

**ALLAMA IQBAL ON EGO  
AND SOME RELATED CONCEPTS**

Dr. Abdul Khaliq

**IQBAL ACADEMY PAKISTAN**

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I dedicate this book to the memory of (late)  
Professors M.M. Sharif and Hamid Ahmad Khan  
who, in absence as well as in presence, have  
Continued to be a source of inspiration  
for me in my academic pursuits.



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## PREFACE

Concept of ‘ego’, needless to say, plays the central role in the thought-system of Allama Muhammad Iqbal. His religious standpoint, his ethical views, his metaphysical speculations, his socio-cultural ramblings etc. all of them, somehow or other, directly or indirectly, derive their connotations from an individual’s realization of his personal as well as social identity or I-amness and the gradual but ensured consolidation of this identity on authentic grounds. All the chapters comprising this book have been prepared with the subjacent awareness of this patent truth about the overall worldview of our Philosopher. Most of the material used has, in its nebulous form, has already been published in various academic journals; for its presentation here, it has of course been thoroughly re-edited, revised and amplified. Some of the chapters / parts of the chapters have, however, been freshly written.

The reader of this book will see that, unusually, I have made a very rare use of the poetic writings of Iqbal; I have mostly based my argument, as regards the appreciation and evaluation of his thought, on his prose writings, specially his maturest regular book *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. This is because of the fact that I firmly hold that the poetic creations of a person can never independently — or even just collaterally with his prose writings — be the source of an intended rigorously consistent account of his views. One, if not the only, reason for this lies in the necessarily emotive character of the poetic exercise as such with its own compulsive requirements of rhythm, rhyme, metre and so on. Iqbal himself says:

It is idle to seek logical truth in poetry. The ideal of imagination is beauty, not truth. Do not try to show a poet's greatness by quoting passages from his works which, in your opinion, embody scientific truth [Stray Reflections: the private note book of Muhammad Iqbal, reflection No.14]

Anyhow, I have absolutely no hesitation to admit that, just because of its rhetorical import and emotive significance, poetry in its own right does have a positive role to play: for one thing, it is surely more effective than prose as regards the immediate mass communication to people at large of a point of view and a message and also as regards the insinuation for them to carry out the duly implied corresponding behavioral agenda. Primarily speaking, all this is exactly the role of the poetic works of Iqbal *vis a vis* his prose writings. He himself has claimed not to have done poetry just for the sake of the promotion of the poetic art itself but for the rejuvenation of the Muslim *Ummah*, in particular, and for the reinstatement of the esoteric worth and excellence of man as such. [cf. e.g.]

خوش آگئی ہے جہاں کو قلندری میری      وگر نہ شعر مرا کیا ہے شاعری کیا ہے  
نغمہ کجا و من کجا ساز سخن بہانہ ایست      سوئے قطاری کشم ناقہ بے زمام را

The first chapter entitled 'The Perfect Man' traces the humble earthly beginnings of the human ego with of course a Divine spark in him and so with an unlimited potential of growth and development. Organic wholeness and unity of man as put forth by Iqbal has been discussed in some detail in the face of the traditional philosophical problem of mind-body relationship and also in the face of the commonsense view that soul is a substance independent of, and temporarily reposed in, the body. Various stages of the human ego towards perfection, till he can 'more-or-less' legitimately claim that he is the *khalifa*, the vicegerent, of God on earth, have been highlighted and explained. The Holy Prophet (peace be on him) is, according to Iqbal, the ideal of perfect manhood in Islam. Towards the close of the chapter a brief reference

has been made to the Qur'anic views on metaphysics and eschatology which have incidentally a very meaningful relevance to the ultimate fate and destiny of the human ego.

In the *Reconstruction*, Allama Iqbal has prefaced his views about the meaning of 'prayer' with an elucidation of his concept of God, the Ultimate Ego, the Great I-Am. Man too is an ego and the more perfect he is in that capacity the greater is the justification with which he also can say 'I am'. God is a Person; man too is a person. In that regard both have a relationship of mutual concern one with the other. Prayer, according to Iqbal, is specially the instrument for man's encounter with God. The second chapter has its subject-matter Iqbal's concept of prayer — ritual prayer of a characteristic 'man of religion' as well as the prayer of a 'man of natural sciences' who in his observation of, and contemplation over, nature is also seeking a sort of intimacy with its Creator. How significant is the fact that the Qur'an uses the word *ayat* (آية) for a phenomenon of nature as well as for every one of its own verbal propositions which connote and qualify, among other things, the nature of God Himself!

The next chapter 'Observation of Nature and God-consciousness' is in a way a continuation of, and complementary to, the idea referred to in the previous chapter, where it has been explained that, according to Iqbal, "nature is to the Divine Self as character is to the human self... it is the habit of Allah" and thus "the observation of nature.... Is only another form of worship". In the present chapter it will be worked out as to how nature, in its broader meanings as comprising all of its three departments *viz* the external universe, the historical accounts of man's socio-cultural behavior and the internal world of man's own psyche. All of them are so authentic, according to the Qur'-an, that they are an evidence for, and a series of unequivocal pointers to, the existence as well as nature of the Divine Being. An answer will be attempted to the question as to how these pointers are to be interpreted in order that they safely lead a

person to what they ultimately refer to: how can the symbols lying close to us help reach the Grand Symbolizandum. Traditional arguments for the existence of God — the Cosmological, the Teleological, the Ontological — which too, throughout the ages, have claimed to register a journey from nature to God have been explained, critically examined and ultimately found to be fallacious on various grounds.

After dealing with the higher and higher reach of human ego in the world here and now, as it has been discussed in the previous chapters, the present, i.e. the fourth, chapter deals with its would-be occurrent destiny in the world hereafter. Post-mortal resurrection of each and every individual is one of the principal articles of Islamic faith. Thinkers, both eastern and western, have given philosophical arguments for the immortality of man. Allama Iqbal critically examines some of them and concludes that every one of them is defective on one count or the other. His own standpoint is that conviction in the veritability of life-after-death is only a matter of faith pure and simple: it is not a rational proposition at all. Iqbal's own views regarding the nature of life-after-death and its relevance to the life that we live in this world, which in many respects appear to be in contradistinction to those of the orthodox among Muslims, have been described in some detail and duly evaluated.

Iqbal's concept of the 'egos' in general as the ultimate constituents of the furniture of the universe, their mutual relationships as well as the potential of all of them for continued existence poses a very interesting comparative study with the concept of 'monads' as formulated by G.W. Leibniz, the German philosopher of 17<sup>th</sup> /18<sup>th</sup> century. The fifth chapter undertakes this study alongwith, in addition, its conceptual relevance to the doctrine of *jawahir* (atoms) of the Ash'arite theologians who flourished in Islam during the earliest times and whose views have been appreciated by Iqbal himself as 'the first important indication of an intellectual revolt against the Aristotelian idea of a fixed

universe’.

The sixth chapter has its subject-matter a discussion in regard to *Tawbeed*, the pivotal, inalienable, apex article of Islamic faith. Absolute Oneness of God, the Supreme Ego, has had three recognizably different interpretations popular with the philosophers of religion of all times: ‘theistic’, ‘pantheistic’ and ‘deistic’. During the discussion that follows a precise definition of these terms, it has been argued that Iqbal’s view of Divine Unity — as also the Qur’anic view itself — cannot be entirely confined to, and delimited by, the thought-jackets variously denoted by these terms. His concept of God, in consonance with that of the Qur’an is in fact simple, elemental and comprehensive, roughly incorporative of all these metaphysical viewpoints as necessary aspects of it. Iqbal’s emphasis that *Tawbeed* does not simply amount to a Muslim’s personal and private attitude of faith but is rather also a living force for the integration of his egoism as well as for the solidarity of the *Ummah* on moral grounds has been elaborated in some details.

The seventh chapter is a discourse on the comparative importance of ‘deed’ and ‘idea’ in the Qur’anic system as this system is understood and appreciated by Iqbal. ‘Deed’ obviously stands for moral action and ‘idea’ for the entire ideational system of the Qur’an — its metaphysics, epistemology and eschatology. In fact Iqbal’s views in this regard appear to be paradoxical. In the beginning of his Preface to the *Reconstruction* he declares that “The Qur’an is a book which emphasizes ‘deed’ rather than ‘idea’:” but at the same time, in what follows in the Preface itself as well as in various chapters of the *Reconstruction*, he has time and again brought about the immensely important role of ‘idea’ in the moral life of man. An attempt has been made in this chapter to resolve this so-called paradox and ultimately conclude that

the ‘idea’ without being faithfully assimilated into our persons is fruitless and the deed without necessarily following from faith is rootless. . The Qur’an requires that its metaphysics

should be lived so that it may compulsively generate moral actions.

The last i.e. the eighth chapter has a distinct sense of direction and a temperament of its own. Unlike the previous chapters which are exploratory as well as critical studies of various views and concepts put forth by Iqbal in his writings, the present one is suggestive in character. It simply refers to certain avenues of research and writing which, in my humble opinion, Iqbal scholars of to-day are required to investigate. This is the kind of job, which and when undertaken, will be a befitting homage to the memory of our revered philosopher-poet. As the generic concern of Allama Iqbal was to reconstruct Islamic religious thought, the burden of this chapter is the problem as to what must be the salient features of such a reconstruction in the socio-political situation and also even the scientific environments of the post-Iqbal scenario. In order to comfortably put my submissions across to the readers I have ventured a brief reference back, as an archetype, to the attempt in this regard made by Sayyid Ahmad, the elder contemporary of Iqbal in the Sub-continent, against the context of his own environments that prevailed specially in the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## FOREWORD

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1887-1938) is a creative thinker in the world of Islam who manifests a unique understanding of both the East and the West. His vision provides a sound edifice to make us understand not only the preceding thought patterns but also the ones which are subsequent to him. He has staunch followers and ardent critics who seem to be divided into different camps. However, there are a few solitary individuals whose sincerity with Iqbal's thought not only makes them responsive to his vision but, at the same time, make them transcend the narrow circuits of loyalty to him. They examine his views in the true spirit of pure objectivity, as far as possible, with due commitment. They understand the provisional nature of philosophical thought and thereby do not ascribe any finality to it. Dr. Abdul Khaliq, our great teacher, is one of such genuine thinkers who make us sincerely remember the forgotten lesson of Iqbal thus: "Towards the close of the Preface to his lectures published as *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, in all humility, but very rightly, observes: 'It must be remembered that there is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking. As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views and probably sounder views than those set forth in these lectures are possible. Our duty is to carefully watch the progress of human thought and to maintain an independent and critical attitude towards it'. This observation is the foundation of Iqbal's *Reconstruction* embracing metaphysical, religious, philosophical and scientific thinking.

Dr. Abdul Khaliq in his Preface alludes to the concept of 'ego' that takes a central place in the 'thought-system' of Allama Muhammad Iqbal. He further provides substances of his each Chapter namely: "The Perfect Man"; "Prayer: The Instrument of Man-God Encounter"; "Observation of Nature and God-Knowledge"; "Immortality of the Human Ego; Egos and Monads: A Comparative Study of Iqbal and Leibniz"; "Supreme Ego: The Unique Identity"; "Deed and Idea"; "Patterns of Sayyid Ahmad, Allama Iqbal and Post-Iqbalian Thought: Reconstruction and Future Openings." It gives the reader a fairly good idea of the living issues he is going to encounter during the course of his reading. It is pertinent to note that the author's approach is reflective which truly brings out the apparent and deeper meaning of Iqbal's thought. It communicates the subtle multidimensional realities in an accurate way.

Dr. Abdul Khaliq has touched on a subject that has a real significance in the life of an individual and of the society at large. He discusses the concept of the Ultimate Ego and its relationship with man and the universe. He shares with us many useful insights in our understanding of the Divine Ego. He brings forth Iqbal's views on the human ego which reveals itself as "a unity of mental states". He discusses its characteristics and delves on Iqbal's view between the 'efficient self' and the 'appreciative self'. He briefs us so well on the immortality of the ego. One is really fascinated to see the reality of the ego being discussed both from the vertical and horizontal dimensions in such an understandable way.

Dr. Abdul Khaliq has a great understanding of Muslim Philosophy and has already done authentic work on the Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He is also well acquainted with the tradition of Western philosophy and understands its strengths and limitations. All this helps him to interpret Iqbal in an open spirit. He examines different angles of an issue and at times gives his own viewpoint. We can take one such example from his work regarding the term pantheism used by

modern philosophy to express existential equation between God and the universe. He quotes Iqbal's interpretation of the Light verse: "...The metaphor of Light as applied to God therefore must... be taken to suggest the Absoluteness of God and not His Omnipresence which easily lends itself to a pantheistic interpretation". The author says: "However, besides this declared attitude, there are a number of implicit, though quite significant, references in the writings of Iqbal which exhibit a tendency towards pantheism. For instance, he says:

- (i) From the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed (the word 'proceed' here suggests a sort of emanationism)
- (ii) The universe...does not confront God as an other existing *per se*... From the standpoint of the all-inclusive Ego there is no other. In him thought and deed, the act of knowing and the act of creating are identical.

And so on.

"The above apparently ambivalent position of Iqbal" says the author "is obliquely due to his almost equally strong allegiance to orthodoxy as well as to the mystico-philosophical traditions in Islam. Really, I hold, pantheism and theism do not refer to two diametrically opposed and mutually contradictory ontological truths in the usual sense of the word 'ontology'. They are simply existential point of view. The difference between them can be understood analogically with reference to the difference between *tariqat* and *shari'at* or that between the inner and the outer aspects of religious awareness... Hence the controversy regarding whether Iqbal was a pantheist or a theist that has long been carried on by the scholars of Iqbal appears to be a little misconstrued. He may justifiably be both.

As we look more closely at the position of Iqbal, we find that he neither holds on to absolute pantheism in the sense of

sheer identity of God with the universe nor does he ascribe to theism in the sense in which a layman would do... Iqbal's characteristic view in this regard is that which has been known as 'pantheism i.e. 'God is in the world and at the same time transcends it'.

We have quoted at length from the author to show the methodical handling of the matter by him and the significance of the issue in understanding the dynamics of Iqbal's thought. It is so vital for understanding Iqbal's concept of ego. However, at the same time, it opens further doors of interpretation. There is no denying the fact that Iqbal takes primary inspiration from the Qur'an and the thought of Rumi. He does not imitate, or succumb to the pitfalls of, modernism but he does use the modern philosophical terminology which at times constricts the reality of a metaphysical concept. Iqbal rightly abhors the use of the term pantheism since it denies the transcendence of God and seems to freeze human activity. But he has to appreciate that the problem does not lie in the metaphysical understanding of the reality but in the modern philosophical category that tries to conceptualise it. Thus, there is no reason to be ambivalent about the metaphysical thought of Ibn Arabi and Mansur Hallaj since their world-view is not pantheistic. The heart of the matter is that there is no scope of pantheism in Eastern metaphysics. The truth about God and the universe has been so rightly expressed in the metaphysical doctrine of the Oneness of Being (*wahdat al-wujud*) which neither denies the transcendence of God nor negates the zeal of human activity. Incidentally, the metaphysics of Khawaja Ghulam Farid (1845-1901) is helpful in removing any such misgivings by 'clearing the way'.

Dr. Abdul Khaliq has provided us a treasure of knowledge and has added fresh insights into the field of Iqbal Studies. His last chapter: "Patterns of Sayyid Ahmad, Allama Iqbal and Post-Iqbalian Thought: Reconstruction and Future Openings" is the climax of the book. It could only be written

by an intellectual of his stature. He takes inspiration from Iqbal's Preface that enjoins the thinkers to move ahead in a spirit of independence. He critically examines the literature on Iqbal's thought and desires an imaginative and creative understanding of the *Reconstruction*. He gives division of themes as follows:

1. Concept of God and His relation with the universe including human beings
2. nature of man; his epistemic approach to God through sense experience/reason/mystic experience/prophetic consciousness.
3. Finality of prophethood and the implied religio-socio-moral responsibilities of the *ulama* of the *Ummah*; *ijtihad*; sources, expansiveness as well as limitations.
4. Challenge to religion posed by Freudian psycho-analysis and the defence put up against it.

He wants the contemporary thinkers to carry on the thread from where Iqbal left. He specifically guides them to write on "Iqbal's own conceived thought plans" which could not be realized by him during his own lifetime. He further gives a very inspiring account of Sayyid's times and teachings. He discusses in detail the times of Sayyid Ahmed and Iqbal and points out that they "had different ways to approach their common goal". He also advises the Iqbal scholars "to take stock of post-Iqbal para-psychological researches". He inspires Iqbal scholars to take up the subject of 'challenges to Religion' and meet them on sound grounds. This chapter of the book assumes tremendous significance especially in the light of the rapid advances taking place in the fields of physics, biology, psychology and other disciplines. It requires the scholars to remain abreast of these advancements and keep track of Iqbal's methodology while interpreting the data received from the sciences. It will be highly instrumental in dispelling an erroneous impression being popularly spread that religion unlike science has no connectivity with

knowledge. Such an approach feigns ignorance of other levels of knowledge and their corresponding levels of being. Thus, scientism and its different forms remain one of the modern challenges to religion that perpetually need to be met both on epistemological and ontological grounds.

The author at the end of the book touches on a complex subject regarding the views of certain critics, namely, Dr. Burhan Ahmad Farooqi, Altaf Ahmad A'zami, Dr. Fazlur Rahman, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Prof. W.C. Smith and Prof. Qayyum who assert that many ideas of Iqbal were “against the intent of the Qur'an” in spite of his claim that all his thought process was in consonance with it. The author suggests that in order to establish a “non-contingent, absolute criterion of truth” of Qur'anic interpretation, we may find the criterion in the words of a *sufi* who has been quoted by Iqbal thus: “No understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually revealed to the believer just as it was revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him).” The author considers it as “the apex method of Qur'an comprehension”. He says that the “Divinity-saturated wise men who ‘look at everything with a brilliant radiance from God Himself’ alone are duly qualified to cognize the nuances and intricacies of the Book of God and its entire diction”. They after being “identified” and “confirmed” be asked to explain the “correct meaning of the Qur'an” in “plain language”. This will ward off contradictory interpretations of the Qur'an. He concludes: “This would be one of the urgent jobs which Allama Iqbal himself did not pursue in detail and so must be taken up now and accomplished.” It is an astounding ending of the book which shakes the reader from his “dogmatic slumber” and opens up new vistas of research.

The aforesaid advice of the author incidentally testified our pressing concern of undertaking a comparative study of the metaphysical thought of Iqbal and that of Khawaja Ghulam Farid which can be supportive, among other things, in resolving metaphysical and philosophical issues including

the reality of the structure, function and status of the ego. Iqbal, for example, says: “The ultimate aim of the ego is not to see something, but to be something...and acquire a more fundamental ‘I am’.” Khawaja Ghulam Farid, on the other hand, says: ‘Farid attained union (identity) by ceasing to be’ (*Divan-i-Farid*). He talks of the spiritual consciousness of his nonbeing. He considers the apex of spiritual life in seeing God everywhere. He says: ‘What a tradition love has made me realize: the Divine beauty is manifest everywhere’ (*Divan-i-Farid*). Here, he is referring to a metaphysical truth of realizing ‘the Supreme Identity’. Is there any contradiction between the metaphysical thought of Iqbal and that of Khawaja Ghulam Farid? One has to realize that there is no contradiction since it essentially points to the same Reality. There are different levels of understanding and different forms of expression. It is principally the Reality (God) that is manifest in all forms including the human medium. Even, the servant-Lord polarity is not final but provisional and is ultimately withdrawn by the transpersonal being by virtue of Grace. It is the Reality (God) that speaks ‘I am the Truth’ (*Ana’l Haqq*) in the medium of Mansur Hallaj. It is purely the Divine Speech and not a ‘human’ utterance as such.

Dr. Abdul Khaliq has done a marvelous work by raising awareness about Iqbal’s concept of ego and the modern challenges being faced in the way of its realization.

**Dr. Shahzad Qaiser**

Lahore

21<sup>st</sup> June, 2016



## THE PERFECT MAN

The self in man as such, his ego or I-ness, has specifically earthly antecedents. There are a number of Qur'anic verses which in different phraseologies and against different contexts assert that he has been created out of clay. Iqbal, in this connection, refers to the verses 23 : 12 -14 which read as follows:

Now of fine clay We created man, then We placed him, a moist germ, in a safe abode, then We made the moist germ a clot of blood, then made the clotted blood into a piece of flesh, then made the piece of flesh into bones, and We clothed the bones with flesh, *then brought forth man of yet another make...*

Given here is in brief a description of the various stages that occur during the conception and the subsequent gradual development of each and every human individual in the womb of his/her mother. Anyhow, this is not the type of development wherein different consecutive stages all of them could assuredly be explained and interpreted in the light of the earlier ones and in accordance with certain well-defined scientific principles. Instead, the Qur'an appears to conceive that man is the result of a process which may be termed, after Lloyd Morgan, "the process of emergent evolution"<sup>1</sup>, i.e. a process in which at a particular stage some novel characteristics appear in the species suddenly and unexpectedly. Thus man can be declared as a new recreation in spite of his declared earthly base. This is particularly evident from the sentence "... then brought forth a man of yet another make" in the quotation from the Qur'an given above. Elsewhere, man alone has been described as the bearer of the Divine Trust which was granted to him by God on his

own consent and which the heavens and the earth and the mountains had earlier refused to accept<sup>2</sup>. The phenomenon of extraordinary and special creation of man is also clear from the verses of the Qur'an like the following:

So when I have made him (i.e. man) complete and *breathed into him of My spirit...*<sup>3</sup>

(God) said: O Iblis! What prevents thee from prostrating thyself to one whom I have created with My own hands.<sup>4</sup>

Iqbal interprets the incident of the breathing of the Divine spirit into man as 'a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being'<sup>5</sup> or as 'a rising from simple consciousness to a state of self-awareness'<sup>6</sup> carrying alongwith it a keen sense of accountability to God.

There is a controversy, specially in Islamic literature as to what does the Qur'anic word *آدم* (Adam) stand for. The orthodox have always been of the opinion that it was the proper name of the first-ever human individual (and the first-ever prophet also) who, after having been specially made by God and having been equipped with His own soul or spirit, was sent down to the earth, alongwith his conjugal partner, to stay on there and be in due course the progenitor of the entire human race. Some modernists, Allama Iqbal being one of them are, however, of the opinion that the Qur'anic descriptions on this subject belong to the category of *mutashabihat* and therefore are to be regarded as symbolic in nature. "The word 'Adam', says Iqbal, "is retained and used more as a concept (connoting all human beings) than as the name of a concrete human individual"<sup>7</sup> [*parenthesis mine*]. He quotes a Qur'anic verse in his favour. The Qur'an, addressing men in general, says:

We created you; then fashioned you; then said We to the angels, prostrate yourself unto Adam.<sup>8</sup>

He further says:

The Qur'anic legend of the Fall (of Adam) has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience.<sup>9</sup>

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, his elder-contemporary, had also held on to the view that in the Qur'anic story, told in some detail, as regards the creation of man, and its subsequent details, the word Adam is just a symbol — as is in fact is the whole story in all its ramifications — and stands for the human race<sup>10</sup>. He specially refers to the Qur'anic verse 7 : 11, which has just been quoted above, and points out that in it God is described as having addressed all men and then, in the same context, the verse mentions the name Adam, which fact signifies the identity of both the referents. Anyway, I need not dwell on this controversy in any detail as it is not very relevant to the present discourse which is confined to Iqbal's concept of the human individual and specially of the Perfect Man.

From the verse 'I breathed into him of My spirit', quoted above, and others of this kind some thinkers, incidentally, have ventured to derive the thesis that soul or spirit or mind is a separate, independent substance in the human organism. This is also the layman's point of view. Dualism of mind and body thus conceived has further raised a host of psychological, metaphysical, ethical as well as eschatological problems that have kept most of the Muslim mystics and philosophers busy working out their details and implications. However, the Qur'an itself when carefully perused does not appear to subscribe to the substantiality of the human soul and, consequently, to the possibility of its disembodied existence — neither in the world herebefore nor in the world hereafter. For instance, it is commonly believed that, long before man appeared in the present spatio-temporal world of ours, God convened a meeting of the souls of all men who were to be created till the Last Day and got a commitment

from them that He is their Lord. The only Qur'anic verse supposed to have mentioned this incident reads as follows:

When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam — from their loins — their descendents and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying). “Am I not your Lord?”. They said: “Yea, we testify”. Lest ye should say on the Day of Judgement: “Of this we were never mindful”.<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, there is no mention here of a gathering of souls or spirits as such. The verse perhaps is rather a symbolic way of saying that faith in the Godhood of Allah is ingrained in the very nature of man. Hence the well-known *sufi* saying: whosoever recognizes himself recognizes his Lord<sup>12</sup>. Incidentally, the celebrated Ontological Argument<sup>13</sup> for the existence of God is grounded in this very fact of ‘God-in-man’. Also, the commonly used phrase ‘immortality of soul’ does not mean that it is the ‘soul-without-body’ that will live forever after the death of a man here and now. The fact is that all descriptions of the Qur’an regarding the affairs of the residents of heaven as well as those of hell clearly imply man’s total psycho-physical resurrection in the Afterlife. Every individual, during the tenure of that life, will not only remember his past deeds but will also recognize other individuals who were known to him in the world there before.

Further, the upholders of the dualism of human nature i.e. of the mutual independence of the substantialities of soul and body sometimes point out that soul and body both depend for their development and progress on different sets of factors which have nothing to do one with the other: body requires the consumption of food and drinks whereas soul requires the inculcation of moral and spiritual values. The Qur’an would not as well permit an absolute distinction which would incidentally amount to an estrangement between the religious and the worldly. According to the Qur’an, bodily needs are to be fulfilled only in the manner that is approved by the valuational standards of spiritualism: and,

correspondingly, the spiritual values are to be implemented not entirely independently but with due regard to the natural comforts of the body. No less than a comprehensive development of man as a whole, taking into consideration both his aspects, is the explicit as well as the implicit aim of the Qur'anic teachings. When terms like *nafs*, *ruh*, *insan* are used in the Qur'an to refer to the human individual in different contexts, they signify his entire personality.

The word 'human ego' or *khudi* used by Iqbal likewise is taken by him to mean the unity and totality of the human person. He rejects the dualist theory of mind and body because parallelism and interactionism — the theories most often offered in this connection— both lead to various sorts of oddities and contradictions. The former (alongwith the 'pre-established harmony' of Leibniz) "reduces the soul to a merely passive spectator of the happenings of the body"; as to the latter, "we cannot find any observable facts to show how and where exactly their interaction takes place and which of the two takes the initiative. The soul is an organ of the body which exploits it for physiological purposes, or the body is an instrument of the soul, are equally true proposition on the theory of interaction"<sup>14</sup>. Mind and body, in fact, belong to the same system, says Iqbal. Matter is "spirit in space-time reference"<sup>15</sup>. It is "a colony of egos of a low order out of which emerges the ego of a higher order, when their association and interaction reach a certain degree of co-ordination. It is the world reaching the point of self-guidance (i.e. in the person of the human individual) wherein the Ultimate Reality, perhaps, reveals its secret and furnishes a clue to its ultimate nature"<sup>16</sup>.

The ego or self that man is has two aspects, according to Iqbal — the 'efficient self' and the 'appreciative self'.<sup>17</sup> The latter, for which he also uses various alternative phrases like the 'deeper self', the 'inner centre of experience', the 'root of being' etc., lives in pure duration while the efficient self deals with serial time. In our day-to-day life we are so much

absorbed with the world of space and time that we entirely lose sight of the fundamental or the appreciative 'I' within. It is, for Iqbal, incumbent upon a person to realize it not only in order to qualify himself for an encounter with the 'Great I Am' and prepare himself for authentic relations with other human beings but also because this achievement would make him a 'human person' in the full sense of the term. "To exist in pure duration", says Iqbal, "is to be a self and to be a self is to be able to say 'I am'. It is the degree of intuition of I-amness that determines the place of a thing in the scale of being".<sup>18</sup>

How do I discover and recognize myself? Iqbal's answer is that, being most simple, fundamental and profound, I-amness is neither an object of perception nor simply an idea to be logically inferred and rationally conceived. It can, in the final analysis, only be known through a flash of intuitive insight. David Hume, the British empiricist, for instance, is well-known for his attempt to reach the self through channels which are purely of sensory, empirical nature. In his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he wrote : "... when I enter most intimately into what I call 'myself' I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch 'myself' at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I, insensible of 'myself' and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death...I should be entirely annihilated"<sup>19</sup>. He thus concluded that there is no such thing as 'I' or 'self' and that a person's mind is nothing but a medley of different perceptions. Hume's supposition here is that all knowledge is to be furnished by sense experience. This leaves no scope for a permanent, non-successional being. Decartes, on the other hand, represents those who followed the course of reason. Being himself a brilliant mathematician and a discoverer of Analytical Geometry, he

was firmly of the opinion that for philosophy a method could be discovered on the analogy of the one used in mathematical sciences, where we start with certain simple, self-evident principles, rising by degrees to the more and more complex ones — thus building up an entire system of thought. So he set out in search of the indubitable and the self-evident. This he did by a grand process of elimination. He doubted away everything he could possibly doubt: the testimony of his senses, his memory, the existence of the physical world, his own body and even the truths of mathematics.. One thing, however, he found, he could not possibly doubt and that was the fact of his own existence, his own self, his I-amness. It is he after all who had been performing the activity of doubting all the time! Doubting is a form of thinking. ‘I think’, he concluded, ‘therefore I am’, meaning to say, ‘I exist’. This argument, the critics have pointed out, is fallacious on many grounds. For one thing, the conclusion to which the entire reasoning leads could only be that “there is a veritable state of doubt”, and that’s all. At the most a logical ‘T’, which in fact is the subject of all propositions that are made in one’s my everyday life can be asserted. From this to skip over to the factual existence of an ‘I’, as Descartes really does, is a leap which cannot at all be justified.

Iqbal thus appears to be right when he holds that both sense-experience as well as reason, forms of perception as well as categories of understanding, are only meant to equip us for our dealings with the spatio-temporal world: they are not capable of reaching the core of one’s being. In fact “in our constant pursuit after external things we weave a kind of veil round the appreciative self which thus becomes alien to us. It is only in the moments of profound mediation”, he goes on to observe, “when the efficient self is in abeyance, that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner centre of experience”<sup>20</sup>. On these premises, neither the *mutakallimun* nor the philosophers but the devotional sufis alone have truly been able to understand the nature of the human soul. The

mediation, referred to here, is either pure mediation through which ideationally I remove from myself all that is not essentially 'me' i.e. all that I possess due to my specific 'historical' and 'geographical' situation, in the broadest sense of these terms. Or it may be the meditation charged with activity in which case I practically eradicate from my nature all of the exclusive love for, and involvement with, the world which is the cause of my alienation from the source and ground of my existence. The second meaning particularly is accepted by the mystics of Islam. The sufistic path formally begins with the inculcation of the virtue of *tauba* (repentance) which signifies purification of soul and the deliverance of it from all extraneous material so that the Divine within it stands realized. "The adherents of mystical religions", says G.S. Spinks, "feel compelled to empty their psychical life... in order to achieve by personality-denying techniques an emptiness that will prepare the way for the incoming of the Divine".<sup>21</sup>

It is to be hurriedly pointed out here that neither according to genuine sufism nor in the thought-system of Iqbal himself does this personality-denying phenomenon stand for self-mortification or asceticism. The world is not to be disparaged and renounced because in fact there is nothing detestable about it as such. It could be as sacred as the spiritual realm. Iqbal's emphasis on the disclosure of the inner being of man is simply aimed, as shown above, at the realization of one's own Divine nature. There is a tradition of the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) which says: Verily God created man after His own image<sup>22</sup>. God is above all determinations and limits; man must therefore try to shed off limitations that make up his efficient personality and tear away the web that he has woven—warily or unwarily—around his original self. It is to this original self that the Qur'an refers when it says: He is indeed successful who causes it to grow; and he indeed fails who burries it<sup>23</sup>. This discovery necessarily gives to man a simple, fresh,

uncontaminated point of view with which to look at everything, a sure ground from which to take off and move towards a truly authentic existence.

Realization of the appreciative self is thus not an end in itself. It only amounts to revolutionizing the behaviour of the man-in-the-world. This fact is well-evidenced by the way of the prophets as conceived by Iqbal. He defines a prophet “as a type of mystic consciousness in which unitary experience tends to overflow its boundaries and seeks opportunities of redirecting or refashioning the forces of collective life. In his personality the finite centre of life sinks into his own infinite depth only to spring up again with fresh vigour to destroy the old and to disclose the new directions of life”<sup>24</sup>. Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) has, in fact, been declared by Iqbal as the ideal of perfect manhood in Islam.

Iqbal is a process philosopher. In the preface to his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he significantly points out that the Qur’an emphasizes ‘deed’ rather than ‘idea’.<sup>25</sup> The Qur’an says: “God created death and life that He might try you — which of you is best in deeds”<sup>26</sup>. Not fatalism and inactivity but ever-continuing formation of fresh goals and their perpetual realization is the desirable style of life for the soldier of the moral ideal. The essence of perfect manhood lies in a constant state of tension. The ego, throughout its career, continues invading the environments and the environments invading the ego. The appreciative self, being a pure receptacle of Divine illumination, as shown above, plays the role of a directive agent in this mutual series of invasions in order to shape the person’s own destiny as well as that of the universe; sometimes he is even called upon to adjust with the forces of the universe. Thus, gradually and surely, his personality continues to be integrated more and more so that ultimately it is ensured stability and perpetuity against all possibilities of dissolution or extinction. “That which tends to maintain the state of tension tends to make us immortal,” says Iqbal. Further, “the idea of personality gives us a

standard of value: it settles the problem of good and evil. That which fortifies personality is good, that which weakens it is bad. Art, religion and ethics must be judged from the standpoint of personality”<sup>27</sup>. On this standard, passionate desire for the realization of goals, supreme indifference to exclusive, evanescent material benefits, sterling self-confidence and courage to overcome obstacles, tolerance for the views and behavior of others etc. are good, whereas ill-founded fears, undeserved possessions, disrespect for humanity, false sense of dignity, malicious attitude towards others are all bad. There being degrees of individuality, God is the most integrated individual. One who is nearest to Him in this respect is thus the ‘completest’ man. This ‘nearness” may of course at the most amount to ‘witness’ but would not at all imply that man can finally be absorbed in God; rather man absorbs God into himself insofar as he assimilates His attributes into his person to the maximum to which it is humanly possible. Even such a voluminous upheaval as the phenomenon of Universal Destruction preceding the Day of Judgement will not affect the individuality, tranquil and quietude of the well-integrated ego. The Qur’an says:

The Trumpet will (just) be sounded, when all that are in the heavens and the earth will swoon *except such as it will please God to (exempt)*.<sup>28</sup>

“Who can be the subject of this exception”, asks Iqbal, “but those in whom the ego has reached the very highest point of intensity?”<sup>29</sup> And the pinnacle of this development is reached when the ego is able to retain the state of self-possession, calm and absolute peace of mind which is not disturbed even when in contact with the Ultimate Ego. It sometimes occurs to me that this state of ‘peace of mind’ (*itmeenan-e qalb*) is the highest level of, or even the level higher than, faith (*iman*). It is this very state which once Prophet Abraham (peace be on him) asked God to grant him, and the same was duly granted to him<sup>30</sup>. See how God will address the human ego *par excellence* — peaceful through and through

— in the life hereafter:

O soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord — well pleased (thyself) and well-pleasing unto Him. Enter thou then among My devotees and enter then My heaven<sup>31</sup>.

Allama Iqbal regards Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) as the ideal of perfect manhood in Islam. On the occasion of *Mi'raj*, the apex event of Spiritual Ascension when he was nearest to, and face to face with, God, his poise was not the least shaken. The Qur'an describes this incident:

His sight never swerved; nor did it go wrong<sup>32</sup>

On the way towards the approximation to this ideal of perfection, an ordinary human ego has to make a graduated progress. There are, according to Iqbal, roughly three stages through which, one after the other, he must rout his journey. Obviously, they are not mutually exclusive but they are definitely collectively exhaustive. These have been described by him in some detail in the 9<sup>th</sup> section of his *Asrar-e Khudi*. The first stage is that of *ita'at* (obedience) which comprises unreasoned obedience to a lawful mundane authority, to one's own conscience congenitally entrusted to him as well as to the *shar'ah* commandments. A life properly lived at this stage ensures discipline, decency and decorum in the behavior of the incumbent, unwarily instills in him qualities of patience, perseverance and steadfastness against heavy odds— all sorts of possible distractions and deviations— and gives him the desirable sense of direction. This phase of life is, by and large, the phase of compulsivity. The constraints, as if from without, under which the moral soldier works are in fact a necessary part of his initial training. Determinism thus envisaged would alone grant authenticity to the initiatives and choices made off and on by each and every individual during his life-time. Freedom of will is no doubt one of the cardinal rights of man but freedom without determinism is, as a matter of commonsense, absolute licentiousness and would

thus amount to his abasement to the level of animals. Incidentally, I am inclined to think that this earliest stage of self-realization has a similarity to the preparatory stage of *fana fi' al-sheikh* at which the *salik* is required to carry out unhesitatingly the directives of his spiritual guide without at all asking about the 'how' and the 'why' of these directives.

The second stage is that of *zabt-e nafs* (self-control). At this level the individual makes an effort to discover the meaningfulness, the rationale and justification of the commandments that had earlier been appreciated and accepted on their face value and obeyed as such. He carries out a sort of self-analysis, becomes aware of the hidden dynamics and potentialities of his person and in general tries to control its infirmities and failings. All this is an attempt to find out a workable relationship between the 'law' and the 'self'. How very like the famous dictum of Kant: 'A principle of moral conduct (which is an unconditional, categorical commandment) is morally binding on me if and only if I can regard as a law that I impose on myself! As to the constituents of the human self-in-contact-with-the-world, Iqbal says, the Creator infused into it two very strong basic sentiments: fear and love — fear of the antagonistic forces in the environments, of his own impending death, of the Hereafter and so on; love of the material wealth, of his wife and children and the closest relatives, of his country and so on. These sentiments, if not properly chiseled, pruned and disciplined, can play havoc with their incumbents and put up impassable barriers in journeying towards the fullest development of their egos. In order to manage them and channelize them in the desirable direction what is required is to subscribe to the doctrine of *Tawheed*, to have a strong faith in, and a strong commitment to, One Supreme God to Whom alone uncompromisingly all allegiance is due. *Tawheed* is a power by dint of which one gets preponderance over the inborn tendencies of his nature instead of being a servant to them. God being the Absolute Power, fear of everything else

becomes practically ineffective; He being the Ideal *par excellence* in every respect, all love and fascination is really directed towards Him and all the other so-called objects of love – and fear also -simply subserve.

The two stages, referred to above lead to the third one, *viz.*, *ni'abat-e Ilahi* (Divine vicegerency).

The agenda of Allama Iqbal given above comprising the moral-cum-spiritual development of an individual is sometimes interpreted, by an undue stretch of imagination, as that of a so called *sufi* who aims at the purification of his own soul that ensures just the personal happiness of his one-to-one relationship of the contemplation and *ma'rifat* of God, the Ultimate Reality. The efforts of a *na'ib- Ilahi*, on the other hand, are too of course directed to the cleansing up of his ego with lesser and lesser irrelevant concern for the world around including other human beings in the society but he is in fact 'the moral 'individual' in the most authentic sense of this term. He is a man of vision, a man of conviction and commitment and a perpetual creator of higher and higher values which he also makes an attempt— knowingly as well as unknowingly— to implant in the society to which he belongs and revolutionize it thereby. The ground of all this in fact lies in the second stage i.e. *zabt-e nafs* where a journeyer towards the summum bonum of self-realization, we have seen, tries to allay the exclusively this-worldly loves and fears with reference to faith in the Oneness of God. This faith, which Iqbal defines as 'a living assurance begotten of rare experience'<sup>33</sup> naturally further prepares him for the assimilation of all the attributes of God idealized in His Beautiful Names (*Asma' al-Husna*). Human individual thus coloured in Divinity is the Most Perfect Ego, the *Mard-e Mo'min*, the *Mard-e Qalander* in his own person as well as in regard to his role in the society comprising human beings in general who are no less important than, what the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) described, 'ayal Allah (the family of God)'<sup>34</sup>. In the word of Iqbal,

the *na'ib* is the vicegerent of God on earth. He is the completest ego, the goal of humanity, the acme of life both in mind and body; in him the discord of our mental life becomes a harmony. The highest power is united in him with the highest knowledge. In his life, thought and action, instinct and reason, become one. He is the last fruit of the tree of humanity and all the trials of a painful evolution are justified because he is to come at the end. He is the real ruler of mankind; his kingdom is the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the popular readers on the subject of ethics, besides identifying various moral ideals, talk of the essential metaphysical assumptions, prerequisites and postulates of moral behavior. Iqbal in his descriptions of the morally perfect individual too registers a due cognizance of them. The most basic one of these as recognized by him is the unity, solidarity and perpetuity of the moral agent so that whatever he does is accepted by him to be entirely his own doing for which he alone is thus responsible to his own conscience as well as to the society at large. This requirement has been explained in detail, directly or indirectly, in the entire above account.

Another requirement for the attainment of moral perfection is faith in, and gnostic awareness of, the existence of God. This is because in order to be assuredly stationed at the highest level of moral excellence man is to realize that he is also answerable to God Himself in the capacity of being His vicegerent on earth. In regard to the ultimate destiny of man as a moral agent the concept of God to which he must subscribe is, according to Iqbal, theistic rather than pantheistic<sup>36</sup>. It is not man who, by assimilating more and more of Divine attributes, is finally absorbed in God but rather it is God Who in a way is absorbed in him<sup>37</sup> so that, symbolically speaking, he stands divinized. Introducing the English translation of *Asrar-e Khudi* he elucidates his position against pantheism on which he further elaborates in his *Reconstruction* and specially in the chapter 'The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer'. In this chapter he brings out the uncompromising individuality of God with reference

to the Qur'-anic *surah Iqbal*. He further refers to the verse:

God is the light of the heavens and of the earth. His light is like a niche in which is a lamp – the lamp encased in a glass – the glass, as it were, a star...<sup>38</sup>

The verse is sometimes understood, particularly by western orientalist, to support a pantheistic view of the Ultimate Reality. “The opening sentence of the verse”, Iqbal admits, does give “the impression of an escape from an individualistic conception of God. But when we follow the metaphor of light in the rest of the verse, it gives just the opposite impression. The development of the metaphor is meant rather to exclude the suggestion of a formless cosmic element by centralizing the light in a flame which is further individualized by its encasement in a glass likened unto a well-defined star.... The metaphor of light as applied to God therefore must... be taken to suggest the Absoluteness of God and not His Omnipresence which easily lends itself to a pantheistic interpretation”.<sup>39</sup>

However, besides this declared attitude, there are a number of implicit, though quite significant, references in the writings of Iqbal which exhibit a tendency towards pantheism. For instance, he says:

- (i) “From the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed”<sup>40</sup> (the word ‘proceed’ here suggests a sort of emanationism).
- (ii) The universe... does not confront God as an ‘other’ existing *per se*... From the standpoint of the all-inclusive Ego there is no ‘other’. In Him thought and deed, the act of knowing and the act of creating are identical.<sup>41</sup>

And so on.

The above apparently ambivalent position of Iqbal is obliquely due to his almost equally strong allegiance to orthodoxy as well as to the mystico-philosophical traditions in Islam. Really, I hold, pantheism and theism do not refer to two diametrically opposed and mutually contradictory ontological truths in the usual sense of the term ‘ontology’.

They are simply existential points of view. The difference between them can be understood analogically with reference to the difference between *tariqat* and *shari'at* or that between the inner and the outer aspects of religious awareness. In one of his letters Iqbal writes:

A proper appreciation of the limits of the self is known as *shari'at* (the Islamic code of life) and to realize this code in the very depths of one's being is *tariqat* (the mystic way to perfection). When God's commands get so suffused in the self that the private affections and attachment cease to exist and the only object of life for the self becomes fulfilment of God's will, the condition is described by some eminent mystics of Islam as *fana* (self-annihilation) and by others *baqa* (self-preservation)...<sup>42</sup>

Hence the controversy regarding whether Iqbal was a pantheist or a theist that has long been carried on by the scholars of Iqbal appears to be a little misconstrued. He may justifiably be both.

As we look more closely at the position of Iqbal, we find that he neither holds on to absolute pantheism in the sense of sheer identity of God with the universe nor does he subscribe to theism in the sense in which a layman would do such that he fails to conceive God as having a constant, living contact and a companionship with man : this contact being available to him only when invoked in petitionary prayers. Iqbal's characteristic view in this regard is that which has been known as 'panentheism' i.e. 'God is in the world and at the same time transcends it'. Such a relation, for instance, exists between a human person, on the one hand, and his habits and character, on the other. Behaviour of the universe comprises the habits of God, according to Iqbal, and the evolution and growth of nature, in general, and of man, in particular, amounts to no less than the realization of the potentialities of Divine Being Himself.<sup>43</sup>

'Immortality in the life hereafter' is another postulate that is generally identified by writers on moral subjects. Iqbal

has in general conceived the nature as well as importance of this one of the basic articles of Muslim faith against the context of the character of life that man lives here and now. Qur'-anic emphasis on rebirth after death, followed by the impending system of rewards and punishments for an unending span of time, is intended for one thing to persuade human beings to perform good actions and to dissuade them from performing evil ones. Most of the moral thinkers have toed the same/a similar line of argument on this subject.<sup>44</sup> For Iqbal, on the other hand, who regards the life of each and every individual here and in the hereafter as one continuity — the so-called death being just a sojourn on the way — faith in immortality is more than just a presupposition of morality: it is rather a fact grounded in man's robust optimism. He says:

Anyway, immortality, according to him, is not ours as of right: it is to be won by constant effort; we are only candidates for it. A detailed appreciation and critical review of Allama Iqbal's concept of immortality has been given elsewhere in this book.<sup>45</sup>

'Free will' of man too is a postulate of morality. It is a commonplace, patent fact that for a person to be regarded as accountable for an action that action must have been freely chosen and intentionally performed by him. Any action done entirely compulsively has no moral worth — neither positive nor negative. In fact freedom, according to Iqbal, is the essential component, if not the entire meaning, of that trust (*amanah*) that was offered to the heavens and the earth and to the mountains but they all declined to accept it: man accepted it at his own risk. The risk involved is that though freedom is an instrument through which we choose a good alternative, yet, at the same time it is the one through which we may as well choose the evil alternative. After having accepted that trust, we have been told, Adam tasted the fruit forbidden to him by God. That act of disobedience by man was also his first act of free choice,<sup>46</sup> says Iqbal.

Every individual, we know, continues to make choices throughout his practical life. There are various degrees of the

authenticity of these choices relevant to the different levels of the refinement and sophistication of the corresponding free acts. The lesser are the existential pangs and pricks of the antagonistic determining factors while going in for a good alternative, the more authentic is that choice. Solider of the moral ideal struggles hand to continue warding off evil alternatives that he comes across in life. He thus makes his good will more and more a part and parcel of his mental and physical culture. Ultimately, his 'good will' becomes the 'holy will'. In the latter stage he of course does make choices between the good and the bad but irresistibly these choices are, as a matter of habit, always in favour of the former. Disregardfulness of the routine mechanics and sheerly mundane comforts of the material universe around us and an impassioned craving for the divinized moral excellences makes more and more of the room for genuine freedom. Ritual prayer, the climax of man's closeness to God, in which the prayee – body and soul together — faces entirely towards God, is described by Allama Iqbal as "ego's escape from mechanism to freedom".<sup>47</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> C.L. Morgan, *Emergent Evolution, passim*

<sup>2</sup> Qur'an, 33:72

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 15:29

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 38:75

<sup>5</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.68

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67

<sup>8</sup> Qur'an, 7:11

<sup>9</sup> Allama Muhamamd Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.67

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sayyid Ahmad, *Maqalat-e Sir Sayyid*, Vol. I, pp.216 – 234 etc.

<sup>11</sup> Qur'an, 7:172

<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ontological Argument, originally offered by St. Anselm, in simple language, proceeds like this:

There is a concept of perfect being — howsoever vague that concept may be — in our mind. Now if this being does not have the quality of existence it cannot be really perfect because non-existence is a defect. So, Perfect Being i.e. God must exist.

- <sup>14</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.84
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.122
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 84-85
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp 38 – 39
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p.45
- <sup>19</sup> Book I part IV
- <sup>20</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.38
- <sup>21</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p.128
- <sup>22</sup> ان اللہ خلق آدم علی صورته
- <sup>23</sup> Qur'an, 91:9
- <sup>24</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.100
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. XX1
- <sup>26</sup> Qur'an, 67:2
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. Allama Iqbal's Introduction to his '*The Secrets of the Self*'
- <sup>28</sup> Qur'an, 67:2
- <sup>29</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.94
- <sup>30</sup> Cf. Qur'an :  
Behold! Abraham said:My Lord ! show me how Thou givest life to the dead. He said:dost Thou not have faith (*iman*)? He said:yea! But that my heart be satisfied *يطمن قلبي* (3:260)
- <sup>31</sup> Qur'an, 89:27 – 30
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 53:17
- <sup>33</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.87
- <sup>34</sup>
- <sup>35</sup> Introduction to *Secrets of the Self*
- <sup>36</sup> For a detailed account of Iqbal's concept of God see below Chapter No
- <sup>37</sup> Cf. saying of the Holy prophet (peace be on him): *تخلقوا باخلاق الله*: (create in yourself the qualities of God).
- <sup>38</sup> Qur'an, 24:35
- <sup>39</sup> Allama Muhammad, *op.cit.*, p.51
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p.57
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, P.62
- <sup>42</sup> *Iqbal Namah*, p.202 (translated into English by Syed Abdul Wahid, *Iqbal — His Art and Thought*, p.235)
- <sup>43</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Iqbal's concept of God see below Chapter VI
- <sup>44</sup>
- <sup>45</sup> See below Chapter IV
- <sup>46</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.68
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p.87



## PRAYER: THE INSTRUMENT OF MAN - GOD ENCOUNTER

*Al-Salat-o Mi'raj-al-Mu'mineen* (prayer is *mi'raj*<sup>1</sup> for the men of faith) is an aphorism very popular among the Muslim orthodoxy — sometimes even recognized as a saying of the Holy Prophet (peace be on him). Whatever its source, the saying is profound and very significant also. Broadly speaking, it points to immeasurable heights in meritorious desert and caliber to which man can rise through the instrumentality of prayer and worship.<sup>2</sup> The prayee is here declared to be able to elevate himself to such a level that he communicates with no less a Being than God Himself and has a living, experiential knowledge of His presence. William James calls such an experience 'an intercourse with the Ideal Companion'<sup>3</sup>. This experiential knowledge happens to take place through a special sensation — spiritual sensation we may call it — which is more or less what Rudolf Otto describes as the 'faculty of divination'<sup>4</sup> or what Father Poulain describes as the 'interior touch'<sup>5</sup>. Man, after having been made by God with His Own hands, <sup>6</sup> 'came down' to the earth as the 'best of creation', 'the image of God' and as 'the bearer of Divine attributes' to whom everything in the heavens and the earth is made to work for, attend to, and serve.<sup>7</sup> In the act of prayer, he 'returns' to the source of his own being as if to receive for himself an occasional reminder of his "word and justification as a dynamic factor in the life of the universe"<sup>8</sup> and of his inherently elevated station to which he must justify himself to be equal. It is this reminder, ever kept fresh in daily prayers, which, incidentally, tends to keep the individual away from

abominable, prohibited acts and help him lead a moral life.<sup>9</sup>

The aphorism quoted in the beginning above also seeks to bypass the literalist commonsense view that prayer is essentially petitionary in nature so that it may be regarded as a plain request to God to interpose Himself into the usual course of events and change it to various sorts of conveniences of the petitioner as he desires. Prayer, it is implied here, is rather a plea for ‘being more’ rather than ‘having more’, for eternal spiritual enrichment rather than temporal, material benefits. At the authentic level of man-God relationship, even if sometimes I do ask for favours, I in fact say to Him: ‘O God! Grant me so and so’; and at the same time: ‘O God! I submit to Your will howsoever it comes out to be and am ready to accept it and carry it out’.<sup>10</sup> So what is really important is the attunement of my own attitude to God and a willing declaration of total surrender to His will and pleasure. This, lexically speaking, is really the entire connotation of being a *مسلم* (Muslim)

Iqbal, in the second chapter of his *Reconstruction*, has prefaced his views on prayer with a detailed philosophical discussion of the nature of God, ‘the ultimate ground of all experience’.<sup>11</sup> The Qur’an, he points out, has emphasized the individuality and personality of God, the Ultimate Ego, Whose “I-ness is independent, elemental, absolute”.<sup>12</sup> He goes on to offer a rationale of this point of view by giving his own interpretation of certain attributes of God and of those Qur’anic verses which apparently have a pantheistic import. This entire prefatory account was necessary to provide a suitable context for a discussion of the nature of prayer in two ways. Firstly, a philosophical understanding of God brings into clear focus the nature of ‘religion’s ambition’ which, according to Iqbal, ‘soars higher than the ambition of philosophy. Religion is not satisfied with mere conception; it seeks a more intimate knowledge of, and association with, the object of its pursuit. The agency through which this association is achieved is, he points out, ‘the act of worship or

prayer”.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, by bringing home to his readers the personal character of God it becomes easier for Iqbal to make them understand the nature of prayer which is an instrument of cognitive association with the ‘Great Companion’ that God is: Prayer, he holds, is essentially a personal encounter, a dialogue, with the Ultimate Reality.

Religious life, Iqbal points out, can be divided into three periods, namely, of faith, thought and discovery. “In the first period religious life appears as a form of discipline which the individual or a whole people must accept as an unconditional command without any rational understanding of the ultimate meaning and purpose of that Command ... Perfect submission to discipline is followed by a rational understanding of the discipline and the ultimate source of its authority. In this period religious life seeks its foundation in a kind of metaphysics—a logically consistent view of the world with God as a part of that view. In the third period metaphysics is displaced by psychology and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality”.<sup>14</sup> It is this direct contact with the Ultimate Reality that is the essence of prayer, according to Iqbal. Prayer is the instrument through which the individual has a vision of what was earlier the object of his faith and thought and so discovers the situation of his personality ‘in a larger whole of life’. This is the maximum to which an ordinary man can go. Prophets, the chosen cognizants and advocates of the highest truth, however, have over and above to play the role of social reformers. In their case “unitary experience tends to overflow its boundaries and seeks opportunities of redirecting or refashioning the forces of collective life.”<sup>15</sup> Thus with them prayer besides being cognitive, as is the case with an ordinary religious consciousness, is also creative.

Ibn Rushd, we are reminded here, too had categorized seekers after truth into three classes: the philosophers, the theologians and the laymen.<sup>16</sup> The philosophers are the people of demonstration who, starting from a scratch, use

their reason to reach the Ultimate Reality. The theologians, the people of dialectics, on the other hand, start from certain preconceived doctrines and beliefs and then try to reason out the truth about these doctrines. The masses, who are the people of rhetorics, seek to understand through examples, poetic persuasions and emotional appeals. The philosophers, according to Ibn Rushd, are the best of all. It is they alone who have the right to interpret the esoteric verses of the Qur'an, and then they must withhold their interpretations from the two other categories of the truth-seekers who, being men of superficialities, are liable to be led astray if exposed to the profundities of knowledge of whose assimilation they are not capable. Thus pure demonstrative reason unalloyed by beliefs and emotions is, according to Ibn Rushd, the most excellent instrument of knowledge. Given all his infatuation with, and a strong bias for, Greek rationalism and epistemic naturalism, he could not go farther than this. He could not visualize that there might be still higher ways possible in which reality can be known, and known better.

In fact, if we regard demonstration and discursive reason as the highest form of knowledge available to man, we can never be in a position to know God and for that matter, the Ultimate Reality — whatever the name we give to this Reality. The entire history of human thought bears witness to this fact. The function of discursive reason, we know, is to conceptualize, and to conceptualize is to divide and relate. But God, being the One Unique Ultimate Reality, is *ex-hypothesi* not subject to division, analysis or composition and also He does not derive His is-ness from being a member of a rational order. So there can be no **conceptual** awareness of God's nature. Mentioning Kant in this respect as a typical example of rationalism, Iqbal justifies his inability to affirm the possibility of a knowledge of God: this was perfectly consistent with his rationalistic principles.<sup>17</sup> The logical intellect confines its operation to the natural order only; the Divine order is consequently unknowable to it. It incidentally

follows from all this that there can be no strictly logical proof for the existence of God in which nature is accepted as the major premiss. Nature is temporal and finite whereas God is eternal and infinite. How can the conclusion belong to the order of eternity whereas the premisses have been derived from the order of time. The gulf between the empirical and the trans-empirical cannot be bridged over by logical reasoning. Stoics have been known to be among the earliest to uphold a natural theology but then their God was fundamentally an existing entity of the same kind as the world. Hence the inadequacy and the inapplicability of a Stoic approach to the religion of Islam in particular which conceives of God as, by and large, essentially different from nature. "The best that can be said of the arguments for the existence of God", A. C. Ewing observed, "is that they give some support to the belief not that they are really conclusive".<sup>18</sup>

Does all this mean that the door to the understanding of God is entirely barred against strictly human initiatives. Is God to remain a mysterious being simply entitled to a blind belief. Iqbal's answer is a positive 'no'. In this connection he compares the viewpoints of Kant and Ghazali. Kant held on to the 'forms of perception' and the 'categories of understanding' as the only available equipment with which we approach the objects of our knowledge and thus, consistently with his premises, held that the Ultimate Reality is unknowable. Ghazali, before Kant, had also observed that it is impossible to build theology on rational grounds, and that discursive reason is incapable to grasp the Real. But according to the former there is still another mode of knowledge possible and this is what he calls *mārifat* or gnostic awareness. It is through the operativeness of this mode of knowledge that Ghazali, according to Iqbal, very rightly vouchsafed independence of religion and secured for it the right to exist independently of science and metaphysics.<sup>19</sup>

Islam is basically a way of knowledge because in fact all

higher religion is essentially experience and recognizes the necessity of experience as its foundation.<sup>20</sup> The Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) registered the culmination of the deductive modes of understanding of the earlier prophets to whom certain truths were revealed as ready-made principles of behaviour for a blind and unquestioned observance by their people. This culmination came when ultimately metaphysics was replaced by psychology.<sup>21</sup> and the source of revelation, the major premiss hitherto accepted on authority, became the possible fact of human experience. Having become capable of such a supreme achievement man was thrown back henceforth to tap his own resources so as to have the joy of reaching the Ultimate through his own initiatives and efforts. Being too mature now to be led by the nose, man has been called upon to go the natural way and thus investigate into an alternative dimension of the being of God. This is what Iqbal means when he says: "The prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world". In him, he goes on to say, "life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction".<sup>22</sup> Thus, in either way, Islam remains a way of knowing. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a prolific writer on Islam, points out that in fact "herein lies one of the major distinctions between the Islamic and the Christian points of view—Christianity is essentially a mystery which veils the Divine from man. The beauty of Christianity lies in the acceptance of God as a mystery and in bowing before this mystery. In Islam, however, it is man who is veiled from God. The Divine Being is not veiled from us; we are veiled from Him and it is for us to try to rend this veil asunder in order to know God. Islam is thus essentially a way of knowledge; it is a way of gnosis. Islam leads to that essential knowledge which integrates our being, which makes us know what we are and be what we know or, in other words, integrates knowledge and being in the ultimate unitive vision

of Reality”.<sup>23</sup>

The very significant intermediate position occupied by the Prophet (peace be on him) as referred to above, also sufficiently explains the remark made by Iqbal “... all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer. The scientific observer of nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer”.<sup>24</sup> Prayer in the sense of canonical prayers may be understood with reference to his the position as belonging to the ‘ancient world’ whereas prayer in the form of a study of nature is to be understood with reference to his position as belonging to the ‘modern world’. The one is deductive; the other inductive. Prayers, of course, both of them are because both of them aim at the ‘ultimate, unitive vision of Reality.’ Only the approaches are different. The former realizes its objective through the recitation of, and contemplation over, certain verses of the Qur’an, the Word of God, alongwith the required bodily postures and movements; the latter through the contemplation of nature, ‘the habit of God.’<sup>25</sup> “knowledge of nature’, says Iqbal, ‘is the knowledge of God’s behavior. In our observation of nature we are virtually seeking a kind of intimacy with the Absolute Ego’.<sup>26</sup>

According to the Qur’anic point of view both the forms of prayer described above are, in the final analysis, equally authentic and are ultimately reducible to the same state of affairs. This is because of the fact that there is no essential disharmony between the ‘Word of God’ and the ‘work of God’. It is illuminative to note here that the Qur’anic word ‘*ayat*’ has been used for a verse in the Qur’an as well as for a phenomenon of nature. This shows their mutual affinity. “Nature’s Laws’, says Khalifa Abdul Hakim, “are God’s thoughts thinking themselves in orbits and tides. As there are signs of God’s power and wisdom and beauty in all nature outside man, so are these signs inscribed in the hearts of all men — the verses of God’s revelation are inscribed in the letters of light in the starry heavens, in the prophetic consciousness and in the minds and hearts of those who

reflect rightly on nature within and nature without”.<sup>27</sup> The Qur’anic text, being the Word of God meant to be understood by human beings is necessarily ‘symbolic’ (in a very broad sense of this term); in its descriptions nature which is the ‘Cosmic Text’ is too a fabric of symbols. Through the language of symbols, they both speak forth the presence of God. Incidentally this explains why to Muslim physical scientists mathematics made such a strong appeal. “Its abstract nature furnished the bridge that Muslims were seeking between multiplicity (of nature) and unity (of God). It provided a fitting texture of symbols for the universe — symbols that were like keys to open the cosmic text.”<sup>28</sup>

That physical nature is replete with significant pointers to the existence of God is very evident a fact to the readers of the Qur’an. When Prophet Moses, for instance, expressed his wish to see God he was directed to look towards the mountain which is just a phenomenon of nature.<sup>29</sup> Thus the way prescribed by God for His cognition was the way through nature. Similarly the mile-stones in Prophet Abraham’s way God were the natural phenomena *viz* stars, moon and the sun.<sup>30</sup> But exactly how and in what specific sense can a study of nature lead one to God. As explained above, there can be nothing of the sort of deductive demonstration involved here. Any *modus operandi* whatever in this respect is not at all of a strictly ‘this-therefore-this’ variety. Nature, as already pointed out, is a composition of symbols. These symbols have to be recognized as such and duly interpreted before they can be appreciated as to what do they symbolize. For this interpretative function we are required to have a ‘cosmological insight’ or what Iqbal has termed ‘the vital way of looking at the universe’. It is not through logical reason but by a trans-empirical mode of perception, through ‘the reason of the heart that the reason knows not of’, that we can bridge up the gulf between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal and can have the experience of God the natural way. Thus, in the last

analysis, the appeal of a profound observer of nature is primarily not to facts or matters of fact as they stand in their own right but rather to the basic religious intuitions. It is at the recalling of these intuitions into conscious awareness of man and bringing them into active operation in him that the Qur'anic teachings directly aim. The word *ziker*<sup>31</sup> (remembrance) used for the Qur'an itself is significant. When man becomes oblivious of these intuitions, God wonders as to why his heart has been left alone to be 'locked up'.<sup>32</sup> The phrase corresponding to this is 'expanding of the breast' (*inshirah-e sadr*): whomsoever God wishes to show the right path, he expands his breast for Islam.<sup>33</sup> This is what Iqbal means when he points out that the observation of nature sharpens our inner perception so that we can have a deeper vision of it (nature).<sup>34</sup> However, we may hasten to point out here that this 'sharpening' of inner perception' is not entirely due to man's effort. It requires, as Iqbal correctly points out, the grace of God to eventualize.<sup>35</sup> On this subject voluminous literature has been provided by the mystics of Islam who have invariably conceived Divine knowledge as direct and immediate and heavily due to the initiative of God Himself. Al-Ghazali, for instance, says in his autobiographical account *Al-Munqidh-min al-Dalal*: "Attainment of it (the truth) did not come by systematic demonstration or marshalled argument but by a light which God Most High cast into my breast. This light is the greater part of knowledge. Whoever thinks that the understanding of things Divine rests upon strict proof has in his thought narrowed down the wideness of God's mercy".<sup>36</sup> It is by virtue of this concept of Divine grace or *taufiq*, as it is known in characteristic *sufi* terminology, that God remains the logically prior objective of the revealed characterizations of His person in spite of the temporal priority of nature and natural observation.

Incidentally, all this speaks eloquently for the importance that must necessarily be attached to a process of self-culture i.e. to the inculcation of an appropriate orientation of mind

and a keen receptivity for the grace of God. By virtue of contemplation and thinking and a clean living we in fact rend asunder the veils of our own superficiality and ignorance. To grasp the meaning of the word as well as the work of God we have to enter into the deeper dimensions of our own being and at the same time keep our physical eyes open. To those who are themselves superficial and uninitiated everything will appear to be superficial too—incapable of any esoteric import. It is such persons who are condemned by the Qur'an as spiritually diseased and the ones involved in self-deception.<sup>37</sup> A person who is blind here, says the Qur'an, will be blind in the hereafter,<sup>38</sup> meaning thereby that one who does not see the facts of life and existence with the correctness of attitude here and now will never be able to have the bliss of the beatific vision of the Ideal.

Thus the essence of prayer, according to Iqbal, lies in going from the finite to the Infinite. It signifies a process of liberation—liberation from finite, temporal existence and from all that it entails. This being a stupendous task, co-operation of God is needed all along, as already pointed out, which is readily granted to the deserving candidates. Incidentally this entire phenomenon of 'man realizing God through nature and God Himself co-operating with man in this endeavour,' incidentally, speaks well for the essential unity of all existence. Everything is 'more or less' the same. All are egos, as Iqbal puts it. "The world in all its details from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego is", he declares, "the self-revelation of the 'Great I am'".<sup>39</sup> Every atom of Divine energy', he goes on to say, "however low in the scale of existence is an ego. But there are degrees in the expression of egohood. Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man."<sup>40</sup>

However, even an ordinary human ego is not entirely perfect because it is not absolutely free. What we have called

above the superficial self of man, from which he has to achieve liberation, is, because of its attachment with serial time, determined by the mechanics of material existence. The real self which is eternal and lives in pure duration is purely free and can most genuinely say 'I am'. In fact "it is the degree of the intuition of I-amness that determines the place of a thing in the scale of being. I too say 'I am' but my I-amness is dependent and arises out of the distinction between the self and the not-self. The Ultimate Self, in the words of the Qur'-an, 'can afford to dispense with all the worlds'. To Him the not-self does not present itself as a confronting other — His I-amness is independent, elemental, absolute".<sup>41</sup> Now, as prayer, according to Iqbal is essentially man's translation from temporal associations to a participation in eternal existence, from the drudgery of worldly business to a meeting with God, 'the Ultimate Source of life and freedom', it is to be understood as "essentially ego's escape from mechanism to freedom".<sup>42</sup> The Qur'-an clearly visualizes the possibility of such a translation when it says:

O Company of djin and men, if you can overpass the bounds of the heaven and the earth, then overpass them. But by power alone shall ye overpass them.<sup>43</sup>

In this act of freeing oneself from the spatio-temporal determiners of finite existence, man continues moving towards the ideal of infinity. And the closer to the ideal he is the more perfect he becomes in respect of his individuality, according to Iqbal, so that there remains lesser and lesser fear of the disintegration of his personality even in the face of the heaviest odds and this makes it possible to have an encounter with God, the Infinite, the Absolute. But, to begin with, how can infinity be reconciled with individuality. Iqbal is sometimes accused of having developed the 'self-contradictory' and 'illogical' concept of an 'infinite personality'. However, he has taken pains to justify this concept by explaining in detail that the personality, that God is, is Infinite intensively: not extensively. It is interesting to

compare his views in this regard with those of some modern European thinkers. Friedrich Von Hugel, for instance, writes: “Indeed we can safely hold with Lotze not only that personality is compatible with infinitude but that the personality of all finite beings can be shown to be imperfect precisely because of the finitude and hence the perfect personality is compatible only with the conception of an infinite being...”<sup>44</sup>

In view of the above, like a person engaged in ritual prayers whose approach is straight and direct, the observer of nature too has his own mode of travelling into the sphere of eternity and freedom. The natural system of causes and effects, which is the subject-matter of his studies, seems to imply strict determinism; but this is not the final state of affairs as to the behavior of things. Firstly, “the causal chain ... is itself an artificial construction of the ego for its own purposes. The ego is called upon to live in a complex environment and he cannot maintain his life in it without reducing it to a system which would give him some kind of assurance as to the behavior of things around him”.<sup>45</sup> Further, “the view of his environment as a system of causes and effects is (in a way) an indispensable instrument of the ego, and not a final expression of the nature of Reality. Indeed in interpreting nature in this way the ego understands and masters its environment and thereby acquires and amplifies its freedom.”<sup>46</sup> How beautifully Iqbal has put it while talking of the discovery level of religious life : “It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from fetters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness”.<sup>47</sup>

This reminds me of a brilliant paper read by Professor Osman Amin of U.A.R. at the Department of Philosophy, Punjab University, Lahore<sup>48</sup> some years ago. He talked at length of his Philosophy of inwardness which he termed as a

‘philosophy of conscious vision’. He also called it interchangeably a ‘philosophy of freedom’ because essential freedom, as he put it, lies in ‘consciousness accompanied by comprehension, the faculty of judging according to clear and distinct reason’. Elaborating a distinction between automatism and consciousness, Prof. Amin made reference to the distinction clearly drawn by Bergson between two very different ways of knowledge, the one being the way of the inward vision, of intellectual sympathy, the other being the way of exterior vision, of applying the testimony of senses or applying the method of logical analysis alone. Consider, Bergson is reported to have said, the difference between the knowledge that one could have of a town from a multitude of photos taken from all possible positions and the knowledge one would have of the same town if one lived in it, loved it, and enjoyed roaming about it. It is only the latter knowledge that is profound and gives control and mastery to one over the object of his knowledge. The former, being fragmentary, binds one down to superficialities. In terms of profundity/superficiality of knowledge the distinction corresponds pretty closely to the distinction made by Spinoza between passive and active emotions, between the state of human bondage and the state of human freedom.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan, a religio-philosophical thinker, once made a distinction between the fundamental and protective injunctions of the Qur’an. The latter of these are secondary in importance. Their function is simply to protect the spirit of the former which are of primary concern from the Qur’anic point of view. Sayyid Ahmad specially mentioned the institution of canonical prayers to illustrate his point of view. Prayer—and for that matter any religious duty—has an essence as well as a form. The essence of prayer as we have already seen is to have an intimate association with the Great ‘I am’. Now this essence has found expression in a variety of forms. The very fact that these forms have differed with different times and circumstances shows that they are

not ends in themselves and should not become a matter of dispute. “To every people, ’ says the Qur’an, ‘have we appointed ways of worship which they observe. Therefore let them not dispute this matter with you”. Which side we turn our face while praying, for example, is not a part and parcel of the most-essential spirit of prayer. Iqbal justifiable quotes Qur’anic reference in this regard:

The East and the West is God’s: Therefore whichever way you turn there is the face of God.”<sup>49</sup>

There is no piety in turning your faces towards the East or the West.<sup>50</sup>

However, the Qur’-anic declaration that ‘there is no piety in turning your faces towards the East or the West’ and so on must be carefully understood and accepted only after making certain qualifications. It, of course, should not at all be taken to imply that various formalities involved in our daily prayers like adhering to certain pre-conditions of cleanliness, choice of a particular direction, joining a congregation in perfect obedience to the *imam* who leads the prayers, and such other observances are futile in any absolute sense of the term. If we accept this interpretation that would lead to a totally esoteric attitude in religious matters. It would unfortunately encourage a sharp distinction between *shari’at* and *tariqat*, a doctrine very popular with the ungenue class of sufis, giving an undue importance to the essential at the entire expense of the formal. The verses rather simply mean that these formalities in their own right i.e. when they are divested of their spiritual content are useless. Those who fulfil the formalities of prayer but are oblivious of its essential character have been condemned by the Qur’an as the people of the hell.<sup>51</sup>

The point of view enunciated by Iqbal is that the importance of the formal requirements of prayer— when the essential character of prayer is also retained— lies in the fact that they serve to fortify the spiritual content and enhance the desired effect. If every time a man goes to prayer he has to undertake a special course of preparation in terms of physical

cleanliness, wearing clean garments, giving due recognition to the portion of the day (because to each specified portion thereof is assigned one particular prayer), selecting a clean spot of earth for the performance of the ceremony etc. —that all serves to vouchsafe the attunement of attitude to a single objective and the centralization of attention in respect of it. When a seeker of God has relinquished all worldly business which would at the most be an indirect approach' to God and is all set for an 'I-Thou' encounter, he faces towards the direction of the *ka'ba* and makes a verbal commitment also: 'I have turned my face in all sincerity towards Him Who has created the heavens and the earth and I am not of the polythesists'.<sup>52</sup> Body and mind being closely related various postures of the body which the person adopts while offering his prayers are a real factor in determining the attitude of the mind. They symbolize humility and single-mindedness and thus accentuate the spiritual realization. Extremely helpful in this spiritual realization is the prophet's (peace be on him) directive that the prayee must be as sure of the being of God as if he is seeing Him and that, if that is not possible for him to feel, then he should have at least the conviction that God is seeing him. When a person's entire attention is thus absorbed, naturally the operation of all his bodily sensations is held in abeyance. Many stories to confirm this psychological fact have been related of the mystics of all times.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> *Mi'raj* is the technical term in Islamic literature to denote the event of Divinely initiated, meta-spacial journey of the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) towards celestial heights in order to have 'face-to-face' cognitive experience of, and a dialogue with, God, the Holy, the Supreme.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., for example, Allama Muhammad Iqbal (Bal-e Jibreel, p.40/364),

سبق ملا ہے یہ معراج مصطفیٰ سے مجھے      کہ عالم بشریت کی زد میں ہے گردوں

<sup>3</sup> *Principles of Psychology*, vol I, p.316

<sup>4</sup> Cf. H.J.Paton, *The Modern Predicament*, p.162

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.152

<sup>6</sup> *Qur'an*, 38:75

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 22:65

<sup>8</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religions Thought in Islam*, p.74

<sup>9</sup> *Qur'an*, 29:45

<sup>10</sup> The Holy Prophet (peace be on him) is reported to have said الدعاء *الدعاء* *i.e.* prayer is the essential component of servitude to God. This *hadith* adequately brings out the status of prayer in Islam.

<sup>11</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.50 Islam

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.45

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.71

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.143

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.100

<sup>16</sup> Cf. George F. Hourani, *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*:translation of Ibn Rushd's *Fasl al-Maqal* ...

<sup>17</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.4

<sup>18</sup> 'Philosophy' (journal), January 1965, article:'Awareness of God'.

<sup>19</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.4

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 143-144

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p.143

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100

<sup>23</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, pp. 21-22

<sup>24</sup> Allama Muhamma Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.73

<sup>25</sup> *Qur'an*, 17:77 etc

<sup>26</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.45

<sup>27</sup> Edward F. Barrett (ed.), *University of Notre Dame Law Institute Proceedings*, article 'Natural Law in Muslim Tradition', pp. 35-36

<sup>28</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, p.25

<sup>29</sup> *Qur'an*, 7:143

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 6:76-80

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 21:50 etc.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 47:24

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 6:125

<sup>34</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p.72

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Javed Iqbal (ed.), *Stray Reflections:the private note book of Muhamamd Iqbal*, reflection No.

<sup>36</sup> W. M. Watt, *Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali* (English translation of *al Munqidh min al-Dalal*), P.28-

<sup>37</sup> *Qur'an*, 2:9

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 17:72

<sup>39</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.57

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p.57

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.87

<sup>43</sup> Qur'-an, 35:33

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Naheed Qutab, *The Philosophy of Prayer* – an unpublished M.A thesis lying in the Punjab University Library

<sup>45</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p. 86

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p 86

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 143

<sup>48</sup> Journal 'Al-Hikamt 1973, pp 1-8

<sup>49</sup> Qur'an, 2:115

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 2:177

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 107:4-5

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 6:79



## OBSERVATION OF NATURE AND GOD- KNOWLEDGE

Allama Muhammad Iqbal, in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, has consistently — though obviously in different contexts — built up a case for the knowledge of God. Divine gnosis or God-consciousness, according to him, in fact denotes the elitist stage of religious life wherein metaphysics of the rationalists “is displaced by psychology, and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality”.<sup>1</sup> In order further to bring into limelight the possibility of this supreme experiential contact he refers to the view of Immanuel Kant that only the appearances, the phenomena, can be known : the noumena, comprising, what he calls, the reality as such, are unknowable. Kant is well-known for building up a case for the possibility of a-priori, synthetic judgements and for his claim that all knowledge whatever is entirely conditioned by forms of perception *viz*, space and time, and categories of understanding such as quantity, quality, relation and modality. Hence the impossibility for him of the epistemic awareness of the Ultimate Real which, by its very definition, is beyond and outside the defining limits of these conditionalities! Given the premises affirmed by him, Kant was justified as regards his conclusion. But sense perception and reason, says Iqbal, are not the only available modes of knowledge. Beside and beyond them there is religious/mystic experience also, veracity of the claimants of which cannot be easily denied nor does this experience have any mystification or esotericism about it. Both sense experience and mystic experience are

qualitatively the same, <sup>2</sup> according to Iqbal. The only difference is that the former gives us knowledge of the so-called appearances whereas the latter gives us knowledge of the Ultimate Real. The latter is no doubt essentially a state of feeling but it does have a cognitive content also. It is by dint of its cognitive character, he says, that it can be communicated to others in the form of judgements whose truth is duly guaranteed by a successfully profitable application to them of, what he calls, 'the intellectual test'.<sup>3</sup>

In view of the above, Iqbal takes care to distinguish his position from that version of mysticism (including the so-called Islamic mysticism or sufism) which — alongwith / despite its claim to God-knowledge — has, in common parlance, put on the connotation of being a life-denying, fact-avoiding attitude of mind directly opposed to the radically experimental / experiential outlook of modern times. He has no sympathies for this nihilistic colour of mysticism. Accordingly, he adopts a positive, empirical approach in this regard.

In my book *Problems of Muslim Mysticism* I have spelled out the salient features of this positive approach.<sup>4</sup> After bringing out the nature of what really stands for mysticism, and differentiating it from all of its fake varieties, I enumerated and explained its three major kinds insofar as its approximation to the ideal of *ma'rifat-e Ilahi* is concerned *viz*:

- 1, **Purgatory mysticism** which emphasizes eradicating by the person concerned from his own self all alloy and rust that happens to have been deposited over it in the form of unnatural accretions behaving as veils and obstructions against The incoming of the Divine;
- 2, **Love mysticism** which lays stress on the development of love (*'ishq*) for God, initially as a consequence of the knowledge of the *sifat* of His being like Gracious, Benevolent, Forgiving, Loving, as regards His relationship with human beings. Intense and absolute love of God in its own right, that gradually develops, makes the love of everything / everyone else as relative and

insignificant making Him the grand Ideal of fascination to be proximated closer and closer; 3, **Contemplative mysticism** which gives priority to the method of contemplating by man over his own self, over the physical nature outside him and over the historical development of human societies and their destinies. All these phenomena of 'nature' — in a very broad sense of the term — being the doing of God must of course have very evidently an intimate relevance to His existence as well as to His attributes and so must be thoroughly tapped by man towards bringing out that relevance. Allama Iqbal would have no objection to any one of these mystical approaches to the knowledge of God. However, presently, we shall concentrate on the last one i.e. the routing of the process of the acquisition of God-knowledge through the observation of, and contemplation over, nature. This incidentally, amounts to seeing Him in the broadest daylight. In general, it would provide, what Iqbal terms, a 'scientific form of religious knowledge' which alone the modern mind can easily understand and appreciate and which has duly been emphasized in *the Reconstruction*.

We are reminded here of the standpoint of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, an elder contemporary of Allama Iqbal. The former too had attempted to bring out the scientific face of religious consciousness by emphasizing that the subject-matter of natural sciences is the work of God whereas the revealed Divine message comprising the Qur'an is the word of God: thus there can be no disharmony between the two. Accordingly, Sayyid Ahmad reconstructed Islamic religious thought against the context of his contemporary 19<sup>th</sup> century science, which incidentally happened to be deterministic through and through; and, as a consequence, sought to divest the Qur'anic teachings of all supernatural content including the possibility of man's knowledge of the Divine Being. What Allama Iqbal, on the other hand, lived was the atmosphere of the 20<sup>th</sup> century physical sciences which, instead, demonstrated free creativity and indeterminism; and,

accordingly, providing a room for the veritability of the yet-to-be, the realm of the unknown and, in general, the possibility of metaphysics. This, according to Iqbal, demonstrates ‘the Qur’anic view that God is in a state (of glory) every moment.’<sup>5</sup> Thus the Ultimate Real is knowable as a free creative movement, as a rationally directed creative life. In Islamic orthodoxy the instrument of encounter with God has been technically known as *salat* (prayer);<sup>6</sup> and Iqbal observes that the scientific observer of nature too is involved in the act of prayer.<sup>7</sup> “The knowledge of nature”, he says, “is the knowledge of God’s behavior. In our observation of nature we are virtually seeking a kind of intimacy with the Absolute Ego”. It is very suggestive to point out here that the word *ayah* (pl. *ayat*) has been used by the Qur’an for one of the verses in it as well as for a phenomenon of nature. This adequately shows the affinity between the Divine and the natural orders. “Nature’s laws”, Khalifa Abdul Hakim very succinctly remarks, “are God’s thoughts thinking themselves in orbits and tides. As there are signs of God’s power and wisdom and beauty in all nature outside man, so there are signs inscribed in the hearts of all men... the verses of God’s revelation are inscribed in the letters of light in the starry heavens, in the prophetic consciousness and in the minds and heart of those who reflect rightly on nature within and nature without”.<sup>8</sup>

God, according to Allama Iqbal, is an Ego — the Ultimate Ego, the Great I – am; as from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed, the whole furniture of the universe too comprises egos. “Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man.”<sup>9</sup> Providing details of this affinity between nature and God, Iqbal variously observes:

Nature is human interpretation put on the creative activity of the Absolute Ego.<sup>10</sup>

Nature is the habit of Allah.<sup>11</sup>

Nature is to the Divine Self as character is to the human self.<sup>12</sup>

(Nature's) passage in time offers the best clue to the ultimate nature of Reality.<sup>13</sup>

Observation of nature is only another form of worship.<sup>14</sup>

God is the omnipsyche of the universe.<sup>15</sup>

God is imminent in nature.<sup>16</sup>

Against the background of Allama Iqbal's statements regarding nature-God mutual organic concern as given above, the question arises how exactly and in what sense is the experience of nature relevant to, may be an argument for, a person's God-consciousness. At the beginning of the second chapter (entitled 'The Philosophical test of the Revelations of Religious experience') of his *Reconstruction* Iqbal refers to the three well-known nature-based arguments for the existence of God viz. Cosmological, Teleological and Ontological, briefly examines them and duly regards them as "a real movement of thought in its quest for the Absolute. But regarded as logical proofs... they are open to serious criticism and further betray a rather superficial interpretation of experience."<sup>17</sup>

The Cosmological argument derives itself from the indispensable phenomenon of causation in the universe. Every effect has a cause which itself is the effect of another cause, and so on. Due to the unthinkability of the infinite regress thus envisaged we have to stop at a cause which must be recognized as the Uncaused First Cause. This Uncaused Cause is God. The argument, says Iqbal, commits a number of fallacies. Firstly, it nullifies the very principle on which it is based. That the existence of God has no cause contradicts the law of causation itself. Secondly, any particular effect i.e. an event in nature — which is necessarily finite and bounded in character — can only give a finite cause or, at the most, an infinite series of such causes: it cannot at all give us the concept of the existence of God as the Absolute Being Who is without any limitations whatever. Thirdly, the cause ultimately reached by the argument cannot be regarded as an autonomous, self-directing being for the simple reason that in a 'cause-effect' relationship both the terms are necessary to,

and equally dependent upon, each other. We can add to these points of criticism raised by Iqbal at least one more. In a causal relationship, once the cause has produced its effect (which in its own right assumes the role of a cause to produce its own effect, and so on), the cause, by and large, becomes inoperative. So, the Uncaused Cause of this argument — once upon a time — simply set the ball rolling in the form of various subsequent cause-effect nexuses in nature. Presently, the ball rolls on of its own and the nature as we observe it, is rendered independent of God, the Uncaused First Cause, for all practical purposes; meaning to say that He would at the most, be a deistic, an absentee God having practically nothing to do with the affairs of the world here and now. In the end, Iqbal observes:

... the infinite reached by contradicting the finite is a false infinite, which neither explains itself nor the finite which is thus made to stand in opposition to the infinite. The true infinite does not exclude the finite; it embraces the finite without effacing its finitude, and explains and justifies its being. Logically speaking, then, the movement from the finite to the infinite as embodied in the cosmological argument is quite illegitimate; and the argument fails in toto.<sup>18</sup>

The Teleological argument originates from the traces of foresight, order, uniformity, adaptation and purposiveness in nature and infers that there must exist a Self-conscious Being of infinite intelligence and power Who presides over it and guarantees that its order is not disturbed and that the meaningfulness inherent in it duly evolves towards the realization of this order. Evidently this argument does not give us a creator but only a designer who has worked/is working on an already existing material which, by its own nature, is *ex hypothesis* just a disorderly hodgepodge of objects; and

even if we suppose him to be also the creator of his material, it does not credit to his wisdom to create his own difficulties by first creating intractable material, and then overcoming its resistance by the application of methods alien to its original

nature. The designer regarded as external to his material must always remain limited by his material, and hence a finite designer whose limited resources compel him to overcome his difficulties after the fashion of a human mechanician.<sup>19</sup>

The Ontological argument has its premises not in the outer world but in the mind or self of man himself. Originally presented by St. Anselm, it has been put forth by the philosophers in different forms. Its simplest formulation, as given by Descartes, is this: There is a 'concept of the perfect being' — howsoever vague — in our mind. Now, if this being does not exist, the concept cannot be perfect because non-existence implies a defect: how can a being which has this defect be a perfect being. The concept of a perfect being necessitates that this being must be existent also. The conclusion is that perfect being i.e. God must necessarily exist. This argument, as is evident, proceeds from the conception of existence to the factual objectivity of existence. Kant's criticism of this argument has become proverbial: the notion of three hundred dollars in my mind cannot prove that I do have them in my pocket.<sup>20</sup> Says Iqbal:

All that the argument proves is that the idea of a perfect being includes the idea of his existence. Between the idea of a perfect being in my mind and the objective reality of that being there is a gulf which cannot be bridged over by a transcendental act of thought.<sup>21</sup>

All the three traditional arguments taken together, according to Iqbal, aside their individual frailties, incongruities and fallacies, "betray a rather superficial interpretation of experience".<sup>22</sup> A modern writer sums up Iqbal's critical position in this regard when he says: Dividing reality into the irreconcilable opposites cause/effect (cosmological), designer/created (teleological) and ideal/real (ontological) creates an internal contradiction in each of these arguments and divides experience into an irreconcilable dualism of thought and being.<sup>23</sup> H.J.Paton, bringing out the barrenness of these arguments, writes in the same strain:

“They appeal .... not to a rich and full and diversified experience but to its bare bones. The inference, so to speak, is not from the levity body of experience but only from its skeleton. Hence “the cosmological argument” — which of course comprises all the argument which infer the existence of God from a particular aspect of cosmic nature — “is arid”<sup>24</sup>

Happily, the Qur’an, while building up its metaphysics, does not abstract in this way. Its reference is always to experience as such. It accepts organic wholeness of nature that is revealed to sense-perception as a system of signs of the Ultimate Reality, which signs we are almost duly-bound to observe and speculate over. Those who are oblivious of the facts of experience here and now will, according to it, remain deprived of the vision of the Ideal in the Hereafter.<sup>25</sup> The Qur’an says:

We shall show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls.<sup>26</sup>

‘Surely, in the creation of the heavens and of the earth and in the alternation of night and day; and in the ships which pass through the sea with what is useful to man and in the rain which God sends down from heaven, giving life to the earth after its death and in scattering over it all kinds of cattle; and in the change of the winds and in the clouds that are made to do service between the heavens and the earth are signs (of God) for those who understand.’<sup>27</sup>

Further:

‘And it is He Who sends down rain from heaven, and We bring forth by it the buds of all the plants and from them we bring forth the green foliage and in the close growing grain and palm trees with sheaths of clustering dates and gardens of grapes and the olives and the pomegranates like and unlike. Look at the fruits when they ripen. Therein are signs for people who believe.’<sup>28</sup>

And so on.

The Qur’an records a number of instances where

Prophets themselves had to attend towards observation of Nature as a pre-requisite for their knowledge of God. When prophet Moses expressed his wish to see God, he was directed to look towards the mountain,<sup>29</sup> which is after all a natural object. Prophet Abraham, the “Upright Muslim” and the Unitarian *par excellence*, found his way to God through a strong realization, based on observation and experience of the ephemeral character of the stars, the moon and the sun.<sup>30</sup> Even when he had acquired faith in God in this way he had to have a recourse back to the world of experience in order to confirm his faith in the supremacy and omnipotence of God and in order to be at peace with himself.<sup>31</sup>

However, all these Qur’anic references do not imply that even the diverse phenomena of nature as much do in any way provide sufficient proofs for the existence of God and His Unique Peerlessness. There can, strictly speaking, be no logical argument worth the name for the existence of God in which Nature, **even in its organic wholeness**, is accepted as the major premise. Nature is finite and temporal: God is infinite and eternal. Neither a deductive nor an inductive reasoning is, in principle, applicable here because in both these types of argument the premises and the conclusion must mutually have at least a continuity of reference and must belong to the same universe of discourse. We may extend finitude to whatever degree we desire: It would never be transformed into infinity. Nor can any number of moments of time joined together give us even a glimpse of eternity. Eternity is simply timelessness and infinite is the very negation of all finitudes and determinations. God is Wholly Other. There is absolutely nothing and no one like Him.

Now, how to bridge up the gulf between nature and God so that we may have God-Knowledge ‘the natural way’, as envisaged by the Qur’an? In other words, how is a natural theology possible? Nature, we have already shown, is a system of signs or symbols pointing towards God. So, plainly speaking, knowledge of God should be a matter of

interpreting these signs and giving them the appropriate meaning rather than resorting to a logical argument proceeding from the signs to what these signs ultimately signify. In order to perform this interpretative function, it is necessary, although of course not sufficient, that we observe well and find out, on the premises of naturalism itself, as to how things happen. What we are required to have, in addition, is a cosmic vision, or – in the beautiful phrase of Iqbal – ‘the vital way of looking at the universe’. This cosmic vision, which is duly presided over by an I-Thou encounter with God, comprises *iman b'al-ghaib* or faith in the Unseen. The Qur'an says:

This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty, who have faith in the Unseen...<sup>32</sup>

By ‘faith in the Unseen’ is meant faith in God, the angels, the Day of Judgement and other metaphysical realities mentioned in the Qur'an which are not open to ordinary observation. However, more generally, it implies an overall supernaturalist attitude of mind. For a stark naturalist or a thorough empiricist, the world of experience is the only reality and a talk of anything beyond it is a nonsense, pure and simple. Hume, the well-known British Empiricist, for instance, says:

If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance, let us ask, Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact or existence? No. Commit it then to the flames for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.<sup>33</sup>

In modern times this position was taken up by Logical Positivists. With their principle of verifiability in hand, they rejected the validity of everything that was outside the purview of positive sciences. “The theist may believe,” says Ayer, one of the pioneers of the Logical Positivist movement, “that his experiences are cognitive experiences but unless he can formulate his knowledge in propositions that are

empirically verifiable, we may be sure that he is deceiving himself.”<sup>34</sup> As opposed to this positivism, the kind of attitude that the Qur’an requires from its readers is that they should have a firm conviction that there are realities beyond those of the sensible world. This is what may be meant by faith in the Unseen. Only those observers of nature are capable of going beyond the appearances, that are directly encountered, and of having a vision of Reality beyond them, who are in principle convinced that Reality does exist and that the world of sensible experience is not the end-all and the be-all of everything. It is truly at this level of his attitude towards God that a scientific observer of Nature can be identified with the religious seeker after the Ultimate Reality. It is at this level alone that he realizes that the spatio-temporal world is not simply a three-dimensional world: it has a fourth dimension as well. “Every thing we experience in the course of our lives, ” says Herbert Butterfield, “is not only what it is; it can be psychologically a symbol of something more.”<sup>35</sup> The Qur’an condemns the strictly matter-of-fact type of people. It is about them that it says that their hearts are sealed:

Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing and there is covering on their eyes.<sup>36</sup>

They have hearts with which they understand not, and they have eyes with which they see not and they have ears with which they hear not; ... nay, they are more astray.<sup>37</sup>

The phrase roughly corresponding to the “sealing of the heart” is “expanding of the breast”:

Whomsoever Allah intends to guide, He expands his breast for Islam.<sup>38</sup>

This “expansion of the breast” helps the individual to develop in himself a more and more profound vision and understanding. He begins understanding the true, esoteric meaning of the word as well as the work of God and is thus transported from finite nature to God, the Infinite. Iqbal most probably has this level of experience in mind when he says that the observation of nature sharpens our inner

perception so that we can have a deeper vision of it (i.e. nature).<sup>39</sup> Once we have that vision, our normal perception, our reason and understanding, are, in turn, thoroughly metamorphosed against new perspectives. “Positive views of ultimate things,” Iqbal rightly observes, “are the work rather of Inspiration than Metaphysics.”<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, indicating the inadequacy of natural-cum-rational approach to God, he quotes with approval the saying of Ibn ‘Arabi that God is a percept as differentiated from the world which is a concept.<sup>41</sup>

Observation of nature as the basis, the prelude or the preface of God-Knowledge has been emphasized by the Qur’an, as shown above, due to the simple fact that nature furnishes pointers to God and suggests the right direction in which a search for Him can be fruitfully undertaken. It is thus only an evocative technique and simply furnishes the occasion to have a knowledge of God Who thus, in spite of its relevance to Him, retains His singularity and autonomy. This can be made clear with the help of an illustration given by I.T. Ramsay in his *Religious Language*.<sup>42</sup> Suppose, he says, I have to bring home the existence of a circle to a person who has a peculiarly developed geometry which is completely without curves. I will ask the person to draw a regular polygon with a certain number of sides. Then I shall ask him to make more polygons each time adding one side more to the last figure already drawn. If the process goes on, there generally comes sooner or later a point of disclosure. The man realizes with a flash of insight that his activity of drawing polygons with more and more of sides is imperceptibly leading to an absolutely new kind of figure i.e. a circle, which these figures are approaching more and more nearly but which he will never reach. The circle is then, according to Ramsey, the “infinite polygon”. The word “infinite” is significant here. It implies that we may add as many sides as we like to our polygons, but still the difference between the circle and the polygons, nearest to it will be as wide as between the infinite and the finite. Yet, the circle is definitely

relevant to the growing polygon and presides over the whole series. On the same analogy, nature is relevant to the existence of God, but still it cannot be equal to Him, nor can it furnish a sufficient proof for His existence.

The entire above account speaks eloquently for a need to under a process of self-culture on which the Muslim mystics in particular have invariably laid special emphasis. Iqbal, also speaks of ego's gradual growth in self-possession, in uniqueness and intensity of his activity as an ego. "The climax of this development," he says, "is reached when the ego is able to retain full self-possession, even in the case of a direct contact with the all-embracing Ego."<sup>43</sup> So, it is only a full-grown, well-integrated ego who can afford to have personal knowledge — knowledge by acquaintance, roughly speaking — of the Divine Being. From the very beginning, the seeker of God must learn to discipline his attitudes and be most sincere in his efforts for the realisation of the ideal. Daily canonical prayers are generally begun with the declaration: "I have turned my face towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth and I am not one of the polytheists." So also the observer of nature should always have in mind the attainment of the Ultimate Truth as the grand objective of his experimentations and researches and should never divert his attention elsewhere, however strong the temptation. There is no holiday in the spiritual life of man.

God-Knowledge, which is pursued with such absorption and single-mindedness and with the discovery of the true I-amness in the background, is, of course, not 'knowledge' in the discursive or analytical sense of the term. It is not the sort of knowledge in whose case it would be possible to make a watertight distinction between the knower and the known and also we could understandably talk about the known object in normal everyday language. It is rather of the nature of what the sufis call *ma'rifat* or gnosis where the gnostic develops a kind of unicity with God and, not very infrequently, comes out with the spontaneous eruptions like

“I am the creative truth” or “I am holy; how great is my majesty” and so on. The distinction between discursive knowledge and gnosis can be well brought out by referring to a corresponding distinction made by Bergson between a man’s knowledge of a city which he gathers from the hundreds and thousands of photographs of that city taken from all possible angles and viewpoints and another man’s knowledge who lives in that city, roams about its streets and has a living contact with its human as well as non-human environments.

Incidentally, the unicity of the human ego with the Divine Ego and the spontaneous ejaculations of certain mystics in that regard (which have been known as *shat-hiyyat* in *sufi* literature) can very easily be interpreted in terms of pantheism. Iqbal scrupulously guards against this interpretation. “The finite ego”, he holds, “must remain distinct, though not isolated, from the Infinite.”<sup>44</sup> “... unitive experience is not the finite ego effacing its own identity by some sort of absorption into the Infinite Ego; it is rather the Infinite passing into the loving embrace of the finite.”<sup>45</sup> Talking specifically of the well-known words of Hallaj (“I am the creative truth”), Iqbal say: “The true interpretation of his experience... is not the drop slipping into the sea, but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and permanence of the human ego in a profounder personality.”<sup>46</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.143

<sup>2</sup> Cf. The account of ‘the characteristics of mystic experience’, *Ibid*, pp.14-19

<sup>3</sup> Allama Iqbal defines ‘intellectual test’ as the “critical interpretation, without any presupposition of human experience, generally without a view to discover whether our interpretation leads us ultimately to a reality of the same character as is revealed by religious experience”, *Ibid*, p.21

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 1.

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- <sup>5</sup> Qur'an, 55:29  
<sup>6</sup> Also see  
<sup>7</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p. 91  
<sup>8</sup> Allama Muhamamd Iqbal, *op.cit.*, P  
<sup>9</sup>  
<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p .45  
<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*  
<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*  
<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*  
<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*  
<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, P.110  
<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p.85  
<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.23  
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* pp.23-24  
<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* p.24  
<sup>20</sup> cf. *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.Kemp Smith, p.505  
<sup>21</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit* p. 25  
<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* p.25  
<sup>23</sup> Muhammad Suheyl Umar and Dr. Basit Bilal Muhammad Iqbal A *Contemporary*, article by Basit Bilal Koshal, p.98  
<sup>24</sup> H.J. Paton, *The Modern Predicament*, pp.193-94  
<sup>25</sup> Qur'an, 2:164  
<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 41:53  
<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* 2:164  
<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* 6:99  
<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* 7:143  
<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* 78:80  
<sup>31</sup> *Ibid* 2:260  
<sup>32</sup> *Ibid* 2:2-3  
<sup>33</sup>  
<sup>34</sup> Quoted by G.S. Spinks, *Psychology and Religion*, p.187  
<sup>35</sup> Qur'an, 2:7  
<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 7:179  
<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 6:125  
<sup>38</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.72  
<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p.91  
<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p.144  
<sup>41</sup> *Religious Language – An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases*, p.69  
<sup>42</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* p.94  
<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p.88  
<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p.110  
<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, P.77  
<sup>46</sup>



## IMMORTALITY OF THE HUMAN EGO

In Islam it is recognized as one of the fundamental, indispensable articles of faith that man, after his physical death in this world, which is bound to occur sooner or later, will be reborn in a world that is yet to be — a world ‘much superior in respect of degrees and much superior in respect of excellence’.<sup>1</sup> No one can be truly a *mō'min* without subscribing to this article. This incident of resurrection, according to the Qur'anic scheme of things, must necessarily be in store for men so that they meet, in the big, the final and the total way, rewards or punishments for their various deeds, good or bad. The Hereafter has been called ‘the domain of recompense’ (*dar al-jazā*), the world here and now being ‘the domain of action’ (*dar al-'amal*):

So he, who does an atom's weight of good, will see it  
And he, who does an atom's weight of evil, will see it.<sup>2</sup>

However, the Qur'an has not furnished any premises which could provide conclusive evidence for the rebirth of man as it does not, in general, do for any one of the eschatological realities or metaphysical truths including the existence of God Himself. Firstly, no ‘proofs’ — in a strictly logical sense of this term — appear to be possible in this area of speculation; and secondly, if at all proofs had been possible and actually given also, that would have robbed man of the privilege to make existential choices between various alternatives. Man's freedom to choose and freedom to believe are so immensely valuable in the estimation of God that He would not like at all to bind him down to irresistible conclusions. So, the Qur'anic appeal in such cases is primarily

to an intuited assurance in man of, and emotive faith in, the all-powerfulness of God, His justice etc. For this it resorts to passionate gestures, rhetorical invocations or, at the most, to various stances of analogical reasoning. For the phenomenon of resurrection, in particular, look at the Qur'anic mode of inference:

See they not that Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth, is able to create the like of them? And He has appointed for them a term, whereof there is no doubt. But the wrongdoers consent to naught but denying<sup>3</sup>

And says man: When I am dead, shall I truly be brought forth alive?

Does not man remember that We created him before, when he was nothing? So, by thy Lord! We shall certainly gather them together...<sup>4</sup>

From it We created you, and into it We shall return you, and from it raise you a second time.<sup>5</sup>

See they not that Allah, Who created the heaven and the earth and was not tired by their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Aye, He is surely Possessor of power over all things.<sup>6</sup>

Were We then fatigued with the first creation? Yet they are in doubt about a new creation.<sup>7</sup>

And so on. That conviction in the hereafter is structured on emotions rather than logic is what Iqbal also subscribes to. In one of his letters he says:

The cast of my emotional life is such that I would not have lived a single moment without a strong faith in the immortality of human consciousness. The faith has come to me from the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) of Islam. Every atom of me is brimming with gratitude to him...<sup>8</sup>

On the same subject, he writes in an another letter:

... In this regard there are many facts which are beyond the ken of human reason. An awareness about them grows from certain sources which have nothings to do with philosophical understanding.<sup>9</sup>

The question arises why is there so much emphasis in the overall Qur'anic worldview on the prospect of

resurrection or rebirth in the hereafter, the next world — *al-akbarah*, in the terminology of the Qur'an. The answer is that, for one thing, it helps man towards a moral and spiritual uplift here and now. Clear and transparent descriptions of the extremely fascinating paraphernalia of heaven and of the most dreadful upheaval that characterizes hell are meant for persuading individuals to lead a good life in this world and deterring them from the evil ways. In the hereafter, it has been promised, the principle of personal accountability and equitable justice will reign supreme. No proxy will be permitted and no sharing of burdens will be allowed. Every individual will be treated strictly in accordance with his own deeds alone and on the behest of the deeds of no one else. The Qur'an says:

I will not suffer the work of any worker among you to be lost.<sup>10</sup>

Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright; and whoever goes astray, to his own detriment only does he go astray. And no bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another.<sup>11</sup>

Leave Me alone with him whom I created.<sup>12</sup>

At length when the Deafening Cry comes, the day when a man flees from his brother and his mother and his father and his spouse and his sons. Every one of them, that day, will have enough concern to make himself indifferent to others.<sup>13</sup>

Iqbal, during his discussion of the problem of immortality in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, has described and examined the views of a number of Eastern and Western thinkers so as to be in a position to formulate his own standpoint in the richest possible perspective. The frame of reference and the subjacent current of his entire critical examination of these views necessarily happens to be his own firm commitment to the insistent standpoint of the Qur'an, delineated in the verses just quoted, that man's immortality is uniquely individual and personal in character. This would immediately refute the doctrine of metempsychosis or, what has more commonly been known

as, the ‘transmigration of souls’ as well as the view that the immortal life of an individual consists in his ultimately becoming a part and parcel of the totality of existence like a drop of water which eternalizes itself by getting submerged in the expanses of an ocean. The former, for example, was the view of Buddhism in India and of the Hindus who accepted the Buddhist influence. The latter was, for one thing, accepted by a number of Muslim mystics who subscribed to a pantheistic metaphysics partly due to the inherent logic of mystic experience itself and partly due to certain alien influences.

The first thinker whom Iqbal critically examines in his *Reconstruction* and finds reasons to refute is Ibn Rushd who, according to him, had propounded the doctrine of ‘collective immortality’. To being with, Ibn Rushd did not subscribe to the conviction in bodily resurrection which the orthodox had built upon the basis of a literalist understanding of the Qur’an: al-Ghazali in his *Tabafut al-Falasifah* defended this conviction and declared it as one of the basic articles of faith in Islam. Ibn Rushd, in his powerful poser *Tabafut al-Tabafut*, refuted al-Ghazali on this point as he chose to de-allegorize – like Farabi and Ibn Sina before him — the relevant Qur’anic verses instead of understanding them in their plain, lexical meanings.

Ibn Rushd had made a distinction between sense or mind, on the one hand, and intelligence, on the other — presumably corresponding to the two Qur’anic terms *nafs* and *ruh*. Mind, according to him, depends for its operation and in fact for its very existence on the data received through the sense organs of the body. It is the principle of individuality in man. Being entirely dependent on the body, it dies with the physical death of man. *Ruh*, on the other hand, he believes, is independent of the body. It is the principle of universality and collectivity. Though residing in each particular body, it only temporarily resides there as a representative of the Universal Soul or Universal Intellect or Active Intellect to which alone

belongs immortal existence. Universal Intellect may be taken to symbolize the entire human race. So not man as an individual person but the human race, in general is bound to survive for all times.

Iqbal raises at least three objections to Ibn Rushd's point of view. Firstly, Ibn Rushd is wrong when he appears to hold that the Qur'anic words *nafs* and *ruh* are the sort of technical terms used for two distinct elements in the human organism which are opposed to each other in character: the former being privately and indissolubly attached to the body; the latter being universal and transcendent and so essentially independent of any physical substratum. Qur'anic concept of the human person, Iqbal, instead, rightly emphasizes is that of an indissoluble organic unity. Secondly, this point of view fails to prove immortality for the human persons as a class: it only proves continued existence for the human race or may be only for the human civilization and culture. Thirdly, it "looks like William James' suggestion of a transcendental mechanism of consciousness which operates on a physical medium for a while and then gives it up in pure sport"<sup>14</sup> and thus it fails to give due importance to the primal, unique individuality of the human person as such.

Kant has dealt with the problem of immortality in both of his *Critiques*. The general tenor of his argument is moral. The observation that can be quoted as the basic intuition of his entire reasoning is available towards the end of his *Critique of Practical Reason*:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heaven above and the moral law within... I see them before me and connect them directly with the consciousness of my experience.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argues that in this world virtue and happiness are two mutually divergent notions. Our reason demands that they should meet so that

virtue is rewarded with happiness. Given the different natures of both, this meeting is not possible in the limited span of an individual's life in this world. It needs an additional other world to eventualize. Hence the inevitability of the life hereafter. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* he proceeds a little differently. Under the auspices of the Moral Law we are duty-bound to be perfect. Now any duty, by virtue of its very connotation, has to be carried out. Perfection to be attained being total and absolute this would not be possible within the limited period of time available in this world. It necessarily needs an unlimited time and so an immortal life.

To the line of argument adopted by Kant Iqbal has some objections specially insofar as it tends to belittle the importance of the present world for the realization of the moral ideal. Further, if it is granted that virtue and happiness are mutually incongruent notions, how can even an unlimited period of time make them meet together. Iqbal is of the opinion that Islam's view of this worldly life is different from that of Christianity which Kant might have in mind. According to Christianity man has been thrown into this world as a package of punishment for the original sin committed by Adam. Being a pit of damnation, this world cannot be the proper place where man can possibly attain the ideal of moral and spiritual excellences. This attainment is to be entirely postponed to the next world. For Islam, on the other hand, the present world plays a positive and constructive role in this connection. It is man's actions here and now that serve to secure higher and higher perfection for the ego and this progression continues on to the life hereafter also. Iqbal's attitude to this world is neither optimistic nor pessimistic but rather melioristic so that the ideals of moral perfection are neither completely realizable nor absolutely unrealizable here: a meaningful progress can of course be made towards their realization.

Besides these points of criticism we can raise an objection against the argument on another count also. Kant

seeks to draw a factual judgement as a conclusion from an evaluative judgement: 'Virtue *ought* to be rewarded with happiness; therefore life hereafter *exists* for this reward'. Or, 'it, is our duty to be perfect; therefore there will be an immortal life in the hereafter in which it will be possible to carry out this duty'. But it is just a matter of simple understanding that 'is' by no trick of logic or even imagination, can be deduced from 'ought', as 'ought' too would be incapable of being deduced from 'is'.

William James tried to build up a case for immortality by refuting the point of view of the Darwinians and the materialists that mind or consciousness is only a productive function of the brain and so, according to them, when body dies, mind goes into non-existence alongwith it. This was, in general, the standpoint of the school of Psychology known as Behaviorism. William James observes that mind is rather the transmissive or permissive function of the brain so that it essentially transcends the brain. It only employs the brain temporarily for its neural contact with the body; so by virtue of its nature it is capable of surviving the cessation of bodily existence. Iqbal, however, objects to this view by saying that it appears to be similar to that of Ibn Rushd insofar as it easily boils down to the point of view that consciousness is a cosmic, universal element which uses the individual brain as an instrument for a limited period of time and then, after the extinction of the brain, lives on as ever before. It does not admit of, or guarantee, personal immortality.

Another thinker whom Iqbal mentions and mentions in some detail is Nietzsche with his doctrine of Eternal Recurrence. Nietzsche believed that the world comprises centers of energy which are limited in number because the quantum of energy is fixed once for all; it neither increases nor does it decrease. It is the diverse combinations and recombinations of energy centers which make up the entire furniture of the universe. As time is infinite according to Nietzsche, all such combinations have been exhausted in the

past: have in fact been repeated a number of times. There is no happening in the universe which can be declared as totally novel. Whatever happens has already happened repeatedly in the past and will continue to happen an infinite number of times in the future. Hence immortality as a patent, cosmic fact! This incidentally would provide a wide scope for the continuing, periodic emergence of the ideal human person whom he calls the ‘superman’.

Iqbal rejects this doctrine as a sort of sheer mechanical arrangement based not on any established fact but on just a working hypothesis of science. Movement of time as circular— instead of being linear — in which various events simply continue repeating themselves infinitely makes immortality monotonous and intolerable. Nietzsche seems to have had some realization of this implication as he himself described his doctrine not as of immortality but rather as a view of life which would make immortality endurable. This endurability is, according to him, due to the expectation that the energy centers will some time in future enter into the ideal combination known as the ‘Superman’ as they have been doing so in the past. This expectation, says Iqbal, is only a passive expectation of the irresistible and does not involve any active progression towards a stage of existence really new. It is only the latter that would be the essential spirit of the concept of personal immortality as conceived and idealized by the Qur’anic teachings. Nietzsche’s view, he says, is a kind of fatalism worse than that implied in the word *qismat* which, according to the orthodox interpretation, means that the entire life schedule, to the minutest details, of every individual was predetermined and in fact written down on the *lawh-e mahfuz*, the guarded tablet’ before he was actually born. “Such a doctrine, far from keeping up the human organism for the fight of life, tends to destroy its action-tendencies and relaxes the tension of the ego”.<sup>15</sup>

After criticizing various Eastern and Western doctrines of immortality from his own characteristic standpoint, let us

see now how does he put forth his own point of view. There are three basic facts which, he says, are emphasized by the Qur'an in this regard. These are as follows:

1. Human ego has a beginning in time and did not pre-exist its emergence in the present spatio-temporal order. Iqbal quotes in favour of this the following verses:

And certainly We created man of an extract of clay; then We placed him, a small life-germ in a firm resting place; then We made the life-germ a clot of blood; then We made the clot a lump of flesh, then We made the lump of flesh into bones; then We clothed the bones with flesh; then We caused it to grow into another creation. So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators.<sup>16</sup>

However, elsewhere, word of the Qur'an does describe the phenomenon of the pre-existence of human souls — may be in their disembodied form. It says:

And when thy Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them bear witness about themselves: Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes; we bear witness. Lest you should say on the day of resurrection: we were unaware of this.<sup>17</sup>

In view of the literal meaning of this verse which, according to most of the commentators, suggests that each and every individual in the entire posterity of Adam had had a distinct existence even before the appearance of the first man in the present spatio-temporal context and a covenant was taken from all of them *en masse* that is binding accordingly on each human individual.<sup>18</sup> This is by and large the orthodox view among the Muslims. Iqbal's thesis may appear to be in contradistinction with this view; however, it can duly be justified in either of the two ways: either Iqbal would accept only a symbolic interpretation of this verse and understand by it that faith in God is embedded in the primordial nature of man<sup>19</sup> and now needs to be simply revived by observing His signs spread throughout the universe; or maybe he proposed to emphasize only that aspect of the Qur'anic idea according

to which — despite the ‘pre-existence of souls’ that may perhaps be granted — a personality that possesses the quality of being fortified or weakened by various sets of behavior patterns did not exist prior to its emergence in this world. The Qur’an, I hold, has a provision for both these modes of justification.

2. There is no possibility of a return to this earth after one is dead and removed from the scene. The Qur’an has many verses emphasizing this point, for instance:

Until when death overtakes one of them he says: My Lord send me back that I may do good in that which I have left. By no means! It is but a word that he speaks. And before them is a barrier, until the day they are raised.<sup>20</sup>

And by the moon when it grows full. That you shall certainly ascend to one state after another.<sup>21</sup>

3. Finitude is the essential character of the destiny of man. Every person shall meet God in the hereafter strictly in his capacity as an individual person with a unique sense of accountability for his and **his own** deeds alone. Finitude is not a misfortune either. It is rather a matter of respect, dignity and honor for the human individual. The higher is the stage of his moral and spiritual evolution, the more well-knit and disciplined his personality becomes. It is only such an ego who will be able to stand the catastrophic upheaval that the Day of Judgement will be and only he will be able to face God with composure and confidence. The Holy Prophet (peace be on him) is the embodiment of this ideal of perfect manhood in Islam. On the occasion of *Mirraj* (the Supreme Ascension), when he was not face to face with God, ‘his eye turned not aside, nor did it wander’.<sup>22</sup> This would be on impossibility in the case of pantheistic metaphysics according to which the individual egos get obliterated in the Supreme Ego just as the rivers flow into, and get indistinguishably mixed up with, the sea waters or just as the light of a candle gets immersed in the daylight when the sun rises. Mansur Hallaj’s ejaculation “*ana’l Haq* (I am the Truth), which is

generally understood pantheistically, was, according to Iqbal, the affirmation by Mansur of a strictly theistic state of affairs. He only meant to declare that his ego had acquired a veritable truth and a robust authenticity by the assimilation of Divine attributes or that — in the words of the Qur'an — it had been soaked in the Divine colours, better than which no colours are available.<sup>23</sup>

Connected with the last point above is Iqbal's primary thesis that immortality is closely relevant to the moral endeavors of the individual self or ego. "There are no pleasure-giving and pain-giving acts; there are only ego-sustaining and ego-dissolving acts. It is the deed that prepares the ego for dissolution or disciplines him for a future career ... personal immortality, then, is not ours as a right it is to be achieved by personal effort. Man is only a candidate for it".<sup>24</sup> That is to say, he has to work and work seriously for its attainment. Referring to *barzakh*, a term available in the Islamic literature for the stage between death and resurrection, Iqbal says it would not be a merely passive state of expectation but rather a state of consciousness characterized by change in the ego's attitude to the new spatio-temporal order that he is going to encounter in the next world. "It must be a state of great psychic unhingement, specially in the case of full-grown egos who have naturally developed fixed modes of operation on a specific spatio-temporal order, and may mean dissolution to less fortunate ones. However, the ego must continue to struggle until he is able to gather himself up and win his resurrection. The resurrection therefore is not an external event. It is the consummation of a life — process within the ego".<sup>25</sup> This activity process in the career of the ego never stops, not even after resurrection, according to Iqbal. Neither hell is a pit of eternal damnation nor heaven a perpetual holiday. Both are only stages — one earlier; the other latter-in the he eternal, unending continuation comprising the development of the ego. The former is a creative, purifying mechanism; the latter

too is characterized by a gradual, on-going journey towards the realization of higher and higher levels of excellence. The orthodox have always held that the life hereafter will be a life of almost passive inactivity, the one involving only different levels of recompense in terms of rewards and punishments: those in hell will be subjected to the severest pangs and tortures as if these were ends in themselves whereas the residents of heaven will have all kinds of pleasures readily available to them without the involvement of any effort on their part. Iqbal, for whom Islam invariably emphasizes deed more than idea, regards life as a continuum, a perpetual moral struggle without a holiday either here or there. Hell, he says, is a transitional phase. Being 'the painful realization of one's failure as a man' it provides an occasion to 'make a hardened ego once more sensitive to the living breeze of Divine grace'. He will be Involved In a constant effort to "march always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality Who 'every moment appears in a new gory'.<sup>26, 27</sup> "Every act of a free ego creates a new situation and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding".<sup>28</sup> Iqbal concludes that "heaven and hell are states and not localities". i.e. their nature is mental, ideational and subjective rather than geographical, independently tangible and objective. The Qur'an says:

No soul knows what is hidden for it of that which will refresh the eyes: a reward for what they did.<sup>29</sup>

An explanation of this verse by the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) is recorded in *Sahih Bukhari* as: Allah says, "I have prepared for my righteous servants what no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what the mind of man has not conceived".<sup>30</sup> Similarly Ibn 'Abbas is reported to have said that "nothing that is in paradise resembles anything that is in the his world except in name".<sup>31</sup>

In view of the above Iqbal at least appears to be right at least when, he says that the eschatological descriptions by the Qur'an involving references to the so-called physical objects

and situations are all of them symbolic in nature. In this he was not alone. It were the Mu'tazilites we know who for the first time regularly resorted to this mode of interpretation. However, if such an interpretation seeks to completely transform the character of existence from physical to mental, that would be going too far. Comparatively less resistant hypothesis would be to say that it may possibly be 'physical' but in the sense that suits the requirements of its incumbents. Obliquely speaking, Iqbal seems to accept this latter hypothesis because "ego as an individual", he says, "is inconceivable without some kind of local reference or empirical background".<sup>32</sup> After all it is the human ego himself for whom heaven and hell have been prepared. Maulana Saeed Ahmad Akbarabadi who, by and large, is sympathetic to Allama Iqbal's concept of immortality, had to say that where the Allama wrote that 'heaven and hell are states not localities' he should have added the word 'only' at the end. "It is not at all impossible", the maulana said, that if he had revised his Lectures he would have actually done so."<sup>33</sup>

By the way, irrespective of the Qur'anic standpoint and its various interpretations, it may be remarked just in the passing that modern researches in parapsychology have indicated the possibility of disembodied existence. In the phenomenon of thought-transference, for example, there is mind-to-mind traffic and consciousness is found to operate independently i.e. without any material reference. The reported incidents of visitations by the souls of the dead also tends to establish the existence of individuals without physical garbs — the so-called astral bodies. However, all these Researchers are hypothetical so far and do not at all actually occupy any stance of authenticity to be seriously reckoned with.

Another objection against Iqbal's concept of 'immortality' is very serious. "Personal immortality", he says. "Is not our as of right: it is to be achieved by personal effort. Man is only a candidate for it."<sup>34</sup> Qur'an, we know, clearly

upholds that each and every person does not simply have a right (which may sometimes be denied to him!) to, nor does he claim simply a candidature (which he himself may sometimes withdraw if he so chooses) for, resurrection; he is rather bound as a rule to be resurrected and to consequently become immortal in hell or in heaven or, 'in the latter, after a temporary stay in the former'. To this rule there is absolutely no exception. If, for a moment it is supposed, that, in the quotation given above, 'immortality' is used as a qualitative term meaning a perpetual life in heaven only then, of course, it has to be won by an individual as a result of his personal effort comprising good actions etc. in the present world; but no such 'personal effort' will be spent by the residents of hell, who, after a Divinely engineered corrective process comprising punishments of various kinds doled out to them, will be allowed to go to heaven.

The view that the concept of hell specifically be demythologized as to mean a corrective process, as Iqbal holds, rather than a purely and entirely punitive measure, has not been maintained by very many thinkers: only a few have done this. These few thinkers, one tends to feel, do so primarily on the basis of considerations over and above those of the strictly Qur'anic text — certain hopes and aspirations, an overall optimism about human destiny and even some sayings said to be reported from the Holy Prophet (peace be on him). According to the plain Qur'anic text itself immortality is not an honorific term, as Iqbal sometimes appears to hold, because the inmates of both hell and heaven will equally have, according to it, an immortal lease of existence.

For Iqbal the term immortality, as said alone, stands reserved for the ever-evolving life of the human ego in the heaven where, with the passage of time, he will have a closer and closer approximation to God, the Ultimate Real. Here, incidentally a question arises: if the human ego is immortal in heaven will it not contravene and violate the Muslims' firm

faith in the singular eternity of God? The Qur'an is very clear on this point" when it says that everything / everyone is bound to perish except God.<sup>35</sup> The truth of this verse, however, stands vindicated and vouchsafed in three ways. Firstly, *in this world* all living creatures and everything else will of course be annihilated till the human beings are raised once again on the Day of Judgement for purposes of recompense. Secondly, in the heaven it will be the Divinity itself which will be involved in the process of self-realization. Temptation towards evil, the element of non-divinity (referred to in the Qur'anic phrase 'except God') will simply be non-existent there. It is in this sense that God has singular eternity which He does not share with anything or anyone else. Thirdly — and that is very important — God's eternity is simply incomparable with man's immortality: they are mutually different categories. Eternity means timelessness whereas immortality involves a linear, non-ending sequence of temporality.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'an, 17:21

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 99:7-8

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 17:99

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 19:66 -68

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 20:55

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 46:33

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 50:15

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in 'Zia Bar', Iqbal Number, p.50

<sup>9</sup> Sayyid Nazir Niazi (ed.) *Maktubat-e Iqbal*, p.74

<sup>10</sup> Qur'an, 3:195

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 74:15

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 74:17

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 80:34 -37

<sup>14</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.89

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.92

The mechanism of the nature of afterlife as put forth by Nietzsche, has, incidentally, an analogy in the doctrine of the 'transmigration of souls', also known as 'reincarnation' or 'metempsychosis' which is traceable in a

number of ancient religions. According to this doctrine the soul that survives the physical death of a living organism continues to migrate from one body to the other without retaining any remembrance of its previous existence.

<sup>16</sup> Qur'an, 23:12 -14

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 7:172

The verse refers to what in orthodox literature has been called '*ehd-e alast* (the primordial conveyance)

<sup>18</sup> Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur'an (text, translation and Commentary), One-Vol. edition, p. 395, note no.1146

<sup>19</sup> Maulana Muhammad Ali, The Holy Qur'an – Arabic Text, English translation and commentary, p. 356, note No.958

<sup>20</sup> Qur'an, 23:99 – 100

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 84:18 -19

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 57:17

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 2:38

<sup>24</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.95

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p.96

<sup>26</sup> Qur'an, 55:29

<sup>27</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* p.98

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>29</sup> Qur'an,

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Maulana Muhammad Ali, *op.cit.* p XXVIII

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>32</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.97

<sup>33</sup> *Khubbat-e Iqbal per Aik Nazar* (Urdu), p.55

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.95

<sup>35</sup> Qur'an, 28:88

## EGOS AND MONADS

### a comparative study of Iqbal and Leibniz

Allama Iqbal, in spite, or rather because, of his declared commitment to monotheism in regard to his faith in God, is a pluralist insofar as his view of the constitution of the universe is concerned. In the second chapter of his *Reconstruction*, he has undertaken a comprehensive philosophical criticism of all the facts of experience on its efficient as well as appreciative side and has been led to the irresistible conclusion that 'the Ultimate Reality is a rationally directed creative life',<sup>1</sup> whom he conceives as an Ego, a Person, a 'Great I Am'. To interpret this life as an Ego, he, of course, hurriedly points out,

is not to fashion God after the image of man. It is only to accept the simple fact of experience that life is not a formless fluid but an organizing principle of unity, a synthetic activity which holds together and focalizes the dispersing dispositions of the living organism for a constructive purpose.<sup>2</sup>

Now, nature and laws of nature being habits of God — a sort of self-revelation of His person—the entire furniture of the universe, from its lowest state of existence to the highest one, does, of necessity, comprise egos and egos alone. Creative activity of God functions as ego-entities because 'from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed',<sup>3</sup>

Iqbal attempts to further define the salient features of his ego philosophy against the context of a critical appreciation of the Ash'arite doctrine of *Jawahir*. The Ash'arites, in opposition to the Mu'tazilite emphasis on human freedom,

had laid maximum stress on the sovereignty of God, His supreme authority and omnipotence. This amounted for them to a denial of the natural powers of secondary agents: the particular material objects as well as animals and human beings have no efficacy and no qualities inherent in them. They have, in fact, no nature whatsoever. As substances exist only by dint of qualities so when qualities are explained away, the substances are dismissed as well and so fail to have any durable existence. Tangibility of substances having thus been rejected, the Ash'arites were led straight to a doctrine of atomism which, Iqbal observes, was 'the first important indication of an intellectual revolt against the Aristotelian idea of a fixed universe'.<sup>4</sup> According to the Greek atomists' view, in general, the atoms were determinate in number whereas for the Ash'arites they are infinite because the creative activity of God is ceaseless. Fresh atoms are coming into existence every moment and the universe is becoming newer and newer every moment. The Ash'arite atom, unlike its Greek counterpart, can be destroyed as well. Its essence is independent of its existence insofar as existence is a quality imposed on the atom by God: if He withdraws this quality, the atom loses its spatio-temporal character. In fact no atom has the characteristic of continuing for two consecutive moments. If a thing does appear to endure for some time what really happens is that God creates, annihilates, creates, annihilates and so on, the accidents of existence and duration in a quick, perpetual sequence. If God wished to destroy a body, it was sufficient that He stops to create in it the accident of existence as well as the other accidents appropriate to it.

The very important fact emphasized by the Ash'arites that the atom appears as materialized and spacialized when God grants it the quality of existence necessarily implies, according to Iqbal, that before receiving that quality — and, thus, basically and essentially— it is nothing but a phase of Divine energy. Its spatio-temporal existence is only Divine activity rendered visible. Iqbal, in this connection, quotes<sup>5</sup>

with approval the remark of Ibn Hazm that the language of the Qur'an makes no distinction between the act of creation and the thing created. And so a material object is nothing but an aggregation of atomic acts perpetrated by God. It is only mind's search for permanence that has created the world of physics. Thus conceived, the material atom is essentially spiritual. It is for these spiritual atoms comprising the whole cosmos that Iqbal uses the term 'egos':

The whole world in all its details from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego is the self-revelation of the 'Great I Am'. Every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an ego.<sup>6</sup>

Iqbal further points out that, corresponding to the different levels of phenomenal existence, viz, material, spiritual and conscious, there are degrees of reality which are nothing but degrees in the expression of egohood. "Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man".<sup>7</sup> The Ego, that God is, is the most Supreme, the most Independent, Elemental and Absolute.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the German philosopher, with whose cosmology Iqbal has greater affinity than is recognizable by a casual observer, was also a spiritual pluralist. He also conceived the universe as an hierarchy, an ascending order of spirit- or force-atoms which are variously named by him; 'metaphysical points' 'substantial forms' or 'monads'. At the apex of this hierarchical structure, according to him, stands God, the Monad of all monads. The number of monads is infinite and no two of them are exactly alike. As God is pure activity, the clearest consciousness, the Soul *par excellence*, so all monads exhibit conscious activity more or less. Each monad is a microcosm— the universe in miniature — as it reflects, mirrors or 'perceives' the universe from its own point of view. There are obscure, confused and obfuscated perceptions— the small perceptions— at the

lowest level. These become clearer and clearer as we go up the scale. In man they become apperceptions comprising a 'reflexive knowledge of the inner state' or, what we call, self-consciousness. They are the clearest in God, the Original Monad. Permitting no leaps in nature there is a continuous line of infinitesimal differences from the inorganic matter through plants, animals, human beings onwards to God.

One consequence of faith in the selfsame unitary principle and ground of the universe to which both Leibniz and Iqbal, in their respective ways, subscribe is that mind and body are to be considered essentially the same. If that is really so, how would the difference between organic and inorganic bodies be understood. Both, of course, are composed of monads, according to Leibniz, and of egos, according to Iqbal, but an organic being, they say, has the distinction of having a central monad or ego. Inorganic bodies are not centralized in this way. They are a mere jumble, a heap of the constituting units. The higher a body is in the scale of being, the more organized and centralized it is.

Answering the question as to how is the central monad, i.e. the mind or the soul related to the peripheral or inferior monads comprising the body of an organism, Leibniz summarily rejects interactionism, the popularly recognized theory about mind-body relationship. Monads, in general, cannot influence one another, he says because 'they have no windows'.<sup>8</sup> Every one of them is self-contained and has in itself the ground of its various states and movements. It is in fact perpetually in a process of evolution and goes on realizing its nature by an internal necessity. He writes:

I do not believe', 'that any system is possible in which the monads inter-act, for there seems no possible way of explaining such action. Moreover such action would be superfluous for why should one monad give another what the other already has, for this is the very nature of substance that the present is big with the future.'<sup>9</sup>

Anyway, some account must be given of the fact that

changes in one thing seem to be connected by definite laws with the changes in others. Apparent mind-body relationship, particularly, can be explained, according to Leibniz, by the theory of a pre-established harmony between monads. The states of each and every monad are internally engineered in such a way that they happen to synchronize with the states of all other monads. The law of natural harmony has been woven into their very respective natures.

Souls act according to the laws of final causes, by means of desires, ends and means. Bodies act according to the laws of efficient causes or notions. And the two realms are in harmony with one another.<sup>10</sup>

The possibility of such a phenomenon can be explained by an analogy. Suppose there are two perfect clocks whose machines have been so set that when one of them strikes an hour, say, exactly one second later, the other strikes that hour too. To a layman it may appear that one clock exercises a sort of influence over the other and makes it behave in a particular way. However, the fact, as we know, is that the harmony between them has been pre-established by the mechanic who made them, in the first instance. Similarly, the visible harmony between any two monads, and particularly between the monads comprising the mind and the body respectively in an organism, has been pre-established by God, their Creator. When, I will to raise my hand and my hand is actually raised, between these two events there is no causal relationship whatsoever. They happen independently but, of course, in such a way that they would be in a relationship of mutual fittingness. Leibniz agrees with the Occasionalists in their rejection of interactionism. However they sharply differ between themselves also insofar as, according to the latter, God is the only direct and immediate agent of every event in the world, whereas, according to the former, every individual substance evolves in accordance with its own nature which was determined once for all when God created the world. Thus, although Leibniz did not subscribe to transient

causality between ordinary monads, he upholds that this causality does operate between God and the universe. This operation took place not only initially as He eternally established harmony between monads but also it continues to happen now and for all times. The clock or the machine that the universe is 'needs to be conserved by God and it depends on Him for its continued existence'. The Supreme Monad would not be windowless to that extent. The source as well as ground of the mechanics of the universe lies in metaphysics.<sup>11</sup>

Iqbal, in general, rejects the dualist theory in regard to mind-body relationship. He specially refutes the doctrine of pre-established harmony because it practically 'reduces the soul to a merely passive spectator of the happenings of the body'.<sup>12</sup> Nor are mind and body entirely separate substances having their mutually exclusive sets of attributes and entering into a relationship of mutual interaction as was, for instance, emphasized by Descartes. They rather belong to the same system, says Iqbal. Both are egos. "Matter is spirit in space-time reference".<sup>13</sup> It is "a colony of egos of a low order out of which emerges the ego of a higher order."<sup>14</sup> The physical organism reacting to environments gradually builds up a systematic unity of experience which we call the human ego. Mind and body become one in action. The Qur'an says:

Now of fine clay We created man. Then We placed him, a moist germ in a safe abode; then made We the moist germ a clot of blood; then made the clotted blood into a piece of flesh; then made the piece of flesh into bones; and we clothed the bones with flesh: then brought forth man of yet another make.<sup>15</sup>

This, however, does not obliterate the distinction between mind and body so that the former may essentially stand reducible to the level of the latter. Iqbal says:

It is not the origin of a thing that matters, it is the capacity, the significance and the final reach of the emergent that matters. Even if we regard the basis of soul-life as purely physical, it by no means follows that the emergent can be resolved into what

has conditioned its birth and growth. The emergent... is an unforeseeable and novel fact on its own plane of being.<sup>16</sup>

Here expressly is a reference to the doctrine of cosmic evolution to which Iqbal subscribes. All higher forms of existence, he holds, evolve out of the lower forms because there is a “gradually rising note of egohood in the universe”.<sup>17</sup>

Incidentally, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in one of his articles,<sup>18</sup> recently published in Pakistan, has emphasized that evolutionism — specially, the concept of biological evolution that was popular in the West of Iqbal’s times — is anti-Islamic in its metaphysical implications and is in contradiction with the teachings of the Qur’an.\*\* Iqbal and other Muslim thinkers of the Subcontinent specially, he in general complains, do not recognize this fact because of the apologetic attitude that they have almost been forced to adopt under the impact of over-all strong influences of Western culture. Here the accusation of being apologetic is, however, I believe, difficult to substantiate adequately at least in case of Iqbal who seems to be fully conscious of the limitations of his contemporary Western science and culture and the inadequacy of the materialistic, reductionist, type of attitude towards life and values that it generated. Anyway, Iqbal is firmly of the opinion that the doctrine of evolution has nothing un-Islamic about it. The verse from the Qur’an quoted above clearly indicates, according to him, that man did evolve out of the lower forms of existence. The orthodox, by applying a literalist approach to some of the verses of the Qur’an, have always held that man is a special creation and is not the result of a long evolutionary process. The human race, according to them, started from Adam, the first human being who was directly and specially created by God. Iqbal, like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), resorts to a symbolic interpretation of the descriptions of the Qur’an in this regard. He says:

The Qur’anic legend of the fall does not describe the episode of the first appearance of man on the earth. Its purpose is

rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self capable of doubt and disobedience. The fall ... is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being.<sup>19</sup>

God is not a mere contriver working on alien matter as one might get the impression from the Qur'anic verse referred to above. He, in fact, caused man to grow 'from earth', meaning thereby 'in the normal evolutionary course of nature operating in the spatio-temporal world'.

There is no purely physical level in the sense of possessing a materiality elementally incapable of evolving the creative synthesis we call life or mind and needing a transcendental deity to impregnate it with the sentient and the mental.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, God Who makes the emergent emerge is in a way immanent in nature: 'He is the First and the Last; and the Manifest and the Hidden.'<sup>21</sup>

Not only in the Qur'an, Iqbal also traces his views on evolution in various Muslim thinkers. It was Jahiz (776-869), he points out, who first observed changes in animal life caused in general by migrations and environments. The Brethren of Purity further elaborated these observations. Miskawaih (942-1030) was, according to him, the first Muslim philosopher who presented the theory in a regular and systematic form. He gave concrete examples of the evolutionary process from the world of minerals, plants and animals. On the basis of his views on evolution, he seeks ultimately to justify the emergence of prophets and to build up a system of his ethical views. Jalal al-Din Rumi (1208-1274), the spiritual guide of Iqbal, too gave an evolutionary interpretation of the emergence of man. However, for him, this evolution does not end with man. It may go beyond him to a level which it is not possible for us to imagine now. "The formulation of the theory of evolution in the world of Islam, says Iqbal, brought into being Rumi's tremendous enthusiasm

for the biological future of man”.<sup>22</sup>

The views of all these Muslim thinkers have remarkable affinities with the concept of evolution as advocated, and made popular in modern times, by Charles Darwin (1809-1882). However, there is one essential respect in which they differ from him. Darwin, we know, is a naturalist. He holds that all changes in the process of evolution occur due to forces in nature itself *viz.*, struggle for existence, chance variations and natural selection. These changes have no exterior causes. Miskawaih and Rumi, on the other hand, are spiritualists. The source and ground of evolution for them is not dead matter but God, Who is the Ultimate Creator of everything. Matter for them is only one of the emanations from God which starting from the First Intelligence become more and more materialized as we go down the scale till we reach the primordial elements. So even matter is not dead and inert. It is constituted of dimly conscious elements. It is the expression of Divine Reality and the objectification of soul. “The universe is nothing but the outward and opaque form of the ideal. When God wanted to manifest Himself, he created a mirror whose face is the soul and whose back is the universe”.<sup>23</sup> Iqbal too is a spiritualist: it is not from dead matter but from God Himself ultimately that everything originates. And it is to Him that all returns.<sup>24</sup> He is the Goal, the Ideal *par excellence*.

Leibniz, we have seen, also believed in evolution although the kind of evolution that he conceives is entirely indigenous and internal to monads. Development of each monad into newer and newer states is, in the last analysis, a sort of self-revelation, pure and simple, not determined from without, because monads have no windows through which any influence may come in or go out. This, in general, is the doctrine of preformation or incasement according to which all future states of a particular object are prefigured or contained in it already. Every monad, it is said, is ‘charged with the past’ and ‘big with the future’. Iqbal, in

contradistinction to this, is of the opinion that egos have genuine mutual contacts. Those of a higher order evolve out of those of a comparatively lower order when the association and interaction of the latter reaches a certain degree of co-ordination. Talking of the human person specifically, he says:

The life of an ego is a kind of tension caused by the ego invading the environment and the environment invading the ego; the ego does not stand outside the arena of this mutual invasion. It is present in it as a directive energy.<sup>25</sup>

Personality is a state of tension which is to be maintained as a valued treasure with the help of a perpetual encounter with partly sympathetic and party antagonistic environments. I must be vigilant and active all the time so as not to give myself in to a state of relaxation and so undo my personality.

Thus human ego is dynamic in its essential nature. Iqbal, in this connection, rejects the views of abu Hamid al-Ghazali (and of the entire school of Muslim theology which he represents), according to whom self of man is something static and unchangeable: 'It is a simple indivisible and immutable soul substance entirely different from the group of our mental states and unaffected by the passage of time'. These theologians wanted to vouchsafe two objectives, a psychological one and a metaphysical one. Psychologically, they wanted to establish that the individual must continue to be the same throughout the diversity of his mental states which are related to the soul-substance as the physical qualities are related to the material substance. Metaphysically, they thought, their doctrine established personal immortality of man. However, Iqbal believes, they have been able to achieve neither of the objectives set before them. Neither are the various conscious experiences related to the ego as physical properties are related to a material object, nor does the simplicity of the ego guarantee its unending existence.

Just as Ghazali and others laid stress on the unity and given-ness of the human ego at the expense of its dynamic

character, so does William James, in his conception of self stress its dynamic character at the expense of its unity. According to the latter, consciousness is a stream of thought and the ego is nothing but ‘the appropriation of the passing impulse by the present impulse of thought and that of the present by its successor’. Iqbal ridicules this idea of appropriation of one bit of experience by the other, holding it to be an impossible state of affairs. For him, human ego is neither over and above our experiences nor is it simply various experiences themselves reporting to one another. Its life, as said above, is rather a state of tension caused by the mutual invasion of the ego and the environments and held in unicity by a sense of direction. I-amness is not a thing; it is an act.

You cannot perceive me like a thing-in-space, or a set of experiences in temporal order; you must interpret, understand and appreciate me in my judgements, in my will-attitudes, aims and aspirations.<sup>26</sup>

The question arises ‘What is the principle involved in the emergence of the human ego? Henry Bergson, the French philosopher and biologist, had believed that it was the principle of *elan vital*, the vital dash, which is entirely arbitrary, undirected, chaotic and unpredictable in its behavior. It is a free creative impulse. “The portals of the future”, he remarked, “must remain wide open to Reality”.<sup>27</sup> Teleology – like mechanical causation — would make free creativeness a mere delusion and would make time unreal. Iqbal, on the other hand, resorts to the theistic hypothesis. God is not only transcendent. He is, in a sense, the immanent force also, Who is constantly causing within the spatio-temporal order newer and newer emergents like the human ego. “Soul is the directive principle from God”,<sup>28</sup> says the Qur’an. Iqbal does agree with Bergson insofar as the latter says that:

if teleology means the working out of a plan in view of a pre-determined end or goal, it does make time unreal... all is already given somewhere in eternity; the temporal order of

events is (then) nothing more than a mere imitation of the eternal mould.<sup>29</sup>

According to this view there would be no really free creation and growth in the universe. Anyway, aside this criticism, Iqbal is firmly of the opinion that our activities are goal-directed, purposiveness being essential to the human self. "The ends and purposes, whether they exist as conscious or sub-conscious, form the warp and woof of our conscious experience."<sup>30</sup> This is because, he points out, there is a sense of teleology available other than the one conceived and rightly rejected by Bergson. As I act I do not do so because there is a grand plan of action already determined for me. I, in fact, go on creating my own purposes in life. "Though there is no far off distant goal towards which we are moving, there is a progressive formation of fresh ends, purposes and ideal scale of values as the process of life grows and expands. We become by ceasing to be what we are; life is a passage through a series of deaths".<sup>31</sup> God, the Ideal, inseminates the entire universe and, specially, the life of man with goal-directed behavior at every step during its tenure of existence. The essence of this insemination is, according to Iqbal, love or *ishq*. He says:

Beneath this visible evolution of forms is the force of love which actualizes all strivings, movement and progress. Things are so constituted that they hate non-existence and love the joy of individuality in various forms. The indeterminate matter, dead in itself, assumes, or more properly, is made to assume by the inner force of love, various forms, and rises higher and higher in the scale of beauty.<sup>32</sup>

The ego is individual. There are, of course, degrees of individuality, as pointed out by Bergson also. Most perfect individuality, says Iqbal, belongs to God, the Ultimate Ego, "Who begets not, nor is He begotten and there is none like Him".<sup>33</sup> But man too is an individual, more or less, insofar as the Qur'an has a clear picture of him as one who is responsible for his own deeds alone and who has his unique

future that awaits him: “No bearer of burdens bears the burden of another.”<sup>34</sup> Further, the Qur’an visualizes that in the life hereafter every resident of heaven or hell will have a clear remembrance of his past life for which he will be rewarded or punished. Psychologically speaking too, the I-amness of man is absolutely private. My experiences, my thoughts and feelings, are all unique with me and unsharable with others. Even my experience of a table or a chair which are, to all appearance, public facts, is strictly my own and cannot be confused with anyone else’s experience of the same objects.

The ego or self in man has two aspects which may be termed as the noumenal aspect and the phenomenal aspect. Bergson calls them the ‘fundamental self’ and the ‘social self’, respectively. Iqbal makes a more or less corresponding distinction between the ‘appreciative self’ and the ‘efficient self’ of man. The former lives in pure duration while the latter deals with serial time. In our day to day life we are so much absorbed with the world i.e. with the serereality of time and the spread-outness of space that we entirely lose sight of the fundamental or the appreciative ‘I’ within. It is almost incumbent upon us to recognize this not only because that would qualify us for an encounter with the ‘Great-I-am’ and prepare us for authentic social relations with other human beings, but also because it would make me a human person, in the full sense of the term. Iqbal says:

To exist in pure duration is to be a self and to be a self is to be able to say ‘I am’. Only that truly exists which can say ‘I am’. It is the degree of intuition of I-amness that determines the place of a thing in the scale of being.<sup>35</sup>

Mystics of all times have laid a special emphasis on the true self-awareness of man.

How do I know myself? Iqbal’s answer is that, being most simple, fundamental and profound, I-amness is neither an object of perception nor an idea pure and simple to be

logically inferred and rationally conceived. It can in the final analysis only be known through a flash of intuitive insight. David Hume, for instance, is the philosopher well-known for his attempt to reach the self through purely sensory, empirical channels. He said:

When I enter most intimately into what I call myself I always stumble on some particular perception i.e. some particular mental content or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception... And were all my perceptions removed by death... I should be entirely annihilated.<sup>36</sup>

He thus concluded that there is no such thing as 'I' or 'self' and that a person is 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions'. Hume's supposition here is that all knowledge is to be furnished by sense experience alone and sense experience being a temporal affair leaves no scope for a permanent, non-successional being. Descartes, on the other hand, represents those who followed the course of reason. Being himself a brilliant mathematician and a discoverer of Analytical Geometry, he was firmly of the opinion that for philosophy a method could be discovered on the analogy of the one used in mathematical sciences where we start with certain simple and self-evident principles, rising by degrees to the complex ones — thus building up an entirely foolproof system of thought. So he set out in search of the indubitable and the self-evident. This he did by a grand process of elimination. He doubted away everything he could possibly doubt: the testimony of his senses, his memory, the existence of the physical world, his own body and even the truths of mathematics. One thing, however, he found, he could not possibly doubt and that was the fact of his own existence, his own self, his I-ness. It is he after all who had been performing the activity of doubting all the time. Doubting is a form of thinking. "I think", he concluded "therefore I am", meaning to say, 'I exist'. This argument, the critics have pointed out, is fallacious on grounds more than one. For one

thing, the conclusion to which the entire reasoning leads could only be that 'there is a state of doubt' and that's all. At the most a logical 'I', which in fact is the subject of all propositions that are made, can be asserted. From this to skip over to the factual existence of an 'I', as Descartes really does, is a leap which cannot at all be justified.

Iqbal is thus right when he holds that both sense-experience as well as reason, forms of perception as well as categories of understanding, are meant to equip us for our dealings with the spatio-temporal world: they are not made to reach the core of my being. In fact "in our constant pursuit after external things we weave a kind of veil round the appreciative self which thus becomes alien to us. It is only in the moments of profound meditation", he goes on to say, "when the efficient self is in abeyance, that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner centre of experience".<sup>37</sup> So neither the *mutakallimun* (theologians) nor the philosophers but the devotional *sufis* alone have truly been able to understand the nature of the human soul. The meditation, referred to here, is either pure meditation through which I imaginatively remove from myself all that is not essentially 'me' i.e. all that I possess due to my particular 'historical' and 'geographical' situation, in the broadest sense of these terms, or it may be the meditation charged with activity in which case I practically eradicate from my nature exclusive love for, and involvement with, the world which is the cause of my alienation from the source and ground of my existence. The second meaning is accepted particularly by the mystics of Islam. The Muslim mystic's path, in fact, starts with the inculcation of the virtue of *tawbah* (repentance or turning about) which signifies purification of soul and the deliverance of it from all extraneous material so that the Divine within it stands realized. It can thus positively prepare itself for an encounter with God because such an encounter can take place only in case a person realizes the Divine in himself and like Him dispenses with all determiners. "The adherents of

mystical religions”, says G.S. Spinks, “feel compelled to empty their psychical life... in order to achieve by personality-denying techniques an emptiness that will prepare the way for the incoming of the Divine”.<sup>38</sup> Anyway, realization of the true self through meditation is not at all an end in itself. It is a means for the improvement of our behavior and for the cementation and confirmation of our personalities:

The ultimate aim of the ego is not to see something but to be something. The end of the ego’s quest is not emancipation from the limitations of individuality; it is, on the other hand, a more precise definition of it.<sup>39</sup>

Now as the essential nature of the human ego is his quest for purposes and ideals, he cannot afford to be mechanical and stereotyped in his behavior. He must be free. Positive scientists – psychologists, physiologists and others – have sometimes tried to understand human behaviour on the pattern of the behavior of the physical world which, they think, is characterized by causal necessity. But the determinism of the physical world, Iqbal rightly observes, is not definitive, objective and final. It is, he says, an “artificial construction of the ego for its own purposes”. Indeed, he goes on to observe, “in interpreting nature in this way the ego understands and masters its environment and thereby acquires and amplifies its freedom”.<sup>40</sup>

Tracing the historical development of the problem of freedom, Iqbal makes a distinction between ordinary fatalism and higher fatalism. The latter which is the result of a living and all-absorbing experience of God is, however, commendable, though very rare: “strong personalities alone are capable of rising to this experience”.<sup>41</sup> The experience is so total that its recipient has a strong feeling of resignation. As the Infinite is absorbed into the loving embrace of the finite, the will of the individual is — though temporarily — held in abeyance. Hopes, desires and aspirations of man, freely exercised by him, become identical with the will of God

because of his being thoroughly saturated in Divine colour.<sup>42</sup>

As to the mutual relationship of God, the Ultimate Ego, and the universe, — and specially as to how did God produce the world— there appears to be a close affinity between the respective standpoints of Iqbal and Leibniz. Iqbal regards creativeness as one of the important elements in the Qur'anic conception of God. But as we follow his argument into details it transpires that he does not hold on to the strictly orthodox position in this regard. The act of creation, he says, was not a specific past event; nor is the universe a manufactured article having no organic concern with the life of its maker and confronting Him as his other. The universe, according to him, is rather to be conceived as a free creative energy that 'proceeds' from God. It is one continuous act which thought breaks up into a plurality of mutually exclusive things and interprets it as space, time and matter. Here the word 'proceeds' is very important. It spontaneously brings to one's mind the doctrine of emanation that was so popular with the earliest Muslim thinkers who philosophised under the aegis of neo-Platonism. 'Proceeds' does have other meanings; for instance, corollaries following from a geometrical definition or rays radiating from the sun or smell from a flower or melodies from a musical instrument or as habits and modes of behavior are exhibited by the personality of an individual. Now God being a Person Himself, the last meaning appears to be the one closest to the mind of Iqbal. That is why he declares the world to be a self-revelation of the 'Great I am.' Incidentally the Qur'an's insistently repeated statement that 'there are pointers to the being of God spread out in the various phenomena of nature' sufficiently bring out the revelatory character of God, on the one hand, and, correspondingly, the representative character of the universe, on the other.

Earlier, Leibniz too had vacillated between creativeness and expressionism. He, like Iqbal, avoided the phrase 'creation out of nothing' for describing the origination of the

universe. Also, he instead used a term which is as ambiguous as — if not more than — the term ‘proceeds’. He describes monads as substances co-eternal with God and calls them ‘fulgurations’ or ‘manifestations’ of Him. As it has been shown above, monads comprising the universe are, according to Leibniz, in general self-contained and independent. The entire life of everyone of them consists purely in the development of its own internal nature. There is, however, at least one property of each monad of which the ground lies not in itself but in God *viz.* its actual existence from the point of view of Leibniz, it may be ingrained as an additional predicate added by the creative act of God to those already contained in the concept of the world as ‘possible’. This view comes close to the metaphysical position of the Ash’arite theologians which was very much appreciated by Iqbal himself.

The last-mentioned closeness between Leibniz and Iqbal points to a deeper metaphysical ambivalence that is mutually shared by them. Creativeness, in general, we know goes with a theistic view of God whereas emanationism implies pantheism. Controversies have raged regarding each one of the thinkers whether he belongs to one of these metaphysical camps or the other. And, further, in either case majority of the writers have agreed that— specially as we go by their overtly declared positions— they must be taken to be more in sympathy with theism than pantheism. A detailed discussion on this subject will not, however, be undertaken here as it will take us a little beyond the scope of the present article. It needs a treatment independent by itself.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.48

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.57.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.54, 56, 109.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.55.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.57.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *The Monadology And Other Philosophical Writings*, translated by Robert Latta, section 7, p.219.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted and translated by Bertrand Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, p.134

<sup>10</sup> G.W. Leibniz, *op. cit.*, section 79, p. 263.

<sup>11</sup> G.B. Duncan (ed.), *The Philosophical Works of Leibniz*, p.241.

<sup>12</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.84.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* P. 122.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p.84.

<sup>15</sup> Qur'an, 23:12-14.

<sup>16</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.85

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* P.57

<sup>18</sup> *Al-Hikmat*, A Research Journal of the Department of Philosophy, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Vol. 6, 1975, pp.45-70.

\*\* For a detailed exposition of Nasr's views on biological evolution, Darwinism, transformist theory and its reductionist implications, see his *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Edinburgh, 1981, Lahore, 1985 pp.169-71, 234-42; *Islamic Life and Thought*, Lahore, 1983, p. 136. Also see his *Science and Civilization in Islam* Cambridge and Lahore, 1992 and *An Introduction to the Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Albany, 1992, pp 71-4. Apart from giving an exposition of the essentially different nature and significance of the views expressed by the Islamic thinkers (Brethren of Purity, Ibn Miskawaih, Rumi etc.) as compared to the Western evolutionism, Nasr has also pointed out the way in which the texts of these Islamic thinkers have been misinterpreted by modernist Muslim writers by reading their own ideas in their texts which were often cited and used with a total disregard for their immediate context and over-all perspective and governing paradigm. (Editor, 'Iqbal Review' 36:1 in which this article was initially published).

<sup>19</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 67-8. Also see Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Maqalat*, Vol. 1, pp 216-234.

<sup>20</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p.85.

<sup>21</sup> Qur'an, 57:3.

<sup>22</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p.147.

<sup>23</sup> Khalifa Abdul Hakim, *Metaphysics of Rumi*, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> Qur'an, 96:8.

<sup>25</sup> Allama Muahmmad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>27</sup> Qur'an, 17:85.

<sup>28</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.43.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 42

<sup>31</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit* pp. 44.

<sup>32</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, p.46

<sup>33</sup> Qur'an, 112:3-4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 6:164.

<sup>35</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, *op. cit.*, p.45.

<sup>36</sup> *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Book I, part IV. P.252.

<sup>37</sup> Allama Muhamdmad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.38.

<sup>38</sup> G. Stephens Spinks, *Psychology and Religion*, p.

<sup>39</sup> Allama Muhamdmad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.86.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 87.

<sup>41</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.87.

<sup>42</sup> The Qur'an says:(We take) Allah's colour, and who is better than Allah at colouring and we are His worshippers (2.138).

## SUPREME EGO: THE UNIQUE IDENTITY

*Tawheed* i.e 'Unity of the Divine Being' is the *sine qua non*, the most essential article of faith, according to the teachings of Islam. Being entirely indispensable and inviolable it admits of no compromises of any kind. Look at the categorical way the Qur'an asserts:

Ascribing partners to God is indeed a grievous iniquity and a great sin.<sup>1</sup>

God has decided that He may forgive anyone He likes but He will not at all forgive those who set up partners with Him.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding the question as to what is the exact nature of Divine Unity a lot of confusion has been created by the philosophers of religion, in general, and by the neo-mu'tazilite modernist Qur'an scholars, in particular. Due to their characteristic habit of analysis, they have characterized the generic concept of the Unity of God into, for instance, the theistic, pantheistic and the deistic varieties which, in many respects, are recognizable as mutually exclusive though not collectively exhaustive. These various sections of thinkers have further tried to prove that the Qur'anic point of view in this connection belongs — safely and neatly — to the one or the other of these varieties only. They duly offer arguments allegedly supported with reference to the Sacred Text itself in order to logically demonstrate their respective points of view. But the basic confusion still remains unresolved. Given the analytical line of approach, it will in fact continue to be so because the spirit behind this classification and even the very nomenclature employed for the same is alien to the temperament of the Qur'an itself. Qur'anic attitude specially

towards the realities of ultimate significance is uncompounded, simple and straightforward and admits of absolutely no categorization and no analysis. If at all we have to use the modern terminology we can affirm that the Qur'anic view of God has the so-called 'theistic, 'pantheistic' as well as 'deistic' **aspects** all of them at the same time but none of them exclusively.

Qur'anic concept of God is theistic insofar as He is the One Who created the universe out of nothing, <sup>3</sup> Who is powerful over every thing, <sup>4</sup> Who listens to the prayers of men and answers them, <sup>5</sup> Who is independent of all the worlds, <sup>6</sup> Who alone continues to help human beings throughout their lives, <sup>7</sup> and to Whom alone worship is due.<sup>8</sup> And so on. This aspect of the Qur'anic teachings was specially highlighted by, among others, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, <sup>9</sup> the celebrated '*mujaddid* (religious reconstructionist) of the second millennium'. The relationship of man to God, according to him, is that of a servant carrying out the orders of his Supreme Lord: man is a servile, humble creation and God is beyond all beyond, then beyond all beyond, then beyond all beyond. Among the earliest Muslim theologians Abul Hasan al-Ash'ari and his followers were thorough-going theists. In their ontological moorings they specially emphasized it so exclusively and so thoroughly that in the face of it everything /everyone else, including human beings, become altogether impotent. Every quality being a sort of effectiveness and powerfulness, God has in fact all the qualities; natural objects have no qualities whatsoever inherent in themselves: They do not have even the quality of existence continuing for any measure of time unless perpetually granted to them by God Almighty. This lead to their doctrine of Occasionalism<sup>10</sup> as to the apparent relations among natural beings and objects including the causal relations. The renowned Imam Ghazali was too an Occasionalist in this sense.

The Qur'anic view of God is pantheistic insofar as He is

the First and the Last, the Evident as well as the Hidden,<sup>11</sup> His throne extends over the heavens and the earth,<sup>12</sup> He is nearer to man than his very life-vein<sup>13</sup> and He encompasses everything.<sup>14</sup> And so on. This point of view was elaborated and adopted by, for example, Ibn Arabi,<sup>15</sup> the mystic, for whom only God has the real existence; all else is evanescent and ephemeral. The universe, he says, was not created by God *ex nihilo* as a tangible 'something else', existing for all practical purposes independently and in its own right; it is for him simply a reflection, an effulgence emanating from Him as rays emanates from the sun or as fragrance emanates from a flower. In fact pantheism appears to be almost the official standpoint of all mysticism. One of the characteristics of a mystic's gnosis of God is that it is entirely gripping and absorbing so that all other shades of consciousness are held in abeyance: for the gnostic nothing/none exists except God at least as long as the trance of that consciousness continues. This trance has naturally a hangover of its own and that justifies the pantheistic metaphysics. Otherwise also, as mystic experience is regarded as the most authentic source of knowledge in the mundane context what this experience discovers is the truth *par excellence!*

Metaphysical standpoint of the Qur'an is deistic insofar as it has asked its readers to inculcate in themselves the inductive spirit. Time and again they have been called upon to observe the course of history, the '*ayyam Allah*'<sup>16</sup> in the Qur'anic terminology, the behavior of the physical universe<sup>17</sup> as well as the facts of their own mind, soul and consciousness<sup>18</sup> so as to draw irresistible conclusions and generalizations therefrom. Obliquely, for some thinkers, it is implied in these directives that the phenomena of nature have uniformities inherent in themselves and causal principles independently operative among them which *ex hypothesi* are not supposed to be disturbed by any agent operating from elsewhere. This aspect of the Qur'anic teachings was specially emphasized by, for instance, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan,<sup>19</sup> a

nineteenth century religio-philosophical thinker of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was a thoroughgoing naturalist. His basic thesis was that the Qur'an is the Word of God and nature is the work of God; so there can be no disharmony between the two. The former is His verbal promise; the latter, His practical promise. Both are trusted, inviolable documents in their respective ways. Nature once having been created and its laws once having been put into operation by a Perfect God, they need not, and must not now, be changed by Him in any way. Given that the laws of nature are the practical promises of God and given that God has taken upon Himself not to go against His promises and commitments, He in fact cannot change them. Hence no literal acceptance by Him of petitionary prayers addressed to Him. No occurrence of miraculous happenings in the sense of the violations of the laws of nature, and so on.

Whether a person reads theism, pantheism or deism into the Qur'an with almost the total exclusion of all other views, it can be easily recognized, ultimately depends on the particular temperament or attitude that he has. This attitude works as a sort of coloured glasses through which he looks at the Holy Script. Those, who have a natural affinity with the naive, indigenous and simple way the Qur'an was understood during the earliest times of Muslim history and those who have in Him and His entire scheme of things a robust faith untouched by discursive reason, have a tendency towards theism. Those, who have an infatuation for the Divine and harbor mystic leanings, an inclination to go beyond and behind the verbal garb and claim to have discovered the esoteric layer of meaning of the religious language, become pantheists. Those, who have a this-worldly, matter-of-fact scientific outlook on life, very easily develop a metaphysics of deism. Now, as the Qur'an is a book of guidance for all people and for all times, it has of necessity catered to the requirements of all these temperamental varieties. A person, who sincerely desires to have the truest understanding of the

Qur'anic concept of God *vis a vis* nature including human beings, must, to begin with, try his best to avoid the temptation of prefacing the Qur'an with his own personal preferences, prejudices, likes and dislikes and let the Book speak for itself. It is, no doubt, very difficult to undertake such a dispassionate study of the Book of God. However, once we are — if at all we are — successful in carrying it out, we shall find that the Qur'anic view of the Supreme Oneness of the Divine is simple but comprehensive and that it transcends all attempts at critical analyses and academic classifications.

Allama Iqbal, not very unjustifiably, claims — in fact takes an oath imprecating himself<sup>20</sup> — that the views expressed by him on various problems are Qur'anic in essence and spirit. Likewise, the concept of Divine Unity given by him too may not be unequivocally bracketed into only one of the categories enumerated above; and also, positively, elements of all of them can be shown to have been woven into its formulation. There has since long been a heated controversy on the subject whether Iqbal, in his maturest views, was a theist or a pantheist and a lot of relevant textual evidence has been marshalled on both sides. The controversy has never been resolved and continues to be revisited again and again by Iqbal scholars and critics. Some of them strike a conciliatory note and say that Iqbal in fact subscribes to both these doctrines at the same time and his position thus supposed to have taken a distinct shape termed by them 'panentheism', meaning to say that God is transcendent above, as well as immanent in, the world. Iqbal, they point out, describes nature as a human interpretation put on the creative activity of the Absolute Ego<sup>21</sup> as the habit of Allah<sup>22</sup>, as 'God's behaviour',<sup>23</sup> as 'a fleeting moment in the life of God'.<sup>24</sup> He also says that nature is to the Divine Self as character is to the human self.<sup>25</sup> Now, just as man stands revealed through his activities, his character and habits and thus in a sense can be declared identical with them but, at the

same time, he transcends them too, so God is very much **in** nature but is not at all entirely exhausted by it. He is **above** and **beside** it also. I have in general no arguments to offer towards the settlement of this theist/pantheist controversy besides the ones that have already been occasionally given by very knowledgeable critics and scholars nor do I have enough space here to mention these arguments all over again. However, I would like to add at least one more dimension to this problem and that dimension is that the thought of Iqbal can be interpreted naturalistically (and so deistically) also. Some years ago, a renowned Iqbal scholar Prof. Abdul Qayyum delivered the Annual Iqbal Memorial Lecture which was titled 'Naturalism of Iqbal'. The Lecture, as usual, was held under the auspices of the Department of Philosophy, University of the Punjab and hosted by the University itself.<sup>26</sup> It was well-documented and was well-received by the learned audience. As a philosopher of religion, the task which Iqbal had set before himself and which he very ably tried to carry out was, as the speaker described in detail in the historical perspective, the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam. Islam being the Universal Religion valid for all times, earlier too Islamic thought had been reconstructed time and again. Farabi and Ibn Sina reconstructed it against the perspective of Greek thought. Iman Ghazali reconstructed it as he wrote *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (Destruction of the Philosophers) and *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Revival of Religious Sciences) in reply, respectively, to the 'heretics' and the 'innovators' in his own camp. Shah Waliullah – 'first Muslim to rethink the whole system of Islam' — reconstructed it so as to make it consonant with the dictates of plain rationality. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan reconstructed it in order to show that it fulfilled the requirements of the nineteenth century scientific naturalism and rationalistic determinism. Iqbal's reconstruction of Islamic thought, visibly on the identical pattern, has been called 'scientific reconstruction' because he was of the view that the Qur'anic concept of God, the Ultimate Reality, is of the same character as that which

qualifies the truth that is being gradually discovered by researchers in the field of natural sciences dealing with all the three departments of nature, *viz* matter, life and consciousness, the subjects-matter, in that order, of physics, biology and psychology.<sup>27</sup>

The account of Allama Iqbal's concept of God in the paragraph just ended, I would reiterate, does not go to prove that there is any kind of self-contradiction in his metaphysical views. Rather, this account simply brings home the fact that his concept of God, in consonance with the one that is laid down in the Qur'an, is comprehensive, holistic and basal: different aspects of this concept that have been, or may ever be, identified simply subscribe to this comprehensiveness.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the entire above account regarding various colours of the 'phenomenological nature of Divine Unity' — which of course does have its own academic importance — Allama Iqbal, once again in consonance with the Qur'anic world-view, holds that this concept has a very vibrant potential of relevance for man-in-the-world. *Tawbeed*, Arabic equivalent of 'commitment to One Supreme Being', he never tires of emphasizing, is not just numerically one article of faith among others which a person must subscribe to in order to be declared a Muslim for all socially acceptable purposes; nor does it have simply an academic or a theological importance. It is rather to be accepted as a dynamic factor, a living force, that must necessarily have an impact on the moral and spiritual life of the individual as well as of the society at large. Sorrowfully he says:

زندہ قوت تھی جہاں میں یہی توحید کبھی آج کیا ہے فقط اک مسئلہ علم کلام

(there was a time when faith in the Oneness of God was a living, dynamic force whereas to-day it is nothing but just one of the theological problems)

How to realize *Tawbeed* as a dynamic force for man here and now. In this connection it would be suggestive to refer to

the three periods of religious life enumerated by Iqbal, namely, the periods of faith, thought and discovery. “In the first period”, he says, “religious life appears as a discipline which the individual or a whole people must accept as an unconditional command. This attitude may be of great consequence in the social and political history of a people, but is not of much consequence so far as the individual’s inner growth and expansion are concerned. Perfect submission to discipline is followed by a rational understanding of the discipline and the ultimate source of its authority. In this period religious life seeks its foundation in a kind of metaphysics — a logically consistent view of the world with God as a part of that view. In the third period metaphysics is displaced by psychology and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality. It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from the fetters of law but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his consciousness”.<sup>29</sup> In the first two periods as described here man has only a dry, calculated ‘I-it’ relationship with God whose existence becomes, at the most, what Iqbal has termed, the subject-matter of a theological discourse. It is only in the third period when man has an I-thou, a person-to-person encounter with Him and when he consciously participates in His life that it becomes a ‘living force’. It is this personal experience amounting to God-consciousness and the perception of His Unique Individuality which positively affects the incumbent in his personal as well as social life. In the Qur’anic dialect this experience is institutionalized in *salat* which Iqbal translates as prayer. Prayer, he further observes, is instinctive in its origin. He approvingly quotes, in this connection, the great American psychologist William James: “It seem probable that, in spite of all that science may do to the contrary, men will continue to pray to the end of time unless their mental nature changes in a manner nothing we know should lead us to expect.”<sup>30</sup>

Anyway, it may parenthetically be remarked, prayer, according to Iqbal, has a wider connotation than that which is commonly recognized. It is generally considered to be equivalent to the formal practice of *salat* commonly observed by a Muslim. In that capacity it may ideally be described as a mode of direct, ‘face-to-face’ encounter with God. But there is an indirect such encounter also which would eventualize through the scientist’s observation of ‘nature’ understood as the ‘habit’ or ‘behaviour’ of God. “Knowledge of nature”, says Iqbal, “is the knowledge of God’s behavior, in our observation of nature we are virtually seeking a kind of intimacy with the Absolute Ego”.<sup>31</sup> In fact “all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer.”<sup>32</sup>

Man-in-the-world, we know, is bound by, what Iqbal describes, ‘forms of perception’ i.e. space and time as well as categories of understanding like possibility/impossibility, existence/non existence, plurality, causality etc. These are the sorts of implements, the mechanics which he has somehow developed for dealing with the universe around him. However, at the same time, they have restricted his knowledge to appearances i.e. the phenomenal world only, holding him back from an acquaintance with the noumena, the Reality as such. When, on the other hand, a person has gnostic awareness of God, Who is beyond space and time and beyond all categories, he himself is freed from all these bounds. The Qur’an has perhaps this contemplated — though difficult to register — achievement of man in view when it says:

O Assembly of jinn and men if you are able to pass through the regions of the heavens and the earth then pass through them. You cannot pass through them but with authority.<sup>33</sup>

“Prayer in Islam”, Iqbal very succinctly remarks, “is the ego’s escape from mechanism to freedom”.<sup>34</sup> Equipment with this freedom amounts to the development of the purest, the most unbiased point of view and the capability to look at everything in the true perspective. “Beware of the wisdom of

a *mo'min*”, the prophet of Islam (peace be on him) is reported to have said, “because he sees with the light of God”.<sup>35</sup> In order to have the clearest idea of the geography of a land we must transcend the ground and undertake its aerial survey. So, in order to have a truly sympathetic understanding of the problems of life and existence we must psychologically take leave of their spatio-temporal settings and look at them afresh from the highest point of view, the point of view that is guaranteed by one’s direct contact with the Ultimate Reality. This paramount equipment also amounts to making the person concerned indifferent to, and independent of, all the false deities and dummy gods that consciously or unconsciously continue to charge the lives of ordinary people, literally, ‘the-men-of-the-world. Says Iqbal:

یہ ایک سجدہ جسے تو گراں سمجھتا ہے ہزار سجدے سے دیتا ہے آدمی کو نجات<sup>36</sup>

This one prostration (to God) in prayers which a person does not feel inclined to perform would actually absolve him of thousands of prostrations (to false deities).

In his *Rumuz-e Bekhudi* Iqbal has a section reserved for an account of a healthy influence that *Tawheed* would exercise on the psychology of an individual.<sup>37</sup> He enumerates in this connection three mental states, despair, grief and fear which, according to him are the basic ailments that are likely to afflict the personality of a man and do him immense harm. As to the sentiment of despair, he says, that life, essentially, is almost identical with optimism sanguinity and hope. If, despite all hardships that we come across in life, we are still hopeful for better days to come and accordingly struggle hard for the same, we continue to be really alive. If, on the other hand, we lose hope, we are almost dead. We live as if we are not alive: we barely exist. Grief or sorrow makes a man hollow from within just as termite eats up a wooden structure. It does not simply snatch away his happiness but also weakens his ‘will to act’. Similarly, fear has a deadening effect on the excellences of a human being. It is the perpetual

enemy of his courage, enthusiasm and valour. Most of the social attitudes like flattery, lying, hypocrisy, cunning and deceit are, in the last analysis grounded in some kind of fear. Faith in One Omniscient, Omnipotent God, Who is always with us, when properly subscribed to and assimilated, removes all these incongruencies and aberrations, and gives us tranquility and peace of mind. All our hopes and aspirations having been directed to the One Being, all lesser beings and the sentiments attached to them become irrelevant and meaningless.

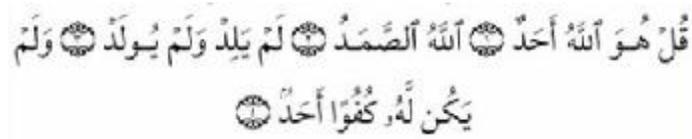
Morally also, existential consciousness of the Supreme Real is specially relevant to the individual as it determines his status in the scale of values. On the authority of his spiritual mentor Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, Allama Iqbal has prescribed three tests<sup>38</sup> which ought to be applied in order to determine the level of integration or authenticity which the ego of an individual has already acquired or the station of moral-spiritual growth that he happens to actually occupy. The first test requires: **look at yourself with the light of your own consciousnesses**. I have my own moral principle within me in the form of my own conscience which gives me pangs and pricks when I perform an evil action and which makes me feel happy and satisfied when I perform a good one. So, to begin with, my conscience must be satisfied with me in regard to my behavior on the moral plain. Obliquely, my conscience demands that I must be prepared to shoulder the responsibility of what I do. The second test is: **'look at yourself with the light of human egos other than you'**. I must be prepared to take up the responsibility of what others do. If there is evil flourishing in the society around me I am duty-bound to stop it forcefully; if that is not possible, I must verbally prohibit people from doing it; if even that is not possible, I should at least feel, with the maximum of heartfulness and sincerity at my command, that it is evil. The third test demands: **look at yourself with the light of God**. This is the most exacting criterion. It requires that man

should recognize and realize the Divine spark within himself and see that his moral will is almost identified with the Divine will. He, of course, continues exercising choices whenever alternatives are available to him but, despite all options open to the contrary, he invariably does choose the way that is good from the highest point of view. His ego becomes disciplined and thoroughly integrated and reaches nearest the Ideal *par excellence*, the Supreme Ego, Who dispenses with all the worlds and Whose I-amness is independent, elemental, absolute. "The act" of such a person, say Iqbal, "is not an intellectual act, but a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego, and sharpen his will with the creative assurance that the world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts, but something to be made and re-made by continuous action. It is a moment of supreme bliss and also a moment of the greatest trial for the ego."<sup>39</sup>

Faith in One God has a healthy effect not only on the personality and character of the individual and his episteme it is also helpful towards the formation and development of a well-knit, thoroughly organized society. Being the essence of nationhood in Islam, *Tawbeed*, says Iqbal, stands for equality solidarity and freedom. Those who share this faith are mutually cemented as a rock. They are one and united in all important respects. They have the same aspirations, same aims and ideals, same patterns of behavior, same criteria of good and evil and same philosophies of life. Fair play and justice prevails among them. Allama Iqbal further points out that the social order of Islam which "finds the foundation of world-unity in this principle of *Tawbeed*, put forth by Islam as a religion, is only a practical means of making the principle a living factor in the intellectual life of (the entire) mankind: It demands loyalty to God and not to the thrones"<sup>40</sup>.

It would be interesting and very informative also, to quote here in some detail from the last i.e. the 16th section of *Asrar-o-Rumuz* wherein Allama Iqbal seeks to derive truths about the relevance of the Muslims' concept of *Tawbeed* to the

well-being of their social life from *surah Iklas*. The *surah*, with four *ayat* only, is one of the shortest *surahs* of the Qur'an. It reads as follows:



In the beginning of this section Iqbal relates a dream of his own in which he met *Hazrat* Abu Bakr Siddiq (God be pleased with him), the first Caliph in Muslim history. The former asked the latter to prescribe as to what should be done to alleviate the socio-moral ailments from which his contemporaneous (early 20<sup>th</sup> century) fellow-Muslims suffered as he himself had been the one who was able to save the *Ummah* from a number of insurgent eruptions that tended to create a lot of social unrest during the earliest times of the spread of Islam. *Hazrat* Abu bakr advised Allama Iqbal that guidance be sought from the verses of *surah Iklas* which are all full pregnant with meaning in this regard. Every verse connotes one particular *sifat* of God. In compliance with the Holy Prophet's (peace be on him) reported directive 'assimilate in your person the *sifat*, the habits, of God',<sup>41</sup> the Muslims should inculcate these *sifat* in their own personal as well as social lives. What follows in *Asrar-o-Rumuz* comprises details of the advice as spelled out on the behest of *Hazrat* Abu Bakr himself.

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ say: He, Allah is One.

Faith in the Oneness of God, provided it is not just a lip-service and a blind conviction but is rather a 'living assurance' – as it necessarily ought to be – implies that the Muslim *ummah*, in compliance with this faith, should keep themselves united as a singular impeccable unity. They should give up their mutual skirmishes, animosities, conflicts and unnecessary differences. Oneness among themselves must in

fact be put forth by Muslims as a testimony and a visible proof of their commitment to One God. If the testimony here happens to be defective, every person should feel concerned that there is something wrong somewhere with that which it is required to testify. So the lesson which this verse imparts to its readers is: be united as an *Ummah* in order to put up a clarion demonstration of the fact that they really understand its meaning and significance.

اللَّهُ الْغَنِيُّ Allah is He on Whom all depend.

From the truth that God is independent, self-determined and absolutely free from all sorts of constraints whatever, every Muslim ought to learn the lesson to vouchsafe and maintain his own dignity, self-respect, prestige and honour, to recognize and discover the immense possibilities of his being and also work hard to realize them; and complementarily to avoid unnecessarily begging from others and thus being under the stress of an obligation to them. What is desirable for all Muslims as individuals as well as for them as a social unit is to exploit their own indigenous resources — moral, spiritual, intellectual and material — and take pride in them. Presently (i.e. in the times of Allama Iqbal —although equally true to-day in our own times), on the contrary, they take pride in blindly mimicking the thought fashions, habits and cultural trends of other nations and even the language they would prefer to speak. All these are shamefully unfortunate indicators of a slavish mentality which belie even the minimal level of sincerity and commitment with which we ought to have faith in God Who is Independent and Absolute.

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ He begets not, nor is He begotten.

God does not beget any child nor is He begotten. He has no blood relations. This character of the Divine, incidentally, demonstrates His nature as the Perfect Individual — the One and Only. ‘For the individuality to be perfect’, Bergson very rightly says, “it would be necessary that no detached part of

the organism could live separately”.<sup>42</sup> Thus “individuality is a matter of degrees and is not fully realized even in the case of the apparently closed off unity of the human being”.<sup>43</sup> This Divine *sifat* is obviously inimitable literally by a human individual because to have various kinds of blood relations are, what is known in logic, ‘inseparable accidents’ of man: he cannot even be conceived to exist without at least some of these accidents. However, he has still a lesson to learn from this *ayat* of the Qur’an. Man cannot relinquish and get rid of his blood relations once they stand established but he can, for all practical purposes, ignore and bypass them and transcend them when the achievement of higher moral-cum-spiritual goals is at stake. When Prophet Abraham (peace be on him) could not bring round his father to stop idol-worshipping, the son had to part his ways from the father, when prophet Noah’s (peace be on him) son refused to subscribe to what he preached, he had no option but to leave him alone; when our Holy prophet (peace be on him) was opposed by the people of Mecca – many of whom were his blood relations – as he preached to them his own apostleship and the singular Unity of the Divine Being, he did not hesitate to migrate to Madina where environments for the spread of Islam were far more congenial. So blood relations are alright and they urgently need to be recognized and honoured so long as they do not come into conflict with higher ideals but when they so come into conflict they ought to be relegated by the Muslim *ummah* to the realm of meaninglessness.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ and none is like Him.

Description of the Divine Being in this verse as ‘the Unique’ and ‘the Unparalleled’ is an indicator of a directive to every Muslim, who has faith in that Being, to be a candidate for the realization of the ideal of the highest position in regard to the integration of his ego insofar as it is humanly possible. Howsoever he endeavours to occupy that position and howsoever he has actually gone in that direction, there is always a space available for him at a still higher pedestal. So

his endeavours must never suffer from any dissipation: they should ever continue. Needless to say once again that what is true here of every individual Muslim is equally true of the entire Muslim *ummah*. The *Ummah* should prove to be a role model for the whole world. Just as God is the One in his Divinity, so is Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) the one and only in respect of the humanistic perspective. He is the ideal of perfect manhood in Islam whom we all should emulate. The Qur'an says:

Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar.<sup>44</sup>

The manhood that the Holy prophet (peace be on him) raised around him is too a beacon light for others to be guided by. He is reported to have said:

My Companions are like the (guiding) stars. Whomsoever of them you follow you will be treading the right path.<sup>45</sup>

Let me enclose in the end a few scattered verses from *Rumuz-e-Bekbudi* which very forcefully bring out the importance of *Tawbeed* as a living force for human beings, *in general*.<sup>46</sup> I shall quote verbatim without giving their translation in, order to communicate to my readers 'beauty of the original', pure and simple:

اینکه در صد سینه پیچد یک نفس	سَرے از اسرارِ توحید اس و بس <sup>47</sup>
یک شود توحید را مشہود کن	غائبش را از عمل موجود کن <sup>48</sup>
دین ازو حکمت ازو آئین ازو	زور ازو قوت ازو تمکین ازو <sup>49</sup>
قدرت او برگزیند بنده را	نوع دیگر آفریند بنده را <sup>50</sup>
بیم و شک میرد عمل گرد حیات	چشم می بیند ضمیر کائنات <sup>51</sup>
لا اله سرامیہ اسرار ما	رشته اش شیراز افکار ما <sup>52</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- <sup>1</sup> Qur'an, 3:150  
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 4:48  
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 29:20  
<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 2:20  
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 2:186  
<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 3:97  
<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 3:150  
<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 1:4  
<sup>9</sup> For a more elaborate description of the position of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi see my book: *Problems of Muslim Mysticism*, pp.143-49  
<sup>10</sup> For a detailed critical study of Occasionalism, see Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas, passim*  
<sup>11</sup> Qur'an, 57:3  
<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 2:255  
<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 50:16  
<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 41:54  
<sup>15</sup> For a more elaborate description of the position of Ibn Arabi, see my book, *op.cit.*, pp.137 -143  
<sup>16</sup> Qur'an, 14:5  
<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 2:164 etc  
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 51:21 etc  
<sup>19</sup> For a more elaborate description of the position of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, see my book, *op.cit.*, pp. 150-157  
<sup>20</sup> See also below Chapter VIII, pp  
<sup>21</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 45  
<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*,  
<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*,  
<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*,  
<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*,  
<sup>26</sup> This lecture was later included in a book published by the Research Society of Pakistan, University of the Punjab, Lahore: *Khutbat Ba Yad-i-Iqbal*, pp. 46 -61  
<sup>27</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, Chapter II  
<sup>28</sup> Zarb-e Kaleem, *Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (Urdu), p.537/37  
<sup>29</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.143  
<sup>30</sup> *The Principles of Psychology* I, p.316  
<sup>31</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, 87  
<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p.73  
<sup>33</sup> Qur'an, 55:33  
<sup>34</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.87

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36 *Zarb-e Kaleem, Kulliyat –e Iqbal* (Urdu), p. 550/50

37 *Kbulliyat-e Iqbal* (Farsi) p.107/91

38 *Ibid*, pp 56–6240 -46

39 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam*, P.

40 *Ibid*, p.117

41

42 *Creative Evolution*, p. 13

43 *Ibid*, p.14

44 Qur'an, 33:21

45

46 *Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (Farsi) p. 163/147

47 *Ibid*,

48 *Ibid*, p. 105/89

49 *Ibid*,

50 *Ibid*,

51 *Ibid*,

52

## DEED AND IDEA

*Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* is the maturest prose writing of Allama Muhammad Iqbal specially as regards the details of a systematic and organized account of his religio-philosophical standpoint. Much has been written on the contents of this book both by way of exposition as well as of critical evaluation but, at the same time, much has yet to be written. There are, I am sure, many areas of its subject-matter which are still unplumbed and unexplored. Some years ago I received an invitation to deliver the Iqbal Memorial Lecture<sup>1</sup> at the Punjab University which I accepted. This was the occasion for me to search for one of such areas so that I preferably explore the same for my proposed lecture. As I just started perusing the book for this purpose, fortunately the very first sentence of the Preface captivated me. It reads: The Qur'an is a book which emphasizes 'deed' rather than 'Idea'<sup>2</sup>

Plain meaning of this quotation from Iqbal, in which he, so obviously, approvingly attributes to the Qur'anic standpoint the priority of deed over idea, appears to be strange, to say the least. For one thing, we see on the contrary, that the burden of the entire account that immediately follows the opening sentence is, to all obviousness, an indicator of the emphasis on idea rather than on deed. In the very next sentence he feels sorry for the modern man who is incapable organically to assimilate an alien universe by reliving as a vital process that special type of inner experience (i.e. mystic experience) on which religious faith (i.e. faith in the ultimate verities of religion) ultimately

rests<sup>3</sup>. It is very much due to this epistemic incapability of his contemporary readers that Allama Iqbal was allegedly forced to put forth in the *Reconstruction* ‘a scientific form of religious knowledge’ and ‘to reconstruct Muslim religious philosophy with due regard to the philosophical traditions of Islam and the more recent developments in the various domains of human knowledge’.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere in the *Reconstruction*, Iqbal emphasizes the basic importance of the idea. When comparing sciences with religion, for example, he writes that the former “can afford to ignore metaphysics and may even believe it to be ‘a justified form of poetry’, as Lange defined it or ‘a legitimate play of grown-ups’, as Nietzsche described it. But the religious expert ... cannot.... Insofar as the Ultimate Nature of reality is concerned nothing is at state in the venture of science; in the religious venture the whole career of the ego... is at stake”,<sup>5</sup> Also, as regards the standpoint of the Qur’an itself, we see that it does, of course, lay a lot of emphasis on the doing of good deeds — on the performance of our duties to God and to other human beings etc. and, correspondingly, on the avoidance of bad deeds; however, in antithesis to the apparent meaning of the sentence referred to above, the declared basic truth recognized and emphasized by it, time and again, is that of *iman b’ al-ghaib* (faith in the Unseen) which amounts to a living assurance of the metaphysics as well as eschatology implied in its overall worldview. This assurance is the essential pre-requisite, the very source of authentication of man’s rightly-guided moral behaviour. Whenever the Qur’an speaks in general of those who perform, or are required to perform, good actions, almost invariably, immediately before that, it speaks of them as the ‘men of faith’ as if faith leads to, is in fact the rationale of, good deeds.<sup>6</sup>

It is precisely the difficulty in regard to the determination of the exact relative importance of deed and idea in the ontological-cum-axiological framework of the Qur’an, as appreciated and understood by Allama Iqbal, that I propose

to address in the account that follows and try to remove it. Incidentally, the fact that in the quotation under review both the key words have been put within commas may possibly be an indication of some kind of twist deliberately woven into it which ought to be straightened out for the readers before the exact connotation of the entire statement becomes unequivocally understandable.

Deed or action (*amal*, *pl. a'mal*), of course is most evidently of great importance from the Qur'anic point of view. The Qur'an does not have as its subject-matter philosophical theorization. It proclaims to be the Book of Guidance and so primarily seeks to prescribe a line of action, a code of behavior, that could safely and surely lead its readers towards the ideals of moral and spiritual excellence laid down in it. There are a very large number of verses in which 'good actions' (*a'mal-e salih*) — absolutely speaking — have been mentioned either appreciatively or directly or as a mark of identification of the men of faith. This is besides the frequent and insistent glorification of specific moral values like life, justice, unity, love, truth, forgiveness, power, beauty etc. Correspondingly, evil actions and attitudes like greed, malice, arrogance, cruelty, hatred, hypocrisy etc. have been positively discouraged and condemned in no less eloquent words. It is action alone, Iqbal rightly and repeatedly emphasizes throughout his poetic and prose works, that determines a man's role in this life, opens up the so-called closed doors of his destiny and adequately qualifies him to enter paradise or hell in the life hereafter. "Personal immortality", he says, "... is not ours as of right it is to be achieved by personal effort."<sup>7</sup> Whatever is received by a man without his personal effort amounts, according to him, to begging, one of the worst moral disvalues which would degrade man in the eyes of others as well as in his own eyes. He defines human personality itself as a 'state of perpetual tension'. "The life of the Ego", he writes, "is a kind of tension caused by the Ego invading the environments and the

environments invading the Ego”.<sup>8</sup>

The word ‘idea’, unlike ‘deed’, is specially vague. It has generally been rendered by the Urdu translators of the *Reconstruction* as *fiker* i.e. thinking. Thus understood, it, according to the Qur’anic scheme of things, is of course as much important as, if not more than, ‘deed’. The Qur’an, we know, strongly recommends speculating over various phenomena of the universe both within and without man which have time and again been described as signs (*ayat*) i.e. as significant pointers to the Ultimate Reality. It has in a number of its verses laid stress on the importance of *ta’ aqqul*, *tadabbur*, *tafakkur*, and so on. Those who fail to inculcate in themselves the virtues of sense experience and reason are declared to be of the category of beasts – even of a category lower than that.<sup>9</sup> They will, in fact, be held answerable to God for this failure on their part.<sup>10</sup> Iqbal too recognizes and highlights this fact of the Qur’anic teachings. He even identifies the birth of Islam with the birth of inductive intellect<sup>11</sup> in man and criticises Greek Philosophy, in general, because of its distaste for speculative observation and experience.

As we keep a close track of the general tenor of argument built up in the *Reconstruction* as well as in the poetic work of Iqbal the word ‘idea’, used in the Preface and considered of secondary value by him cannot be considered as equivalent to constructive reasoning and argumentation. It would be the height of injustice to do so. It must rather be considered to stand for abstract, ideational thinking, purely drawing-room type of concept-analysis and hair-splitting, particularly about spiritual, a-natural and eschatological facts mentioned in the Qur’an. Obviously such speculation, when once allowed to be initiated, proceeds unchecked — in the absence of any in-built mechanism to stop it — and ordinarily generates more and more of speculation itself and nothing else. It practically leads nowhere. Consequently, man’s contact with the concrete realm of everyday

experience, which is evidently the realm of activity, gets more and more weakened. It is on this very count that Iqbal rejects the idealistic philosophies of Plato, Hegel and others of that kind, which he says, are devoid of all sense-content. The Qur'an too appears to discourage, this kind of free-lance speculation, specially in regard to the *mutashabihat* among its verses. It says:

He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book. In it are verses basic or fundamental (*the mubkammat*): They are the foundation of the Book; others are allegorical (*the mutashabihat*). But those in whose heart is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings; but no one knows its hidden meanings except God.<sup>12</sup>

How to differentiate between, the *mubkammat* and the *Mutashabihat*? Commentators, of the Qur'an have provided detailed discussions on the subject. The Qur'an itself does not give a categorical clear-cut classification of its verses into these two groups but there is almost a consensus of opinion among the scholars that the former ones are those verses which relate to the practical life of man, i.e. to doctrines, rituals, commandments etc., whereas the latter relate to the metaphysical realities, the realities which are ordinarily beyond human observation and understanding, like God, angels, paradise, hell etc. According to the words of the Qur'an, as quoted above, those who try to understand the ontologically, exact nature of its metaphysics and eschatology which can be called **the-idea-in-its own-right**, are perverse and erratic in their attitude.

The above, however, does not mean at all that different metaphysical, supernatural truths mentioned by the Qur'an — technically called the *ghaib*, the 'unseen' — are in any way unimportant, or even less important. They are rather of basic and foundational significance for its scheme of things entire. Acceptance of the Unseen, by the verdict of the Qur'an itself, is in fact the condition that alone would ensure and guarantee

for its reader the release of guidance from the verbal understanding of its text:<sup>13</sup> otherwise this understanding, howsoever perfect it may be from the lexical point of view, would have all the possibility to lead him away from the right path.<sup>14</sup> The Qur'an, by virtue of its own claim, is a book, clear and evident, and perfectly self-consistent<sup>15</sup> also. These characteristics would further require that mutual relevance and fittingness of some kind be established between the **seen** and the **unseen**, the *muhkamat* and the *mutashabihat*, the **deed** and the **idea**. This relevance can, in principle, be established at two levels. One is the level that would generate a relationship of mutual externality between them: the other is totalitarian and organismic in character. Translated into religious language, one is that of belief; the other, that of faith. Belief and faith both can be recognized as intimately related to 'knowledge' in a very broad sense of this term. I propose to explain in what follows how this comes to be.

Three stages of 'the knowledge of the world of existence' have been marked out by the Qur'an. These are the stages of '*ilm al-yaqin*,<sup>16</sup> '*ain al-yaqin*<sup>17</sup> and *haqq al-yaqin*.<sup>18</sup> The first one would roughly correspond to what Bertrand Russell has termed in his *Problems of Philosophy* as 'knowledge by description'<sup>19</sup> or what Allama Iqbal has described as *khabar* (information) as opposed to *nazar* (vision).<sup>20</sup> It is the knowledge as it is provided, or made available, to a person by mediation or inference, not directly acquired by him. For example, I know on the authority of someone else that man has landed on the moon, that there are big mountains growing on the bottom of the oceans, that the earth is elliptical in shape, and so on. '*Ain al-yaqin* is the knowledge attained by a person directly on the basis of his own sense experience. I know that students who work hard get through the examination, that fire has burnt the finger of my friend, that a particular medicine cures headache, and so on. Both these levels of knowledge ordinarily involve a relationship of 'I-it' between the knower and the known. The latter is

practically considered to be a thing, a statement, a givenness, pure and simple, a passivity which the former may exploit for the realization of his own goals, epistemic or practical. Unfortunately, an ordinary man's concept of God Himself is generally of this nature. From a layman's point of view, He sits on the throne beyond heavens, He is kind, just, loving, forgiving and so on. And whenever a person is in trouble he, in humble prayers, invokes the corresponding Divine attribute for the redressal of his specific trouble. We love and obey Him because his pleasure thus earned will get our seat reserved in the heavens; we fear Him so that he may not get angry with us and throw us into the hell. How eloquent is the Qur'an on this subject when it says:

When we bestow favours on man, he turns away and gets himself remote on his side (instead of coming to Us); and when evil seizes him. He comes full of prolonged prayer.<sup>21</sup>

It is to show his disapproval for such a selfish and opportunistic attitude of man that *Hazrat* Ali is reported to have said that if a person is sincere in his love of God he should deny away His attributes,<sup>22</sup> meaning to say that he must keep his love disinterested, selfless and unconditional. Based on the laymen's view of the beyond-heavens view of God is the entire concept of Islam as a formal discipline only comprising some formulas that we utter, some doctrines that we hold on to, some practices that we go through and some rituals that we perform with meticulous regularity. All this is regarded as sufficient to make us good Muslims for all overt purposes. We may be said to *have the religion of Islam* but do absolutely fall short of *living it*. The third level of knowledge, i.e. *haqq al-yaqin*, is the level where the mutual externality of subject and object of knowledge is transcended and the knower enters into a personal, reciprocal, subject-to-subject, I-thou encounter with the known. In religious context, this is what Iqbal calls the period of 'discovery' in the evolution of religious consciousness. "In this period metaphysics is displaced by psychology and religious life develops the

ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality. It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from the fetters of law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness".<sup>23</sup> This is exactly how we are said to bring home, assimilate and live the metaphysics of religion rather than to have its intellectual understanding only, as is done by the *naiveté* among the orthodox religionists.<sup>24</sup> This is, of course, a rare phenomenon of which very few persons can prove themselves to be capable. "There are men" says Iqbal, "to whom it is not possible organically to assimilate an alien universe by re-living, as a vital process, that special type of inner experience on which religious faith ultimately rests".<sup>25</sup> The instrument through which this assimilation is achieved is, according to Iqbal, worship or prayer, a 'vital act by which the little island of our personality suddenly discovers Its situation in a larger whole of life.'<sup>26</sup>

The first two modes of knowledge amount to what has been known as 'belief' while the third one is equivalent to 'faith' which is the religious category *par excellence*.

Modern philosophers of religion in their books and articles have specialized in bringing out the nature and significance of 'faith' with its religious connotation as different from 'belief' which is a conventional and a primarily intellectual concept.<sup>27</sup> Earlier, these two words had been used interchangeably. Even the Qur'anic term *iman* has almost invariably been translated into English by Muslim scholars as 'belief' (the *mo'minoon*, as 'the believers' etc.) which, I hold, is a mistranslation: *iman* is rather equivalent to 'faith' as I hope to show in the following pages.

'Belief', as this word is commonly used, indicates only a higher or lower degree of knowledge. 'Knowledge' is understood as inner conviction and certitude about an objective state of affairs and can be declared true or false. 'Belief' is partial knowledge and partial ignorance. It simply

indicates more or less of the certitude itself and is, in the last analysis, only an attitude of mind. So conceived, the criteria of its truth or falsehood, if there are any, are different from those that are applicable to knowledge as such. There is no contradiction between saying that 'a person believes that Mr. X is a graduate' and that 'Mr. X is not a graduate.' So, belief, unlike knowledge, falls short of a correspondence between one's inner conviction and the grammatical object of that conviction. Consequently, there is always a possibility that, as greater and greater amount of evidence is available, beliefs are improved, replaced, rejected altogether or maybe sometimes confirmed. Another characteristic of 'belief' is that, unlike knowledge, it is invariably propositional in character. We always *believe that* such and such is the case. There are no doubt *belief in* declarations also but they can justifiably be translated into *belief that* statements. When I say 'I *believe in* my friend', that simply means 'I *believe that* he tells the truth' or 'I *believe that* he will help me in distress' or whatever. Knowledge, on the other hand, has both the propositional and the non-propositional uses. 'I know that the earth is round', 'I know that two and two make four' etc; and also 'I know Mr. X,' meaning to say that I have acquaintance with him or that I recognize him. There is another difference between 'belief' and 'knowledge'; Knowledge has as its basis some evidence which is either sense experiential or rational or both. Sense-experiential knowledge is contingent whereas rational knowledge is necessary. The former is temporal; the latter, timeless and eternal. Beliefs, as they are a matter of degree, relate, on the other hand, only to contingent truths.

'Faith' is the superiormost mode of non-propositional knowledge, the most comprehensive, intimate awareness. In the Qur'an the word *iman* and its various derivatives are almost invariably followed by the preposition *بِ* rather than *اِنَّ* or *اَنَّ* indicating that it is a direct, faithful allegiance to a being rather than an intellectual consent of some truth. It is, as said above, *haqq al-yaqin*. It combines the characteristics of

sense-experience as well as rational knowledge. Like sense-experience it is non-inferential, direct and immediate and like reason it is inviolable and sure. Definition of *iman*, as given by Iqbal, brings the comprehensiveness of it into clear focus when he says:

*Iman* is not merely a passive belief in one or more propositions of a certain kind; it is living assurance begotten of a rare experience.<sup>28</sup>

‘So *iman* is sure and certain despite the fact that it is based on experience. Besides *iqrar-un b’al-lisan* (verbal affirmation), It is also *tasdiq-un b’al-ghaib* (confirmation by the heart); meaning to say, it is self-authenticating and has not to search for its justification elsewhere. It is a matter of personal commitment to that in which / whom it is reposed. Being thus the affair of the whole man, it is irrefutable and irreplaceable unless the man concerned goes through an entire metamorphosis of his personality and becomes a new man altogether. Thus a man of faith must of necessity prove himself equal, and remain firm, to his faith though he may have to go for that sake through the severest agonies and the most painful trials, amounting even to death in the battle field. Earliest history of Islam is replete with incidents of the most excruciating torments and afflictions to which the converts to Islam were subjected but they held on to their faith and remained firm to their new commitment. The Qur’an says;

‘Do men think that on their (mere) saying ‘we have attained to faith’ they will be left to themselves and will not be put to test. Yes indeed we did test those who lived before them (and so now too. He will test the people now living).<sup>29</sup>

Referring to this same phenomenon of qualifying the test, Iqbal says in *Armaghan e Hijaz*:

چومی گوئم مسلمانم بلرزم کہ دانم مشکلات لآ إله را<sup>30</sup>

When I say I am a Muslim I tremble because I understand the magnitude of hardships implied in the proclamation of the truth that 'there is no god but Allah'.

In order to demonstrate how *iman*, characteristically *iman b'al-ghaib* (faith in the unseen) is grounded in personal experience we shall have to refer to the ordinarily known levels of existence in nature, viz., matter, life, bare consciousness and ought-consciousness. Every one of these levels has a different set of laws that regulate its behavior — the laws discovered by the sciences of physics, biology, psychology and ethics, respectively. These levels obviously do not exist as distinct and separate realms of nature; two or three or even all of them rather co-exist on different occasions and so influence one another. In plants, life is together with matter; in animals, consciousness, life and matter are together all of them, whereas human beings have, over and above, an awareness of ideals which they are duty-bound to realize. The higher in every one of these existents is obviously supernatural, alien and, in fact, miraculous from the point of view of the lower because the former, although it assimilates the latter, has peculiar causal principles of its own. However, the lower, if it has to exist peacefully with the higher, must in some sense recognize the higher level/levels of existence. It must not simply recognize but rather also have a living assurance of the veritability of the supernatural, practically, a 'faith in the unseen'. Man, like every one of the beings lower than him must prove himself true to the total meaning of his existence. Rising above the causalities, that he is already bound by, as an incumbent of material, biological, conscious and moral characteristics, he is bound to recognize a higher causality whose effects he continues to observe in his daily life. Against the perspective of theism, we can say a *mo'min* is one who has faith in God, the Unseen as an Active Agent Who has his own purposes and plans which are being constantly carried out in the universe at large. These characteristically Divine plans are a part and parcel of man's episteme at its subjacent level. They have to be brought out in

the broad-day light of full consciousness and made a matter of his ordinary, every-day awareness. Iqbal approvingly quotes a Muslim *sufi* who said : ‘no understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually revealed to the man of faith just as it was revealed to the Prophet’.<sup>31</sup> A *mo'min* must, in the last analysis, discover the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness.<sup>32</sup> This reminds me of an analogous thesis of Immanuel Kant, the moralist, to the effect that a principle of moral conduct is morally binding on me if and only if I can regard it as a law that I impose on myself. Existential awareness of participation with the Divine, of *rifaqat* or companionship with God, spelled out here is that ‘living assurance’, that self-authenticating certitude which, according to Iqbal, is institutionalized in the act of canonical prayer that ultimately amounts to a sort of dialogue between man and God: a popular *sufi* saying even describes it as a *mi'raj* (heavenwards ascension) for the faithful. Iqbal also describes it as higher fatalism<sup>33</sup> as distinct from lower fatalism. Lower fatalism amounts to the belief that the destiny, to the minutest details, of each and every individual who is yet to be born, is already recorded in the *Lauh-e Mahfuz* (the Preserved Tablet) and he cannot budge even an inch from that. This is the laymen’s concept of *qismat* which is sustained by their literalist view regarding the Divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience. In order to understand what higher fatalism is, we must make a distinction made by Kant between ‘good will’ and ‘holy will’.<sup>34</sup> Bearer of a good will is one who, despite the possibility of performing either the good or the evil action, exercises his free will, as a matter of fact, in favour of the former. A soldier of the moral ideal, who consistently continues to exercise his choices in favour of the good, develops in due course a holy will which means that to all intents and purposes he does exercise a free choice but always, as a **matter of necessity**, performs the good actions. This is the way of the man of faith who, according to the terminology of the Qur’an is soaked in the colour of God. Thus saturated, his wisdom is

thoroughly Divinized.

Human experience is characteristically subjective and so has all the possibility to go erratic. The unique experience which has been shown above to make for religious faith is also highly subjective. On that score – cursorily – it may also be considered to have the liability to illusion. It is specially suspect, says Iqbal, in the eyes of the modern man who has developed habits of concrete thought, “habits which Islam itself fostered at least in the earliest stages of its cultural career”.<sup>35</sup> It must, however, be pointed out that the subjectivity, which religious faith is, is not ordinary subjectivity; it is rather the one which has already gone through an amount of civilization and refinement. Iqbal made a distinction between the efficient and the appreciative aspects of the self of man.<sup>36</sup> Efficient ego is the I-amness that operates in this spatio-temporal world. It is man-in-the-world comprising all the characteristics and qualifications – which are ‘determiners’ all of them — that are the result of my contact with the world and that I have ‘learnt’, in a very broad sense of this term. In moments of ‘profound meditation’, as Iqbal would have it, or by practically eliminating ‘love of the world for its own sake’ alongwith all the attendant disvalues, as the sufis recommend, we can transcend the efficient self, dispense with all the ‘determiners’ and rise above space and time. This is the level of ‘transsubjectivity, the level of the appreciative self of man. This is how one realizes the Divine within himself by virtue of which he becomes a fit candidate for God-awareness. For this realization of the Divine within, Iqbal in his *Javed Nama* used the phrase *خویش را دیدن بنور ذات حق* (looking at oneself with the light of God, the Truth). Alternatively, it is like bringing in the consciousness of God to bear witness to the supreme perfection of the human ego. Besides this, there are two more witnesses that are to be invoked, viz, the consciousness of one’s own self and the consciousness of the not-self or the other. The verses in this connection that Iqbal put in the mouth of Rumi are beautiful

and worth-quoting in full:

زندہ یا مردہ یا جاں بلب      از سہ شاہد کن شہادت را طلب  
 شاہد اول شعور خویشتن      خویش را دیدن بنور خویش تن  
 شاہد ثانی شعور دیگرے      خویش را دیدن بنور دیگرے  
 شاہد ثالث شعور ذات حق      خویش را دیدن بنور ذات حق  
 پیش ایں نور اربمانی استوار      حی قائم چوں خدا خود را شمار<sup>37</sup>

(If you are living or dead or suspended between life and death seek a confirmation of your state from three witnesses. First witness is your own consciousness: it is looking at yourself in the light of your own consciousness. Second witness is the consciousness of other: It is looking at yourself in the light of the consciousness of the other Third witness is the consciousness of God: it is looking at yourself with the consciousness of God. If you remain steadfast before this light consider yourself eternal and firm like God)

Islamic faith, in fact, is *shabadah* or testimony or 'bearing witness to'. A Muslim does not simply say : 'I believe that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad (peace be on him) is His prophet'; he rather says : ' I bear witness to the fact that .... 'This witness formula is proclaimed by a *mu'azzin* at the pitch of his voice twice in every call to prayer five times a day. This is a public declaration to the effect that the basic articles of faith are, in principle, a matter of intimately personal, direct experience. Of course, one cannot bear witness to a state of affairs unless that state of affairs has been 'experienced' by him in some valid sense of this term. Can I offer *shabadah* to the effects that the Eid moon has appeared if I have not myself seen the moon? Certainly not.

Faith, being a person's commitment and unconditional surrender to the reality in which it is reposed and being thus organismic and comprehensive, is, as said above, an affair of the whole man: it affects the man of faith in all aspect of his

personality — cognitive, affective as well as conative. The Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) is reported to have said: ‘Beware of the wisdom of a *mo'min* because he sees with the light of God’.<sup>38</sup> Enlightened vision of the *mo'min* helps him see, and argue about, the problems of life and existence in true perspective. On the affective side, his pleasures and pains, his joys and sorrows, his likes and dislikes, his friendships and enmities are all entirely metamorphosed. Similarly, on the conative side, actions of a particular kind and quality do necessarily emanate from him. The Qur’an, on most of the occasions, mentions the ‘inculcation of faith’ immediately before the ‘performance of good actions’, indicating between them a relationship of entailment, of a reason to its consequents, of a dictum to its corollaries. Qur’anic God is the bearer of all the Beautiful Names<sup>39</sup> which, from the human point of view, are the supreme ideals of moral and spiritual excellences. So from faith in Him emanates a morally good human life; nothing can stop this emanation. When the poet Ghalib said:

جانتا ہوں ثواب طاعت زہد پر طبیعت ادھر نہیں آتی

I am convinced that ‘obedience to God’ and ‘piety’ are prized activities but I don’t feel inclined towards them.

his understanding of the value of the acts of obedience and piety was either of the nature of belief only or it was at the most a piece of discursive knowledge. Had it been of the level of faith, he must have been positively inclined towards them. However, when Socrates says that ‘knowledge is virtue’, meaning to say, knowledge of virtue necessarily leads, in fact amounts, to the performance of the virtuous action, his concept of knowledge comes very close to the connotation of ‘faith’ as we have spelled out above. Conversely he was also right when he said that a virtuous action must invariably be grounded in knowledge and never in ignorance.

Going back from where we started we can conclude by saying that the ‘idea’ without being faithfully assimilated into

our persons is fruitless and the deed without necessarily following from faith is rootless. The Qur'an requires that metaphysics which is so indigenously to the *weltanschauung* put forth by it should not only be conceived and simply be given a lip-service to but rather be positively lived, so that moral actions are compulsively generated. And, correspondingly, deed is of course very important but only on the condition that the idea is duly absorbed into it. This is the overall Qur'anic point of view and this is what Iqbal has in fact consistently sought to maintain in his prose as well as poetic writings.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Iqbal Memorial Lectures were instituted by the Punjab University to pay homage to one of its most illustrious alumni Allama Muhammad Iqbal. They are held every year under the auspices of its Department of Philosophy. Eminent scholars from home and abroad have been delivering these Lectures since 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, P.XXI

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, parenthetic additions mine

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp XXI — XXII

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.146

<sup>6</sup> As to the necessary relationship between 'faith' and 'action' see for detail my book *Problems of Muslim Theology*, chapter 'Faith and Actions,' *passim*

<sup>7</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.95

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.82

<sup>9</sup> Qur'an, 7:179

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 17:34

<sup>11</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.101

<sup>12</sup> Qur'an, 3:7

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 2:2-3

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 2:26

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 4:82

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 102:5

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 102:7

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 56:95

<sup>19</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, Chap. V

<sup>20</sup> For instance, see his 'Armaghan-e-Hijaz', *خبر عقل و خرد کی ناتوانی نظر دل کی حیات*, *جاودانی Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (farsi), p. 24/716

- <sup>21</sup> Qur'an, 41:51
- <sup>22</sup> *Nahj al Balaghah*, Sermon No.1 [Praise is due to Allah Whose worth cannot be described]
- <sup>23</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam*, p.143
- <sup>24</sup> These two attitudes towards the truths of ultimate significance as recognized by the Qur'an are well expressed in its verse 49:14  
Dwellers of the desert say:we are men of faith (*aslamma*). Say:you are not, but say:we submit(*aslamma*); and faith has not entered your hearts.
- <sup>25</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.XXI
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.72
- <sup>27</sup> On this subject, specially refer to A. P. Griffith (ed.), *Knowledge and Belief*. Also see my book *Problems of Muslim Theology*, Chapter 'Faith and Actions'
- <sup>28</sup> Allaa Muhammed Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.87
- <sup>29</sup> Qur'an, 28:2-3
- <sup>30</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (Farsi), p. 52/804
- <sup>31</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.143
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid*. p
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 87 -88
- <sup>34</sup> Cf. C.D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, pp.135-136
- <sup>35</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. XXI
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, pp.38 -39
- <sup>37</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, 'Javed Nama', *Kulliyat-e Iqbal*, p.20/492
- <sup>38</sup> اتقوا فراسة المؤمن فانه ينظر بنور الله
- <sup>39</sup> Qur'an, 17:110



PATTERNS OF SAYYID AHMAD, ALLAMA  
IQBAL AND POST-IQBALIAN THOUGHT:  
Reconstruction and Future Openings

Towards the close of the Preface to his lectures published as *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* Allama Muhammad Iqbal, in all humility, but very rightly, observes:

It must... be remembered that there is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking. As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views, and probably sounder views than those set forth in these lectures, are possible. Our duty is carefully to watch the progress of human thought, and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it.<sup>1</sup>

This observation is deeply meaningful and extremely valuable. However, by and large, the futuristic perception contained in it has not been sympathetically recognized as such by Iqbal scholars so as to be consequently pursued and carried out by them in their writings. A large variety of available books and articles on the religio-philosophical thought of Iqbal and his message are plainly descriptive and elaborative in character; the few that are valuational among them are mostly eulogistic and even highly devotional. The writers have often adamantly chosen to deny themselves the right to critically appraise — in good faith, of course — the views of Iqbal and, at the same time, to see beyond him as forcefully recommended, rather enjoined, by him. That attempt, if seriously, made would certainly be a befitting homage to the memory of the celebrated philosopher-poet of

Pakistan.

Naturally, as a pre-requisite to the prospective activity of ‘seeing beyond’ and also in order for a scholar to take his addressees along with him, he must get assured that he himself and of course they too have safely available with them the firm substantial ground from which they have to take off. I mean to say that they must have with them a sympathetic, accordant, exactly a paraphrastic restatement in ordinary language – and of course without any axiological comments at all — of the thought system presented by Iqbal in his prose writings, particularly in the most well-thought-out among them i.e. *The Reconstruction*.<sup>2</sup> Some works have no doubt been attempted in that direction but they are not adequate and still fall short of the desired level of purity, simplicity and comprehensiveness. A few regular ‘companion volumes’ etc. including an edited one<sup>3</sup> prepared by the Department of Philosophy of the Punjab University, have been written and published in order to make all the chapters of *The Reconstruction*, one by one, easier to comprehend in their stark objectivity by the readers. But I now feel that instead of chapter-wise studies, a thematic breakup of the entire contents of this book for giving them the required treatment, the kind of which has perhaps not been methodically taken up so far, would be more appropriate. The following divisions of themes, which in some cases may, however, be very easily divided still further, I hope, are likely to exhaust the entire content:

1. Concept of God and His relation with the universe including human beings
2. Nature of man; his epistemic approach to God through sense experience/reason/mystic experience/ prophetic consciousness.
3. Finality of prophethood and the implied religio-socio-moral responsibilities of the ‘*ulama* of the *Ummah*; *ijtihad*: sources, expansiveness as well as limitations.

4. Challenge to religion posed by Freudian psycho-analysis and the defence put up against it.

Another project, obliquely related to the above one, that our contemporary scholars may take upon themselves, is to execute, as far as possible, Iqbal's own conceived thought plans. It is desirable that they write (practically posing as his substitutes) on the subjects on which he had intended to write but perhaps did not find time to do so or on which he was actually in the process of writing but did not complete the task during the span of his lifetime. This will certainly be a difficult, near-impossible, undertaking as it practically amounts to an act of 'intellectual proxying' *i.e.* 'thinking and arguing on behalf of someone else'. Accordingly, the best results whatever in this area are likely to be produced only by those allies who happen to have had a confidence with Allama Iqbal, at both intellectual as well as academic plains, and have an empathic consonance with the entire thought-system that he visualized, planned and also actually tried to produce in his writings. Sufficient amount of statistical information in connection with the works contemplated but not initiated and the ones initiated but left incomplete by Allama Iqbal has been gleaned by some authors of his biographical accounts from his letters, statements, verbal talks etc. Dr. Javed Iqbal, for instance, wrote an epistle, which was duly published, on the subject: 'The Works that Iqbal Left Unfinished'.<sup>4</sup> Recently, I have come across even a whole book<sup>5</sup> on this subject. It has been discovered by these and many other writers that on different occasions he expressed the desire to write a book on the 'History of Muslim Thought', on '*Ijtihad*: its nature, history and evolution', on 'his own understanding of Islam', on the 'History of *Tasawwuf*', and so on. Anyway, giving details regarding the subjects-matter/exact titles of the works that he did not actually wind-up is not presently our concern as this will take us away from the parameters of what we primarily intend to bring forth. An unavoidable special mention, of course, should urgently be

made here of his very much desired project *viz.*, ‘to write on the Reconstruction of Legal Thought in Islam’ on the pattern of the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. The latter he thought, would in fact serve as a necessary prelude to the former. “... the bare fact that the Allama wanted to write it and the great importance that he attached to the writing of it signifies, perhaps, no less than his will to posterity”.<sup>6</sup>

As to the main them of the present chapter, which indicates a religio-philosophical travelogue from Sayyid Ahmad to Allama Iqbal and onwards to later times, we must recognize, to begin with, one basic truth about the mental constitution of any thinker whosoever. A thinker, whatever be his interests and whatever be the universe of discourse that he happens to inhabit, has, according to the terminology used by Prof. A.N. Whitehead, a ‘climate of opinion’; and — to continue the metaphor — what Prof. Stebbing calls, a ‘local weather’<sup>7</sup> as well. By the ‘climate of opinion’ of a thinker is meant the thought-fashions which are available to him in his contemporaneous society including the historical traditions of this society that are still alive and also what he has consciously or unconsciously ‘learned’— in a very broad sense of this term — from his studies of other thinkers etc. All these have naturally an impact on his thinking very much like the geographical climate which every individual exposed to it must necessarily live irrespective of the fact whether he is conscious of this climate or not and also whether he likes it or not. Local weather of a person, on the other hand, comprises his own personal response to what he has imbibed and inhaled from elsewhere. All this being true of each and every thinker without exception, in the context of our present discourse, specially, it is true of the one who proposes to write on the subject of the reconstruction of Islamic religious thought. The climate of opinion is of course bound to differ with different individual thinkers and with different times; and naturally the ‘local weather’ too. All this also speaks eloquently in favour of the urgent ever-active role of the

'*ulama* of the *Ummah*, the Muslim theologians and philosophers against the perspective of the 'Finality of Prophethood'<sup>8</sup> which is one of the basic articles of Islamic faith and an immensely suggestive truth of Qur'anic teachings<sup>6</sup>. Hence the abiding valuableness of the above quote from the *Reconstruction*.

Whatever be the concept of the religion of Islam itself (whose thought has to be reconstructed occasionally) it is a patent fact that ours – particularly in the Indo-Pakistan context – has always been, by and large, a religious society. Religion for the majority of people, happens to be the perpetual *raison d'être* and the persistently, subjacent frame of reference in regard to whatever they do, whatever they approve or disapprove in life, in fact whatever be the entire worldview to which they subscribe. This contextual role of religion becomes extremely vocal with the laymen who invariably start with the naïve, literal meaning of the commonly recognized aphorism 'Islam is the complete code of life', try to place every human activity relating to the mundane world in one or the other of the tight jackets connoted by the terms like *mustahab* or *makruh*, *halal* or *haram*, *ja'iz* or *mamnu*, ' the one leading to *thawab* or the one leading to *'aḏab* etc. available in Islamic literature. This attitude was very eloquently displayed by the co-religionists of Allama Iqbal's elder-contemporary Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the social reformer. It is in the atmosphere of this particular attitude — besides of course certain other dynamics, as we shall indicate below— that he had reconstructed Islamic religious thought during his own times.

Sayyid Ahmad had, as his direct addressees the Muslim community of the post- 1857 Undivided India who stood thoroughly demoralized due to the failure of their War of Independence and the consequent takeover of the Indian rule by the English. The latter had deprived the former of the governance of the Indian Sub-continent which they had wielded for centuries together. For the local Hindu

population it was just an incident marking the change of rulers; for the Muslims, it amounted to the abysmal state of total deprivation and bereavement: it was practically a straight overturn from the state of sovereignty to that of servitude and bondage. This humiliation at the behest of 'intruders' from the lands across the seas occasioned violent feelings of mutual abhorrence and distrust between the Muslims and the English. Fearing the possibility of some kind of retaliation from the Muslims the English rulers subjected them to all kinds of atrocities — social, political as well as economic — and it did not take much time for the entire Muslim community to be compelled to subsist at the lowest line of poverty. The attitude of the Muslims themselves contributed its share to this deplorable state of affairs. Maddened by their hatred for the English they closed their eyes to the hard facts attendant upon the new realities and argued to themselves on the strictly religious plain that it was heretical, i.e. a deviation from Islam, to have any direct or indirect contact with the Christian rulers. In general they adopted a policy of total boycott. Strictly on religious grounds they would refuse to do jobs in Government offices, to learn the English language, to sit with the English on a dining table, to send their children to the schools established by them for the spread of modern education. When it was ordained that English would be the only language for correspondence etc. in official administration, the doors of respectable Government jobs at all levels were automatically closed to them. Self-imposed prohibition of the Muslim to make current advancements in knowledge available for them and their children had, besides hatred for the English rulers another reason also. Modern knowledge, specially that of natural sciences, which were being taught in the English schools, they said, was atheistic. It was atheistic in the sense that, according to the 19<sup>th</sup> century positive sciences which are being taught in the English schools, nature, by and large stood strictly bound by a system of causes and effects inherent in nature itself; no supra-natural agency was at all required for its explanation and

understanding. How diametrically opposed to the standard Muslim orthodox point of view that God is literally and directly powerful over everything and He Himself is the real cause of whatever happens in the universe! It is reported that, when Laplace presented a book of his on the subject of Astronomy to Napoleon, the latter, after going through it, asked the author: how is it that I do not find the mention of God in your book'. To this Laplace replied: 'Sir, He was not needed'<sup>9</sup> [The Godless scientific attitude displayed in this anecdote is, directly or indirectly, still popular with a large section of the natural scientists of the present times who to deny all sorts of supernatural causation and thus pose a challenge to the religious phenomenon which, by definition itself, amounts to a faithful assurance of the Unseen as a patent factor in the working of the visible universe around us].

The above is a statement of the climate of opinion that Sayyid Ahmad inhaled regarding the attitude of his co-religionists. Against the context of this climate, he did not choose to remind them of the gloriousness of their past and so pamper in them the sentiments of dignity and self-regard. Had he attempted to do so and had he been successful in his attempt, the consequences would have been disastrous for them. In view of the prospect of a violent reaction of the rulers their very existence as a community could have been at stake. So, on the contrary, his overall attitude towards his fellow – Muslims – specially during the years immediately following the War of Independence – was sharply incisive to their honour and painfully humiliating; on the other hand, towards the English it was extremely flattering. "All good things spiritual and worldly", he once remarked, "which ought to be present in a person have been bestowed by the Almighty on Europe and special on England".<sup>10</sup> Also, "without any exaggeration I truly say that all the natives of India, high and low, rich and poor, merchants and shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when compared to the

English in education, manners and civilization are like a dirty animal to a very able and handsome man'.<sup>11</sup> British ruler in India", he said, "is the most wonderful phenomenon the world has ever seen" and expressed his desire that it might continue "not simply for a long time but till eternity".<sup>12</sup> In the broader framework of his intended reconstruction of Islamic thought, he met the orthodox Muslims on their own ground as he appears to have conceded their habit to seek a sanction, for whatever they do, from the Qur'an and the *sunnah*. He duly quoted these authorities time and again in order to demonstrate that it is expressly permissible for the Muslims to dine with the English at the same table and to have all the required socio-cultural contacts with them. He assured them that, according to the Islamic teachings, "if through the will of God we are subjected by a nation which gives religious freedom, rules with justice, maintains peace in the country and respects our individuality and property — as it is presently being done by the British rule in India — we should be loyal to it" and "cooperate with it".<sup>13</sup>

As to the deterministic complexion of the physical sciences of his times, Sayyid Ahmad invoked his favourite — and undoubtedly 'in-principal valid' — formula: "nature is the work of God and the Qur'an is the word of God; so there can be no disharmony between the two". Now, if the sciences investigating into the work of God have actually discovered a strict determinism in the natural course of actions, the character of the word of God too, he said, must necessarily be — and in fact is — the same. In the *Tafsir al-Qur'an* (which was never completed) that he wrote in 1870s as well as in a number of articles published in his journal *Tabzib al-Akhlāq* he proclaimed, allegedly with reference to the textual evidence, that God of course Himself instituted the laws to be independently and comprehensively operative in the universe for all times and that He has taken upon Himself not to interfere with these laws. So the Qur'an itself, according to him, certifies and vouchsafes the doctrine of Naturalistic

Determinism.<sup>14</sup> God, he paradoxically remarked, is Himself a naturalist.<sup>15</sup>

About sixty years after Sayyid Ahmad offered an understanding of the Islamic teachings in fittingness with the doctrinal, ritualistic, socio-religio-scientific climate around him; Allama Iqbal too could not do without recognizing the comprehensiveness of the religious reference that still continued to be popular with the Muslim community of his own times. But in order to reconstruct Islamic thought for them afresh he did not meet them on their own grounds; he rather sought to elevate their concept of religion itself. In contradistinction to the layman's point of view that it is a 'form of discipline which the individual or a whole people must accept as an unconditional command';<sup>16</sup> and even in supersession of the standpoint of the philosophers who seek 'a rational understanding of the discipline and the ultimate source of its authority', he asserted that, essentially speaking, it rather amounts to a gnostic experience of God, the Ultimate Reality. It "is neither dogma, nor priesthood, nor ritual".<sup>17</sup> The Supreme Experience, he further says, is so important that it would inculcate in its recipient "that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it in the hereafter."<sup>18</sup> At another place he defines *iman* (faith) as a 'living assurance begotten of a rare experience'; and also as 'the vital way of appropriating the universe'.<sup>19</sup> This characteristically cosmic role of 'faith' — the crux of Islamic discipline — for the self-culture of each and every individual as also for his social behavior amounts to the truth that it gives to the 'man of faith' (*mo'min*) a pristine and authentic point of view with which to look at, appreciate, and deal with, all the diverse problems of life and existence. Thus Iqbal too subscribes to the truth proclaimed by the orthodox that 'Islam is the complete code of life' though he would not equate Islam with certain beliefs, rituals and doctrine, as it appears to have been done by his predecessor Sayyid Ahmad, but rather with faith culminating in a certain viewpoint that

permeates the entire life of its upholder.

The above observations, incidentally, bring to our mind the urgency to make a distinction between ‘faith’ and ‘belief’. ‘Faith’, which, I firmly hold, is the closest equivalent of *iman* as this term and its various derivatives are used in the Holy Qur’an, is to be distinguished in detail from the term ‘belief’ and its various derivatives, which unfortunately most of the translators of the Qur’an use instead. Modern philosophers of religion / philosophers of language have written extensively on the diverse connotations of the words ‘faith’ and ‘belief’ (which may be translated in Urdu as *i’tiqad*) in respect of their respective conative roles in any religio-social environment.<sup>20</sup> Relevance of this distinction to the meaning of the Qur’anic text, in particular, and to the overall Islamic teachings, in general, is very significant. It is to be meticulously worked out and sympathetically understood. Further, it is desirable that the Iqbal scholars of to-day undertake an investigation into the way / ways in which the Supreme Experience (generating a living assurance) that results into, or in fact practically amounts to, the attitude known as ‘faith’ can possibly take place.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the pivotal importance of *iman* (faith) it may incidentally be pointed out that it is not only ‘the vital way of appropriating the universe’ but also an essential methodology to (understand and) get guidance from, the Qur’an.<sup>22</sup> Hence the urgency of an enquiry into its nature and a dire need to dispel all possible confusions in regard to its meaning.

As to his essentially socio-political thought, Allama Iqbal, very evidently, had a climate of opinion and a context different from that of his elder-contemporary; so they had different ways to approach their common goal, i.e., the realization of the overall welfare of their co-religionists and the co-incident stances of Islamic reconstructionism befitting their respective situations. Sayyid Ahmad’s tendency was towards a peaceful rapprochement of the Muslims with the West — sometimes even at the cost of their abject

humiliation and surrender of self-respect —particularly, in the face of their British rulers, and, generally, as regards an almost blind assimilation of the entire Western culture; the tendency of Iqbal, on the other hand, was towards inculcating in the Muslims of the Sub-continent the sentiments of a robust egotism and self-regard alongwith the acquisition of power so as to prepare them for an encounter with the British, their *de facto* rulers and of gracefully and honourably having contacts with them without any apologies and positively almost on equal footing. That would, for one thing, give them the audacity and courage to keep their heads high and demand for themselves their legitimate rights. In the chapter on ‘The Spirit of Muslim Culture’ of his *Reconstruction* Iqbal in fact lays down that the immense advancements in science and technology of the Western countries which obviously gave them an aura of dignity, superiority and power *vis a vis* other nations, particularly their Muslim subjects in the Sub-continent, were due to none else than the earliest Muslim *hukama’* of Arabia who, in turn, were duly inspired by the Qur’anic emphasis on the importance of the inductive methodology of investigation, measurement and research. Thus inspired, these *hukama’* wrote extensively and with authenticity books on various branches of medicine, astronomy, mathematics physical and chemical sciences etc. Knowledge created by these writings was, in due course of time transmitted to the West through its Latin translations.<sup>23</sup> Allama Iqbal approvingly quotes from Briffault’s *Making of Humanity*:

What we call science arose in Europe as a result of a new spirit of enquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the methods of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks. That spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs.<sup>24</sup>

During Sayyid Ahmad’s times, as has already been explained, the policy of peaceful — practically passive —

coexistence with the British rulers was urgently required otherwise the very existence of the Muslims, as a community to be seriously reckoned with, would be in danger; during Allama Iqbal's times, on the other hand, a policy of dignified self-assertion was required to be confidently followed by his fellow-Muslim countrymen otherwise their movement for a separate homeland, which was taking shape, would have lost its dignified character and, may be, would have in fact been jeopardized altogether. Seen closely, the kind of efforts made by Sayyid Ahmad towards the rehabilitation of the Muslims was a necessary prelude, a preface, to the kind of endeavour that Allama Iqbal made in his own times. The former saved the situation which the latter exploited for positive gains. Their attempts in a way roughly comprise the 'negative' and the 'positive', respectively, of the same objective. The ground objective they both were trying to realize — remotely, in one case, and proximately, in the other — was to reinstate and vouchsafe the respectable character and dignity of the Muslims of the Sub-continent and their identification and affirmation as a separate nation. Anyway, both of them tried to derive the justifications for their respective modes of Islamic reconstructionism, equally from the Qur'an itself.

We have already shown how Sayyid Ahmad cited evidence from the Qur'an in his support when he recommended an acquiescent, servile adjustments with the emergent socio-political environments which had come about through an historical necessity. As to evidence from the Qur'an, Allama Iqbal too brings it forth but only to prove instead that it recommends a graceful self-resepecting, dignified, non-apologetic posture of the human person, not only in respect of his social context but also as regards the highest moral excellences to be targeted by him. It is in fact, according to Iqbal, the essential component of the most fundamental article of Islamic faith *يَزِيْرُ* total commitment by man to the uniqueness and absolute oneness of God to Whom essentially all allegiance is due. He says:

خودی کاسر نہاں لایله اللہ<sup>25</sup>

‘There is no god but Allah’ implies the covert, esoteric truth of a dignified self-hood.

He, for one thing, very forcefully puts forth the Qur’anic paradigm in this respect when he refers to the Holy Prophet’s (peace be on him) *Mi’raj* event. On that occasion when face to face with none less than God, the Ultimate Being, he is described to have retained his own I-amness and self-composure<sup>26</sup> This, according to Iqbal, is the ideal of perfect manhood in Islam.<sup>27</sup>

The way Allama Iqbal has defined and extolled, glorified, rather divinized egohood, which is basically a social concept, is highly commendable. Excepting contingent surrender of this value for some exigent, temporary phases that a society may incidentally come across during its historical evolution, it remains to be an excellence of intrinsic worth for all human beings for all times: there is absolutely no doubt about this fact. However, I have a very strong feeling that a contemporary scholar who intends to reconstruct Islamic religious thought, specially in the framework of Pakistani society to-day, must also urgently pinpoint and highlight, with all the emphasis at his disposal, the Qur’anic accent on the inculcation among people the sentiments of peace and harmony. These values are of paramount importance and the ones that are of immediate concern for our present society whose poise and comfort, to our utter misfortune, stands perilously endangered, in fact thoroughly shattered. The very realization of the collective ego, national honour, dignity and power, that was Iqbal’s coveted dream for the Muslims and that of course naturally grows out of, and ultimately comprises, egos of the individuals who constitute it, practically appears to have been entirely consigned to the oblivion. Tolerance level, specially the tolerance level in regard to even the smallest religious differences, appears to be at its minimum. Softer moral values, in general, have become

meaningless terms in the face of a maddening race for the achievement of higher and higher levels of personal aggrandizement in terms of material wealth and benefits and for the acquisition of fake honorific positions in society *vis-a-vis* their fellow-humans. Target killings, pillage and plunder, violent and rampant encroachments on the freedom and comforts of others, suicide bombing and so on have become the order of the day. For the sake of granting the usual allegedly religious sanction to these adventurous activities a network of well-established, regular seminaries/teaching institutions which, through brain-washing and through a lot of indoctrination, appear to be functioning underground, impelling their pupils to deleteriously abhor, violate and even massacre those who hold such and such — particularly so-called religious — views. If they did so, they are held out the promise by the self-styled ‘authorized connoisseurs’ — as if on behalf of God Himself — that, immediately after their own death if it occurs during their confrontation with the ‘enemies of God’, they would go direct to paradise. Infact hours residing in that place would be eagerly waiting to welcome them with open arms. Seen closely, the pseudo-religious, anti-moral and a-social values rampant in our contemporary society, needless to say, are nothing but the direct consequences of a sheer disregard for egohood, i.e., the sense of dignity and respect in oneself and in others. But they, in their own right, have grown so monstrously outrageous that they urgently, need to be directly addressed with the help of references to the relevant Qur’anic statements of condemnation and firm directives which are categorically put forth and are unambiguously clear. A contemporary Islamic reconstructionist must recommend, and academically plan how to bring home to his fellow-Muslims what have been known as the characteristic ‘mystical’, soft moral values of the good old days of Islam like gratitude, patience, peace (with oneself, with others and with God), forbearance, self-sacrifice, benevolence universal brotherhood, and so on.<sup>28</sup> The term ‘mystical’ used here does

not at all carry its corrupted sense of a world-avoiding, a meta-/extra – shari‘ah attitude but rather the sense of being essentially Islamic, and so Qur’anic, to the core of it, as Allama Iqbal himself would have it. This, I strongly and confidently hold, is the uncontaminated, original meaning of Islamic mysticism or *tasawwuf*.<sup>29</sup>

Allama Iqbal for whom nature comprises no less than the behavior of God, too, like his predecessor appears to subscribe to the ‘nature-revelation harmony’ principle. It is exactly for the sake of demonstrating this harmony that that he applies, what he terms, ‘the intellectual test’ or, alternatively, ‘the philosophical test’ based on the study of nature to the truth-value claims of religious experience, including prophetic revelations, only to bring out that this test it duly qualities. Taking a clue from a number of Qur’anic verses which declare that there are signs of the Ultimate Reality in various phenomena of nature including the self of man himself, he, in his *Reconstruction*, undertakes a survey of the researches carried on by natural sciences of physics, biology and psychology — with their subjects-matter ‘matter’, ‘life’ and ‘mind’, respectively. The salient features of natural existence as discovered by these sciences he concludes are in fittingness with what the word of the Qur’an has revealed. Anyhow, Allama Iqbal did not commit the mistake of Sayyid Ahmad who had almost mathematically equated the basic character of truths discovered by natural sciences (which was incidentally deterministic) at a particular stage of their historical evolution (i.e. at the stage at which these ‘truths’ stood during his times) with the characteristically non-temporal, eternal truth-system of the Qur’anic teachings. The insistent Qur’anic standpoint is that the diverse phenomena of nature are not commensurate with, nor do they have the status of the premises of a logical argument for, but only indicators (*ayat*) of, the verities of ultimate significance. The summary statement regarding the findings of scientific investigations and the tendentious character of these

investigations is, according to Allama Iqbal, that the universe is a **free creative** movement<sup>30</sup>... “Thus a comprehensive philosophical criticism of all the facts of experience in its efficient as well appreciative side bring us to the conclusion that the Ultimate Reality is a rationally directed **creative life**”<sup>31</sup> He further observes that, on the very basis of the scientific study of nature, this creative life “must be conceived as an Ego”<sup>32</sup> Perpetually creative and dynamic character of God, the Ultimate Ego, Iqbal also seeks to bring out independently with the help of evidence from the verses of the Qur’an itself. For instance, the Qur’an says: كل يوم هو في شأن.<sup>33</sup> *i.e.* everyday God is in a (new) state (of splendor). Talking of the infinite perfection of God, it according to Allama Iqbal, “consists in the infinite possibilities of His creative activity of which the universe, as known to us, is only a partial expression”.<sup>34</sup> So He is ‘potentially’, not ‘actually’, perfect: the latter, we know, had been the declared view of the Muslim Philosophers Abu Nasr al-Farabi and Ibn Sina that, according to Iqbal, made God practically a static Being. Sayyid Ahmad, we have seen, worked out a particular texture of ‘nature-revelation harmony’ truism with reference to the nineteenth century determinism of the natural sciences and Allama did this in view of the indeterminism, creativity and evolution attendant upon the concept of a growing, expanding universe that his contemporaneous twentieth century sciences of physics, biology and psychology stood for. Now more than eighty years have elapsed since Iqbal delivered the lectures that comprise the *Reconstruction*. During all this time scientific investigations are very likely to have discovered new facts in, and maybe overall character of, nature as such. By virtue of my own curricular training I am not at all in a position even to give an opinion whether or not such an evolution has actually occurred but those, who are in that position and also propose to go beyond Iqbal in that respect on the lines suggested by him, must take upon themselves the research project directed towards finding out a

possibly fresher form of accordance between the 'work of God' and the 'Word of God'. Anyway, being a student of 'Philosophy' and of its sister-discipline 'Parapsychology' or 'philosophical psychology' or, more broadly speaking, of the 'philosophical implications of psychological deliberations', I feel authorized with some amount of confidence to make one observation in this connection. During his reference to the findings of psychology in its capacity as one of the natural sciences investigated by him for the discovery of pointers to the Qur'anic metaphysics and epistemology he, in the chapter 'Is Religion Possible' of his *Reconstruction*, observes:

Modern psychology has not yet touched even the outer fringe of religious life and is still far from the richness and variety of what is called religious experience.<sup>35</sup>

I would recommend to the present-day Iqbal scholars, in general, and the serious readers of the *Reconstruction* in particular, to take stock of post-Iqbal parapsychological researches. These researches are now well on their way to secure more and more of experiential / experimental justification for whatever truths they arrive at; these truths are sure to have a bearing on religious consciousness including faith in the Hereafter. It is to be seen how far parapsychological studies of recent times can round off the sharp corners of the statement of Iqbal quoted above and in what respect they can promise a worthwhile probe into the phenomenon of religious life. Some time ago, the Pakistan Philosophical Congress held a Symposium at one of its regular Annual Sessions on the subject 'E.S.P. (Extra-sensory Perception) and Religious Consciousness'<sup>36</sup> in which a number of senior professors from home and abroad participated. I too had the privilege to read a paper. The speakers were, by and large, of the opinion that researches in this newly emerging branch of academics, particularly as regards telepathy (knowledge of other minds), clairvoyance (knowledge of objects obtained without the intermediacy of usual sense organs), psychokinesis (affecting material objects

without any physical contact with them); and also as regards the possibility of summoning the souls of the dead through mediums in order to have a converse with them, are likely to corroborate faith of the Qur'an-readers in the realms of metaphysics and eschatology; and to play their role, alongwith physics and biology, to generate pointers to the nature of the Ultimate Reality as revealed by the Word of God. Present times demand that the meaningfulness of these pointers must be worked out in detail. Incidentally, it is a very happy phenomenon that regular laboratories have already been set up in a number of countries in the West to investigate on strictly scientific grounds into different categories of paranormal happenings. Scientists in these laboratories are conducting experimental research and duly producing encouraging results. There is no reason, the symposiasts were of the opinion, why such a research cannot be carried out in Pakistan.

Assignment of a similar kind, which a 21<sup>st</sup> century Iqbal scholar may desirably take up and accomplish, relates to the area of 'Challenges to Religion'. I have already referred above to the so-called naturalistic determinism and cause-effect necessity which ever since 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries has claimed self-sufficiency for science to be able to explain every phenomenon of the universe. This claim has tended to erode religious supernaturalism in all its dimensions. In present times this overall attitude has very widely become fashionable not only with the scientists themselves but with the self-styled intellectuals. They continue to live in a state of doubt and distrust in regard to the verities of religion and religious consciousness. Learned men of faith, in general, and Iqbal scholars in particular, are required to come forward to allay the reservations of this ever-growing class of sceptics and put up a reasoned out defence of religion.<sup>37</sup> Allama Iqbal's lecture to the Aristotelian Society, London in 1932/33 which now occurs as the seventh chapter of his *Reconstruction* is titled 'Is Religion Possible'. It discusses and tries to establish the

possibility of religious experience as a valid source of knowledge against the challenge posed by Freudian psychoanalysis. Since mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by now at least three more regular challenges have appeared as forceful posers to the religious phenomenon *wis̄*. Dialectical Materialism, Logical Positivism and Atheistic Existentialism. These have to be addressed by our contemporary religious reconstructionists in order to register a continuation of the work done by Iqbal himself more than eight decades ago. Some rudimentary and sporadic work in this regard has of course been done by our writers off and on but that is inadequate; for instance, Dr. C.A. Qadir who was Head of the Department of Philosophy at the Punjab University in late 1960s, produced a students' reader,<sup>38</sup> in one of the chapters of which he briefly dilated on this subject. Anyway, for a comprehensive treatment of various objections raised against the validity of religious experience, the veracity of religious statements and also against the justification of the very institution of religion as such what is required is to write in detail at a highly scholastic and professional level.

Aside specific issues and problems, some of which have been referred to above, and regarding which it is required to further dilate, elaborate and comment, a few words about the general tenor and the persistently subjacent character of the religious thought of Iqbal! He himself has declared time and again that whatever he has said and written is an expression of nothing but the Qur'anic point of view. He vows in this respect in the strongest dialect available to him. In what possibly more intensive way he could put forth his claim than the one he used in the following verses addressed to the Holy Prophet (peace be on him):

گردآلم آئینه بے جوهر است      در بحر نم غیر قرآں مضمهر است

پردہ ناموس فکرم چاک کن      ایں خیاباں را زخارم پاک کن

---

تنگ کن رختِ حیات اندر برم اہل ملت را نگہدار از شرم

---

روزِ محشر خوار و رسوا کن مرا بے نصیب از بوسہ پاکن مرا<sup>39</sup>

---

If indeed the mirror of my heart is without luster, and if indeed there is anything In my words other than the Qur'an.

---

Then rend the fabric of my thoughts; sweep clean the world of my offending thorn.

---

Choke in my breast the breath of life. Remove my wicked mischief from the community of your followers.

---

Disgrace me on the Day of Reckoning and do not allow me the honour of kissing your feet.<sup>40</sup>

However, despite Iqbal's categorically firm declaration under an oath regarding his Qur'an-abidingness, most of the criticism that has been leveled against his writings, specially the *Reconstruction*, is, ironically speaking, that quite a number of his religio-philosophical views are actually against the intent of the Qur'an. Renowned scholars like Dr. Burhan Ahmad Farooqi, Altaf Ahmad A'zami, Dr. Fazlur Rahman, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Prof. W.C. Smith and some others are the heralds of an entire group of scholars for whom it is extremely difficult, sometimes even impossible, to establish the conformity of at least some of his concepts to the Qur'anic point of view. A few years ago, Prof. Abdul Qayyum, in the 'Iqbal Memorial Lecture' that he delivered at the Punjab University, developed, the general thesis that the overall stance of Iqbal's epistemology is naturalistic insofar as

he holds that mystic experiences of the *awhya'* as well as revelations of the prophets are similar to ordinary human experiences having no supersensible overlays in them.<sup>41</sup> evidently, in contradistinction to the commonly accepted view that the metaphysical and the supernatural is an essential, indispensable component of religion, in general, and of the Qur'an- consciousness, in particular! Prof. Qayyum extensively quoted from the *Reconstruction* in support of his claim. For instance,

The facts of religious experience (meaning to say, mystic experience) are facts among other facts of human experience and in the capacity of yielding knowledge by interpretation one fact is as good as another.<sup>42</sup>

Mystic experience.... qualitatively does not differ from the experiences of the prophets.<sup>43</sup>

A prophet may be defined as a type of mystic consciousness in which unitary experience tends to overflow its boundaries and seeks opportunities of redirecting and refashioning the forces of collective life.<sup>44</sup>

and so on.

Anyway, against the context of Allama Iqbal's claim categorically put forth above alongwith the counter-claims and profusely incisive comments of his critics, it can, in general ordinarily be laid down with confidence that there ought to be no logical contradiction between the following two statements:

- (a) A thinker declares that whatever he has said and written is in perfect agreement with the Qur'anic teachings, and
- (b) The sayings and writings of that thinker may actually not be in perfect agreement with the Qur'anic teachings.

Both these statements can very easily go together and have obviously gone together in the history of Islamic/Muslim thought. I am sure I shall be widely endorsed when I say that no good Muslim thinker — in fact no Muslim thinker, barely speaking — can deliberately deny what the Qur'an affirms nor deliberately affirm what the Qur'an

denies, otherwise he would not be a Muslim at all. However, practically, writers on Islamic subjects have offered — honestly and in good faith, I suppose — widely different and sometimes even contradictory interpretations of the verses of the Holy Qur’an. As a result of this they have built up expressly variant stances of religious epistemology, metaphysics and eschatology. Evidently all of these cannot possibly be true to the Qur’an as such. In order to decide once for all whether this or that interpretation is **really** in consonance with the Qur’an, the Word of God, what is required is to get a deliverance from the relative, personal preferences displayed in the various stances of its exegesis; and discover, instead, in this regard, a non-contingent, absolute criterion of truth. Happily, Allama Iqbal himself identified such a criterion when he approvingly quoted a beautiful sufi saying although it is not clear whether he himself claimed to have, or did as a matter of fact, come up to that criterion or not. The saying is: “No understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually revealed to the believer just as it was revealed to the Prophet (peace be on him)”.<sup>45</sup> This is no doubt the *par excellence* ideal state of affairs; and ‘ideals’, by virtue of their very definition, are not entirely realizable; they can only be approximated more or less. Keeping this distinction of the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’ duly in mind, I myself feel agreeable with what this pithy saying implies. In principle it surely lays down the apex method of Qur’an comprehension. Divinity-saturated wise men who ‘look at everything with a brilliant radiance from God Himself’ alone are duly qualified to cognize the nuances and intricacies of the Book of God and its entire diction. How to identify such men? That is the basic question. Anyway, when identified and confirmed they must be duly persuaded to come forwarded to explain the sufi saying, quoted above, in plain communicable language<sup>46</sup> so that, consequently, the most proximately correct meaning of the Qur’an is understood and the painfully striking differences among the various Qur’an interpreters are bridged up or at least softened

to the maximum possible. Coincidentally, I am sure, social bickerings and conflicts, most of which, specially in our part of the world, as already explained, are grounded in the religious frame of reference, are likely to be alleviated to a very great extent. This would be one of the urgent jobs which Allama Iqbal himself did not pursue in detail and so must be taken up now and accomplished.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, P.XXII

<sup>2</sup> A thematic-cum-paraphrastic exercise of this kind was attempted by me — I hope, to good results — in connection with the Qur'anic teachings, cf. *Qur'an Studies: a Philosophical Exposition*, Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Abdul Khaliq (ed.) (*Companion to Allama Iqbal's Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam*)

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Javed Iqbal, وہ کام جو اقبال ادھورے چھوڑ گئے, published in the brochure series 2/2012 by Mian Iqbal Salahuddin.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Maqbool Ilahi, *Iqbal's Unwritten Works*.

<sup>6</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, Editor's Introduction, p. XVII.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. L.S. Stebbing, *A Modern Introduction to Logic*, p.291.

<sup>8</sup> In olden times prophets used to be deputed by God for the guidance of people against their ever-evolving socio-cultural conditions. As this continuing process of deputation was stopped with Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) the function of such guidance was ordained to be taken over by the knowledgeable men of the *Ummah*. He is reported to have said

علمائے امتی کا نبی بنائیں اسرائیل (the 'ulama' of my *Ummah* are analogous to the prophets of banu Israel)

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Khalifa Abdul Hakim, *Islamic Ideology*, p.2

<sup>10</sup> Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Musafiran-e London* (Urdu), p.2

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 83-84

<sup>12</sup> Altaf Hussain Hali, *Hayat-e Javed* (Urdu), p.404

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by J. M. S. Baljon, *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, pp. 18-19

<sup>14</sup> Specially refer to his Thesis, *الاسلام هو الفطرۃ والفرطۃ صی الاسلام* (Islam is nature and nature is Islam) which is the title of one of his essays, M. Ismail Panipati (ed.), *Maqalat-e Sir Sayyid*, vol. 3, p.16

<sup>15</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p. 143

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, P.149

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p.87

<sup>20</sup> *Vide*, for example, A. P. Griffiths (ed.), *Knowledge and Belief*, *passim*, Also refer to my book *Problems of Muslim Theology*, Chapter 5.

<sup>21</sup> Refer to my book *Problems of Muslim Mysticism* pp. 21 -32

<sup>22</sup> The Qur'an says: this book (i.e. the Qur'an) is not to be doubted. It is a guide for the righteous who have faith in the Unseen (2:1)

<sup>23</sup> For specific details in this respect see M.M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*. vol.II, pp. 1349 – 1388

<sup>24</sup> Robert Briffault, *Making of Humanity*, p. 191, quoted by Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.104

<sup>25</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (Urdu) p.527/27 [*Zarb-e Kaleem*]. Verses carrying similar meanings can be almost endlessly multiplied from the works of Allama Iqbal

<sup>26</sup> Qur'an, 53:17

<sup>27</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, P.94

<sup>28</sup> Mystic / sufist moral teachings, I have persistly emphasized, if meticulously carried out, covertly work towards the solution of all the agitating problems of the individual as well as the society. Refer to my book *Problems of Muslim Mysticism*, specially the chapters entitled 'Logic Science Mysticism and Philosophy, and 'Some Last Words'.

<sup>29</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, chapter II

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p.41

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, P. 48

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p.49

<sup>33</sup> Qur'an, 55:29

<sup>34</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.52

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p.152

<sup>36</sup> Bashir Ahmad Dar (ed.), *E.S.P. and Religious Consciousness*.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. my article 'Islam and the Scientific Worldview', Proceedings of the International Colloquium on "Modern Challenges to Religion and the Islamic Response'. Later, published

<sup>38</sup> C. A. Qadir, *Logical Positivism*.

<sup>39</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Khulliyat-e Iqbal* (Farsi) P.173/157 [English translation by Ahmad Afzal. Cf. Muhammad Suheyl Umar and Dr. Bilal Koshul (eds.), p.13

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Dr. Javed Iqbal, *Khutbat-e Iqbal: tasheel-o- tafheem* (Urdu), pp.5-25

<sup>41</sup> *Khutbat ba Yad-e Iqbal*, article: 'Naturalism of Iqbal.

<sup>42</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*,

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*. p. 101

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p.100

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p.143

<sup>46</sup> Cf. my book *Qur'an Studies: a Philosophical Exposition*, Chapter 'Logic of the *Qur'an* and God-consciousness.'



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