following the vocation of Prophet Muhammad, Muslims always encouraged free trade and, therefore, unlike Christianity, did not have to discriminate against Jews as international merchants or money-lending usurers. Socially, there was nothing in the Islamic tradition similar to the Hindu caste system that would have led to the treatment of Hindus in discriminatory manners. Instead, Muslims treated Hindus as members of a different socio-religious community whose internal affairs were regulated by Hindu, not Islamic, laws. Politically, Muslim rulers were more or less pragmatic and used relatively lenient legal provisions to ensure the loyalty of their non-Muslim subjects. Forced conversion or economic discrimination was not in the interest of the state or the Muslim communities. This socio-economic and legal framework, thus, played a key role in the rapid spread of Islam and facilitated the development of a “culture of coexistence” in Muslim societies that had considerable non-Muslim populations from the Balkans and Anatolia to the subcontinent of India.

Legal protection, however, is not a licence to theological laxity. The Qur’an sharply criticizes the Meccan polytheists and accuses them of failing to understand the true nature of God. Jews and Christians are not spared from criticism, some of which are general and some specific. The primary reason for the Qur’an’s constant dialogue with them is its unflinching effort to hold them up to higher moral and religious standards than the Meccan pagans. As the two heirs or claimants to the legacy of Abraham, Jewish and Christian communities are expected to

uphold the principles of monotheism and accept the new revelation sent through the prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an calls upon them to recognize Islam as part of the Abrahamic tradition: ³ "Say: O People of the Book. Come to a word [*kalimah*] common between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partners unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him)." ⁴ (al-i 'Imran 3: 64).

The tension between theological certitude and legal protection is further complicated by another tension between the unity of the essential message of religions and the multiplicity of socio-religious communities. The tension is real with theological and political consequences. The problem is how to explain and then reconcile the discrepancy between the unity of the divine message and the diversity of faith communities to which the divine message has been sent. As I shall discuss below, the Qur'an seeks to overcome this problem by defining the plurality of socio-religious communities as part of God's plan to test different communities in their struggle for virtue and the common good (*al-khayrat*).

The universality of divine revelation is a constant theme in the Qur'an and forms the basis of what we might call the Abrahamic ecumenism of monotheistic religions. As the father of monotheism, Abraham is assigned a central role to represent the universalist nature of the divine revelation: he is the most important figure to unite Jews, Christians, and Muslims, despite the fact that Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are also accorded special places in the Islamic tradition. While Abraham represents the pinnacle of this ecumenism, other prophets are seen as bearers of the same message, i.e., believing in the unity of God, worshipping him alone, and leading a virtuous life. "And before thy time We never sent any apostle without having revealed to him that there is no deity save Me, - [and that,] therefore, you shall worship Me [alone]!" (al-Anbiya 21:25).

The Qur'an presents this claim to universality as a trait of not only Islam but also other Abrahamic faiths and calls upon Jews and Christians specifically to renew their bond with the father of monotheism. The true religion is "islam" (with a small "i") in the sense of "surrendering oneself to God" fully and unconditionally. Once this common denominator is secured, ritual differences and even some theological disparities can be overcome. The Qur'an calls all to *islam* without making a distinction: "Do they seek a

faith other than in God [*din Allah*], although it is unto Him that whatever is in the heavens and on earth surrenders itself [aslama], willingly or unwillingly, since unto Him all must return?” (al-i ‘Imran 3:83; compare also al-Ra’d 13:15). The reference to the cosmological order of things, which we see in some Qur’anic verses (compare al-Rahman 55:1–18; Isra 17:44), is of particular significance since it establishes “surrendering to God” (*islam*), as both a cosmological and human-religious principle. The universality of divine message extends beyond revealed books all the way to the natural world. This universalism, however, is always qualified by a reference to true faith in God and His decision to send messengers to warn those who are mistaken. “Say: “We believe in God, and in that which has been revealed unto us, and that which has been revealed unto upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed by their Sustainer unto Moses and Jesus and all the [other] prophets: we make no distinction between any of them. And unto Him do we surrender ourselves [literally “we’re muslims to Him”].” (al-i ‘Imran 3:84)

These specific references to the prophets of Abrahamic monotheism shows Islam’s specific interest to have a constant dialogue with the People of the Book and form a kind of religious alliance with them against the Meccap polytheists. If the prophet Abraham is understood correctly as the father of monotheism, then the theological differences between Jews, Christians and Muslims can be negotiated. The Qur’an is, thus, absolutely uncompromising on the fundamental Abrahamic principle, i.e., surrendering oneself to the one God alone: “For, if one goes in search of a religion other than surrendering to God (*al-islam*), it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come he shall be among the lost” (al-i ‘Imran 3:85). Commenting on the verse, Ibn Kathir says that “whoever follows a path other than what God has ordained, it will not be accepted.”⁵ Fakhr al-Din al- Razi quotes Abu Muslim as saying that the expression “we surrender ourselves to Him” (*muslimuna labu*) means that “we submit to God’s command with consent and turn away from all opposition to Him. This is the quality of those who believe in God and they are the people of peace [ahl al Isilm]”⁶ Despite the narrow interpretation of some classical and contemporary Muslims, this reading of the verse supports our rendering of *Islam* as “surrendering to God.”

The universality of divine revelation is a constant theme in the Qur’an and forms the basis of what we might call the Abrahamic ecumenism of monotheistic religions.

This emphasis on the unique nature of the Abrahamic tradition underlies Islam's attitude towards other religions. It is by virtue of this linkage that Judaism and Christianity receive more attention in the Islamic sources than any other religion besides, of course, polytheism, which the Qur'an rejects unconditionally. Islam recognizes the reality of other religions but does so with a critical attitude in that all religious communities are called upon to (re)affirm and appropriate the main thrust of Abrahamic monotheism. Any claim to religious belief short of this is denounced as an aberration, metaphysical error, schism, and affront to God.

In what follows, I shall analyze the applications of these general principles and discuss the grounds and limits of tolerance and intolerance towards other religions in the Islamic tradition. The focus will be Judaism and Christianity, leaving aside other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism for another discussion. I shall claim that, while Islam does not claim a monopoly on belief in God and leading a virtuous life, it sets strict conditions for accepting a faith as a legitimate path that one can follow to reach salvation. The tensions between the oneness and universality of the divine message on the one hand and the multiplicity of human communities on the other will also be discussed. The following verse is the anchor point of our discussion: "Unto every one of you We have appointed a [different] law [*shir'atan*] and way of life [*minbajan*]. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community [*ummah wahidah*]: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works!" (al-Ma'idah 5:48; see also Hud 11:118). I shall discuss the extent to which the call for "vying for the common good" can form the basis of an Islamic notion of religious tolerance.

Universal Revelation and Abrahamic Ecumenism

The Qur'an presents revelation (*wahy kitab*) as a universal phenomenon. Whether it talks about the creation of the universe or the stories of the prophets, it refers to revelation as having both historical continuity and claim to universal truth. Revelation is historically universal for God has revealed his message to different societies to remind them of faith and salvation and warn against disbelief: "Verily, We have sent thee with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner: for there never was any community [*ummah*] but a warner has [lived and] passed away in its midst" (al-Fatir 35:24). The same principle is stated in another verse: "And for every community there is a messenger [rasul]; and

only after their messenger has appeared [and delivered his message] is judgment passed on them, in all equity” (Yunus 10:47). In both verses, the word *ummah* is used to refer to different communities to which messengers have been sent.⁷ While *ummah* has come to denote specifically the Muslim community in the later Islamic scholarship, it is used in the Qur’an and the Hadith to describe any faith community whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. The word *ummah* is also used for humanity in general (compare al-Baqarah 2:213).

While all revelation comes from God, revelation in the specific sense such as a revealed book originates from what the Qur’an calls the “mother of the book” (*umm al-kitab*). Like all other revelations, the Qur’an originates from this “mother book,” which is the “protected tablet” (*lawh mahfuz*) in the divine presence⁸: “Consider this divine book, clear in itself and clearly showing the truth: behold, We have caused it to be a discourse in the Arabic tongue, so that you might encompass it with your reason. And, verily, [originating as it does] in the source, with Us, of all revelation, it is indeed sublime, full of wisdom” (al-Zukhruf 43:2-4). The word *umm*, literally “mother,” means origin and source.⁹ The word *kitab*, book, in this context refers not to any particular revealed book but to revelation as such. This comprehensive meaning applies to all revelation: “Every age has its revealed book [*kitab*]. God annuls or confirms whatever He wills [of His earlier messages]; for with Him is the source of all revelation [*umm al-kitab*]” (al-Ra’d 13: 38-39). The Qur’an, thus, considers the history of revelation as one and connects the prophets from Adam and Noah to Jesus and Muhammad in a single chain- of prophetic tradition. The continuity of divine revelation links different socio-religious communities through the bondage of a common tradition. The following verse, while making a strong case against religious communalism and ethnic nationalism, which was rampant in the pre-Islamic Arabia, points to what really unites different communities: “O humans! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all knowing, all-aware.” al-Hujurat 49:13

Commenting on the above verses; Fakhr al-Din al-Razi points out that human beings are born in total equality. They acquire the qualities that distinguish them from others as inferior or superior only “after they come into this world; and the noblest among these

qualities are the fear of God [*al-taqwa*] and closeness [*al-qurb*] to Him.”¹⁰ All “nations and tribes” are called upon to possess these qualities and honour the primordial covenant they have made with God to worship him alone and “turn their face [i.e., whole being] to God.” This “turning towards God” is also the essence of the natural disposition or state according to which God has created human beings: “And so, set thy face steadfastly towards the [one ever-true] faith [*al-din*], turning away from all that is false [*hanifan*], in accordance with the natural disposition [*fitrah*] which God has instilled into man. No change shall there be in God’s creation [*khalq*]. This is the established true religion [*al-din al-qayyim*] but most people know it not.” (al-Rum 30:30)

Two words require our attention here. The word *hanif(an)*, translated by Asad as “turning away from all that is false” and by Pickthall as “upright,” is used in the Qur’an twelve times (two times in the plural) and derived from the verb *hanafa*, which literally means “inclining towards a right state.” A *hanif* is a person who turns towards God as the only deity. In pre-Islamic Arabia, there was a group of people called *hanifs*, who were neither polytheists - nor Jew or Christian. Their theological lineage went back to Abraham, who is mentioned seven times in the twelve verses that have the word *hanif* in them. Abraham is presented as the perfect example of those who are upright and turn their whole being towards God: “Verily, Abraham was a nation [*ummatan*] by himself, devoutly obeying God’s will, turning away from all that is false [*hanifan*], and not being of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God: [for he was always] grateful for the blessings granted by Him who had elected him and guided him onto a straight way” (al-Nahl 16:120-21). Another verse stresses the same link between Abraham and monotheism: “Say: God has spoken the truth: follow, then, the creed [*millah*] of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false [*hanifan*], and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God” (al-i ‘Imran 3:95). *Millat Ibrahim*, “Abraham’s community,” represents the transnational community that believes in the pure and simple unity of God in tandem with one’s primordial nature. Muslims are urged to be Abraham’s community today and, thus, go beyond both Judaism and Christianity.¹¹

In this sense, Abraham does not belong to any of the particular faith traditions: “Abraham was neither a ‘Jew’ nor a ‘Christian,’ but was one who turned away from all that is false [*hanifan*], having surrendered himself unto God [*musliman*]; and he was not of those who ascribe partnership

to Him [*musbrikin*]” (al-i ‘Imran 3:67). Commenting on the word *hanif*, Ibn Kathir describes Abraham as “turning away from polytheism [*al-shirk*] to faith [all *iman*]¹²“ The commentators Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti interpret it as “turning away from all other religions towards the one firmly established religion” (*al-din al-qayyim*; compare Qur’an, al-Tawbah 9:36, al-Rum 30:30, al-Mu’min 40:12). It is only when commenting on 3:95 that they use the word *al-Islam*, meaning the religion of Islam.¹³ The famous Andalusian commentator Qurtubi concurs: the word *hanif* means “turning away from abhorrent religions [*al-adyan al-makruhah*] towards the true religion of Abraham.”¹⁴ In the Qur’anic reading of biblical history, the adjective *hanif* places all prophets including Moses and Jesus in a position beyond any particular religion including Judaism and Christianity. *The Religious Dialogue of Jerusalem*, a ninth-century polemic between a Christian monk and Abd al-Rahman, the supposed amir of Jerusalem, quotes the Muslim interlocutor as saying that “you have accredited Christ with idolatry because Christ was neither Jew nor Christian but *hanif*, surrendered to God (Muslim).”¹⁵

Another key term that points to the universal nature of belief in God is the word *fitrah*, translated as natural disposition or primordial nature. *Fitrah* is the noun form of the verb *fatara*, which literally means to fashion something in a certain manner. It denotes the specific nature or traits according to which God has created human beings. In a famous hadith of the Prophet narrated by both Bukhari and Muslim, the word *fitrah* is used as the presocial state of humans: “Every child is born in this natural disposition; it is only his parents that later turn him into a ‘Jew,’ a ‘Christian,’ or a ‘Magian.” It is important to note that the three religious traditions mentioned here are also the three religions that are considered to be the People of the Book. The Hadith states the same principle outlined in the above verses: while belief in one God (and acting in accord with it) is universal and the revelations are sent to confirm it, it is through the multiplicity of human communities that different theological languages develop and come to form one’s religious identity as Jew, Christian, Magian, or Muslim.

In relation to the People of the Book, the Qur’an makes specific references to the Abrahamic tradition and asks Muslims as well as Jews and Christians to recognize and appreciate the underlying unity between their religious faiths. “In matters of faith

[*al-din*], He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Noah - and into which We gave thee [O Muhammad] revelation as well as that which We had enjoined upon Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus: Steadfastly uphold the [true] faith, and do not break up your unity therein” (al-Shura 42:13). This is usually interpreted as referring to the doctrine of *tawhid*, unity of God, which is the same doctrine revealed to other prophets before Muhammad.¹⁶ According to al-Razi, the warning about breaking up “your unity” pertains to disunity resulting from worshipping deities other than God.¹⁷ The term *al-din*, translated conventionally as “religion,” refers not to any particular religion and certainly not to “institutional religion” but to the essence of *tawhid*. The life of Abraham and his followers is a testimony to the robust monotheism of the Abrahamic faith: “Indeed, you have had a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, when they said unto their [idolatrous] people: “Verily, we totally dissociate ourselves from you and of all that you worship instead of God: we deny the truth of whatever you believe; and between us and you there has arisen enmity and hatred, to last until such a time as you come to believe in the One God!” (al-Mumtahina 60:4)

Abraham does not belong to any of the particular faith traditions:

Abraham was neither a ‘Jew’ nor a ‘Christian,’ but was one who turned away from all that is false [hanifan], having surrendered himself unto God [musliman].

Since both Judaism and Christianity trace their origin to Abraham, the Qur’an returns to him over and over again and invites Jews and Christians to think of Abraham not within the narrow confines of their respective theologies but in light of what he represents in the history of divine revelations. The Qur’an makes a special note of the disputes among Jews and Christians about Abraham: “O People of the Book! Why do you argue about Abraham, seeing that the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed till [long] after him? Will you not, then, use your reason?” (al-i ‘Imran 3:65). Abraham, whom “God has taken as a sincere friend (al-Nisa 4:125), is the “forefather” (*abikum*) (al-Hajj 22:78) of monotheism and, thus, cannot be appropriated by a particular religion or community. His mission is universal as his legacy: “Behold, the people who have the best claim to Abraham are surely those who follow him - as does this Prophet and all who believe [in him] - and God is near unto the believers” (al-i ‘Imran 3:68). The Qur’an goes even further and describes all prophets after Abraham as neither Jew nor Christian: “Do you claim that Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants were ‘Jews’ or

‘Christians?’” Say: “Do you know more than God does? And who could be more wicked than he who suppresses a testimony given to him by God?¹⁸ Yet God is not unmindful of what you do” (al-Baqarah 2:140). According to the Islamic sources, this is a reference to the fact that Judaism and Christianity came into being long after Abraham and other prophets. Their claim to call Abraham Jew or Christian is, therefore, supported neither by scripture nor history.¹⁹

The figure of Abraham is central not only for the universal proclamation of divine unity but also for Muslims as the youngest members of the Abrahamic tradition. In the following verse, Abraham is presented as the “forefather” of all those who believe in one God and follow his “path” (*millah*): “And strive hard in God’s cause with all the striving that is due to Him: it is He who has elected you [to carry His message], and has laid no hardship on you in [anything that pertains to] religion, [and made you follow] the path [*millah*] of your forefather Abraham. It is He who has named you in bygone times as well as in this [divine writ] - “those who have surrendered themselves to God” [*al-muslimun*], so that the Messenger might bear witness to the truth before you, and that you might bear witness to it before all mankind. Thus, be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and hold fast unto God.” (al-Hajj 22:78)

This verse establishes an unmistakable link between Abraham and the Prophet of Islam. The Qur’an narrates the story of Abraham to confirm the divinely sanctioned authority of prophet Muhammad as the last messenger. The Prophet’s legitimacy is, thus, underlined by linking him to Abraham. Yet the verse also indicates to the newly established Muslim community where they agree and part ways with the followers of the earlier revelations. On the one hand, Abraham unites all monotheist believers since he is the most important figure on whom Jews, Christians and Muslims can agree. Despite the obvious differences in theological languages and historical narratives, his message of divine unity is essentially the same in the three traditions. On the other hand, Jews and Christians are divided over Abraham, each calling him heir own “forefather.” The Qur’an seeks to overcome this impasse by declaring Abraham neither Jewish nor Christian but *muslim*, i.e., “he who surrenders himself to God.”

This is where the prophet Muhammad joins Abraham, and the Qur’an invites the People of the Book to ‘recognize the continuity between the two. The Prophet of Islam is asked to reassert the essential unity of all revelations but to do so with a sense of

compassion and respect: “Because of this, then, summon [all mankind], and pursue the right course, as thou hast been bidden [by God]; and do not follow their likes and dislikes, but say: ‘I believe in whatever revelation God has bestowed from on high; and I am bidden to bring about equity in your mutual views. God is our Sustainer as well as your Sustainer. To us shall be accounted our deeds, and to you, your deeds. Let there be no contention between us and you: God will bring us all together - for with Him is all journeys’ end.’” (al-Shura 42:15)

While the Qur’an presents Abraham as the unifying father of monotheism and emphasizes the essential unity of the Abrahamic tradition, it also recognizes the multiplicity of “nations and tribes.” As we shall see below, this multiplicity is presented as part of God’s plan to test different communities in their effort to attain goodness. Yet the tension between the unity of the divine message and the plurality of different communities remains as an issue taken up by the later scholars of Islam. Whether the plurality of human communities is a natural state to be accepted or a state of disorder and confusion to be overcome would occupy the Islamic religious thought up to our day. Those who see plurality as chaos and detrimental to the unity of the community would reject all lenient measures and argue for radical orthodoxy. The Qur’an and the Sunnah, however, present different possibilities, to which we now turn.

Plurality of Human Communities: A Paradox for Religions?

According to the Qur’an, each prophet has been sent to a particular community with a particular language while the essence of that message is the same.²⁰ The Qur’an accepts the multiplicity of human communities as part of God’s creation: “Now had God so willed, He could surely have made them all one single community” (al-Shura 42:8). Multiplicity is presented as contributing to the betterment of human societies whereby different groups, nations, and tribes come to know each other and vie for the common good. “O humans! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another” (al-Hujurat 49:13). Underlying all this diversity is the same message embodied in the figure of Abraham: believing in one God and leading a virtuous life. In addressing the question of plurality, the Qur’an uses the word *ummah* in both the singular and the plural forms. *Ummah* signifies a socio-religious community bound together by a set of common beliefs and principles. Within the pagan context of pre-Islamic Arabia, it is

contrasted with such communal bonds as family, group, tribe, and nation. All of these associations are based on lineages other than what makes different communities an *ummah*. According to Ibn Qayyim, an *ummah* is “a single group [*sinif wahid*] held together by a single goal [*maqsad wahid*].”²¹ The Qur’an says that “all mankind were once but one single community [*ummah wahidah*], and only later did they begin to hold divergent views. And had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from thy Sustainer, all their differences would indeed have been settled [from the outset]” (Yunus 10:19). The essential unity of humankind has been broken because of the inevitable differences that have arisen among people in the long course of history. The Qur’an does not explain what these differences are, but it is not difficult to see that they pertain primarily to the essential matters of religion and faith.²² Prophets have been sent to address these differences and invite their communities back to their original faith in one God: “All mankind were once one single community (*ummah wahidah*)”²³ [Then they began to differ] whereupon God raised up the prophets as heralds of glad tidings and as warners, and through them bestowed revelation from on high, setting forth the truth, so that it might decide between people with regard to all on which they had come to hold divergent views.” (al-Baqarah 2:213)

The plurality of socio-religious communities is accepted as divinely decreed because God has willed to make humanity composed of different “tribes and nations”: “And had thy Sustainer so willed, He could surely have made all mankind one single community [*ummah wahidah*]: but [He willed it otherwise, and so] they continue to hold divergent views” (Hud 11:118). These and similar verses display a constructive ambiguity about the delicate relationship between the plurality of human communities and the differences of opinion about God. It is not clear which comes first and what it implies for the history of religions. Are the differences of opinion a natural result of the existence of different communities or have different communities come about as a result of holding divergent and often conflicting views about God? It is hard to state with any degree of certainty that the Qur’an completely endorses or abhors the plurality of “divergent views” held by different communities.

At any rate, unity is not uniformity and the Qur’an tries to overcome this tension by calling all communities to renew their covenant with God and seek guidance from him. “For, had God so

willed, He could surely, have made you all one single community; however, He lets go astray him that, wills [to go astray], and guides aright him that wills [to be guided]; and you will surely be called to account for all that you ever did” (al-Nahl 16:93). In another context, the “plurality factor” underlies one’s attitude towards other communities. While it is true that God has willed communities to be different, it is also “dear that the goal is to regulate plurality in such a way to reach a desirable level of unity. The absence of unity in the sense of religious consensus or social cohesion does not nullify the good deeds of those who believe in God and seek virtue: “Verily [O you who believe in Me,] this community of yours is one single community, since I am the Sustainer of you all: worship, then, Me (alone)! But men have torn their unity wide asunder, [forgetting that] unto Us they all are bound to return. And yet, whoever does [the least] of righteous deeds and is a believer, his endeavour shall not be disowned: for, behold, We shall record it in his favour.” (al-Anbiya 21: 92-94)

That plurality is not a case for disunity is highlighted in the verses that talk about diverse laws and paths given to different communities. There is no doubt that Islam, like all other religions, would like to see a unity of believers built around its main pillars. The exclusivist believer sees anything short of this as an imperfection on the part of the community of believers and even an affront to God. This is where theologies of intolerance arise and lead to sole claims of ownership over religious truth. Oppositional identities based on narrow interpretations of core religious teachings threaten to replace the universal message of faith traditions. Yet to look for perfect unity in a world of multiplicity is to mistake the world for something more than what it is. The following verse sees no contradiction between the oneness of God and the plurality of ways and paths leading up to Him: “Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law [*shir’atan*] and way of life [*minhajan*]. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.” (al-Maidah 5:48)

It is important to note that the word *shir’a(tan)* is derived from the same root as the word *shar’iyyah*. Even though the word *shari’ah* has come to mean Islamic law, it essentially indicates the totality of the moral, spiritual, social, and legal teachings of Islam (or any

religion for that matter). Even if we understand the *shari'ah* as law specific to a religion, the above verse adds the word *minhaj(an)*, implying that the combination of the two gives us a belief system, a code of ethics and a way of life. In this context, each socio-religious community has been given a “clear path in religion to follow.”²⁴ According to Qurtubi, “God has made the Torah for its people, the Gospel for its people and the Qur’an for its people. This is in regards to laws [*shara’i*] and rituals [*ibadat*]. As for the principle of divine unity (*tawhid*), there is no disagreement among them.”²⁵ He then quotes Mujahid as saying that “the law [*shari’ah*] and the way of life [*minhaj*] are the religion of Muhammad; everything else has been abrogated.” According to Ibn Kathir, God has certainly sent different paths and “traditions” [*sunan*] for people to follow but all of them have been abrogated after the coming of Islam.²⁶ While this is invariably the position of the most of the classical Islamic scholars and can be seen as a clear case of theological exclusivism, it does not appear to have invalidated the policies of tolerance and accommodation towards other religions and particularly the People of the Book.

This is borne out by the fact that the treatment of the plurality of human communities in the Qur’an is not merely general or abstract. The Qur’an is deeply conscious of the presence of Jews and Christians in Mecca and Medina and sees them closer to Muslims than other communities. It is this historical and theological proximity that creates a sense of theological rivalry as to who is best entitled to the legacy of Abraham. A large number of verses talk about specific Jewish and Christian objections against the new ‘revelation and the prophet Muhammad. Even though they focus on specific arguments, they provide general guidelines about Islam’s attitude towards the People of the Book. And they display both inclusivist and exclusivist tones. They contain elements of inclusivism because Islam relates itself to Judaism and Christianity through the figure of Abraham, the story of Noah, the story of creation, and the stories of Solomon, Joseph, Moses, Mary, Jesus, and other prophets who are common to the Bible and the Qur’an. The moral and eschatological teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam can also be included in this category of teachings. The focal point of such verses is the recognition of the truth of the new religion and its prophet by acknowledging their common lineage that goes back to Abraham. Instead of rejecting in toto the earlier revelations and the religious communities that subscribe to them, the Qur’an invites them to

agree and eventually unite on the fundamental principles of the Abrahamic tradition.

Besides specific theological arguments that contain elements of inclusivism, it should also be mentioned that Islam did not have to quarrel with the People of the Book in the way Christianity did with Judaism. Since Islam was neither the fulfilment of a Judaic or Christian prophecy nor was the prophet Muhammad the messiah, Muslims did not have to contest Jews or Christians on issues specific to the theological traditions of these two communities. Furthermore, there was no ground for a blood libel between Islam on the one hand and Judaism and Christianity on the other. Even though Islam quarrelled with these two religions on many theological issues, it started out with recognizing and accepting their existence. Since Islam was ethnically diverse and culturally plural from the very beginning, it did not have any reason to oppose or defame Jews on account of their ethnic identity. In short, Islam did not need to establish itself at the expense of its Judaic or Christian predecessors. This explains to a large extent why there was no demonization of Jews or Christians by Muslims despite the rich literature of intense polemics, bitter arguments, and counterarguments.

Yet, despite the legal and socio-political factors that have facilitated the policies of tolerance towards the People of the Book, the Qur'an also contains elements of exclusivism, for it calls itself with a specific name, *Islam*, and invites its followers to be *Muslims*. No religion can be entirely inclusivist because this would destroy the spiritual integrity of any tradition. In this sense, Islam could not have called itself simply the *religion of Abraham*; if had to distinguish itself from the other contenders in a way that would give its followers a non-ambiguous sense of allegiance and integrity. This has not prevented to the Qur'an from approaching the People of the Book with differing degrees of critical engagement while calling upon them to understand the essential meaning of religious faith.

The plurality of socio-religious communities is accepted as divinely decreed because God has willed make humanity composed of different "tribes and nations".

A good example of this is the treatment of non-Islamic rituals in the Qur'an. Putting aside the polytheistic rituals of the pagan Arabs, which Islam rejects unequivocally, the Qur'an discusses a number of ancient ritual practices and asks what purpose they are meant to serve. In its anthropological analyses of rituals, the Qur'an draws attention to their fundamental meaning and invites non-

Muslims to look for what is essential in the Muslim rituals.

I will pick up two examples to illustrate this point. The first example is from the Meccan polytheists. To show that true piety is not to perform blindly certain rituals but to seek proximity to God, the Qur'an refers to the Meccan custom of "entering houses from the rear." The Meccans used to dig up holes and stay in them during the time of pilgrimage. As part of the customary ritual, they also used to enter their houses from the backdoors.

When the Meccans asked the prophet Muhammad about the significance of the "new moons" and the time of pilgrimage, he was told to give the following answer: "They will ask thee about the new moons. Say: 'They indicate the periods for [various doings of] mankind, including the pilgrimage (al-Baqarah 2:189). While this answer addresses the specific question about the "new moons" (*ahillab*), it shifts the focus from a specific ritual to the general question of what constitutes piety and God-consciousness (*al-taqwa*), which is the essence of all rituals. The remainder of the verse refers both to a specific ritual during pilgrimage and to the larger meaning of an act deemed to be pious: "However, piety [*al-birr*] does not consist in your entering houses from the rear [as it were] but truly pious is he who is conscious of God. Hence enter houses through their doors, and remain conscious of God, so that you might attain to a happy state" (al-Baqarah 2:189). The verse disapproves of the act of "entering houses from the rear" yet gives no specific reason for it. But it also uses a metaphorical language, for the expression "enter(ing) houses through their doors" has the meaning of doing something properly. *al-Birr*, thus, points to the spiritual meaning of ritual acts and invites the Meccan polytheists as well as the People of the Book to go beyond the narrow perspectives of their respective traditions. The second example is related to facing the Ka'ba as the direction of prayers. In the early years of the revelation, the prophet Muhammad had instructed Muslims to pray towards Jerusalem while facing the Ka'ba at the same time.²⁷ While this had certainly gained the favour of the Jews of Mecca and Medina especially against the Christians, it has also led them to boast of the fact that Muslims were facing *their qiblah*. This seems to have caused some concern for the Prophet leading him to pray to God for a new direction of prayer for Muslims: "We have seen thee [O Prophet] often turn thy face towards heaven [for guidance]: and now We shall indeed make thee turn in prayer in a direction which will fulfil thy desire. Turn, then, thy face towards the Inviolable House of Worship [*masjid al-haram*]; and wherever

you all may be, turn your faces towards it [in prayer]" (al-Baqarah 2:144).

This change was probably expected because, according to the Qur'an (al-i 'Imran 3:96), the Ka'ba is the first sanctuary devoted to the worship of God to which Abraham (and his sons) turned (al-Baqarah 2:125-29).²⁸ The incident appears to have caused a rift between Muslims and certain members of the Jewish and Christian communities in Medina. The Qur'an accuses them of not being sincere in their hardened positions: "And, verily, those who have been given the book aforetime know well that this [commandment] comes in truth from their Sustainer, and God is not unaware of what they do" (al-Baqarah 2:144). The People of the Book are expected to welcome such a change because they know the meaning of praying towards a certain direction: "They unto whom We have given the book aforetime know it as they know their own children: but, behold, some of them knowingly suppress the truth" (al-Baqarah `2:146). The prophet Muhammad is asked to endure any criticism or ridicule that may come from the Arabian Jews and Christians. He is also advised to distinguish his *qibla* from theirs and accept it *as a fact*: "... even if thou were to place all evidence before those who have been given the book, they would not follow thy direction of prayer [*qiblah*], and neither mayest thou follow their direction of prayer [*qiblah*], nor even do they follow one another's direction. And if thou shouldst follow their errant views after all the knowledge that has come unto thee, thou wouldst surely be among the evildoers." (al-Baqarah 2:145)

The Qur'an addresses the *qibla* incident to give assurances to the Muslim community in Medina on the one hand and draw attention to the futility of taking rituals to be an absolute indicator of piety on the other. Against religious sectarianism, God asks all believers to put aside their petty differences: "... every community faces a direction of its own, of which He is the focal point."²⁹ Vie, therefore, with one another in doing good works. Wherever you may be, God will gather you all unto Himself: for, verily, God has the power to will anything" (al-Baqarah 2:148). The expression "every community faces a direction of its own" gives a similar meaning stated in al-Maidah 5:48, quoted above. Just as Muslims accept the *qiblah* of Jews and Christians, they also should recognize the Muslim *qiblah* as valid for turning towards God during ritual prayers. The Qur'an chastises those who ridicule the Prophet of Islam for turning towards Ka'ba after praying towards Jerusalem: "The weak-minded [or the foolish, *sufaha*] among people will say 'What has turned them away from the direction of prayer which

they have hitherto observed?’ Say: ‘God’s is the east and the west; He guides whom He wills onto a straight way (al-Baqarah 2:142-43).

In these and other verses, the Qur’an warns against the danger of causing friction on the basis of differences in ritual acts. While this is an attempt to safeguard the newly established Muslim community against the accusations of the Jews and Christians of Medina, it is also a call for transcending religious and sectarian differences. The following verse makes a strong point about this: “True piety [*al-birr*] does not consist in turning your faces towards the east or the west. But truly pious is he who believes in God, and the Last Day; and the angels, and revelation, and the prophets; and spends his substance - however much he himself may cherish it - upon his near of kin, and the orphans, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and the beggars, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage; and is constant in prayer, and renders the purifying dues; and [truly pious are] they who keep their promises whenever they promise, and are patient in misfortune and hardship and in time of peril: it is they that have proved themselves true, and it is they, they who are conscious of God.” (al-Baqarah 2:177)

The word *al-birr*, translated as virtue and righteousness, signifies a virtuous act conducted with the fear and consciousness of God. The person who has the *birr* is the person who is in constant vigilance and mindfulness of God.³⁰ The Qur’an defines true piety as having full consciousness of God, believing in his books and prophets, and doing such virtuous acts as praying, almsgiving, and helping the poor and the needy.³¹ Virtue requires constant vigilance, and the believers are not excepted: “[But as for you, O believers] never shall you attain to true piety [*al-birr*] unless you spend out of what you cherish yourselves; and whatever you spend, verily God has full knowledge thereof” (al-i ‘Imran 3:92). The People of the Book are also reminded: “Do you enjoin other people to be pious while you forget your own-self; and yet you recite the Book [*al-kitab*]” (al-Baqarah 2:44).

In addressing specific rituals, the Qur’an does not belittle their significance but points to what is essential in them. As later Muslim scholars and especially the Sufis would elaborate, this generic rule holds true for all ritual practices. The Qur’an insists that true piety and goodness (*al-birr*) are the ultimate goal of religious acts and that all communities should seek to attain it. Furthermore, vying for piety and goodness is a solid basis for an ethics of co-existence: “...help one another in furthering virtue [*al-birr*] and God

consciousness, and do not . help one another in furthering evil and enmity” (al-Mai’dah 5:2).

Religious Tolerance and the People of the Book

There are no other two religions on which the Qur’an spends as much time as on Judaism and Christianity. Given Islam’s claim to be the last revelation and completion of the Abrahamic tradition, this should come as no surprise. A large number of verses speak about various Jewish and Christian themes. These Qur’anic conversations concentrate, among others, on three issues. The first is the disputes among Jews and Christians about issues such as Abraham, revelation, salvation, and the hereafter. Some verses describe these disputes as futile, selfish, and ignorant (al-Baqarah 2:111), referring, at the same time, to the stiff opposition of Jewish and Christian leaders to the prophet Muhammad. The second is the political alliances which the Jews and some Christians of Medina had formed with the Meccan polytheists against the newly established Muslim community. The most severe statements in the Qur’an and the Hadith collections against the Jews pertain to this historical fact. The only incident in the history of Islam where a particular group of Jews has been ordered to be killed is related to the violation of a treaty of political alliance between certain Jewish tribes and Muslims in Medina. The third issue is the recognition of the validity of the new revelation and the prophet Muhammad, which remains a difficult issue for Christians up to our own day. The Qur’an brings up the disputes between Jews and Christians to indicate to them that while claiming to be heirs to the legacy of Abraham, they are engaged in destructive quarrels and petty fights. With such bitter disunity and bickering, they cannot be proper models of what Abraham stood for. The Qur’an seems to imply that the intractable opposition of Jews and Christians of Madina to the prophet Muhammad is similar to their internal disputes and thus cannot serve as a basis for a serious dialogue: “Furthermore, the Jews assert, “The Christians have no valid ground for their beliefs,” while the Christians assert, “The Jews have no valid ground for their beliefs” and both quote the Book! Even thus, like unto what they say, have [always] spoken those who were devoid of knowledge; but it is God who will judge between them on Resurrection Day with regard to all on which they were wont to differ.” (al-Baqarah 2:113)

Following this line of argumentation, the Qur’an addresses Jews and Christians directly because they are different and more special from the polytheists, Magians, or Zoroastrians. In some cases, they are described as behaving worse than the disbelievers of Mecca. It is

usually these verses that Muslim exclusivists take up as a basis for classifying the People of the Book together with the Meccan polytheists. The Qur'an, however, does not fail to make a distinction between those who have completely turned against God and those whose hearts are filled with reverence for God among Jews and Christians. There is also a distinction between those who have betrayed the Prophet and his community and those who have honoured their promises. The following verse, for instance, is extremely harsh on the People of the Book: "Overshadowed by ignominy are they wherever they may be, save [when they bind themselves again] in a bond with God and a bond with men; for they have earned the burden of God's condemnation, and are overshadowed by humiliation: all this [has befallen *or* them] because they persisted in denying the truth of God's messages and in slaying the prophets against all right: all this, because they rebelled [against God], and persisted in transgressing the bounds of what is right." (al-i 'Imran 3:112)

True piety [al-birr] does not consist in turning your faces towards the east or the west. But truly pious is he who believes in God, and the Last Day; and the angels, and revelation, and the prophets.

This is followed by another verse which reflects the careful discernment of the Qur'an regarding the People-of the Book: "[But] they are not all alike: among the People of the Book are upright people [*ummah*], who recite God's messages throughout the night, and prostrate themselves [before Him]. They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and vie with one another in doing good works: and these are among the righteous. And whatever good they do, they shall never be denied the reward thereof: for, God has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him." (al-i 'Imran 3: 113–15)

While the classical commentators usually read this verse as referring to Jews and Christians who converted to Islam, there is no compelling reason that we should accept it as abrogated (*mansukh*). In fact, it would not make sense to call them the People of the Book if they had already converted to Islam. Such subtle distinctions are not hard to find in the Qur'an. Yet in al-Maidah 5: 82:84, we find a clear favouring of Christians over Jews: "Thou wilt surely find that, of all people, the most hostile to those who believe [in this divine writ] are the Jews as well as those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught beside God; and thou wilt surely find that, of all people, they who say "Behold, we are Christians" come closest to feeling affection for those who believe

[in this divine writ]: this is so because there are priests and monks among Them, and because these are not given to arrogance. For, when they come to understand what has been bestowed from on high upon this Apostle, thou canst see their eyes overflow with tears, because they recognize something of its truth;³² [and] they say: “O our Sustainer! We do believe; make us one, then, with all who bear witness to the truth. And how could we fail to believe in God and in whatever truth has come unto us, when we so fervently desire that our Sustainer count us among the righteous?” (al-Ma’idah 5:82–84)

Even though the Qur’an harsh treatment of Jewish tribes in Medina has not been lost to the Prophet and his followers, it has not led to an anti-Semitic literature in the Islamic tradition.

The “closeness” to which the verse refers is a reference to both the social and political proximity which the Christian communities of the period felt towards Muslims. The famous expedition of a group of companions of the Prophet to the Christian king of Abyssinia and the warm welcome they had received can also be seen as a factor in this clearly favourable description of Christians. As a number of early Muslim historians have noted, Muslims were hoping for the eventual success of the Byzantine Empire over the Persians because the former were Christian.³³ Furthermore, the Christians of Medina had remained loyal to the Medinan Treaty against the Meccans, thus gaining the favour and affinity of Muslims. Commenting on the verse above, Ibn Qayyim quotes al-Zujjaj as saying that Christians are praised for they have been “less inclined towards the Meccans than the Jews.”³⁴

The harsh assessment of the Jews is, thus, a response to the political alliance of the Jews of Medina with the Meccan polytheists and in violation of the Medinan Treaty to which we referred above. According to the treaty, the Jewish tribes in Medina and Muslims had agreed to defend each other against aggressors, i.e., the Meccans. It is clear that the prophet Muhammad was concerned to secure a strong political alliance with the Jews and Christians of Medina against the Meccans. While the Christians remained mostly loyal to the agreement and did not fight or plot against Muslims, the Meccans were able to get some prominent Jewish leaders on their side in their military campaigns against Muslims.³⁵ Those who violated the treaty and thus betrayed the Muslim community included not only Jews but also those whom the Qur’an calls the “hypocrites” (*al-munafiqun*). The Qur’an uses an extremely harsh language against them because they claim to be part of the Muslim community while forming alliances with the Meccan polytheists.

The Qur'an is so stern on this point that the prophet Muhammad is banned from praying for their soul.

Even though the Qur'an's harsh treatment of Jewish tribes in Medina has not been lost to the Prophet and his followers, it has not led to an anti-Semitic literature in the Islamic tradition. Since the Jewish communities, unlike Christianity, did not pose a political threat that had, at least by association, the backing of the Byzantine Empire, they were hardly part of political conflicts in later centuries. For both political and theological reasons, the great majority of Muslim polemical works in the medieval period have been directed against Christianity more than Judaism.³⁶ The socio-political and economic structure of Muslim societies has been conducive to a largely successful integration of Jewish communities. As I mentioned above, the Jewish merchants were never ostracized for their profession or prevented from practicing it because the economic system of Muslim societies allowed greater flexibility for international trade and finance. Furthermore, the Jews in the Near East where Muslims came to rule were the indigenous communities of the area, not immigrants as they were in Western Christendom. This has given them a right of property and communal freedom that we do not see in Europe. In fact, this can be compared only to the position of Hindus after India came under Muslim rule. Finally, the ethnic composition of Muslim societies was so diverse that the Jewish communities did not have to stand out as different or "strange."

Even though the Qur'an approaches Christians more favourably than Jews, it does not shy away from criticizing them for introducing a number of "inventions" or "corruption" (*tabrij*) into their religion. As mentioned before, there are many such criticisms the most important of which concern the nature of Jesus Christ and the Christian claim that he was the son of God. This is not the place to go into a discussion of the place of Jesus in Islam. It suffices to say, however, that the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition reject (compare al-Nisa 4:171-73 and al-Ma'idah 5:72-77) the divinity of Jesus as formulated by the later Christian doctrine. Besides theology, one specific practice for which the Qur'an criticizes the Christians is "monasticism" (*rahbaniyyah*). Christians are praised for their fear and veneration of God but criticized for going to the extreme of inventing a monastic life not enjoined by God: "And thereupon We caused [other of] Our apostles to follow in their footsteps; and [in the course of time] We caused them to be followed by Jesus, the son of Mary, upon whom We bestowed the Gospel; and in the hearts of those who [truly] followed him We engendered compassion and

mercy. But as for monasticism [*rabbaniyyah*]; We did not enjoin it upon them: they invented it themselves out of a desire for God's goodly acceptance. But then, they did not [always] observe it as it ought to have been observed: and so We granted their recompense unto such of them as had [truly] attained to faith, whereas many of them became iniquitous." (al-Hadid 57:27)

The underlying principle behind the attitudes of accommodation is that the overall interests of human beings are served better in Peace than in conflict.

The classical commentators interpret this verse as pointing to the harsh conditions of early Christians to protect themselves against the persecutions of the Roman rulers. Monasticism (and celibacy, we should add) could be seen as a temporary solution in times of extreme measures but cannot be a general rule for attaining piety because religions are meant to save not just the elect but everyone. It is also important to note that the mainstream Islamic tradition does not posit *any* intermediaries between God and the ordinary believer. There is no need for a monastic institution to train spiritual leaders to provide religious guidance for the average person. The commentators, thus, take this opportunity to stress that Islam has come to establish a balance (*wasatab*) between worldly indulgence and extreme asceticism. This point is reiterated in the following verse: "And ordain Thou for us what is good in this world as well as in the life to come: behold, unto Thee have we turned in repentance!" [God] answered: "With My chastisement do I afflict whom I will - but My grace overspreads everything: and so I shall confer it on those who are conscious of Me and spend in charity, and who believe in Our messages those who shall follow the [last] Apostle, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them, and [later on] in the Gospel: [the Prophet] who will enjoin upon them the doing of what is right and forbid them the doing of what is wrong, and make lawful to them the good things of life and forbid them the bad things, and lift from them their burdens and the shackles that were upon them [aforetime]. Those, therefore, who shall believe in him, and honour him, and succour him, and follow the light that has been bestowed from on high through him-it is they that shall attain to a happy state." (al-A'raf 7:156-57)

While Jews and Christians are usually thought to be the People of the Book, the Qur'an also mentions several other communities as part of the non-Islamic religious traditions under protection. The mention of "Sabians" in the following shows that the concept of

the People of the Book was set to be flexible and ever-expanding from the very beginning: “Verily, those who have attained to faith, as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians³⁷; all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve” (al-Baqarah 2:62).³⁸ It is important to note that the status of “no fear” mentioned in the above verse legally refers to the protection of the People of the Book as part of ahl *al-dhimmah*. While the *dhimmi* status was initially given to Jews, Christians, Sabians, and Zoroastrians, its scope was later extended to include all non-Muslims living under Islam especially in the subcontinent of India.³⁹ This is exactly what happened in India when Muhammad b. al-Qasim, the first Muslim commander to set foot on Indian soil in the eighth century, compared Hindus to Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians and declared them as part of the *ahl al-dhimmah*⁴⁰ This decision, which was later sanctioned by the Hanafi jurists, was a momentous event in the development of the Muslim attitude towards the religions of India.

That the People of the Book were accorded a special status is not only attested by the various Qur’anic verses but also recorded in a number of treatises signed by the prophet Muhammad after his migration to Medina in 622. The “Medinan Treatise” (*sahifat al-madina*), also called the “Medinan Constitution,” recognizes the Jews of Banu ‘Awf, Banu al-Najar, Banu Tha’laba, Banu Harith, and other Jewish tribes as distinct communities: “The Jews of Banu ‘Awf are a community [*ummah*] together with Muslims; they have their own religion, properties and lives, and Muslims their own except those who commit injustice and wrongdoing; and they only harm themselves.”⁴¹ Another treatise signed with the People of the Book of Najran reads as follows: “They [People of the Book] shall have the protection of Allah and the promise of Muhammad, the Apostle of Allah, that they shall be secured their lives, property, lands, creed, those absent and those present, their families, their churches, and all that they possess. No bishop or monk shall be displaced from his parish or monastery no priest shall be forced to abandon his priestly life. No hardships or humiliation shall be imposed on them nor shall their land be occupied by [our] army. Those who seek justice, shall have it: there will be no oppressors nor oppressed.”⁴² ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph of Islam, has given a similar safeguard (*aman*) to the people of Jerusalem when he took the city in 623: “In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate! This is the safeguard granted to the inhabitants

of ‘Alia [Jerusalem] by the servant of God, ‘Umar, commander of the faithful. They are given protection of their persons, their churches, their crosses - whether these are in good state or not - and their cult in general. No constraints will be exercised against them in the matter of religion and no harm will be done to any of them. The inhabitants of ‘Alia will have to pay the *jizya* in the same way as the inhabitants of other towns. It rests with them to expel the Byzantines and robbers from their city. Those among them the latter who wish to remain there will be permitted on condition that they pay the same *jizya* as the inhabitants of ‘Alia.”⁴³

The poll tax called *jizya* was imposed on *ahl al-dhimma* as compensation for their protection as well as for their exemption from compulsory military service. Contrary to a common belief, the primary goal of *jizya* was not the “humiliation” of the People of the Book. While most contemporary translations of the Qur’an render the words *wa hum al-saghirun* (al-Tawbah 9: 29) as “so that they will be humiliated,” Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, who has written the most extensive work on the People of the Book, reads it as securing- the allegiance of the People of the Book to laws pertaining to them. According to Ibn Qayyim, *wa hum al-saghirun* means *of in-* making all subjects of the state obey the law and, in the - case of the People of the Book, pay the *jizya*.⁴⁴ Despite Ibn Qayyim’s relatively lenient position, his teacher, the famous Hanbali scholar Ihan Taymiyya, takes a hard position against non- Muslims and calls for their conversion or submission.⁴⁵ Yet, Abu Yusuf, the student of Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Hanafi school of law, advises the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid (d. 803) to “treat with leniency those under the protection of our Prophet Muhammad, and not allow that more than what is due to be taken from them or more that they are able to pay, and that nothing should be confiscated from their properties without legal justification.”⁴⁶ To substantiate his case, Abu Yusuf narrates a tradition in which the Prophet says that “he who robs a *dhimmi* or imposes on him more than he can bear will have me as his opponent.” Another well-known case is the Prophet’s ordering of the execution of a Muslim who had killed a *dhimmi*. In response to the incident, the Prophet has said that “it is most appropriate that I live up fully to my (promise of) protection.”⁴⁷

(While we can find divergent policies of tolerance and intolerance in’ the Islamic and intolerance in’ the Islamic religious tradition and social history, the contemporary Muslim world has to confront the Challenge of religious pluralism in a way that would

avoid the extremes of in tolerant exclusivism on the one hand and a root less pluralism at the expense of all orthodoxy on the other)

While these examples show the complexities of Islamic history, the underlying principle behind the attitudes of accommodation is that the overall interests of human beings are served better in peace than in conflict.⁴⁸ In dealing with the People of the Book, the prophet Muhammad is instructed to take a special care: “Hence, judge between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high” (al-Mai’dah 5:49). Yet he is also warned against the temptation of compromising his mission in order to gain their favour: “And do not follow their errant views; and beware of them, lest they tempt thee away from aught that God has bestowed from on high upon thee. And if they turn away [from His commandments], then know that it is but God’s will [thus] to afflict them for some of their sins: for, behold, a great many people are iniquitous indeed” (al- Ma’idah 5:49). None of these measures would have made sense had they not been complemented by a clear rule about the problem of conversion. It is one thing to say that people are free to choose their religion, but it is another thing to set in place a legal and social system where the principle of religious freedom is applied with relative ease and success. This is what al-Baqarah 2: 256 establishes with its proclamation that “there is no compulsion in religion.” The verse and the way it states the principle are crucial for understanding the policies of conversion that have developed in early and later Islamic history. Both the overall attitude of the Qur’an and the Prophet toward non-Muslims and the legal injunctions regarding the People of the Book stipulate against forced conversion. Furthermore, the Arabic command form *la ikraha* can be read not only as “there is no compulsion” but also as “there should be no compulsion.” The subtle difference between the two is that, while the former implies that the proofs and foundations of Islam are clear and therefore the non-believer should accept its truth without difficulty, the latter states that no non- Muslim can be forced to convert even if the proofs are clear to him or her. Like Christianity, Islam encourages its followers to spread the word and argue with peoples of other faiths “in the best possible way” so that they understand and, it is hoped, embrace the message of Islam. This leads us to yet another tension in Islam between claims to universality and policies of protection and accommodation. Furthermore, some later jurists have claimed that Baqarah 256 has been abrogated by other verses after the conquest of Mecca.⁴⁹ According to Qurtubi, Sulayman ibn Musa has defended this argument because “the Prophet of Islam has forced

the pagan Arabs into Islam, fought them and refused to accept from them anything but professing the Islamic faith.”⁵⁰ The second view is that the verse has not been abrogated because it has been sent specifically for the People of the Book. This interpretation is supported by the famous incident, for which Baqarah 256 has been revealed, when Bani Salim b. ‘Afw, one of the companions of the Prophet from Medina, had forced his Christian sons to accept Islam.⁵¹ According to Ibn Kathir, the verse is a command “not to force anyone to enter the religion of Islam because it is clear and evident.”⁵² Another incident cited by Qurtubi involves Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph of Islam, who asks an old Christian woman to embrace Islam. The old lady responds by saying that “I am an old lady and death is nearing me.” Upon this answer, Umar reads the verse Baqarah 256 and leaves her.⁵³

Fakh al-Din al-Razi opposes compulsion of any kind on intellectual grounds. According to him, not just the People of the Book but no one should be forced to believe because “God has not built faith upon compulsion and pressure but on acceptance and free choice.” Even though al-Razi considers this “free will defence” to be the position of the Mutazilites, to whom he is always opposed, he rejects al-Qifal’s argument that, since all of the proofs of the true religion have been made clear to the disbeliever, he may be forced to accept it. For al-Razi, compulsion in matters of faith annuls the principle of free will (*taklif*) and goes against God’s plan to try people.⁵⁴

The last point I will take up here concerns the verse al-Ma’idah 5:51, which has led many Western students of Islam to claim that the Qur’an advises Muslims against developing friendly relationships with Jews and Christians. The verse reads as follows: “O you who have attained to faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your *awliya*: they are but *awliya*’ of one another. Whoever among you takes them as his *wall* is one of them.” The word *awliya*’ is the plural of *wall*, which is rendered in most of the English translations of the Qur’an as “friend.” According to this interpretation, the verse reads as “do not take Jews and Christians as friends.” Even though the word *wall* means friend in the ordinary sense of the term, in this context, it has the meaning of protector, legal guardian, and ally. This rendering is confirmed by al-Tabari’s explanation that the verse 5:51 was revealed during one of the battles (the battle of Badr in 624 or Uhud in 625) that the Muslims in Medina had fought against the Meccans. Under the circumstances of a military campaign, the verse advises the new Muslim community not to form political alliances with non-

Muslims if they violate the terms of a treaty they had signed with them.⁵⁵ It is important to note that Muslims, Jews, or Christians to whom the verse refers represent not only religious but also socio-political communities. The meaning of “ally” or “legal guardian” for *wali/awliya*’ makes sense especially in view of Ibn Qayyim’s explanation that “whoever forms an alliance with them through a treaty [*‘and*] is with them in violating the agreement.”⁵⁶

Relations with Non-Muslims

The Islamic code of ethics for the treatment of non-Muslims follows the overall principles discussed so far. As far as the Islamic attitude towards Judaism and Christianity is concerned, there is a delicate balance between treating them with respect and refusing to compromise the essential features of the Abrahamic tradition. Among the non-Muslim communities, the only exception is the Meccan polytheists, which Islam rejects *in toto*. The “sword verses” of the Qur’an that aim at the Meccans are misinterpreted as a declaration of war on all non-Muslims. The fact is that the Qur’an calls upon Muslims to take up arms against the Meccans and explains the reasons in nonambiguous terms:

And fight in God’s cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression - for, verily, God does not love aggressors. And slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away - for oppression [*fitnah*]⁵⁷ is even worse than killing. And fight not against them near the Inviolable House of Worship unless they fight against you there first; but if they fight against you, slay them: such shall be the recompense of those who deny the truth. But if they desist - behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. Hence, fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is devoted to God alone; but if they desist, then all hostility shall cease, save against those who [wilfully] do wrong. (al-Baqarah 2:190–93)

According to Ibn Hisham, there are primarily two reasons for Islam’s extremely hostile attitude towards the Meccan pagans. The first is the impossibility of reconciling paganism and polytheism with the central Islamic doctrine of divine unity (*tawhid*). Numerous Qur’ānic verses and prophetic traditions describe the ignorance and arrogance of Meccan polytheists in vivid detail. Their lack of respect for God (‘ and human dignity and such social evils as slavery, infanticide (compare al-Mumtahinah 60:12; al-Takwir 81:8-9), and tribal racism are results of their fundamental theological error: taking partners unto God (*shirk*). The second reason, which Ibn Hisham emphasizes more than the first, is their

total denial of the messenger, of God and the political plots they created to destroy the new Muslim community. Early Islamic history is filled with incidents of the inhuman treatment of Muhammad and his followers. That the Meccans tried to kill the Prophet of Islam has only added to the sense of outrage and hostility towards them.⁵⁸ Abu Hanifah and others have pointed out that the only community that will not receive mercy on the day of judgment are the Meccan polytheists to whom the last Prophet has been sent. According to the majority of the classical commentators, the famous “slay them ...” verse refers exclusively to pagan Arabs who fought against the Prophet and his followers.⁵⁹ While military combat is not completely ruled out but kept as a last resort, war, when it becomes inevitable, has to be conducted under certain restrictions.⁶⁰

That the verses of war are specifically for those who have declared war against Muslims is also confirmed by the verses al-Mumtahinah 60:8-9. It is important to note that the chapter cites two main reasons for taking up arms against the Meccan polytheists: suppression of faith and expulsion from homeland.⁶¹ Both actions were taken against the early Muslim community in Mecca and later in Madina. Muslims are ordered not to take the Meccans as allies or protectors (*allies*) and show them any “kindness”: O you who have attained to faith! Do not take My enemies - who are your enemies as well - for your allies, showing them affection even though they are bent on denying whatever truth has come unto you, [and even though] they have driven the Apostle and yourselves away, [only] because you believe in God, your Sustainer! If [it be true that] you have gone forth [from your homes] to strive [*jihad*] in My cause, and out of a longing for My goodly acceptance, [do not take them for your friends,] inclining towards them in secret affection: for I am fully aware of all that you may conceal as well as of all that you do openly. And any of you who does this has already strayed from the right path. (al-Mumtahinah 60:1)

The verses bring up the example of Abraham who had a similar experience with his community. Abraham is mentioned to have prayed for his father: “I shall indeed pray for [God’s] forgiveness for thee, although I have it not in my power to obtain anything from God in thy behalf”(al-Mumtahinah 60:4). This reminder was presumably meant to give moral support to the first Muslims who were persecuted and expelled from their homeland. In fact, the verses draw attention to the weakness of some among them for their

desire to approach the Meccans to protect their children and relatives who were still in Mecca. Yet the Qur'an also warns that the enmity in which they find themselves is not unconditional: "[But] it may well be that God will bring about [mutual] affection between you [O believers] and some of those whom you [now] face as enemies: for, God is all-powerful and God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace" (al-Mumtahinah 60:7). These provisions and examples are summed up in the following verse, which lays the ground rules for dealing with non-Muslims in times of war and peace:

As for such [of the unbelievers] as do not fight against you on account of [your] faith [*al-din*], and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably. God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards such as fight against you because of [your] faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid [others] in driving you forth: and as for those [from among you] who turn towards them in friendship; it is they, they who are truly wrongdoers! (al-Mumtahinah 60:8-9)

According to Ibn al-Qayyim, the verse "permits [*rukahsab*] to have good relations with those who have not declared war against Muslims and allows kindness towards them even though they may not be allies."⁶² Al-Tabari interprets the verse along similar lines: "The most credible view is that the verse refers to people of all kinds of creeds and religions who should be shown kindness and treated equitably. God referred to all those who do not fight the Muslims or drive them from their homes without exception or qualification."⁶³ In granting permission to Muslims to fight against the Meccans, the Qur'an stresses that the kind of fight Muslims are allowed to engage is not only for themselves but for all those who believe in God:

Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged and, verily, God has indeed the power to succour them - those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, "Our Sustainer is God!" For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques - in [all of] which God's name is abundantly extolled - would surely have been destroyed [ere now]. (al-Hajj) 22: 39-40)

Thus, putting aside the Arab pagans during the time of the Prophet, the Qur'an proposes a number of lenient measures for the treatment of the People of the Book and other non-Muslim communities. One verse states this as follows: "Call thou [all mankind] unto thy Sustainer's path with wisdom and goodly

exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner” (al-Nahl 16:125). The Jews and Christians are mentioned specifically as partners of a serious and respectful dialogue:

And do not argue with the People of the Book otherwise than in a most kindly manner - unless it be such of them as are bent on evildoing and say: “We believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you: our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that We [all] surrender ourselves. (al-’Ankabut 29:46)

While we can find divergent policies of tolerance and intolerance in the Islamic religious tradition and social history, the contemporary Muslim world has to confront the challenge of religious pluralism in a way that would avoid the extremes of intolerant exclusivism on the one hand and a rootless pluralism at the expense of all orthodoxy on the other. Reading foundational texts and history be guided by a set of principles would remain true to the spirit the tradition while having enough suppleness to deal with the current challenges. We can cite countless cases from the military conquests of the Ottomans. to the employment of Jewish and Christian professionals in various positions across the Islamic world. We can remind ourselves that Muslim empires have had periods of peace and stability as well as conflict and disorder. There have been many confrontations between Muslim and Christian communities in the Balkans, Asia Minor, or North Africa. There is no doubt that all of these factors have had an impact on the development of the Islamic legal tradition and shaped the framework of socioreligious practices in the Muslim world. The historical and contextual reading of Islamic law is, therefore, indispensable for distinguishing between what the contemporary scholar Taha Jabir Alwani calls the “fiqh of conflict” and the “fiqh of coexistence.”⁶⁴

A case in point is the question of apostasy in Islam. The classical jurists have usually ruled that apostasy in Islam is punishable by death. The Qur’an does not mention any penalty for the apostate but warns of divine punishment on the Day of Judgment (compare al-Baqarah 2:217; al-Ma’idah 5:54). The ruling for death penalty is based on the hadith in which the Prophet says to “kill those who change their religion.” At its face value, this is an extremely harsh statement and goes against the principle of free choice in Islam. The hadith, however, makes perfect sense when we understand the context in which it has been said. The hadith refers to changing one’s political alliance and betraying the Muslim community especially during times of war. This includes taking arms against the Muslim state. That is why the Hanafi jurists have

ruled that women apostates cannot be killed because they are not considered soldiers in the army.⁶⁵ Contemporary Muslim scholars have applied this approach and concluded that the classical rulings on the death penalty for apostasy are based on sociohistorical circumstances and do not apply today.⁶⁶

Based on the textual evidence gathered from the Qur'an and prophetic traditions, we can assert that other religions, and especially Judaism and Christianity, play a significant role in Islam. Islam's self-view as the seal of the Abrahamic tradition links it to the Jewish and Christian faiths in a way that we don't find in relation to any other religion. Much of the interreligious dialogue we find in the sacred sources of Islam is addressed to these religions. Islam acknowledges the plurality of human societies and faith traditions but insists on reaching a common ground between them. As we discussed above, each socio-religious community is recognized as an *ummah*, as potentially legitimate paths to God, but invited to reassert the unity of God and commit themselves to upholding the principles of a virtuous life. Different communities and thus different religious paths exist because God has willed plurality in the world in which we live. This should not be a concern for the believer because the ultimate goal of multiplicity is a noble one: different communities vying for the common good of humanity.

While this is a solid basis for a theology of inclusivism, it does not necessarily lead to moral laxity and social incoherence. Each socio-religious community is bound to have some level of exclusivism theologically, ritually, and socially; otherwise, it would be impossible to maintain the integrity of any religious tradition. Each religious universe must claim to be complete and absolute in itself; otherwise, it cannot fulfil the purpose for which it stands. A genuine culture of tolerance and accommodation is possible only when the principles of respect are observed without compromising the integrity and orthodoxy of a religion. This is in no way far from the infinite mercy that God has written upon himself: "And when those who believe in Our messages come unto thee, say: 'Peace be upon you. Your Sustainer has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy - so that if any of you does a bad deed out of ignorance, and thereafter repents and lives righteously, He shall be [found] much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.'" (al-An'am 6:54)

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Cf. J. Waardenburg, "World Religions as seen in the Light of Islam" in *Islam Past influence and Present Challenge*, eds. A. T. Welch and P. Cachia (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 248-49. See also J. Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003).

² All translations of Qur'anic verses are from Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an*. I have occasionally made some revisions in the translations.

³ As Fakhr al-Din al-Razi points out, the verse refers to some Christians groups that have had veneration for their clergy to the point of worshipping them. Cf. *al-Tafsir al-Kabir* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 2001), 3:252. Qurtubi makes the same point; cf. Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' li'l-Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Riyadh: Dar al-Adab al-Kutub, 2003), 2:106. As I shall discuss below, the Christian tendency to extreme monasticism is criticized in several verses of the Qur'an.

⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 2006), 290. According to Mujahid and al-Suddi, this verse was revealed for al-Harith b. Suwayd, the brother of al-Hulas b. Suwayd, one of the companions of the Prophet. Al-Harith was one of the ansar (Muslims of Medina); then, he left Islam and joined the Meccans. At that time, this verse was revealed. Upon hearing the verse, al-Harith sent a message to his brother and expressed his regret for leaving Islam and joining the Meccans. Cf. Qurtubi, *al-Jami'*, 2:128.

⁵ al-Razi, *Tafsir*, 3:282.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 6:261.

⁷ *Ibid.*, *Tafsir*, 9:617

⁸ In 3:7, the expression *umm al-kitab* refers to the clearly established and nonallegorical verses of the Qur'an (*ayat muhkamat*). This is contrasted to the allegorical ones (*mutashabihat*) which may create confusion and lead some astray: "Those hearts are given to swerving from the truth go after that part of the book [al-kitab] which has been expressed in allegory: seeking out [what is bound to create] confusion, and seek (to arrive at) its final meaning [in an arbitrary manner]; but save God knows its final meaning." When confronted with such a situation, the believers are asked to follow the example of those "who are deeply rooted in knowledge [who] say: We believe in it; the whole [of the divine book] is from our Sustainer, albeit none takes this to heart save those who are endowed insight." Only those whose hearts are pure can comprehend the whole of the Qur'anic verses whether allegorical or not because the Qur'an is ultimately a well-protected book: "Mold, it is a truly

noble discourse [conveyed unto man] well-guarded book [kitab maknun] which none but the pure [of heart can touch” [56:78—79]. Fakhar al-Din al-Razi provides on extensive analysis of these point with his usual precision cf. Tafsir, 3:137-148.

⁹ al-Razi, Tafsir, 10:113.

¹⁰ Cf. Waardenburg, Muslims and Others, 99–101.

¹¹ Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 285.

¹² Tafsir al-Jalalayn (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risalah, 1995), 62.

¹³ Qurtubi, al-Jomii 2:109. cf. also pp. 139–140 where Qurtubi says that “Abraham was called hanif because he turned to the religion of God, which is Islam.”

¹⁴ The Religious Dialogue of Jerusalem, in *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632–900 A.D.)* Translations with Commentary, ed. N. A. Newman (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 285.

¹⁵ Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 1414; Tafsir al-jalalayn, 484.

¹⁶ al-Rani, Tafsir, 9:587.

¹⁷ According to M. Mad, this is “a reference to the Biblical pre-diction of the coming of the Prophet. Muhammad, which effectively contradicts the Judaeo-Christian claim that all true prophets, after the Patriarchs, belonged to the children of Israel.” M. Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an* (Gibraltar: Dar at-Andalus, 1980), 29.

¹⁸ Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 285. This point is reiterated in almost all of the classical commentaries. Cf. Qurtubi, al-Jami’, 2:107 where Qurtubi quotes al-Zujfaj as saying that “this is the clearest proof against Jews and Christians. The Torah and the Gospel were revealed after him (Abraham) and the name of these religions is not mentioned in them. But the name Islam is in all the books.” Fakhr al-Din al-Razi adds that “the religions brought by prophets cannot be different in principles.” Tafsir, 3:254.

¹⁹ This is a theme repeated throughout the Qur’an: “Never have We sent forth any apostle otherwise than [with a message] in his own people’s tongue” (14:4).

²⁰ Cf. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zad at-Masir fi ilm al-tafsir* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Istami, 2002), 1335.

²¹ Ibn Qayyim says that they pertain to “matters of religion”; *Zad al-Masir*, 124.

²² Some early scholars interpret this as referring to Adam alone because he is the first man and the source of all later generations. Others, however, insist that it refers to both Adam and Eve. The underlying idea is that we are all children of Adam and Eve. Cf. Qurtubi, al-Jami’, 2:30.

²³ Tafsir al-Jalalayn, 116.

²⁴ Qurtubi, al-Jami’, 2:211. Cf. al-Razi, Tafsir; 4:373, and Muhammad al-Ghazali, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur’an* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000), 102. See also Ibn Qayyim, *Zad al-Masir*, 388.

²⁵ Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 506.

²⁶ As Fazlur Rahman points out, this was also due to the fact that, while in Mecca, Muslims were not allowed to pray in the Ka’ba. There was no reason for them not to face the Ka’ba when they migrated to Medina. The argument that the change of direction came after the so-called “Jewish-Muslim break out” is, therefore, unsubstantiated. Cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an* (Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1989), 147-48.

²⁷ Ibn Qayyim, *Zad al-Masir* 93.

²⁸ Pickthall translates *wa li-kullin wijhatun huwa muwalliho* as “and each one hath a goal toward which he turneth,” interpreting *huwa* as referring to the person who prays, not God to whom one turns in prayers. Yusuf Ali translates as “to each is a goal to which Allah turns him.” Other translations give different interpretations.. While all these readings are linguistically possible, Asad’s rendering

of huwa as “He”, God seems to be in keeping with the classical commentaries. Tafsir Jailjailalayn renders huwa as his direction in ritual prayer” and “his Master”; cf. p. 23. Cf. Ibn Qayyim, *Zad al-Masir*, 94.

²⁹ The plural *abrar* refers to those who have attained salvation because of their godly acts. See the references in the Qur’an: 3:193, 197, 56:5, 82:13, 83:18, 22.

³⁰ Ibn Qayyim, *Zad al-Masih* 102

³¹ According to Ibn Abbas, the verse is a reference to Najashi, the king of Abyssinia. Cf. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, 521. As a Christian king, Najashi had received a delegation of Muslims from Mecca before the migration of the Prophet to Medina and given them asylum, despite the demands of the Meccans for their deportation. See also Ibn Qayyim, *Zad al-Masir*, 401.

³² Cf. al-Ghazali, *A Thematic Commentary*, 111-12.

³³ Ibn Qayyim, *Zad al-Masir*, 402.

³⁴ Cf. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, 521.

³⁵ Cf. Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others*, 176. This is not to existence of the relatively rich literature of Jewish ‘mical works. Cf. Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm in, 1996* and Moshe Perlmann, “The Medieval Po-tween Islam and Judaism,” in *Religion in gious Age*, ed. Solomon dob Goitein, 103–138 (Cam-; MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974).

³⁶ For a well-informed discussion of these points, see Mark Co-hen, “Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History,” in *Jews among Muslims: Communities in the Pre-colonial Middle East*, eds. Sholomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner, 50–63 (New York New York University Press, 1996).

³⁷ The exegetical tradition has identified the Sabians in various ways. Imam Shaff’i considers them a Christian group. q. Ibn Qayyim, *Ahkam*, 1:92, al-Rani mentions several possibilities: a group from among the Magians; a group that worships angels and prays to the sun; still, a group that worships the stars (a reference to the Sabians of Harran). Cf. al-Razi, *Tafsir*, 1:536. They have also been described as Mandocans, a Baptist sect of Judaeo-Christian origin. The etymology of the word *s-b-* gives the meaning “baptizing.” Cf. “Sabra,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), VIII, 675a. For other interpretations, see J. D. McAuliffe, “Exegetical identification of the Sabian,” *The Muslim World* 72 (1983): 95–106. It is a notorious fact that the Harranians, an obscure religious sect with gnostic inclinations from the Harran region, have identified themselves as Sabians during the time of the Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mun. They have traced their origin hack to the prophet Enoch Odds in the Islamic sources) and claimed to have been related to the Hermetic tradition. Cf. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987), 31.

³⁸ Another verse makes the same point, but this time criticizes the People of the Book for their obstinacy: “Say: O followers of the Book! [ahl al-kitab]. You have no valid ground for your beliefs unless you [truly] observe the Torah and the Gospel, and all that has been bestowed from on high upon you by your Sustainer! Yet all that has been bestowed from on high upon thee [O Prophet] by thy Sustainer is bound to make many of them yet more stubborn in their overweening arrogance and in their denial of the truth. But sorrow not over people who deny the truth: for, verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians - all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds - no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve” (al-Ma’idah 5:68-69).

³⁹ There is a consensus on this in the Hanafī and Maliki schools of law as well as some Haribali scholars. For references in Arabic, see Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 85-86. For the inclusion of Zoroastrians among the People of the Book, see Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, 72-76.

⁴⁰ The incident is recorded in Baladhuri's *Futuh al-buldan*. Cf. Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, 85.

⁴¹ *al-Sirat al-Nabawiyah li-Ibn Hisham*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 255. The full text of the Medinan Treatise is also published in Muhammad Hamidullah, *Documents sur la Diplomatie a L'Epoque du Prophete et des Khalifes Orthodoxes* (Paris, 1935), 9-14. For an English translation, see Khadduri, *War and Peace*, 206-209.

⁴² Quoted in Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, 179. The original text of the Najran treatise is quoted in Abu Yusuf's *Kitab al-kharaf* and Baladhuri's *Futuh al-buldan*.

⁴³ From the Treaty of Capitulation of Jerusalem (633) recorded by el-Tabari, *Tarikh alrusul wa'l-muluk*, quoted in Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, translated from the French by Judy Mabro (London/New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1998), 1. Another treaty of safeguard given to the people of Damascus follows the same rules: "In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful. This is what Khalid ibn al- Walid would grant to the inhabitants of Damas-cus if he enters therein: he promises to give them security or their lives, property and churches. Their city wall shall not be demolished; neither shall any Moslem be quartered in their houses. Thereunto we give to them the pact of Allah and the protection of His Prophet, the caliphs and the believers. So long as they pay the poll tax, nothing but good shall befall them." Baladhuri, *Futuh al-buldan*, quoted in Philip iC Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 7th ed. (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1960), 150.

⁴⁴ Ibn Qayyim, *Ahkam ahl al-dhimmah*, 1:24. For the amount of *jizya* and the treatment of Jews and Christians in Islamic history, see my "Islam and Peace: A Survey of the Sources of Peace in the Islamic Tradition," *Islamic Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 327-62.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Siyasat al-Shar'iyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Rawi, 2000), 127-28.

⁴⁶ Khadduri, *War and Peace*, 85.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, 40.

⁴⁸ Contemporary applications of this can be followed from the growing literature on Islam, nonviolence, and conflict-resolution. For an overview, see Muhammad Abu-Nimer, "Framework for Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam," in *Contemporary Islam: Dynamic, not Static*, eds. A. Aziz Said, M. Abu-Nimer and M. Sharify-Funk, 131-172 (London/New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁹ Cf. Ibn Qayyim, *Zad al-Masir*, 157.

⁵⁰ Qurtubi, *al-Jami'*, 2:280.

⁵¹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, 23 9-40.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 239.

⁵³ Qurtubi, *al-Jami'*, 2:280.

⁵⁴ Al Razi, *Tafsir*, 3:15.

⁵⁵ For an analysis of this point, see David Dakake, "The Myth of a Militant Islam," in *Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition*, ed. Joseph Lumbard (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 5-8.

⁵⁶ Ibn Qayyim, *Zad al-Masir*, 390.

⁵⁷ The word *fitnah* has a wide range of meanings: trial, calamity, disorder, civil strife, sedition, and even persecution in the particular verse above.

⁵⁸ Cf. *al-Sirat al-Nabawiyah* li-Ibn Hisham, 332.

⁵⁹ for full references, see David Dakake, "The Myth of a Militant 9-11."

⁶⁰ For "just war" (*jus ad bellum*) and conditions of war (*jus in se* see my "Islam and Peace," 342-50. Not surprisingly, bin Laden quotes the "slay them ..." verse in his in-1998 fatwa for the "killing of Americans and their allies and military." For the text of this fatwa and its based on the Islamic sources, see Vincenzo Oliveti, *The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences* (Birmingham, AL: Amadeusbooks, 2002).

⁶¹ War is also waged to defend the rights of 'those who are weak, ill-treated, and oppressed among men, women, and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors' (al-Nisa 4: 75).

⁶² Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zad al-Masir*, 425. Qurtubi has a similar interpretation; cf. al-Jami', 10:43.

⁶³ Quoted in Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities* (London/Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2003), 26

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11. Numerous studies have been undertaken by contemporary Muslim scholars to address the question of how to engage Islamic law in the face of the contemporary challenges the Muslim world faces. Imam Shatibi's concept of the "purposes of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shari'ah*), which he has developed in his *al-Muwafagat*, has been the subject of many studies in recent years. One fine example is Ahmad al-Raysuni, *Imam Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives and Intents of Islamic Law*, trans. Nancy Roberts (London/Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005). Taha Jabir al-Alwani has dealt with the sources and development of Islamic jurisprudence in his *Source Methodology in Islamic Jurisprudence*, 3rd ed., trans. and ed. Yusuf Talal Delorenzo and Anas al-Shaykh Ali (London/ Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2003). Another contemporary scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi has adopted a similar point of view in his *Approaching the Sunna: Comprehension and Controversy*, trans. Jamil Qureshi (London/Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006). Other works with a similar approach and scope include Shaykh al-Tahir ibn Ashur, *Magasid al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah* (Tunis: al-Dor al-Tunisiyyah, 1972), and Yusuf al-Alim, *Magasid al-Shari'ah* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1991).

⁶⁵ Abu Bahr ibn Sahl al-Sarakhsi, *pl-Mabsut* (Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari, 1983), 10:109.

⁶⁶ Cf. Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *La ikraha fi'l-din: ishkaliyat alriddah wa'l-murtaddin min sadr al-islam ila'l-yawrri*, 2nd ed. (Cairo/Herndon VA: HIT and Maktab al-Shuruq al-Duwaliyyah, 2006).

FROM YOUNG TO OLD: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF IQBAL AND T. S. ELIOT

Khurram Ali Shafique

ABSTRACT

Eliot's first professionally published poem appeared in Munroe's magazine in June 1915. The title was 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. It was the time when Iqbal was reading the final proofs of *his* first "professionally published" poem, "The Secrets of the Self" (*Asrar-i-Khudi*), in Persian. His poem appeared soon afterwards in September. The two poems, each cataclysmic in its own way, could not have come at a more critical moment. In 1915, the world was just beginning to realize, painfully, that the war started last year might not end soon and might even merit to be called a "World War". Hence, it was a fateful year when the British Empire was compelled to make, among other choices, a choice between two poets: Iqbal and Eliot, both of whom would live and die as citizens of the British Empire. Almost necessarily, the legacies of these two poets were destined to be different. Iqbal's poems were quoted and are still quoted, diversely but Eliot did not seek such popularity and did not get it. This article gives a comparison of the both poets that the "morning breeze" fulfilling Iqbal's poetic desire, approaching the "the Western sage" is a call to reconcile reason with love, and intellect with heart, and to rebuild the world in a new fashion. The Western sage, if he turns out to be none other than Eliot, may respond to this by saying: We are the hollow men, we are the stuffed men... headpiece filled with straw.

The Open Door will be the policy of this magazine—may the great poet we are looking for never find it shut, or half-shut, against his ample genius!

This is how the American patron of arts, Harriet Munroe (1860-1936), described her mission statement while launching her elitist magazine, *Poetry*, from Chicago in 1912. The “great poet” she was looking for appeared only three years later. He was, of course, the young American T. S. Eliot (1888-1965). Eliot’s first professionally published poem appeared in Munroe’s magazine in June 1915. The title was ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’.

Quite interestingly, June 1915 was the time when Iqbal was reading the final proofs of his first “professionally published” poem, ‘The Secrets of the Self’ (Asrar-i-Khudi), in Persian (although he had been a leading poet since the beginning of the century, he had never got his poems collected or published “professionally”). His poem appeared soon afterwards in September. Unlike Eliot, Iqbal’s poem was self-published. It came out in the form of a little book, of which only 500 copies were printed in the first round.

The two poems, each cataclysmic in its own way, could not have come at a more critical moment. In 1915, the world was just beginning to realize, painfully, that the war started last year might not end soon and might even merit to be called a “World War” (or at least the “Great European War”). Hence, it was a fateful year when the British Empire was compelled to make, among other choices, a choice between two poets: Iqbal and Eliot, both of whom would live and die as citizens of the British Empire (Iqbal was a citizen of the Empire since he was born in the British India, while Eliot became a naturalized citizen of Britain in 1927). Paradoxically, no two poets may have been more different from each other.

When starting the magazine *Poetry*, the elitist Munroe had hoped to liberate her anticipated “great poet” from “the limitations imposed by the popular magazine”. She stated in a circular sent to poets:

While the ordinary magazines must minister to a large public little interested in poetry, this magazine will appeal to, and it may be hoped, will develop, a public primarily interested in poetry as an art, as the highest, most complete expression of truth and beauty.

One needs little imagination to see how this platform, which became the launching pad for the young Eliot, was precisely the opposite of the two platforms from which Iqbal had launched his literary career some fifteen years earlier. He had recited his first long poem in the annual session of Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam in February 1900. The event was a fundraiser attended by “a large public little interested in poetry” – the sort of thing loathed by Harriet. Iqbal became a regular feature of such fundraisers, year after year, right up to the last year of his life.

His other platform was *Makbzan*, just the kind of “popular magazine” Harriet considered detrimental to the cause of the poetic art. It catered to all kind of audience, from the princes to the paupers (and an unflattering reminder of this is the diversity of paid advertisements carried by it: from the scholarly work of Iqbal on political economy to the cheap aphrodisiacs of the quacks).

Almost necessarily, the legacies of these two poets were destined to be different. Iqbal’s poems were quoted and are still quoted, diversely, by religious preachers, socialists, atheists, secularist liberals, intellectuals, scholars, students, rulers, politicians begging for votes and beggars begging for food. At least as late as 1948, the poems recited from the pulpit for motivating the believers to piety were also being sung in the red light areas by dancing girls for pleasing a debauched audience. Even today, through modern renditions, Iqbal is competing with the writers of pop songs on the charts of bestselling albums. Eliot did not seek such popularity and did not get it.

But the most remarkable difference in their legacies was that Eliot lived long enough to witness the downfall of the empire of his adopted nation, and saw it losing its possession of its territories. Iqbal died before he could see the birth of the sovereign state which he had predicted for his people, but in all likelihood he died with the certainty that his prediction would not go wrong. Subsequently, the newborn state would be proclaimed to be his brainchild and his people would often be heard saying that they might not have gained possession of the country which they won, had he not delivered the message he delivered at the crucial period of history when he delivered it. Whether the message that Eliot delivered, at the crucial period of history when he delivered it, also had a role in bringing the downfall of his adopted nation and reducing it from an empire on which the sun never set to a land where it almost does not rise for a good part of the year, is a question which the admirers of Eliot have not considered so far.

1915: From dusk till dawn

‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ by T. S. Eliot was published in the American magazine, *Poetry*, in June 1915. ‘Secrets of the Self’ (*Asrar-i-Khudi*) was self-published by Iqbal in September the same year.

The concept of the “self” is central to both poems, with the difference that Iqbal’s poem is a long treatise on the secrets of the self while Eliot’s poem is much shorter and treats the subject indirectly in an impressionistic manner. However, the approach of the two poets towards the notion of the self is diametrically opposed to each other: while Iqbal openly advises his readers to the “strengthen” their “selves”, and projects his own self as the harbinger of a new age, Eliot’s protagonist protests meekly, “No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; / Am an attendant lord...”

Consistent with these differences, the two poems open with epigrams that are very different from each other. Eliot chooses lines from the *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) to be quoted at the beginning. In Dante’s poem they are spoken by Guido de Montefeltro (1223-1298), eternally damned for giving evil advice to Pope Boniface VIII (c.1235-1303). The speaker has no chance of ever being released from hell: “If I thought that my answer were being made to someone who would ever return to earth, this flame would remain without further movement; but since no one has ever returned alive from this depth, if what I hear is true, I answer you without fear of infamy.”¹

How different is the spirit of these lines from the verses of the *Divan-i-Shams-i-Tabriz* of Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), which Iqbal used as epigram in the definitive final edition of his poem in 1922:

دی شیخ با چراغِ ہی گشت گردِ شہر
کز دام و دو ملولم و انسانم آرزوست
زین ہرمان ست عناصرِ دلم گرفت
شیر خدا و رستم دستانم آرزوست
گفتم کہ یافت می نشود جستہ ایم ما
گفت آنچه یافت می نشود آنم آرزوست

[Translation]

Last night the Elder wandered about the city with a lantern
saying, ‘I am weary of demon and monster: man is my desire.’

My heart is sick of these feeble-spirited fellow-travellers;
the Lion of God and Rustam-i Dastan, are my desire.
I said, 'The thing we quested after is never attained.'
He said, 'The unattainable—that thing is my desire!'²

Even without this epigram, the poem in its first edition in 1915 opened with a 'Prelude' (retained in the subsequent editions), in which the poet claimed that although he did not care to be heard by his contemporaries, he was sure to be heard by the posterity, because "many a poet was born after his death... and journeyed forth again from nothingness, like roses blossoming o'er the earth of his grave." Exactly the opposite of what Guido is contemplating in the lines quoted by Eliot!

Regarding Eliot's use of this epigram, the critics Frank Kermode and John Hollander have observed that the persona of the poem, i.e. the fictitious "J. Alfred Prufrock" through whom Eliot speaks in the poem, "also tries to speak—though of a much less dramatic life—with a similar candor; on the assumption that whatever hell he is in, the reader is there also; or expecting... that to give such importance to his plight would simply gain him a rebuff."³

Just like Eliot, Iqbal also uses a fictitious persona as his mouthpiece. In the chapter where he intends to offer direct advice to his readers, he introduces "Mir Nijat Naqshband, a.k.a. Baba-i-Sihrai". However, while Eliot's Prufrock is a young man feeling old before his time, Iqbal's Baba is an old man feeling eternally youthful. Like Prufrock, Baba has also been in a hell and perceives the reader to be in a living hell as well ("You have cast knowledge of God behind you and squandered your religion for the sake of a loaf"), but unlike Prufrock and Montefeltro, Baba escaped from his hell and is now determined to rescue the reader.

To be fair on Eliot, it may be observed that he had behind him a new "tradition" initiated in 1857 with the publication of *The Flowers of Evil* by the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867). In the prefatory poem addressed to the reader, Baudelaire had exclaimed, "Hypocrite reader! My likeness, my brother!" The poetry contained in that volume, and the new tradition emerging from it, was "hypocritical" in the sense that it remained non-committal while presenting "the flowers of evil", pre-requiring a similar outlook on life on part of the audience (and also, curiously enough, the writers of this new school became rather pharisaical in looking down upon the general public – something which a Rumi, a Shakespeare or a Goethe would never do).

However, Iqbal's theory of literature took care of this issue as well – the theory he propounded in the same poem which is being

discussed here, further expanding it in the revised edition three years later. According to this theory, societies thrived by listening to poets who presented beauty, idealism and hope; they perished by poets who presented ugliness and despair. Realism was no excuse ("Painters who submit before Nature depict Nature but lose thereby their own self," Iqbal would later say in *Persian Psalms*. "Their today has no reflection of tomorrow. It is wrong to seek beauty outside one's self since what ought to be is not before us.").

The first twelve lines of both poems are being given below as a starter for more detailed comparison by those who may be interested. Eliot's poem opens famously with the description of a diseased evening while Iqbal's poem opens with just the opposite: a bright dawn. Curious readers are encouraged to see what other points of contrast exist "between the lines".

Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

اسرار خودی

راہ شب چون مہر عالمتاب زد
گریہ من بر رخ گل، آب زد
اشک من از چشم زگس خواب شست
سبزہ از ہنگامہ ام بیدار رست
باغبان زور کلامم آزمود
مصرعے کارید و شمشیرے درود
در چمن جز دانہ اشکم نکشت
تار افغانم بہ پود باغ رشت
ذره ام مہر منیر آن من است
صد سحر اندر گریبان من است

خاک من روشن تر از جام جم است
محرّم از نازدہائے عالم است

[Translation: Secrets of the Self]

When the world-illuming sun rushed upon Night like a brigand,
My weeping bedewed the face of the rose.
My tears washed away sleep from the eye of the narcissus,
My passion wakened the grass and made it grow.
The Gardener tried the power of my song,
He sowed my verse and reaped a sword.
In the soil he planted only the seed of my tears
And wove my lament with the garden, as warp and woof.
Tho' I am but a mote, the radiant sun is mine:
Within my bosom are a hundred dawns.
My dust is brighter than Jamshid's cup
It knows things that are yet unborn in the world.⁴

1917-19: Critical appreciations

The publication of 'Secrets of the Self' raised an outcry from certain quarters in the sub-continent, especially against Iqbal's criticism of decadent mysticism, the Greek philosopher Plato and the Persian poet Hafez of Shiraz. In about three years, Iqbal retracted from his criticism of Hafez altogether and modified his position on some of the Sufi masters, though he retained his position on the philosophy of Plato. In the meanwhile, he penned down a number of argumentative essays. Some of these, especially those concerning the principle of literary criticism, may be regarded as representative of ideas that were going to stay with him.

Interestingly, this was the period when Eliot was also busy writing essays on literary topics and formulating his theory of criticism, most famously in the essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which was first published in *The Egoist* in 1919, and then included in *The Sacred Wood* the next year.

The following is a passage from Iqbal's most representative essay from this period, 'Our Prophet's Criticism of Contemporary Arabic Poetry' followed by a passage from Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. It might be interesting to see the contrasts between the literary theories propounded in these two passages.

Our Prophet's Criticism of Contemporary Arabic Poetry

Again the following verse of Antra of the tribe of Abs was read to our Prophet: "Verily I pass through whole nights of toil to merit a livelihood worth of an honourable man." The Prophet whose mission was to glorify life and to beautify all its trials was immensely pleased, and said to his companions: "The praise of an Arabian has

never kindled in me a desire to see him, but I tell you I do wish to meet the author of this verse.”

Imagine the man, a single look at whose face was a source of infinite bliss to the looker desiring to meet an infidel Arab for his verse! What is the secret of this unusual honour which the Prophet wished to give to the poet? It is because the verse is so healthful and vitalising, it is because the poet idealises the pain of honourable labour. The Prophet’s appreciation of this verse indicates to us another art-principle of great value – that that art is subordinate to life, not superior to it. The ultimate end of all human activity is Life-glorious, powerful, exuberant. All human art must be subordinated to this final purpose and the value of everything must be determined in reference to its life-yielding capacity. The highest art is that which awakens our dormant will-force, and nerves us to face the trials of life manfully. All that brings drowsiness and makes us shut our eyes to reality around – on the mastery of which alone life depends – is a message of decay and death. There should be no opium-eating in Art. The dogma of Art for the sake of Art is a clever invention of decadence to cheat us out of life and power.

Thus the Prophet’s appreciation of Antra’s verse gives us the ultimate principle for the proper evaluation of all arts.

Tradition and the Individual Talent

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of æsthetic, not merely historical, criticism.

1917-1920: Shakespeare and Goethe

In 1910, Iqbal wrote in his private notebook, *Stray Reflections*, “To explain the deepest truths of life in the form of homely parables requires extraordinary genius. Shakespeare, Maulana Rum (Jalaluddin) and Jesus Christ are probably the only illustrations of this rare type of genius.” Six years later, on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s death, he contributed a poem in Urdu with English translation to the *Book of Homage to Shakespeare*. The poem, titled ‘Shakespeare’, is considered to be one of the greatest tributes ever presented to the Bard, and was permanently placed on a commemorative plaque at Shakespeare’s Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 21, 2009.

In 1917, Iqbal offered a brief comparison of Shakespeare and Goethe in a series he was contributing under the heading ‘Stray Thoughts’ for *New Era*, a newspaper published from Lucknow (this

was also written originally in the private notebook in 1910 and later modified for publication). Three years later, Eliot also wrote about Shakespeare and Goethe in his essay 'Hamlet and His Problems', which appeared in *The Sacred Wood* (1920), a collection of his prose writings on literary topics.

The brief reflection of Iqbal and the opening sentences from Eliot's essay are given below. Although too brief to fully explain the thought, the passages still show us how much the two writers differed in their estimation of Shakespeare and Goethe – and quite remarkably, the Muslim thinker appears here as the best hope of the two European geniuses who are about to be displaced by the European critic.

Stray Thoughts

Both Shakespeare and Goethe rethink the thought of Divine Creation. There is, however, one important difference between them. The realist Englishmen rethinks the individual; the Idealist German, the universal. Faust is a seeming individual only. In reality, he is humanity individualised.

Hamlet and His Problems

Few critics have even admitted that *Hamlet* the play is the primary problem, and Hamlet the character only secondary. And Hamlet the character has had an especial temptation for that most dangerous type of critic: the critic with a mind which is naturally of the creative order, but which through some weakness in creative power exercises itself in criticism instead. These minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realization. Such a mind had Goethe, who made of Hamlet a Werther; and such had Coleridge, who made of Hamlet a Coleridge; and probably neither of these men in writing about Hamlet remembered that his first business was to study a work of art. The kind of criticism that Goethe and Coleridge produced, in writing of Hamlet, is the most misleading kind possible.

1920-22: Two old men

'Gerontion' literally means "little old man" and is the title of a poem Eliot published in his anthology, *Poems* (1920). The protagonist is an old man, who, according to Frank Kermode and John Hollander, "is obviously in some ways the image of a moribund civilization."⁵

Two years later, Iqbal recited his poem 'Khizr of the Way' to an enthusiastic crowd at the annual fundraising event of Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam, Lahore. The protagonist, like Gerontion, is an old man, but of a very different type: he is the ever-living guide who has drunk from the Fountain of Life and now, revealing the mysteries of

life, calls upon the meek to inherit the earth for their hour has come. If Gerontion is “the image of a moribund civilization”, Khizr also reminisces about the calamities which Islam is facing throughout the world, but unlike Gerontion, he foresees an impending resurrection of his civilization in the immediate future. While Eliot’s poem begins with a quote from Shakespeare, Iqbal’s Khizr quotes from Rumi towards the end of the poem – both quotations are similar in spirit but have been used for very different purposes by Iqbal and Eliot respectively.

The first stanza of ‘Gerontion’ and the first stanza of Khizr’s dialogue (which actually happens to be the third stanza of the poem) are given below.

Gerontion

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.
My house is a decayed house,
And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.
The goat coughs at night in the field overhead;
Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds.
The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,
Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.

خضر راہ

کیوں تعجب ہے مری صحراوردی پر تجھے
یہ تگا پوئے دمام زندگی کی ہے دلیل
اے رہین خانہ تو نے وہ سماں دیکھا نہیں
گو نجی ہے جب فضائے دشت میں بانگ رحیل
ریت کے ٹیلے پہ وہ آہو کا بے پروا خرام
وہ حضر بے برگ و سماں، وہ سنبھلے سنگ و میل
وہ نمود اختر سیماب پا ہنگام صبح
یا نمایاں بام گردوں سے جبین جبرئیل

وہ سکوت شام صحرا میں غروب آفتاب
جس سے روشن تر ہوئی چشم جہاں بین خلیل
اور وہ پانی کے چشمے پر مقام کارواں
اہل ایماں جس طرح جنت میں گرد سلسبیل
تازہ ویرانے کی سودائے محبت کو تلاش
اور آبادی میں تو زنجیری کشت و نخیل
پختہ تر ہے گردش پیہم سے جام زندگی
ہے یہی اے بے خبر راز دوام زندگی

[Translation: Khizr of the Way]

What is it to make you wonder, if I roam the desert waste?
Witness of enduring life is this unending toil and haste!
You, shut in by walls, have never known that moment when shrill
Bugle-call that sounds the march goes echoing over wood and hill,
Never known the wild deer's careless walk across its sandy plain,
Never halt unroofed, uncumbered, on the trail no milestones chain,
Never fleeting vision of that star that crowns the daybreak hour,
Never Gabriel's radiant brow effulgent from heaven's topmost tower,
Nor the going-down of suns in stillness of desert ways,
Twilight splendour such as brightened Abraham's world-beholding
gaze,
Nor those springs of running water where the caravans take rest
As in heaven bright spirits cluster round the Fountain of the Blest!
Wildernesses ever new love's fever seeks and thirsts to roam—
You the furrowed field and palm-groves fetter to one poor home;
Mellow grows the wind of life when hand to hand the cup goes round
Foolish one! In this alone is life's eternal secret found.

1922-23: Resurrection, good or bad?

The Waste Land, published by Eliot in 1922, has been regarded as one of the most important poems of the twentieth century by many, such as Andrew Motion (b. 1952), the poet laureate from 1999 to 2009.⁶

For the sake of keeping the record straight, it may to be added here that such opinions are voiced on behalf of those critics who developed the “acquired taste” for the poem; these opinions do not take into account the general public as well as those of the “elite” who, despite their highest educational and social background, might have remained “uninitiated” – such as the Queen Mother, who famously recalled a recital of the poem by Eliot to the Royal Family

during the Second World War in the following words: “We had this rather lugubrious man in a suit, and he read a poem... I think it was called *The Desert*. And first the girls [Elizabeth and Margaret] got the giggles and then I did and then even the King.”⁷

Iqbal’s poem ‘*The Dawn of Islam*’, which came a year later, is shorter (consisting of 144 lines as compared to Eliot’s 434), and unlike ‘*The Waste Land*’, it became instantly popular among all segments of the society and still remains the most popular long poem ever written in Urdu.

The first four lines of each poem are given below. The contrasts are striking: while April is “the cruellest month” for Eliot, who loathes the stirring of “dull roots”, Iqbal rejoices at similar notions of rebirth and celebrates them whole-heartedly.

The Waste Land

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

طلوع اسلام

دلیل صبح روشن ہے ستاروں کی تنک تابلی
افق سے آفتاب اُبھرا، گیا دور گراں خوابلی
عروق مردہء مشرق میں خون زندگی دوڑا
سمجھ سکتے نہیں اس راز کو سینا و فارابی

[Translation: *The Dawn of Islam*]

The dimness of the stars is evidence of the bright morning.

The sun has risen over the horizon; the time of deep slumber has passed.

The blood of life runs in the veins of the dead East:

Avicenna and Farabi cannot understand this secret.⁸

1923-1925: East is West and West is East (and never the twain shall meet)

East is stereotyped as pessimistic, inactive and otherworldly. The West is usually seen as geared towards happiness, enjoyment and practical pursuits. These generalizations begin to fade when we compare the literary career of Eliot, the spokesperson of “the mind of Europe”, with that of Iqbal, the commonly-acclaimed “Poet of the East”. Here, perhaps, one must remember how Iqbal had foreseen the future development of literary trends in the two cultures

as early as 1923 when he wrote in the preface to *The Message of the East* (*Payam-i-Mashriq*):

Regarded from a purely literary standpoint, the debilitation of the forces of life in Europe after the ordeal of the war is unfavourable to the development of a correct and mature literary ideal. Indeed, the fear is that the minds of the nations may be gripped by that slow-pulsed Magianism which runs away from life's difficulties and which fails to distinguish between the sentiments of the heart and the thoughts of the brain... The East, and especially the Muslim East, has opened its eyes after a centuries-long slumber.⁹

Several decades later, Iqbal's prediction about European literature was corroborated, unknowingly, by the leading British historian A. J. P. Taylor, who observed about the British writers of the interwar period (1919-1938):

To judge from all leading writers, the barbarians were breaking in. The decline and fall of the Roman empire were being repeated. Civilized men could only lament and withdraw, as the writers did to their considerable profit. The writers were almost alone in feeling like this, and it is not easy to understand why they thus cut themselves off. By any more prosaic standard, this was the best time mankind, or at any rate Englishmen, had known.¹⁰

Hence, by 1920s, the cultures of the East and the West had already reversed roles. The Western intellectual had become pessimistic and eager to rehabilitate the "slow-pulsed Magianism" displaced from its Oriental residence by the awakening of the East.

'The Message' ('Payam'), addressed by Iqbal to the Western intellectual in *The Message of the East*, offers an interesting comparison with 'The Hollow Men', composed by Eliot around the same time and published in 1925. The two poems have a common theme: the moral decline in the West. However, while Iqbal approaches the subject with discretion, Eliot's poem merely depicts it in a manner that borders on celebrating the very same depravity which is supposed to be loathed.

The comparison can be amusing if one imagines the "morning breeze" to be fulfilling Iqbal's poetic desire, approaching the "the Western sage" and delivering the message from Iqbal message – a call to reconcile reason with love, and intellect with heart, and to rebuild the world in a new fashion. The Western sage, if he turns out to be none other than Eliot, may respond to this by saying, "We are the hollow men, we are the stuffed men... headpiece filled with straw." One may end up wondering whether these two writers could have even carried out a serious conversation each other without one of them feeling very stupid for having it.

When ‘The Hollow Men’ was first published, the American critic John Orley Allen Tate (1899-1979) wrote: “The ‘continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity’ that is so characteristic of [Eliot’s] mythical method remains in fine form.” From the perspective of Iqbal, however, a more important question may be whether the writer of this poem is not a classic example of the kind of mind “which fails to distinguish between the sentiments of the heart and the thoughts of the brain”?

The first stanzas of both poems are given below.

پیام

از من اے باد صبا گوے با دانائے فرنگ
عقل تا بال کشود است گرفتار تر است
برق را این با جگر میزند آن رام کند
عشق از عقل فسون پیشه جگر دار تر است
چشم جز رنگ گل و لاله نسیند ورنه
آنچه در پرده رنگ است پدیدار تر است
عجب آن نیست که اعجاز مسیحا داری
عجب این است که بیمار تو بیمار تر است
دانش اندوخته ئی دل ز کف انداخته ئی
آه زان نقد گرانیامیہ کہ در باخته ئی

[Translation: The Message]

O morning breeze, convey this to the Western sage from me:
With wings unfolded, Wisdom is a captive all the more.
It tames the lightning, but Love lets it strike its very heart:
In courage Love excels that clever sorcerer by far.
The eye sees just the colour of the tulip and the rose;
But far more obvious, could we see it, is the flower’s core.
It is not strange that you have the Messiah’s healing touch:
What is strange is your patient is the more sick for your cure.
Though you have gathered knowledge, you have thrown away the heart;
With what a precious treasure you have thought it fit to part!¹¹

The Hollow Men

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together

Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar
Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;
Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us – if at all – not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

1927-30: The sacred

زبور عجم

می شود پردہ چشم پر کاہے گاہے
دیدہ ام ہر دو جہان را با نگاہے گاہے
وادیء عشق بے دور و دراز است ولے
طے شود جادہ صد سالہ بہ آہے گاہے
در طلب کوش و مدہ دامن امید زدست
دولتے ہست کہ یابے سر راہے گاہے

[Translation: *Persian Psalms*]

A straw, at times, becomes the screen of my eye;
And with one look, at times, I have seen both the worlds.
The Valley of Love is a long way away, and yet, at times,
The journey of a hundred years is covered in a sigh.
Persist in your search, and do not let go of the hem of hope—
There is a treasure that, at times, you will find by the way.¹²
Ash Wednesday
Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?

1930-48: Islam and the West

It is quite interesting to note that just as Iqbal is credited with outlining the ideological foundations of a modern Muslim state, Eliot also became preoccupied with the idea of “a Christian society” (although much later than Iqbal) – and just like Iqbal, he also talked about some sort of reconstruction.

Iqbal’s definitive statements in this regard are *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930/1934) and the presidential address delivered at the annual session of All-India Muslim League at Allahabad on December 30, 1930, popularly known as the *Allahabad Address*. Eliot’s most lucid reflections on the matter appear in his book *Christianity and Culture* (1939/1948), which consists of his lecture ‘The Idea of a Christian Society’, delivered in March 1939 at the invitation of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christie College, Cambridge, ‘Notes Towards the Definition of Culture’ and the transcript of a radio address to the people of West Germany after the Second World War (1939-45) in 1946.

The following selection offers three passages each from the *Allahabad Address* by Iqbal and ‘The Unity of European Culture’ by Eliot. It may be asked while comparing these two passages: what are practical implications of each of these for cultural pluralism?

1

Allahabad Address

It is, then, this mistaken separation of spiritual and temporal which has largely influenced European religious and political thought, and has resulted practically in the total exclusion of Christianity from the life of European states. The result is a set of mutually ill-adjusted states dominated by interests, not human but national. And these mutually ill-adjusted states, after trampling over the moral and religious convictions of Christianity, are to-day feeling the need of a federated Europe, i.e. the need of a unity which the Christian Church-organisation originally gave them, but which, instead of reconstructing in the light of Christ’s vision of human brotherhood, they considered it fit to destroy under the inspiration of Luther.

Christianity and Culture

Relevant to my work are the writings of Christian sociologists—those writers who criticize our economic system in the light of Christian ethics... Many of the changes which such writers advocate, while deducible from Christian principles, can recommend themselves to any intelligent and disinterested person, and do not require a Christian society to carry them into effect, or Christian belief to render them acceptable: though they are changes which would make it more possible for the individual Christian to live out his Christianity. I am concerned

here only secondarily with changes in economic organization, and only secondarily with the life of a devout Christian: my primary interest is a change in our social attitude, such a change only as could bring about anything worthy to be called a Christian Society.¹³

2

Allahabad Address

At the present moment the national idea is racialising the outlook of Muslims, and thus materially counteracting the humanising work of Islam. And the growth of racial consciousness may mean the growth of standards different and even opposed to the standards of Islam... Never in our history Islam has had to stand a greater trial than the one which confronts it today.

Christianity and Culture

I believe that the choice before us is between the formation of a new Christian culture, and the acceptance of a pagan one. Both involve radical changes; but I believe that the majority of us, if we could be faced immediately with all the changes which will only be accomplished in several generations, would prefer Christianity.¹⁴

3

Allahabad Address

Indeed the first practical step that Islam took towards the realization of a final combination of humanity was to call upon peoples possessing practically the same ethical ideal to come forward and combine. The Quran declares, "O people of the Book! Come let us join together on the 'word' (Unity of God), that is common to us all."¹⁵ The wars of Islam and Christianity, and, later, European aggression in its various forms, could not allow the infinite meaning of this verse to work itself out in the world of Islam. Today it is gradually being realized in the countries of Islam in the shape of what is called Muslim Nationalism.¹⁶

Christianity and Culture

If Asia were converted to Christianity tomorrow, it would not thereby become a part of Europe...¹⁷ To our Christian heritage we owe many things besides religious faith. Through it we trace the evolution of our art, through it we have our conception of Roman Law which has done so much to shape the Western World, through it we have our conceptions of private and public morality. And through it we have our common standards of literature, in literatures of Greece and Rome. The Western World has its unity in this heritage, in Christianity and in the ancient civilizations of Greece, Rome and Israel, from which, owing to two thousand years of Christianity, we trace our descent.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

¹ Translation has been taken from a footnote on the poem in *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature* (1973), edited by Frank Kermode, John Hollander, et. al. p.1972.

² Translation is taken from the translation of *Javid Nama* by A. J. Arberry (1969).

³ *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature* (1973), p.1972

⁴ Translation is taken from *Secrets of the Self* by R. A. Nicholson (1920).

⁵ *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature* (1973), p. 1976

⁶ 'Margate's shrine to Eliot's muse' by Vanessa Thorpe in the Main Section, p. 9, of *The Observer*, UK, July 2, 2009.

⁷ Quoted on the Wikipedia page of the poem; from *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations*. Ed. Elizabeth Knowles. Oxford University Press, 2008

⁸ Translation from D. J. Matthews

⁹ Translation from M. Hadi Husain

¹⁰ A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914–1945*

¹¹ Translation from M. Hadi Husain

¹² Translation from Mustansar Mir

¹³ The practical implication of Eliot's proposition undermines the very foundation on which Iqbal was hoping a healthy cultural exchange between Islam and the West. Eliot practically replaces the ethical ideal of Christianity with the aesthetics of the Western elite – what Matthew Arnold had earlier described as “high culture” (see also the last excerpt).

¹⁴ The question is: By Christianity, does Eliot mean the message of Jesus or the thing which Iqbal has disapprovingly named as “racialising the outlook”?

¹⁵ Quran (3:64)

¹⁶ Iqbal seems to be proposing that comparative study of religion is not sufficient, or might be even unhelpful, unless followers of diverse faiths work together towards a “universal social reconstruction” on the basis of shared ethical ideals. He sees it happening through “what is called Muslim Nationalism.”

¹⁷ It is actually shocking to see that he could be so blatantly racist. Iqbal had anticipated this kind of mentality in his poem ‘The Preaching of Islam in the West’ (included in *The Blow of Moses*, published in 1936), translated by V. G. Kernin as follows:

Through all the Western politeia
Religion withers to the roots;
For the white man, ties of blood and race
Are all he knows of brotherhood—
A Brahmin, in Britannia's sight,
Ascends no higher in life's scale
Because the creed of the Messiah
Has numbered him with its recruits;
All Britain one day might embrace
Muhammad's doctrine, if she would,
And yet the Mohammedan, luckless might,
Be left as now beyond the pale.

MAKING THE INCONSPICUOUS,
MANIFEST: AESTHETICS OF THE
BEDOUINS

Mamoona Khan

ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at exploring the aesthetics of a race that dwells in the region which is the cradle of Islam, habitants of which are generally labelled as uncouth and uncivilised. First half of this paper hence, strives to determine status of the race, probing the ethnicity of people that can rightly be entrusted the sobriquet, Bedouins. While the second half scrutinises about their sense of beauty and creativity by contemplating the annals of history, considering in mind that beauty and creativity is instinctive in man which is hard to be eluded. Religious chronicles and historical facts both are probed about contextually in this respect. Deciphering consequently that art is a human instinct, with which man cannot depart, although it is not one of his basic needs. But being instinctive its outlet emerges at once in propitious circumstances, and tries to peep out in the unpropitious.

In the annals of history Bedouins are labelled as uncouth barbarians, the uncivilised nomads habitual of plundering the riches of others, as their rightful occupation. In the field of aesthetics they are considered deficient. But a closer affinity with the history of Arabs, disapproves this allegation. It asserts that the sense of beauty was not lacking in them, on the contrary the true hindrance lied in the unpropitious conditions they had to face in their unruly abode: the desert. However, they proved to be creators of aesthetics of great calibre wherever conditions were permitted. There is a probing question about their identity. Who were the Bedouins?

In general terms, the word Bedouin is mostly found in the Egyptian history, designated to the nomads roaming around Egypt and Arabia (Hitti 33). But etymology of this word is Semitic which means desert or its dwellers but no nationality is linked with them. Whereas, in the Holy *Qur'an* the term *Arab* is only used for Bedouins (Hottinger 23), so Arab and nomads are synonymous too (Hitti 41). Similarly, in the English version of Bible, the Hebrew word *arabāb* is translated as *desert* or *wilderness* (Montgomery 79). There are references of Arabs and Arabia in the Old Testament, where the word Arab is used for nomadic Bedouins that are the Arab people, not that region. The term Arabia was later coined by Greeks to denote the Arab peninsula (Montgomery 28). Thus it is corroborated by tracing chronicles and religious scriptures that Bedouins were the nomadic people of Arabia, who, when turned to sedentary population, were called Semites.

Semitic affiliation of the Bedouins is generally a moot proposition, considered by numerous Arabists as the immigrants of Mesopotamia, while others entrust Arab peninsula as the original home of Semites. It is still to be determined on philological and ethnological inductions. But it is a historical fact that there had been a constant seeping in of the Semites to the surrounding lands from the Arab peninsula which must be the reservoir of this race (Montgomery 21). So it asserts that the Arab peninsula was the “cradle” of Semites (Hitti 3), who were Hamites of Eastern Africa. From the times immemorial they migrated to this part of land and later received the nomenclature Semites. History approves this fact by disclosing that millions of years ago Cape of Arab was joined with

Africa, particularly with Ethiopia (Munir 7). The topography and arid climate of the region is also similar to the Eastern Africa. Excessive part of the land is occupied by desert with sand and limestone plateaus bordered by mountains which appear to be a continuation of the African continent (Kheirallah 7). Semites of Africa migrated to the coastal lands of Arabia and settled at the fringes of the desert which were the only verdant lands. These Semitic tribes when increased in population moved periodically to the fertile lands surrounding the Arab peninsula because in the Arabian cape, coastal parts were the only areas where promising conditions for life prevailed. The inner part of the cape was barren, which could not allow the coastal dwellers to expand their living quarters there that is inside the desert. So they were bound to migrate to the fertile lands located around the cape. Whereas, some other scholars believe that Semites were the original inhabitants of Tigris-Euphrates valley who, moved to Arabia and elsewhere.

These scholars mostly refer to Bible for the story of the great patriarch Abraham, who with his family migrated from Ur of the Chaldaes: the southern edge of Babylonia. He moved northward to Harran in the upper Euphrates valley, and then trekking south settled in the Western lands now called Palestine (Montgomery 55). In the Biblical genealogy Aramaeans are connected with Abraham, who appeared on the borders of Mesopotamia about middle of the second millennium B.C. It was similar to the movement of Amorites a millennium earlier from the same quarters. Aramaeans were the descendents of Abraham's brother Nahor. It is recorded in the Bible that Isaac, the son of Abraham, married Rabekah, the grand daughter of Nahor. Nahor's son Batheul and grand son Laban retained the cognomen "the Aramaeans". Hence, Aramaeans descended from Nahor. Moreover, Jacob the son of Isac got two wives and two concubines from the Aramaean stock; his wife was the daughter of Batheul (Montgomery 48). The descendents of Abraham, in this respect, were from the Aramaeans. Thus Abraham and Babylonians of the first dynasty are generally regarded as Amorites, who were Semites of the Western land, the land of Amurru¹ (Montgomery 50). But in the Assyrian records, the land extending between Syria and Mesopotamia is considered to be the oldest homeland of Semites (EI. vol-1 524).

Aramaean Bedouins are mentioned in this source as ancestors of the Arabs, who were anti-Assyrian in the 9th century B.C. and interfered in the affairs of upper Euphrates valley. It is historical evidence that Gindibu, from the land of Aribi² (meaning an Arabian

bedouin) in 854 B.C. helped *Bir'idri* of Damascus³ with one thousand camels against the Assyrian vassal, Salmanssar III in the battle of Karkar (EI. vol-1 524). There are numerous other sources defining Mesopotamia and the lands adjacent to it as the cradle of Semites, which is but a debatable issue.

One thing is to be borne in mind that all these races descended from a single ancestral line. We cannot challenge Bible for the story of Abraham or his Amorite pedigree or the Holy Qur'ān for defining Arabs as the Bedouins of the Arab peninsula. Truth lies in the fact that they were all Semites whose place of origin was East Africa which had been attached to the cape of Arabia, millions of years ago. Earliest inhabitants were nomads, who roamed about in search of pastures. Arabia would have provided easy access to these nomads, who must have settled at the coastal fringes. But with the increasing population and scarcity of natural resources they would have migrated to the resourceful lands of Nile valley or Tigris- Euphrates valley. Not the reverse of it because in the course of history it had been witnessed that ancient people had always turned from nomadic to sedentary population, not from settled to nomadic. But the migration of Amorites or Aramaeans and Abraham or Nahor happened very late. Earliest Semitic migration from East Africa to the cape of Arabia was very ancient incident which was followed by numerous other immigrations from Arabia to the adjacent lands.

In the table of nations in Gen: 10, two genealogies have been traced, one from Shem and the other from Hamites, which then "pairs with Shemite Pedigree". The descent from Shem is traced from the Yahwistic source of Pentateuch⁴: the oldest in this source being Shem, then Arpachshad, then Shelah and after that Eber. Eber had two sons: Pelege and Yoktan. From the elder son Pelege descended Abraham: Pelege, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah and after him Abraham. Therefore the Paternal ancestor of Abraham was Eber. Eber is actually pronounced Heber and the title Hebrew for the Jewish language has its derivative from Heber (Montgomery 37). From Yoktan descended the people of Arabia. Thus all descended from Eber or Heber. Moreover Bible Pentateuch links Assyrians as the great uncles of Eber (Montgomery 38). But their link with the Semitic race is far earlier.

Breeding and domestication of dromedary: the single humped camel in the cape of Arabia in the ancient times also supports the hypothesis that Arabia is the earliest home of Semites. There are signs that wild dromedary lived in North-Africa and Near-East until about third millennium B.C. and became extinct from both these regions except surviving in Arabia. On the other hand presence of

dromedary in the Arab peninsula is very old but historians are not sure about when and where camel was first domesticated in that region. Referring to the history they had mentioned that by the eleventh century B.C., “sons of the east made incursions on camel backs into Palestine across the Jordan river”. They believed that camel was domesticated in Arabia between 16th to 11th centuries B.C. So the presence of Semites in this region must be earlier than that. (EI. volum-1 881), and South-Arabian desert is considered to be the area where it was domesticated at the earliest. In the Table of People, Genesis 25, camel nomads of central and north-west Arabia are mentioned and a triangle of desert steppe forming between the agrarian lands of South-Arabia, Egypt and Assyria is attributed as their homeland. It is the desert near Yemen. Earliest records of camel riding Bedouins are from cuneiforms, about their fighting against the vassal Assur Nasirpal in 880 B.C. (EI. volum-1, 882)

A cord made of camel hair has been discovered from Egypt belonging to the period of the third dynasty and a relief, stylistically attributed to the New-Empire represents the one humped camel along the other wild animals. This is not enough to prove Egypt as the place of origin of dromedary. Actually the climate of North-Africa as well as of Egypt was not suitable for the breeding of the animal, so its domestication was impossible there (E. I. volum-1 880). So it must be some foreign item, whereas climate of the Arab cape was suitable for its survival. In *Thamūdean*⁵ graffiti camels besides other domesticated animals are represented. Furthermore, a pottery jar with a head of camel has been unearthed from South Arabia in the excavation of Hadiar b. Humayd in Bayhān⁶, dated from about 9th or 10th century B.C. (E. I. volum-1, 882). There are numerous other evidences to claim that dromedary was the creature of Arabia, an essential element of the Bedouin Semites. It did not come from Mesopotamia, on the contrary reached there with the nomadic Semites of the Arab peninsula whenever they migrated there. Because it was the only animal that could withstand the hard conditions of desert and the best means of transportation for the nomads.

So, Semites were the Bedouins of Arabia who came from East Africa and settled at the coastal regions of Arabia, and then surplus population migrated periodically to the adjacent lands for the pursuit of survival. Finding a safe passage on the western coasts that led to an elbow room in the north they moved to the fertile Nile valley. A synchronous migration took place around 3500 B.C from the eastern shores of Arabia to the Tigro-Euphrates valley, inhibited by

Sumerians (Hitti 10). Semitic Bedouins when joined with the locals proved themselves to have productive minds, even in the field of aesthetics.

When they merged in the local populace of Egypt, introduced leading innovations that are still persisting in our civilisation. They are the ones who introduced solar calendar, still used in our times. They also initiated stone structures, the culmination of which is the pyramids, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient World. Moreover, Semites when entered Tigro-Euphrates valley they encountered the cultured gentry, who were agrarian people, used to erect permanent living quarters and above all, knew the art of writing. Semitics when joined with Sumerians produced Babylonian civilization (Hitti 10) and numerous modern innovations are accredited to these creative brains. In architecture they introduced arch and vault system, originators of wheel cart and also gave the system of weight and measure. Hanging Gardens of Babylonia too are attributed to them.

Hamurabi, famous as “the law giver” was the Amorite Babylonian. By about 1900 B.C. Assyrians excelled in writing, evidence of which survive in the form of 22000 clay tablets, preserved in the British Museum. It is said that 5000 years ago they were accustomed to record their accounts on clay tablets with the help of a stylus. Chaldaean era, also called the second Babylonian age beginning about 604 B.C. is known as the age of “the mother of sciences”. And above all, the earliest known archaeologist was Nabonidus, a Babylonian, who was captured by Cyrus in 539 B.C., while he was engaged in archaeological studies (Kheirallah 14-15). Architecture of Babylonia was also at a developed stage, adorned with sculptures and reliefs. The artisans were masters of the craft of lapidary; Ishtar Gate adorned with glazed tiles depicting coloured animals in relief form is among the best examples. Babylonians introduced basic method of road building, postal system and even earliest musical notation of records are among the innovations introduced by them (Kheirallah 18).

Phoenicians (west Syrians and Palestinians) migrated about the middle of the third millennium B.C. were the sole innovators of a complete alphabetic system of writing consisting of twenty two symbols (alphabets), a brain child of Semites. This context is enough to rule out the notion that Semites, the Bedouins of al- Hijāz were devoid of aesthetics.

Although it retains the charge of lacking aesthetic heritage while its neighbours: Babylonians, Assyrians, Chaldaeans, Aramaeans, Hebrews and Phoenicians are exalted for their artistic creations. But

marked analogy of their languages and physical features compels one to think about certain deep rooted kinship among these people. The similarity of languages is actually another cord that ties these people to one string. All these languages had Semitic roots, emerging from the one called Ur-Semitic (O'leary 24) or Ursemitisch (Hitti 12). Although, original Semitic language was retained by none but numerous words holding similar meaning were commonly used in many of these languages, a mark of affinity among these people. For instance, Maulānā Abu al-Kalām Āzād while commenting on the words "Allāh" and "Rab" in the exegesis of the first chapter of the Holy Qur'ān: *al-Fāṭiha*, asserts that these words were used in all the Semitic languages. The word "Rab" is used in *Ibrānī* (Hebrew), *Siryānī* and Arabic denoting the One, who nurtures. He further adds that in *Ibrānī* (Hebrew) and Aramaic, "Rabbāh" and "Rabbī" have similar meaning. And in the ancient Egyptians and *Khāldi* languages the word "Rabū" denotes identical connotation. Thus he also stresses that the similarity of these languages proves the ancient Semitic homogeneity of these people (Azad 29).

It was further enhanced in the 19th century when Cuneiform language was decoded. It disclosed the cognate nature of these languages that is Assyro-Babylonian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and Ethiopic. The grammar and vocabulary of these languages have closer kinship. It means they stem from a single cord. Further investigation disclosed greater similarity of the "social institutions, religious beliefs and physical features" (Hitti 9) of these people. It is inferred thus from the evidences that these people must have emanated from the same ancestral line, which is ascribed to the Hamites of Eastern Africa, who were re-named Semites later.

Semites who were Bedouins in Arabia, Babylonians in Mesopotamia and Phoenicians in Syria were the intelligentsia who best adapted themselves to the circumstances surrounding them. The Bedouins of Arabia represent the optimum adjustment "of human life to the desert conditions" (Hitti 22), which is also an aspect of their aesthetics. When they migrated to the fertile valleys, where their energies were not spent on the hardships of desert, they engaged themselves in the healthy activities. In the creative and aesthetic pursuits they proved superb. But all this arises certain queries about the attribution of the creative acts, such as, whether those creations were by native people or attribution of any sort be given to the immigrant Bedouins that is to Semites, as they had no past heritage likewise. It is true that they had lived in simplicity: their raiment, dwellings, customs and traditions were so simple that did not require

any lavishness. This does not mean that they lacked aesthetic values rather their circumstances did not allow them to ponder on these lines.

It is evident therefore, that creativity can not be placed in the category of the basic human needs but it is one of the basic human instincts. One can survive without it but this survival would not be a pleasant one. So Bedouins of Arabia expressed their creative skills wherever they met propitious conditions. Specimens of their talent are not only auspicious in the lands they migrated but in the Arab peninsula as well, where surroundings were promising, such as, Yaman in the Southern Arabia and Petra and Palmyra in the north.

In the civilised stance south western part of Arabia preceded the rest. The most expressive remains that provide a precise glimpse of a civilisation were its inscriptions and Sabaeans: the sedentary Bedouins, of Yaman used inscription as early as the 8th century B.C. The alphabets of these inscriptions had closer affinity with the letters of the classical Arabic. It was called South-Arabic by the scholars and in the Greek usage it was termed "Himyaritic". These inscriptions disclose that highly developed culture persisted for about 1200 years in this civilisation, peopled with elaborate civic organization (Montgomery 129).

It was not the cuneiform script as defined by many scholars which was adopted by the ancient orient beyond the confines of Babylonia. Cuneiform was surpassed by the Phoenician alphabets: more refined than Cuneiform. It was adopted by the people of Asia, Mediterranean, Greeks, and Romans and eventually by the whole world. These alphabets were early adopted by the northern-Semitic world. People from the southern part of the Arabian cape adopted this script far earlier, almost about the first half of the first millennium B.C., which confirms the civilised culture of these people at a very early date (Montgomery 163).

The South Arabian inscriptions had diversity of content but all were ultimately linked with religion. Even business documents were pasted in temples to acquire approval from deities. There were votive inscriptions on tablets consecrated to their gods. Architectural inscriptions used on temples and public buildings to commemorate historical incidents or to record the patrons and builders of these edifices. Police ordinances were engraved on pillars, and tomb architecture also contained inscriptions (Hitti 51). There were constitutional texts; elaborately defining laws of state as well as numerous inscriptions relating to the confession of sins. It defines that polytheistic religion prevailed there with elaborate system of rituals. The technique of bronze casting was applied for several

inscriptions which had no precedence (Montgomery 130). Such was the organized set up of the southern populace of Arabia. A mature not naive civilisation existed in the southern quarters of Arabia and a pronounced culture, at such an early age with its arts, inscriptions, distinctive theology and polity. Furthermore, there were prolific examples in that part, of the architectural edifices of the peninsula.

In the first century A.D. al-Yaman was called “the land of castles”, and the most illustrious of all, was the castle of *Ghumdān* at *San‘ā’* in al-Yaman erected by Himyarites. It is the earliest sky scraper, a twenty storied fortified citadel. There were astonishing facts about this castle. The upper most storey, where the court of the king was held, its ceiling had such a transparency that it is proverbial that one could look through it skyward and easily distinguish between a kite and a crow. Moreover, each corner of the outer side of building had a brazen lion which roared with blowing of wind (Hitti 57), a witness of the prodigy of Semites. Historians Ili *Shariha* al-Hamdāni and then Yāqūt have recorded this palace in detail in the first century A.D., when it was in shambles (Hitti 57), meaning that it was erected at some early date. Another exceptionally marvellous edifice near ancient al-Yaman was the great *M‘arib* dam.

It was a fine example of engineering talent of the Semites, who may be called cultured Bedouins. A colossal water reservoir in al-Yaman, fifty five miles north-east of *San‘ā’* built under the Sabaeans rule, which extended from 950 to 115 B.C. (Hitti 54). Exact date of its erection is not known but it is suggested that it was built in about 8th century B.C. and remained in working condition for thirteen centuries that is up till the 6th century A.D. It was such a huge water reservoir that the busting of it brought enough destruction, causing migration of its people and devastating the Sabaen kingdom. It was such a great catastrophe that it is even cited in the Holy Qur‘ān. Referring infidelity of the people of Sabā‘, it is quoted, Qur‘ān xxxiv (Saba‘), 16:

(tr.) But they turned away (from Allāh), and We sent against them the flood (releasd) from the Dams, and we countered their two gardens (rows) into “gardens” providing bitter fruit and tamarisks and some few (stunted) Lot trees.

“so they turned aside and we sent on them the flood of ‘*Arim* (34, 15). ‘*Arim* means catastrophic rain or a rat, which is interpreted that excessive rain caused flood by breaking the dam or it might be by a rat that bored the dam which was already over full due to rain. An inscription denotes that the dam was destroyed by flood about 447-450 A.D. and repaired by the Abyssinian ruler Abraha, then again it was destroyed by a later date (O’Leary 90). It was a great irrigation project,

a specimen of scientific engineering, and a major contributor in the prosperity of al-Yaman (Khierallah 19-20). It had thirty regulators to control: reduce or increase the flow of water as required (Munir 8). The mortar or cement used to join stones is so strong that it has not chipped off, even after passing 2800 years. The granite and volcanic stones are so intact that it seems to have constructed recently. The northern outlet of the dam is well preserved with five spillways and in the middle, is a dyke: a solid structure to break the pressure of water (Khierallah 20). A well thought out project, not an incidental construction. Nearby it, is still existing a chain of numerous deep spring-fed reservoirs. The irrigation system related to this dam also provided a safe trade route to the caravans moving between East-Africa, India, Syria, and Egypt, which could be insecure with scarcity of water.

Apart from the southern quarter of the peninsula, a few regions in the north do retain artefacts of exquisite beauty, such as Petra⁷ and Palmyra⁸. Both were though subjugated by the Romans by around 1st century B.C. but the places are renowned for their artefacts. Petra famous for its rock hewn tombs decked with sculptures and high reliefs, particularly in the town of al-'Ula (Hitti 72). Palmyra too had architectural monuments. But thanks to the 20th century excavations that support the anti-thesis that the ancient dwellers of the cape of Arabia were neither uncivilised nor uncultured in the sphere of aesthetics. A few specimens from the excavated sites of other quarters of the cape have also been unearthed.

In Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, etc. archaeologists have dug out numerous artefacts ranging from domestic and funerary architecture to round sculptures, reliefs, jewellery, and pottery, including a few specimen of wall painting as well, a tangible proof of the sense of beauty and creativity, instinctive in man, proved unavoidable in Bedouins.

Considering in mind the ancient architecture of those regions we realise that in its function and usage it was not confined to a few limited types. There was domestic, funerary, palatial, military and religious architecture that cannot be generalised for its apparent shape or functions because of the variety it kept. It was actually subjected to the diverse climatic conditions of the peninsula and availability of its materials. For example, on the coastal lines of the Gulf, Batina, coast of Oman and Tihama, huts of perishable material such as date palm fronds were erected and dry stone construction especially of the beach-rock was made. In the former, date palm was intertwined in such a way that it provided ample space for decorative patterns, like designs weaved in the art of basketry. It is considered certain that decorative designs on Mesopotamian cylindrical seals of

proto literate period (late 4th millennium B.C. to early 3rd millennium B.C.) and the soft stone pottery pieces of the early Dynastic II and III (2600-23000 B.C.) have some affinity with these ancient examples. For permanent quarters locally available stones such as beach rock or locally available dry stone of any kind were used for construction and gypsum plaster was used as binding material. But beach-rock did not facilitate adornments because it was difficult to be carved out, so houses were just painted from outside to make them decorative.

Plans of the houses were also varied, such as circular, oval, rectangular and square. In the second millennium B.C. that is the Bronze Age, sites of Yemen had square and oval houses of dry-stone, whereas, rectangular houses with multiple rooms were common in Oman and north-west Arabia. From 2000 to 1700 B.C. the region now called Bahrain had a certain generalization of square houses with a large L-shaped room attached to a smaller square one, perhaps a pantry. Windows seem to be a part of domestic architecture because thin alabaster slabs, found from these sites, are still used as window panes in Yemen (Schmidt 247-248). The civilized stance of the Arab cape is obvious not only from their domestic architecture but funerary structures too, had enough elaboration, an evidence of their belief in the life hereafter.

In the Oman peninsula there are several examples of ancient burials with single as well as group inhumations. The most ancient example of single burials labeled as “Haft burial type⁹”, consisted of an inner and an outer ring of stone walls, which were piled up to form a domical structure. It was approached by a narrow entrance leading to a small inner chamber for the keeping of corps. Beehive graves were another type of burials either contemporary to “Haft type” or a little later addition. Here, roof is provided with horizontal placing of flat stone slabs, without mortar, to form tholos¹⁰ (Schmidt 248). Furthermore, the title Umm-al Nār¹¹ was labelled to circular graves with diameters ranging from 5 to 13 meters because these are collective burials. These were different apparently from the Haft or Beehive graves, consisted of dry-stone several feet high walls placed on a huge plinth, faced with lime stone. The whole structure was unroofed and entrance to it was from an apsidal hole in the wall. It was such a colossal structure that it could keep up to 200 corpses. Collective inhumations remained much in vogue even in the 2nd millennium B.C. along with the burial of single corpses within stone lined cists. Now there is much variety in the burial places, there are subterranean as well as above ground collective graves. In Qattara

near al- 'Ayn, Bidya, a place between Dibba and Khor Fakkan, and al-Qusays near Dubai include about 40 meters long semi-subterranean structure covered with a flat or saddle- back shaped roof formed by placing boulders without fixing with a mortar. T-shaped deep subterranean graves were found from Dhaya near Rams and Bithna near Fujayra town, in the north of the Oman. Among the above ground graves there are Shimal type that have rounded ends, it did not include any underground chamber instead the whole was placed on the ground. Khatt graves are another type which are actually Shimal type but with addition of an outer wall encircled around it to keep more corpses. By the end of the 2nd millennium B.C., there were circular and horse-shoe shaped, mostly underground. Shaft grave became popular then, which contain a vertical opening that extends into an oval chamber.

Furthermore, we see rapid advancement in burial architecture by the first few centuries A.D., specimen unearthed from Mleiha in Sharja Qaryat al-Faw in central Arabia. It was based on a subterranean chamber topped by a rectangular shaped mud brick tower, adorned with architectural ornamentation, which then took the shape of a stepped pyramid, which was much like the parapets of fortresses depicted in Neo-Assyrian reliefs. But a more elaborate type of burial from the 1st century A.D. was in the shape of a subterranean rectangular walled chamber, of locally available beach rock or some other stones masonry, and covered with a barrel vault. It had a well constructed shaft entrance, which is also roofed over with another vault. It was like a tomb structure the entrance and barrel vault of which stood above the ground whereas the actual burial chamber lay underneath (Schmidt 248-249). The above mentioned examples were related to the burial places of Oman peninsula. The use of barrel vault in such ancient times is amazing and proof of the aesthetics of those people.

Excessive examples of funerary architecture of Arabia came from its Southern quarters. Five types of burials have been unearthed from Yemen: simple pit burial, stone cairns, rock cut cists for single inhumation, used in mountainous regions, free standing sarcophagi sealed with flat stone slabs instead of lids of the stone coffins and rock hewn chambers with multiple niches. Another specialty of south-Arabian funerary places is the constructed graves. These consist of a central corridor, surrounded by eight to ten narrow chambers to keep corpses.

North-West Arabia did not lag behind the South in funerary monuments; rather it was a step ahead in its ornamentation. For example simple pit burial of each grave was provided with a stone

stele, decorated with a pair of eyes, eye brows and nose. Stepped burial mounds were surmounted by a rectangular burial cist above ground, particularly at Tayma. At Dedan, the cist was divided and frequently accompanied by frontally positioned large lions, carved out in low relief (Schmidt 249).

Rock-cut chambers were treated like large public buildings, elaborately adorned under the Nabataean rule of the north-west Arabia (4th BC. - 4th AD.), specially at Mada'in Salih: a site in Hījāz. Entrances, for instance, to these tombs were decorated with "zoomorphic" creatures like, lions and eagles, and architectural components such as curving pediments, architraves, rosettes, triglyphs, funerary urns, cornices and capitals. Entrance doors were surrounded by elaborately decorative facades, having attached columns topped with cornices (Akiyama, ed. et al. 249). But scholars like Rudolph E. Brunnow, Aferd von Domaszewski and others are of the view that Nabataeans borrowed decorative element from Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Hellenistic Greek art and blended them with their own. For example the capitals of Nabataean columns were shaped by voluted horns, instead of the volutes of Ionic columns, although the usual size and entasis of Greek column are altogether missing here. Moreover, floral decorations, diagonal arrangement of ornamentation of walls and the size of façade and tomb chambers are original Nabataean attributions not resulted from any other source of inspiration (Hammond 419).

The most arresting example of Nabataean tomb complex was in Madā'in al-Sālih, a place in Hijāz, 25 km. north of al- 'Ula. There were about forty rock hewn tombs in this region. The most striking characteristic of the structures was *tabula ansata*:¹² placed above the entrance to the tomb, describing the name of builder, date of his death and terms relating to the use of temple by the family members of the deceased and other people (Akiyama, ed. et al. 250). Funerary architecture was not the only type excavated from the Arabian cape; it retained examples of palaces and military architecture too.

From the few excavated sites of Arabia one gets familiar with the magnificent residential quarters. In grandness these were not of lesser merit than their Assyrian, Babylonian or Greek counterparts. A large palace at Qal'at al-Bahrain with 1.1 metre thick walls, reminded archaeologists of the Neo- Assyrian palace of Nimrud, called Fort Shalmaneser (mid 9th century B.C.) and Babylonian summer palace of Nabuchadnezzar (604-526 B.C.). Although it has not been fully unearthed but the exposed parts approve grandness of that complex with its reception rooms, bed rooms and bath. Three other buildings

from Jumayra in Dubai were excavated in the 1970s: a complex of square shops on either side of the street, governor's palace and a large house resembling the hunting lodge. Its plan and outer layout remind the hunting lodges of the Umayyad period: rectangular rooms flanking around courtyard. The external walls intersected by circular corner bastions, semi-circular buttresses etc. The whole was decorated with plaster and stucco in Sasanian style.

There are numerous examples of military architecture too, which is of two types: small fortresses and vast open area surrounded by walls. Best examples of the latter are from east-Arabia: from al-Dur examples from 1st century A.D., at Qal'at al Bahrain specimen of 2nd century A.D. and from Jumayra 5th and 6th century buildings have been executed. The architectural features of Parthian edifices of the 3rd century B.C. can be viewed here, such as round towers, semi-circular buttresses, quarter circular pilasters, instead of square structures. The rounded shapes were adopted by Sasanians which later became important feature of the Muslim architecture (Turner, ed. 250-251).

The story of ancient architecture of the cape of Arabia does not end here but besides military this region is marked by heterogeneous religious edifices as well. In plan these structures are oval, rectangular in the shape of a parallelogram. Example of the last shape is the Barbar temple of Bahrain (2200 B.C.) which is based on a platform retaining the shape of a parallelogram. It is topped by a small rectangular shrine, surrounded by an oval wall, covering an area of 70×58m. It is constructed on a low hill with natural spring in its vicinity which was directed into the temple complex. It was such a marvellous building that it remained in use for almost five centuries that is from 2200 B.C. to 1700 B.C.

Aesthetics of the Bedouins did not lag in the field of sculpture making. Modern excavations have made us familiar with this side of their intellect. There are examples of reliefs as well as free standing sculptures in the round but those people seem more inclined to the former type. There are stone, bronze along with terracotta sculptures, mostly found from the southern quarters of the Arab peninsula, though there are examples found from other sides of this region. Reliefs are mostly linked with funerary edifices in the form of grave steles. In the Oman peninsula the earliest examples dating 2500 to 3000 B.C. are from the umm al-Nār and al-ʿAin graves in Abu-Dhabi. Ashlar masonry provided ample free space for ornamentation which was utilised properly by the artistic brains of Bedouins. On the Umm al-Nār Cairn II, there are five reliefs, three represent animals, while one depicts a creeper and another had a

stylised representation analogous to human figure. Dromedary is rendered on two blocks: on one single dromedary and on the other, dromedary with an Arabian oryx is shown. Third relief depicts a short horned bull with upturned tail. An interesting form exists on the fourth block which consists of a semi-circular shape surmounting a vertical rectangular form that has slightly narrow waist. Most probably it indicates a stylised human figure. The fifth block is perhaps part of a broken offering table that is adorned with a meandering snake carved in high relief. Further specimens are on a large grave at al-'Ain adorned with human and animal figures (Schmidt 253-254).

An interesting relief is found from 'Tayma' in north-west Arabia, which is in the north-east of Madā'in Sālih. A tall bearded figure is represented here, wearing long robes and tiara on his head, holding a sceptre in the left hand, while a winged sun disc surmounts his head. A few scholars consider him as a priest while others label him Nabonidus because of its resemblance with a stele found from Harran in the south-east of Turkey. Madā'in Sālih is a place, where Nabonidus the last king of Neo-Babylonia, had lived for ten years. He is the one, labelled as the first archaeologist of the world. So it is a good reason to assert that this figure must be Nabonidus himself.

Excessive use of relief carving has been unearthed from the southern quarters of the Cape of Arabia which includes ornamentation of public buildings along with grave stelae. There are zoomorphic elements, floral and geometric ornaments as well as human figures along with inscriptions, represented on these reliefs. Among the zoomorphic there are ibexes, gazelles, bucrania, oryxes, horse oxen and dromedary. The architectural ornaments can generally be categorised into two groups: zoomorphic and floral. Interlacing grapevine tendrils with symmetrically arranged bunches of grapes, acanthus leaves, date palms and different other trees belong to the latter category, zigzag chevron pattern is also part of the list, including female dancers in one of the buildings of Ma'in. But all this is rendered with extreme simplicity which is in stark contrast to the sophisticatedly intricate architectural designs of this region. Scholars have linked it with early Christian and medieval art not with Greeks for its simplified renderings (Potts 255), which might be their conscious attempt to remain individual instead of imitating their other contemporaries.

One of the fine examples of the grave stelae of this region identified from the text inscribed as the grave stone of 'Ijl, son of Sa'dlat. Surmounting this inscription is a recessed panel with banquet

scene. On the left is a lute player and on right is a comparatively larger figure with a cup in hand, picked from the table, by its side is a smaller figure that might be an attendant. A band with grapevine separates the lower panel with a horse rider, chasing a camel with a spear in hand. These types of stelae where the deceased is riding an animal or walking with a staff in hand, accompanied a servile figure in series of registers are frequent. A device also adopted by Muslims in the representation of narratives in miniatures.

Stylistically all these reliefs are extremely simplified renditions, where details are indicated just through lines but identity of the figures represented is lost no where. In this respect these are quite akin to the simplified representations of modern abstract renderings or we can anticipate the premonitions of the style evolved by Muslim artists in the times to come. Moreover, these are closer to the Babylonian and Assyrian types. It is another link of relations of the Bedouins with the lands adjacent to the cape of Arabia. Moreover, most of these reliefs carry inscriptions, either related to the deceased person or the name of the dedicant of the stele.

The free standing statues found from the cape include men and women, a dolphin, eagles, horse, retaining Babylonian or Egyptian influences. Best examples are again from southern parts of Arabia, finest among them are in alabaster stone while some coarser ones, which seems to have produced in masses are in lime stone. Despite variations in the quality of workmanship, there are certain generalised features such as all are symmetrically frontal, have angular features and mask-like appearances. Eyes are fully inlaid either with shell, bitumen or hard stone or just pupils are inlaid.

Another exception is the sculptures in bronze that are widely spread in the Pre-Islamic Arabia, from small miniature figurines to the full scale sculptures. They had used lost -wax technique for bronze casting, the only evidence of bronze casting is found from south-Arabia. Many of these sculptures are Greek in influence but the evidence of their casting in the cape proves that these were locally made.

Terracotta figurines, dating 1st century B.C. have also been unearthed from Arabia, where human and animals both are rendered but female statuettes out-number the rest. Human figurines found from south-Arabia are simple and typical in representation having arms bent from elbows, hands in front of chests, stylised faces with eye brows and noses indicated through incised lines. Eyes too were not modelled, just impression created. Numerous examples of camel figurines and a long necked animal with unusual head and ear are also traced from this site. Moreover, from east-Arabia examples of

males and females statuettes, almost identical to the south Arabian type are excavated (Potts 260).

These are a few specimens to prove that in the field of art and aesthetics Semites (Bedouins) did not lag behind any other people. If artefacts had not existed in the barren climes it was not subjected to their talent but in reality their forces were directed to the survival pursuits. And it emerged wherever they found an outlet. It again raises a question about the kinship of Bedouins with Sabaeans or Himyarites.

Basically they all were Semites, who came from East-Africa, settled at the coastal and verdant lands of Arabia. So, various tribes bearing a number of nomenclatures were all Semites. In the fertile lands they were civilized at an earlier date, while others followed this course and remained Bedouins for a longer time. But even these Bedouins were not like usual gypsies, wandering purposeless, on the other hand roaming was essential for their survival. They went after pastures. Hitti has given a pithy statement when he says, “nomadism is as much a scientific mode of living in the Nufūd as industrialism is in Detroit or Manchester” (Hitti 22). But wandering from place to place was not the only occupation of these Bedouins (Arabs) rather they had an additional qualification of eloquence. Arab bards were great orators too. Rhythm of their rhymes produced music, so bewitching that they called it “lawful magic” “*Sibr-e bilāl*”. It was enchanting even for those who could not comprehend the language (Hitti 90). Even modern Persia, boastful for its literary heritage of Firdausi, Jāmi or Nizāmi, can accredit Arab Bedouins for their talent because prior to the advent of Islam, it is hard to find nay ballistic specimens in that land which is renowned for the rich and ancient most artistic traditions.

Although Bedouins did not produce any tangible recognisable form of art but one attribute was quite individual to them, their rich literature of poetry, produced in the period labeled as “*Jabilia*”: the age of ignorance (Hottinger 19). It is well said by Hitti that “their artistic nature found expression through one medium only: speech. If the Greek gloried in his statues and architecture, the Arabian found in his ode (*qasida*) and the Hebrew in his psalm, a finer mode of self-expression” (Hitti 90). Arabians placed greater significance to this mode of expression. Therefore, numerous adages had been evolved in its support, such as, “beauty of man lies in the eloquence of his tongue”. Another pithy maxim in this context defined in the *Majmū’al Rasā’il* by *al-Jābiḡ* and quoted by Hitti, “wisdom has alighted

on three things: the brain of Franks, the hands of the Chinese and the tongue of the Arabs” (Hitti 90-91).

Arabic language has miraculous effectiveness. It is precise and concise. A true delineation of the Bedouin mindset, who is ranked among the uncouth barbarians but the art of poetic expression was his cultural asset (Hitti 92). The poetic creations of ancient Arabia were so highly revered that poems in later times were mostly composed on the standards set by the Bedouins of *Jabalia*. It is similar to the Classical Greek art which remained a criterion of all artistic creations of the Western world till the emergence of the Modern era. Poetry of ancient Arabia is considered both as refined and primitive. In the range of concepts and in emotive field it is restricted but in all the other aspects such as the rules of prosody and rhymes, rich vocabulary of the language, and above all “the variety and diversity of its rhythmic and tonal nuances”, it is marvellous (Hottinger 19). Poems are not necessarily composed to narrate a story or a thought, for which prose is enough. This medium is basically subservient to the beauty of rhythm, the hallmark of Arabic poetry, but it is not impoverish in content.

Broadly speaking, the content of the ancient Arabic poetry can be categorized into two groups: one related to the objective descriptions and the other idealising the heroic deeds of the Bedouins. In descriptive content it was very rich, dealing with the minute details of landscapes, animals, or weather phenomenon, with accomplished command on the use of similes. But the major aim of their poetry was to glorify the clan or individuals. They proudly boast of the bravery to withstand the terrible tempests alone, etc. For this they had masterly utilised all the accessories of a fine poetry: accurate observation and expression, essential details, novel similes and the emotional inspiration to tie the whole in a string (Hottinger 20-21), which is the criterion of their aesthetics.

The poetic culture in pre-Islamic Arabia was so deep rooted that an annual fair was held at ‘*Ukāz*, a place between *Nakblab* and *al-Tā’if* in *al-Hijāz*. It was a sort of literary congress (Hitti 93) of the present day. Poets used to participate enthusiastically to make their name. In the linguistic philosophy the Bedouin’s dialect: Arabic is extolled as the most refined and highly expressive language, “ever fashioned by the mind and tongue of man” (Atiya 22). Poetry is actually a direct form of expression which is not subservient to any tangible material. The visual arts: painting and sculpture do have this sort of servility. So keeping in mind the severe conditions of desert they substantiated their creative urge through words. Beauty of words was Bedouins only tool with which he chiselled his thoughts to expression.

This is the aesthetic of the Bedouin: virtuoso of the verbal discourse. It is also one of the attributes of the sacred scripture of Muslims: the Holy Qur'ān, although written in prose form but retains the rhythm of poetry. Moreover, an exceptional trait of the Bedouin was extraordinary memory, which he developed out of the scarcity of materials in the desert. He modelled his thoughts into words, without longing for pen or parchment to record them. Retained all in his memory and kept them alive through generations by passing on from mouth to mouth. Thus along the beauty of the language, Bedouins are praised for their innate skill of commemoration (Hottinger 19).

These are a few evidences to eliminate the blame that the Arab peninsula which is the cradle of Islam was devoid of artistic traditions of any sort and Bedouins had no consideration for art. It is only that the word Bedouin has been isolated for the people of the barren lands of the peninsula. Though there are multifarious facts that prove them Semites, who had highly aesthetic nature which remained muted in unfavourable circumstances but amplified wherever they find it possible. So, Arabs of the verdant lands, Sumerians, Babylonians, Phoenicians and Bedouins etc. were all Semites because their language too has closer affinity. Consequently, Bedouin Arabs were also Semites who were permeated with their innate faculty for creativity that is their artistic instinct. Because instincts are the innate behaviours in humans with which they cannot apart. Though their expression can be reduced, amplified or modified according to the situations encountered by their possessors but cannot be extinguished.

It corroborated through historical evidences that a magnificent civilisation prevailed in the Arab cape thousands of years prior to the Greeks learnt the art of writing or chiselled his earliest sculptures. But unfortunately the whole world is familiar with the creative activities of Greeks but unfamiliar with the genius of the people bearing the nomenclature of Bedouins. Alloy Springer is the one who tried to make people familiar that Greeks acquired knowledge, culture and even mythology from the East, especially from Babylonia. He asserts that Greeks;

Personified their idols after the Babylonia formula, invented fables in explanation of the reasons and produced poetry which, like their arts, personified their idols. It was the old Oriental fable in a new and more pleasing garment Natural philosophy they gained from Chaldeans and Egyptians, for Aristotle alludes occasionally to these sources; half of their medicines and plants had names of Arabic and Persian origin ... they adopted Babylonian chronology and sciences; therefore, when

Arabs came into their own, they found their own Semitic thoughts beautifully arranged (Kheirallah 23).

It is reasonable then to assert that the civilised cultures of the world emerged through the Semites, and Bedouins were not deficient of it. Whenever they met favourable circumstances they made their talent manifest. Though, the Bedouins of Arab lagged behind in the civilised cultural field only due to the ominous conditions of the desert. But they periodically enriched the surrounding lands with the fresh blood of Semites, who made an outburst of their instinct of beauty in the auspicious lands. So, they can rightly be called artistic not only for their capacity to create objects of beauty but also for their courage to survive in that unruly abode.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

¹ Empire of Amurru is the fabulous land considered by the students of history, located somewhere north of Syria, and resided by the biblical Amorites (Montgomery 54).

² The land of Aribi is designated to the area between Syria and Mesopotamia.

³ Mentioned in the Bible as Benhadad 11

⁴ Pentateuch are the first five books of Bible

⁵ There are references in the Holy Qur'ān of the nations of 'Ād and Thamūd, who were destroyed for their infidel attitudes. Greek geographers had located their settlement as Midian-Salih, at the south of the Red sea. It is a place from where special ancient Arabic inscriptions, titled Thamūdian type has been discovered (Montgomery 91).

⁶ In ancient times Bayhān was called Katakān.

⁷ Petra was a north Arabian state, situated between Sab'ā' and Mediterranean.

⁸ Palmyra was located on an oasis in the middle of the Syrian Desert.

⁹ It is so labelled because the earliest monumental graves were excavated from Jabal Haft, which is close to the borders of Oman and Abu-Dhabi, dated from 3000 to 2700 B.C.

¹⁰ Tholos is circular temple.

¹¹ Umm-al-Nār is an island opposite the modern city of Abu Dhabi.

¹² Recessed panels containing Nabataean inscriptions.

THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY AND THE
LANGUAGE OF THE BIRDS

Dr. Ayesha Leghari

ABSTRACT

The famous mystic, poet and lover of God Fariduddin 'Attar wrote the beautiful *Mantiq-al-tayr* as an ode for the family of souls who yearn for returning to their original home and source i.e. the Presence of the Divine. *Mantiq-al-tayr* is an ode that uses symbolic language to guide spiritual seekers who are in search of God. The real aim and goal is knowledge of God which is the fruit tasted at the end of the spiritual journey. All those who have a faint memory of the origin, yearn for a return to that world which is the true source of all joy. This yearning is an indication that such souls belong to the family of birds. Their souls have wings which keep attempting to fly back to their original nest i.e. the space of Divine Presence. In order to undertake the spiritual journey human beings are taught to interiorize and "assume the character-traits of God." Only a person who has reached the station of union with God through inculcating His character-traits can be called one who has actualized his full and true potential. The *Mantiq al-tayr* of *Farid-al-Din 'Attar'* is a glorious, spiritually inspiring piece of Islamic literature which is an example of Islamic creativity at its highest level. The poem has an alchemical effect on the souls of its readers who cannot help but being affected by this journey of the birds to the top of the cosmic mountain *Qaf*. This poem also symbolizes how Islam views the whole spiritual journey from the dimension of the Divine Essence, the Creator to the dimension of the first of created beings i.e. the Logos or the First Intellect known in Sufi terminology as the Light of Muhammad and finally to the dimension of the human souls who strive to return to the light of the Divine Essence.

The famous mystic, poet and lover of God Fariduddin ‘Attar wrote the beautiful *Mantiq-al-tayr* as an ode for the family of souls who yearn for returning to their original home and source i.e. the Presence of the Divine. Fariduddin ‘Attar called this ode of 4458 verses by the names of *Zaban-i-murqhan*, which means literally, the *Language of the Birds* and *Maqamat-i-tuyur*, *The Station of the Birds*. According to the Quran, God taught this language of the birds (*Mantiq-al-tayr*) to Solomon and it is by this title that the peerless work of ‘Attar finally became known.¹

Fariduddin ‘Attar was from Nishapur and most probably died of old age in 1220. ‘Attar is famous for his storytelling abilities which are greatly in evidence in his famous books, *Tadbkirat al-auliya*, “Stories of the Saints,” *Ilahiname*, “The Stories of the King and His Six Sons,” and the *Musibatname*, “The Book of Affliction.” He combines the attributes of a master storyteller and a poet in the ode *Mantiq-al-tayr*. This work became part of the classical works of Sufi literature which inspired generations of Sufis and poets who came after him.²

Mantiq-al-tayr is an ode that uses symbolic language to guide spiritual seekers who are in search of God. The real aim and goal is knowledge of God which is the fruit tasted at the end of the spiritual journey. All those who have a faint memory of the origin, yearn for a return to that world which is the true source of all joy. This yearning is an indication that such souls belong to the family of birds. Their souls have wings which keep attempting to fly back to their original nest i.e. the space of Divine Presence³.

And Soloman was David’s heir. And he said. ‘O mankind ! Lo ! we have been taught the language of the birds (*Mantiq al-tayr*) (xxvii:16)

‘Attar himself cites the reasons for writing this ode.

I have recited for you the language of the birds, one by one. Understand it then, O uninformed one! Among the lovers, those birds become free, who escape from the cage, before the moment of death. They all possess another account and description, for the birds possess another tongue. Before the *Simurgh* that person can make the elixir, who knows the language of the birds.⁴

‘Attar uses the most beautiful symbolic language to express the experience of mystic union with the Divine Beloved through this ode.

The theme of the soul's suffering due its separation from God is used as the motive force for starting the spiritual quest. 'Attar does not stop at this stage but goes beyond to reveal the mysteries of subsistence of the self (*baqa*) after it has already tasted annihilation (*fana*). At this stage the birds are able to recognize who they really are individually and finally to know themselves as they ought to be known in accordance to the saying, 'He who knows himself, knoweth the Lord'?⁵

O thou who through thy manifestation hath become invisible, the whole universe is Thee, but none hath beheld Thy face. The soul is hidden in the body and Thou in the soul, O thou hidden in the heart O Soul of soul !

Although Thou art hidden in the heart and the soul, Thou art manifest to both heart and the soul.

I see the whole Universe manifest by Thee, Yet I see no sign of Thee in the world.⁶

'Attar leads his readers by using the language of gnosis (*marifat*) fired by love of the Divine to the knowledge of the mystery of *Tawhid*. To reach this level of understanding, the reader is brought face to face with the concept of union with the Lord, not as intellectual concept but one which is grasped through the experience of actual spiritual tasting and initiation. The opening verses of the *Mantiq al-tayr* give the reader the confidence to trust the author as one which is a true guide. The author could not have revealed all that he did without having successfully undertaken the journey towards God himself. Only a master, intensely aware of the various stages of the journey and the various pitfalls that could distract the souls on the way, could have written such an account of the spiritual journey.

In order to undertake the spiritual journey human beings are taught to interiorize and "assume the character-traits of God."⁷ Only a person who has reached the station of union with God through inculcating His character-traits can be called one who has actualized his full and true potential. "Assuming the character-traits of God" does not take place easily and usually requires the process of spiritual quest, initiation by a spiritual master, a spiritual journey under the guidance of the master, reaching and recognizing various spiritual stations and finally reaching the spiritual goal, namely the experience of union with the Divine Beloved. 'Attar's ode is considered as one of the most beautiful expositions of this journey. Couched in poetic language which makes use of universal archetypes the ode expresses the universal human longing to unite and subsist in the Divine. This spiritual journey is not just a quest for personal satisfaction. Instead, its aim is to fulfill the true purpose of human creation according to Islam, which is to worship God and to reach the highest human

potential of becoming the *Khalifatullah* or the “representative of God” on earth.

‘*Mantiq-al-tayr*’ is a master piece which gives its readers a good insight into how this journey is conducted and how the goal is reached by a variety of souls who have to overcome their own shortcomings and limitations.

‘Attar’s aim is to lead the reader through the beautiful and symbolic language of gnosis (*marifah*) to a clearer understanding of the process involved in transforming the soul so that it is purified and is able to reach its Divine home.

The following is a passage from Attar’s ode glorifying the Prophet who represented the first of God’s creation, the Logos, the Perfect Man (*Insan al-kamil*), the being who was the perfect reflection of God Himself. These passages from Attar’s poem are being presented for two reasons. One is to gain an insight into the flight of the birds or of souls towards God, how this journey takes place and what are its various way-stations. The second reason is to give an example of how creativity and art has been used to formulate some of the most beautiful verses in Islamic literature. The reader can perceive how creativity finds its highest and most beautiful expression in Islamic literature when it is under the sway of the highest Islamic goal i.e. union with the Divine Beloved. ‘Attar writes the following verses in praise of the Prophet whom he declares to be the Master.

The Master of the Nocturnal Ascent and foremost among creatures,
The shadow of the Truth and the sun of the Divine Essence,
The Master of the two worlds and the king of all,
The sun of the soul and the faith of all beings,
His light was the purpose of creatures; He was the principle of all
existents and non-existents.
When the Truth saw the absolute light present,
It created a hundred oceans of light from his light.
It created that pure gold for It self,
Then created the creatures of the world for him.⁸

After the praise of the Prophet, the story of *Mantiq al-tayr* is presented which in itself is not a complicated one. The birds get together because they feel they need to have a king without whom they feel they cannot live in harmony and peace. The Hoopoe introduces himself to the assembly of birds as the ambassador sent by Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. He declares that the only bird worthy of being their king is the *Simurgh*.

All the birds realize that to reach the *Simurgh* is an arduous task so they make all sorts of excuses in order to avoid embarking on the journey. The Hoopoe is able to satisfy the questions and allay the fears and doubts of all the individual birds so that he rounds them up

for the journey. After having completed their preparations for the journey, they start the flight over the seven valleys of the spiritual mountain *Qaf*. Their aim is to reach the *Simurgh* or Celestial Monarch who resides on the top of this mountain.

The seven valleys which lead to the top of the mountain are the valleys of quest (*talab*), love (*ishq*), gnosis (*ma'rif*), contentment (*istighna*), unity (*twahid*), wonder (*hayrat*), poverty (*faqr*) and annihilation (*fana*). As is clear from the names of the valleys, they actually represent the various stages on the path which need to be actualized before the initiate can reach the top of the mountain and have a vision of the *Simurgh*.

The birds go through a transformation after they have achieved annihilation (*fana*) and it is only after this transformation that they can be in the Presence of the Divine. This is the part of the classical ode that highlights the intrinsic connection between the highest possible goal envisioned in Islam i.e. vision of God with the creative spiritual transformation that takes place within the being of the initiate who beholds God. 'Attar informs us that when the birds get transformed, each bird sees "it-self" because the thirty birds (*Simurgh*, in Persian) see the *Simurgh* simultaneously as totally separate from themselves and also the same as themselves.

Each bird sees its higher self in the *Simurgh*. The amazing experience of these birds is that not only do they perceive the *Simurgh* in the eternal *Simurgh* outside themselves but also within themselves. In fact when they looked at both directions, i.e. within and without, the only thing they could perceive was the one and only *Simurgh*. Their amazement knows no bounds and they reach a state of meditation beyond meditation. While in this state of amazement they asked the *Simurgh* to unveil this great mystery. The asking of this question takes place without the use of language and the answer comes to them in the same mode for the questioners and questioned are participating in the phenomenon which can be called a sort of creative union where language has no place. Language is a means of communication between two separate beings. But the answer to the question is that the *Simurgh* or thirty birds saw themselves in the Divine Mirror which is God's Majesty Itself. Therefore all thirty birds saw themselves reflected in the Divine Mirror and at the same time they were aware of their own inner selves.

At this point another dimension is added to the spiritual journey i.e. the dimension of God's eternal transcendence which is beyond the experience of individual existence because the *Simurgh* in its essential and eternal level is higher than the experience of any individual creature.⁹

To be consumed by the light of the presence of the *Simurgh* is to realized that,

I know not whether I am Thee or Thou art I;
I have disappeared in Thee and duality hath perished.¹⁰

Duality perishes only when the initiates experience annihilation of their individual selves through the actualization of their real Selves. They are able to experience their true reality which consists of pure spirit that was breathed into human beings at the outset of his/her creation. The real Self can only be experienced when all of the lower self has been annihilated and the soul unites with the One whose Breath constitutes its spirit.

The journey of the birds symbolizes the return journey to God which is in essence a creative, individual spiritual ascent just as the journey from God to material existence was a creative, individual, spiritual descent into formal matter. Creativity (*takebliq*) viewed from this perspective, was the means by which God manifested Himself through the mirror of the universe (*macrocosm*) and the mirror of the human being (*microcosm*).

Deeper contemplation of this phenomenon reveals that in His attribute of being the Creator (*Khaliq*) God never stops being the Creator of everything starting from the creation of the First Intellect, the Logos or the Light of Muhammad, to the generation of the whole of cosmos that stands bellow this first creation. He made the human being special for He formed a creature which contained the potential of actualizing all the attributes and names of God within itself. Seyyed Hossain Nasr explains this creative relationship from the perspective of *Fariduddin Attar's Simurgh*:

The *Simurgh* in reality symbolizes both the Divine Essence which stands above the created order and the Divinity as Creator and principle manifestation. The point on top of Mount *Qaf* is at once in the infinite expanse of the sky and the principle generation of the whole cosmic mountain below it. Moreover it is the point where the two orders, namely, the created and the uncreated, meet under this aspect, the abode of the *Simurgh* corresponds to the Logos or Intellect which is both created and uncreated depending upon how it is envisaged.¹¹

Here we observe that the “point on top of *Mount Qaf*” is the creative juncture between the world of spirit and the world of matter. It can be looked at as symbolizing the Creative principle which becomes the means and isthmus, (*barzakb*) of creation of the whole cosmos as well as the means of creation reaching back to its Origin. ‘Attar’s *Mantiq-al-tayr* is a piece of Sufi literature which has been successful in expressing difficult esoteric concepts in beautiful and comprehensible symbolic language and this great Sufi mystic’s

influence on many generations of Sufis that came after him cannot be doubted.¹²

The *Mantiq al-tayr* of *Farid-al-Din* 'Attar' is a glorious, spiritually inspiring piece of Islamic literature which is an example of Islamic creativity at its highest level. The poem has an alchemical effect on the souls of its readers who cannot help but being affected by this journey of the birds to the top of the cosmic mountain *Qaf*. This poem also symbolizes how Islam views the whole spiritual journey from the dimension of the Divine Essence, the Creator to the dimension of the first of created beings i.e. the Logos or the First Intellect known in Sufi terminology as the Light of Muhammad and finally to the dimension of the human souls who strive to return to the light of the Divine Essence.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

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- ¹ Seyyed H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1987. p. 99.
- ² Annemarie Schemmel, Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003, Lahore, p. 305.
- ³ Seyyed H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. p.98.
- ⁴ Fariduddin 'Attar, *Mantiq-al-tayr*, edited by M. J. Mashkur, Tehran, 1337 (A.H Solar), p. 316 trans. Seyyed H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, 1987, Suhail Academy, Lahore, p.99.
- ⁵ This famous saying usually cited in Sufi texts as a hadith is not acknowledged by the specialists.
- ⁶ Fariduddin 'Attar, *Mantiq-al-tayr*, edited by M. J. Mashkur, p. 6 trans. Seyyed H. Nasr, 1987, p. 100.
- ⁷ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000. p. 283
- ⁸ Seyyed H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. p. 101.
- ⁹ It is worth mentioning here that another great Muslim thinker Avicenna was able to tackle this theme of the esoteric spiritual journey in a beautiful manner. Refer to Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. W.R. Trask, New York, 1960: Corbin, En. Islam Iranian, vol. II.
- ¹⁰ 'Arrar, *Mantiq al-tayr*, trans. p. 267, Nasr, 101.
- ¹¹ Seyyed H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, p.112.
- ¹² Schimmel, p. 305.